SHOULDN'T HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FOCUS ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

by

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ABSTRACT

Lately, there has been increasing interest in the international statistical community towards better measures of progress of societies. Traditionally, the system of national accounts (SNA) provided statistics on macroeconomic aggregates that have served the purpose of monitoring development.

However, development experts have recognized and realized the limitations of the SNA in measuring progress. One offshoot of this is the development by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of the Human Development Index (HDI), which basically captures three dimensions of progress: long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. Lately, increasing recognition and attention have been given thru the OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge, and Policy to the measurement of happiness. In July 2010, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) developed the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to reflect the multiple deprivations that a poor person faces with respect to education, health, and living standard.

But aside from the criticisms that have been raised against the HDI since its formulation in 1990, one obvious shortcoming of the HDI is its failure to capture the development of children. Ideally, the HDI should be an aggregate index of human development in various life stages such as childhood, adolescence, working age and senior years. Likewise, existing measures of happiness and the MPI pay no particular focus on assessing the development of children.

Statistics compiled by the NSCB in collaboration with the UNICEF have highlighted the vulnerability of children and brought to the fore how Philippine society has neglected our children, most particularly, in the areas of education and poverty alleviation. Among the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), MDG 2 on education has the lowest probability of achieving the target. Net enrolment rate in primary education only slightly increased from 84.6% in 1990 to 85.1% in 2008; the proportion of pupils starting Grade I who reach Grade VI was 69.7% in 1990, remaining low at 75.4% in 2008; and primary completion rate which was at 64.2% in 1990 likewise was low at 73.3% in 2008. In terms of poverty, children had higher poverty incidence than the general population with 42.5%, 38.8%, and 40.8% in 2000, 2003, and 2006, respectively, compared to 33.0%, 30.0%, and 32.9%. In fact, among the basic sectors, children consistently accounted for the largest number of poor population in the country with 14.1 million, 13.5 million, and 14.4 million poor children in 2000, 2003, and 2006, respectively. Deprivation of our children, of

1 Secretary General of the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), OIC-Social Policy and Local Development Section of the UNICEF, OIC-Director III and Statistical Coordination Officer II of the NSCB, respectively. The authors thank the session organizer, Mr. Wilfredo Nuqui for his comments and suggestions. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSCB or the UNICEF.


3 The Human Development Report Office has been reviewing the HDI since 2009.
course, will deprive us of potentially excellent national leaders, and consequently, deprive us of a brighter future.

It is therefore important to give top priority to children in crafting the development agenda of the country. Corollarily, it is necessary to formulate better measures and indicators that monitor the state of the children more accurately and more vividly than the HDI and other available statistics on children.

Cognizant of the need for our development agenda to prioritize policies and programs geared towards the development of children, Virola and Encarnacion\(^4\) developed in 2008 a Child Development Index (CDI) and produced national and regional estimates of the CDI for 2000 and 2003. The estimates were updated\(^5\) in 2009 to cover 2006.

This paper builds on the past initiatives of the NSCB and the UNICEF in formulating the Child Development Index. Subject to data availability, it improves on the CDI methodology by incorporating new and more relevant variables and indicators to capture the situation/challenges in the development of children. To enhance the usefulness and policy-relevance of the CDI, the paper gives greater focus to and improves on the rights-based CDI thereby stressing the important role of the duty bearers in the development of children. Lastly, the paper presents disturbing statistics on children, specifically on health, education, and child abuse.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES: measure of progress of society, system of national accounts, Human Development Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index, Child Development Index, rights-based CDI, health, education, poverty alleviation, and child abuse.

