

Discourses of Poverty: The Narratives of the Poor in Samar



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ABSTRACT: The study aimed at exploring, through the view of the future for themselves and their children, the perceptions of the poor about the temporal dimensions of poverty. The study adopted a discursive perspective, to illustrate the hopes, dreams and expectations of the poor regarding their future and, ultimately, how they view their status and how the LGU officials would address the different faces and current status of poverty in their respective locality. The researchers used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The following are the themes obtained from the responses of the participants: limited knowledge and lower health status, lack of ambition and motivation to improve the situation, inadequate basic needs like food due to large family size, and poverty are transmitted to the next generation. Eradicating poverty is a challenge that sees no means of receding. LGUs do whatever they can to improve people's lives. Despite those programs and initiatives of the local government units, there are still municipalities in Samar that are experiencing poverty. The poorest of the poor in Samar suffer from a lack of jobs in rural areas, low motivation to pursue education, and limited resources for large families. This has led to a widening gap between the haves and have-nots. Add to that frequent natural disasters being experienced in Samar at least fifteen typhoons in a year which takes away what little the poor have. The fundamental solution for reducing poverty is to tackle poverty and to pursue equity in income, and education, provide more livelihood programs or interventions, and social participation. Community projects that focus on the restoration and development of social networks and social cohesion and the improvement of the social, communication, and coping skills of the deprived, should be encouraged.

KEYWORDS: poverty, hunger, low motivation, quality education, healthcare

I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty in the Philippines remains a challenge, especially in Samar provinces. More resident- households consider themselves poor. According to the report released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) last October 14, 2022, poverty incidence among families in Eastern Visayas in 2021 was estimated at 22.2 percent. This implies that in 2021, about 22 in every 100 families in the region were poor or had income below the poverty threshold, or the amount needed to buy their basic food and non-food needs.

Poverty is very widespread and rampant in Samar. The people affected by this problem are the families living in extreme poverty since they cannot provide for the immediate needs of their family. Poverty remains one of the biggest problems in the world. To aid this poverty, there are conditional cash transfer programs that provide cash subsidies and help poor families meet their needs one of which is the PANTAWID PAMILYANG PILIPINO PROGRAM (4Ps) wherein, the majority of the poor are beneficiaries of this program. 4Ps acts as a lifesaver for families living in extreme poverty because it provides monetary assistance to help them finance their immediate needs. The beneficiaries are obliged to follow the conditions given by the DSWD (Ranario, 2012). 4Ps help the government achieve the country's commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals, namely: (1) eliminate extreme poverty and hunger, (2) achieve universal education at the primary level, (3) promote gender equality, (4) reduce the death of children under 5 years old, and (5) ameliorate the condition and health of pregnant women (Reyes and Tabuga, 2012; Ranario, 2012; Montilla et al., 2015).

The government's primary objective is to reduce poverty. Numerous studies on poverty are being carried out to give indicators of poverty, which are then used as the foundation for national and local government strategies and initiatives aimed at reducing poverty. As a result, the study identified the stories of the underprivileged groups in Samar's second district. The Philippines has long struggled with poverty and inequality, which have gained attention once more in the aftermath of this year's rising food, fuel, and commodity costs as well as the present global financial crisis. Although the negative effects of COVID-19 affect all facets of society, Samar's impoverished and disadvantaged communities have suffered the most. Nevertheless, researchers typically seek to give a thorough account of the lives of those living in these communities along the poverty line.

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Given the existing state of Samar's marginalized areas, many people probably experience poverty. The term "poor" still heavily influences how people live. Not having enough money to cover one's basic expenses for clothing, food, and shelter is what is meant by poverty.

In light of this, the researchers evaluated the fundamental mechanisms that either contributed to the observed conditions of poverty or shed light on the causes of its persistence, including the hazards that households face from falling into poverty in the future. The study would prioritize and identify future needs and interventions in addition to giving a summary of the current state of LGU responses, strategies, and accomplishments.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Materials and Design

The researchers utilized qualitative design and used a narrative inquiry approach. It aims to explore the experiences of the participants living in the marginalized communities in Samar. Narrative research can uncover behaviors, feelings, and motivations that are not expressed explicitly. It also provides rich linguistic data that may shed light on various aspects of cultural or social phenomena. Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research in which the stories themselves become the raw data. This approach has been used in many disciplines to learn more about the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle (Creswell, 2013). In the aspect of language, the researchers used discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method for studying "language in context" (Gee, 2011). The process goes beyond analyzing words and sentences, establishing a deeper context about how language is used to engage in actions and form social identity. The researchers used interview guide questions which were submitted for ethical approval and expert validation.

