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Criselda M. Balisacan¹, Evangeline S. Galacgac², Marie Rose C. Aceret³

ABSTRACT

Poverty phenomenon has not been widely studied in Ilocos Region. Macro-oriented studies abound but very few of those that should be understood in the local dimension were undertaken. Most have largely focused on statistics that are mere results of food, income and expenditure survey (FIES) and censuses. Although there had been enormous development programs/projects, the government was not so successful in reducing poverty in the past decades due to lack of locally aggregated data/information as basis.

The LSA is a tool used to cluster individual households as a group with similar factors and processes affecting their poverty and vulnerability. It also encompasses the capabilities, material and social resources, and activities required for a particular means of living. Analysis can then be focused on either households or individuals.

Profiling was carried out in selected urban and rural barangays of four municipalities: Batac (365 respondents), Burgos (80), Currimao (95) and Pinili (55). A set of methods for the characterization of livelihood systems of 595 farmers, fishermen, backyard/small-scale livestock raisers and entrepreneurs is presented. Dynamics of poverty was looked at through focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys. Factors that accounts for the respondents' poverty were identified and their views and ideas were considered.

Keywords: Livelihood system, vulnerability, locally aggregated data

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I. Background/ Rationale

Poverty reduction is the ultimate goal of development that is why the Philippine government has put it as its overarching goal. Apparently, despite huge investments and efforts, the country has not succeeded in reducing the incidence of poverty in the past decades.

The underlying assumption behind many poverty reduction schemes is that the poor people need to do something more productive in order to get out from poverty. They have to be engaged in a livelihood that is sustainable. Livelihood comprises the *capabilities*, *assets* (including both material and social resources) and *activities* required for a means of living. Livelihood is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Segura, 2004).

Nearly two – thirds of the poor are located in rural areas, the large bulk of them are dependent on agriculture and agriculture-related livelihood activities for incomes. And contrary to common perceptions, they are vulnerable to adverse macroeconomic shocks, especially when these lead to sharp changes in food prices and natural calamities. However, despite the focus on poverty reduction in recent years, little is known about the current economic lives and livelihoods of the poor. This information gap makes appropriate planning and programming difficult.

For a poverty reduction program to be effective, studies related to profile of poverty is an important element in the information kit of the policy makers. A clear understanding of the immediate, underlying, and basic causes of poverty is needful but information base at the local level is very weak. So far, no appropriate baseline information collection has been conducted except a number of surveys that had been carried out by different organizations for very specific purpose.

The main purpose of profiling using the livelihood system approach (LSA) is to support planning and monitoring at the different levels (i.e., local, regional and national levels). As resources for emergency interventions become scarce, there is a need for information to plan and implement interventions through efficient or better targeting. This resource when combined with locally gathered information will surely improve targeting and monitoring. Once the livelihood systems and their vulnerable groups are identified and profiled, the design of indicators for regular monitoring will allow all stakeholders to

continuously assess the poverty and food security situation for early warning and vulnerability work.

What distinguishes this study from previous poverty profiling studies is essentially, the recognition that Ilocanos, even though they are poor, are very resourceful and they have their own forms of assets and strategies developed over generations, including livelihood diversification, that are appropriate to their context and culture. The livelihood system approach employed here assumes that people are already doing a number of creative and productive activities.

II. Objectives

The principal objective of this study is to establish a profile on poverty (adopting the LSA) of selected municipalities in Ilocos Norte that will provide relevant information for planning, beneficiary targeting, monitoring, and policy-making processes in reducing poverty and in sustaining food security in these areas.

Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Determine what economic/livelihood activities the households are engaged in;
2. Describe the demographic, social and economic profile of households of different livelihood groups;
3. Characterize poverty in terms of their quality of life, income, assets, free or subsidized services, and participation in decision-making and other activities in the community;
4. Identify the systems (kinship, loans/credit, etc.) they resort to in their struggle for survival;
5. Describe their perceptions of their present and future household conditions, and of government programs and services aimed at improving their welfare;
6. Determine their level of aspirations, the constraints and potentials in realizing these.

III. Methodology

This study presents a set of methods in characterizing the livelihood systems of selected barangays in four municipalities of Ilocos Norte, namely: Batac, Burgos, Currimao and Pinili. Factors that exactly accounts for an individual or households' poverty or

vulnerability were identified. The views and ideas of respondents were also considered in order to understand the complexity of their livelihood systems.

3.1 Profiling/Data Gathering. The basic structure of the information contained in this poverty profile reflects the factors that influence livelihoods and poverty situation of those being profiled:

1. assets controlled by the household or to which the household has access;
2. mediating factors such as a) laws, b) policies, and regulations directly affecting the household, c) development programmes and projects operating in the area and d) local attitudes and beliefs;
3. demographic trends, the conditions of the natural resource base and macroeconomic data;
4. effect/impact of shocks, such as falling of commodity prices, agro-meteorological factors (drought, typhoon, flood, earthquakes, disease and pests), conflicts, or large scale illnesses/pestilence.

3.2 Interview/Survey. List of poor households were obtained from the offices of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Interior and Local Government of the four municipalities and were validated.

- In the barangays where the household survey was administered, a fairly comprehensive questionnaire was designed in order to capture as many aspects as possible in intra- and inter-household dynamics.

Results from household surveys were cross-checked with the findings obtained through the qualitative assessment, improving the understanding of “grey” areas, and providing additional details to substantiate or discard arguments emerging from the qualitative analysis.