2.2 Validation of Instrument

The semi-structured questionnaire was submitted for expert validation and a dry-run was also conducted. Lastly, validation of themes from other experts was conducted.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers sought a formal communication letter to seek approval from the different municipalities to conduct interviews. Upon approval of the permit letter, the researchers proceeded with the interview. The privacy of the participants was ensured by giving them the option to not write their names on the questionnaire.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The researchers informed the participants that the data collected from them were used solely for this study. They were given assurances regarding confidentiality, security of information, and authorized access; that is, the information that might identify their names would never be disclosed while interpreting the data. A consent letter was also given to the participants using INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

2.5 Data Analysis

The researchers used a narrative research method and discourse analysis as an approach to get the languages of the participants. As a method, narrative research begins with the experiences as expressed in the lived and told stories of participants. While discourse analysis was utilized in the study to complete the system by which participants communicate, it's the widest interpretation of what we call 'language'. It includes both written, verbal, and non-verbal communication, as well as the wider social concepts that underpin what language means, and how it changes.

The study also used total saturation, which gave the researchers a reasonable assurance that additional data collection would produce results similar to those obtained in the initial study and would serve to support emergent themes and conclusions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fishery Production is the Primary Source of Living of the Participants. During the interview with the residents of the five (5) municipalities, the majority of them are fishermen. They have been into fishing since they were young. Most of them were raised by fishermen and housewives. Based on the responses of the fishermen, fishing is seasonal there are months wherein, they cannot catch enough fish and as a result, they sometimes go home without any amount. For November, they have an oversupply of crabs and the customers would buy per kilo of crabs for only P 100.00.

Participant 1: "If the weather is not good, especially if there is a typhoon, we cannot catch fish. We are not allowed to sail by the authority for our safety. If we do not go fishing and have no sales from fishing then, we do not have money to provide our family with rice and meals. We do not also encourage our children to go to school since they do not have something to eat if they are in school".

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Participant 2: My father is a fisherman but he usually catches crabs. Like November, it is the best season to catch crabs but we usually sell crabs at a minimal price of P 100.00. And it is not enough for us to buy food.

Participant 3: The majority of the residents here are into fishing. Sometimes, few would go for farming but this is seldom since they can only produce a few plants like root crops. Sometimes we work as construction workers just to earn extra money

Participant 4: Others chose to stop their schooling due to financial problems. Expenses like fares, school allowances, and fees for boarding houses are the reasons why they stop schooling. Some young women chose to be helpers/maids in Manila).

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released updates on the 2023 Full Year Official Poverty Statistics which states that the national poverty incidence among families in 2023 was recorded at 10.9 percent. This is equivalent to 2.99 million Filipino families without enough income to meet their basic food and non-food needs.

How do they view their own poverty and what it means to be poor?

The following are themes that were formulated based from the responses of the participants from the five (5) poorest municipalities in Samar.

1. Limited knowledge and lower health status

Participant 1: For like us living far from the town, it is hard for us to go to the town if there is an emergency. What we usually do, we look for a faith healer for immediate healing.

Participant 2: I stay in a barangay which is far from the town proper. Our source of living is fishing. If there is someone in our family who is sick, we go immediately to the faith healer because it is far to be going to the hospital and we do not have money to buy medicines.

Burkey (2015) made mentioned that health literacy has been defined as, "The degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand basic information and services needed to make appropriate decisions regarding their health". Conceptual knowledge of health and healthcare is an important element of health literacy, such as knowledge of treatment options. Limited health knowledge and health literacy can significantly affect the utilization of conventional healthcare services, the practice of preventive health behaviors, disease management, disease outcomes, and healthcare expenditures (Macabasco-O'Connell et al., 2011). Correlates of limited health knowledge included lower levels of functional health literacy, lower educational attainment, lower socioeconomic status, and race (Homayoon et al., 2013).

2. Lack of ambition and motivation to improve the situation

The most commonly cited feature in this context is a lack of ambition and motivation to improve the situation.

Participant 1: We cannot do anything, this is the fate that we have.

"They don't want to change their situation . . .; they are used to it. They no longer dare to change it." Finally, they do not have the eagerness and motivation to finish schooling due to financial constraints.

Participant 2: It would be better to go to Manila instead of going to school, it is very expensive).

Participant 3: Where can we get an allowance to provide to our kids if they go to school? We still need to spend money on the fare and for the rental.

Participant 4: Some were able to graduate and find jobs. Some of them are already (public) Teachers. Lucky for them because they have parents who can afford to send their children to school.

Participant 5: Not all can go to school since only a few are chosen to be included in the scholarship program).

3. Inadequate basic needs like food due to large family size

Orbeta (2016) stated that the population and poverty nexus is not new but remains to be an important development issue for many countries. In the Philippines, for instance, the debate on role of population growth and family size in development, in general, and poverty, in particular, is largely unresolved.

Participant 1: We have seven children, one is about to enter her college, however, did not pursue. Other Children are in elementary and high school levels. The other one is in Manila).

Participant 2: We have five children and all of them have already their own families. Their spouses are fisherman and the other one is construction worker to earn for a living. They were not able to graduate because they got married (early).

Participant 3: (We need to divide our meal among our family members. We go to the store and ask sardines for our meal and to be paid if we have already money from fishing.

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As added by Orbeta (2016), he said that family size on such areas as poverty incidence, vulnerability to poverty, as well as the underlying mechanism of savings, labor supply and earnings of parents, and human capital investments. Several conclusions can be made from the evidence presented. One, there is a clear negative impact, on average, from additional children on household welfare. Two, and more importantly, these negative impacts are regressive, i.e. the negative impacts on poorer households are larger. Three, the associations between larger family size, poverty incidence, and vulnerability to poverty are strong and enduring.

Therefore, large family size as an obvious, but not well-understood reason, not only for the low and inconsistent economic growth rates but also for direct debilitating effects on many aspects of household welfare.

4. Poverty is transmitted to the next generation

On this subject, some participants refer to the fact that poverty is structurally transmitted from one generation to another and consider it almost impossible to break this vicious circle.

The underlying ideology here is: *“If the father is a workman, the son is a workman. If the father is a fisherman; the son goes with the same job. If the young lady cannot graduate, she would go for Manila and find her journey”*.

Participant 1: If they do not like to go to school, we do not force them because, most likely they will be into Fishing.

Participant 2: My children went to Manila to be a helper. One is in Catbalogan. We permitted them to work as helpers because that was the same job as their mother before, and for them to have income).

Poverty studies distinguish three dimensions in the conceptualization of poverty: economic well-being, social exclusion, and capability. Economic well-being stems from the issue of whether someone has sufficient income to acquire a basic level of consumption or human welfare. Secondly, the social isolation of the poor from the rest of society can be perceived as a cause of poverty. Finally, poverty can be regarded as a function of the lack of the individual skills, such as education or health, needed to attain a basic level of human well-being (Willems et al., 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

The quality of life for many Samar inhabitants is severely impacted by poverty, which continues to be a major concern. Samar, a province in the Eastern Visayas, is well-known for its scenic beauty and rich cultural legacy, but it also has significant socioeconomic problems. Samar's poverty is caused by a variety of intricately intertwined reasons, including social, economic, and environmental problems.

1. Financial Aspects

Few Possibilities for Employment: The two main sectors of Samar's economy, fishing and agriculture, are frequently low-paying, seasonal, and subject to natural calamities. Due to the province's lack of industrial growth and thus low official employment options, many citizens are forced to look for work outside of it.

Infrastructure Deficits: Economic growth is hampered by inadequate infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and internet access. The isolation of many rural communities hinders the flow of products and services, restricts access to markets, and deters investment.

Low Educational Attainment: The cycle of poverty is exacerbated by a lack of access to high-quality education. Low-income levels are perpetuated by limited educational options, especially in rural places where it might be difficult for people to enter professional professions or gain higher-paying positions.

2. Social Elements

Nutrition and Health Care Access: People' general well-being is impacted by limited access to health care services, especially in rural areas. Poor healthcare systems and high rates of malnutrition, especially in children, make poverty worse by preventing people from working and improving their living situations.

Population expansion: Samar's scarce resources are strained in some regions due to the city's rapid population expansion. To escape the cycle of poverty, overcrowded homes and communities find it difficult to supply necessities like clean water, sanitary conditions, and suitable housing.

3. Environmental Elements

Samar is very vulnerable to natural catastrophes, including typhoons and other calamities that destroy homes, infrastructure, and crops. Rebuilding from major disasters is a difficult process, especially for underprivileged populations.

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Environmental Degradation: Deforestation, unsustainable farming and fishing methods, and other factors have contributed to environmental degradation, which has further reduced the land's and the sea's potential for productivity. This reduces many families' potential long-term income from natural resources.

4. Interventions by the Government and Policies

Social Welfare Programs: To reduce poverty, both national and local governments have put in place initiatives like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), which gives low-income families conditional cash transfers in exchange for better access to healthcare and education. Long-term solutions that produce sustainable livelihoods are still difficult to come by, though.

Infrastructure Development Initiatives: The government is constantly working to upgrade Samar's infrastructure, but progress is frequently sluggish. Examples of these initiatives include creating new roads and increasing internet access. By stimulating local economies and facilitating access to necessary services, improving connectivity and transportation could have a major positive impact on reducing poverty.

5. The Private Sector's and NGOs' Roles

Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are addressing poverty in Samar through livelihood projects, education, and preparedness for disasters. Communities have become more resilient thanks to initiatives that support small business development, sustainable farming, and fishing practices.

Investments made by the private sector in tourism, agriculture, and renewable energy can boost employment and the economy.

6. The Way Out of Poverty

Samar's poverty calls for a multifaceted strategy, including:

Promoting sectors like tourism, green energy, and agro-processing to generate a wider range of employment prospects is known as economic diversification. Enhancing access to high-quality education and career training to equip locals for a wider range of jobs in the education and skills sectors.

Infrastructure Development: To improve community access to markets and services, infrastructure development for power, transportation, and communication must be accelerated.

Disaster preparedness is the process of making a community more resilient to natural catastrophes by improving programs for reducing disaster risk and practicing sustainable environmental management.

Samar's poverty is a multifaceted problem influenced by social, cultural, and environmental variables. Even if there are several initiatives in place, long-term solutions will necessitate ongoing cooperation between the public, business, and civil society sectors to guarantee that the Samar people have access to the opportunities and resources required for long-term development and the reduction of poverty.

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