3.3 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)/sessions at municipal and barangay levels. Representatives of health, education, food and agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure and other sectors in the municipality and barangay, Non-government organizations (NGOs) and socio-professional organizations (women’s associations, and others) were part of the FGDs. Open-ended questions were posed to the participants following a checklist of themes to be addressed in order to elicit responses on broad issues concerning the small-scale farming, fishing, informal business (sari-sari stores, gamet drying/packaging, salt making, among others).

3.4 Classifying the population . The respondents were purposively selected and were classified into livelihood groups namely: farming, fishing, small scale livestock raising and entrepreneurship. This is to understand how different groups of poor people residing in lowland and upland areas, coastal zones, and urban areas are differentially affected by

macro dynamics. Specifically, how poverty is differentially distributed among a range of socio-economic or population groups.

IV. Results and Discussions

The study sites were the municipalities and barangays of Ilocos Norte which are recipients of KALAH! (Kapit Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan) programs of NEDA and Regional KALAH! Convergence Group (RKCG) of Region 1 except for the municipality of Batac. There were 365 respondents grouped into livelihood system (LSs) as follows:

<u>Livelihood system</u>	Batac	Burgos	Currimaos	Pinili	Total
Farming	160	65	9	46	280
Fishing	-	12	62	-	74
Small scale livestock raisers	128	-	-	9	137
Small scale entrepreneurs	77	16	24	-	117
Total	365	93*	95	55	608

*Combination of farming/fishing and small scale entrepreneurs

Demographic and Socio-economic profile . Family heads of the different LS are mostly 32-55 years old, married and finished elementary level. They have stayed in their respective barangays for 37 to 44 years. There are a few who provide agricultural labor only and are engaged in non-farm activities i.e., carpentry, mechanic or welding.

The average family size is 4.8, this include prevalence of extended families. Most of household members are aged 21-30 years. The wives are mostly engaged in house tending, while some are domestic helpers or overseas worker. Majority of the household members either finished elementary or secondary education but no longer continued to high school or college.

Involvement to community and other organizations. Most of the household heads and members are not engaged into any community organizations. While some are barangay officials, others are members of cooperatives, women's and senior citizens organizations. It is noteworthy that farmer-respondents' wives in Sacritan Pinili are members of an association of loomweavers and the heads of Currimaos fishers are members of a fishermen's cooperative. Both are being assisted by the DSWD's Self Employment Assistance for Kaunlaran (SEA-K) program.

Housing and dwelling amenities. Majority of the beneficiaries owned their housing units and lots while some are owned by their parents. The floor area of housing units ranges from a small 6 sq.m. to a medium-size of approximately 40 sq. m made of cement or wood while there are still those of just compacted soil . House roofings are made of galvanized iron with only few of cogon or a combination of it. Walls are mostly made of hollowblocks materials, only few are made of bamboo, wood, *bolo*, while others are made of light materials such as “sawali”, “bado-bado” or “tittid”.

The 62 fishermen in Currimao, however, are considered squatters in the lot they are occupying as this is owned by private businessmen. The group has been residing there from two generation of families.

Source of drinking water. Household sources of drinking/domestic use are mostly from deep well or artesian well. Those nearby hills and mountains enjoy the springs and the urban households utilize the water supply from the National Water Services Administration (NAWASA).

Access to health facilities. Although there are hospitals and health centers in every municipality, the more remote barangays cannot easily access medical services when emergency cases arise. There are no health/medical centers in the different barangays which should take care of the health needs of the residents. In the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted the residents prioritized a Barangay health station where a doctor/medical staff are available to address the medical of the residents.

Access to electricity. The Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative (INEC) is the electricity provider of 80% of the urban and rural respondent families. But a significant percentage of 16.83% do not have electricity in their houses even in some urban areas. Because of their meager income, these families resort to kerosene lamp as they cannot afford to pay monthly electric bill, other households are far from the distribution lines of INEC.

4.a Factors that brought the respondents to poverty

Lack of education. It is noteworthy that most of the marginal household heads attribute their being poor to lack of education and early marriage. Others claim that their parents were poor that is why they were not able to send them to school and did not obtain a degree for a good-paying- job (chronic poverty). This is the main reason why they put all

effort to send their children to school with the hope that they will be instrumental in getting out from poverty.

Landlessness. Other respondents claim that they are in poverty due to lack of land/farm of their own to till. Most of them are farm-labor providers to those who own lands and so their source of income is only seasonal. Carpentry or tri-cycle driving are some of their off-farm sources of income. This is emphasized by households in Camandingan, Batac.

Unemployment/Unstable job. Majority of the respondents, particularly in the rural areas pointed out that it is unemployment that brought them to poverty. They said that if only there are stable jobs around, they would be well-off as they are industrious and are willing to work. However, they don't have any option but to make both ends meet with their meager income.

4.b Opportunities and Constraints of the Livelihood Systems (LSs)

4.b1 Farming LS. In the lowland areas, rice and corn are the major wet season crops while tomato, tobacco, vegetables are the dry season crops. Unlike commercial farming, sweet pepper and garlic are not the main crops planted by the respondents except in Burgos where garlic is the main dry season crop of farmer-respondents. In the upland areas, rice is planted through kaingin farming during the wet season and vegetables (i.e., beans, squash, patola, ampalaya, etc.) during the dry season.

Because majority of the farmers are tenants, they only have a small share of their produce. The farmer-respondents claim that it is always the tenant who is at a losing end because he provides all the inputs particularly fertilizer, insecticide, fuel, etc. Most of the upland farmers are into subsistence farming.

The more well-off farming group own irrigation pump, irrigation hose, sprayer, and able to hire tractor/rototiller, while the poorer group only have plow, *suyod*, *palpal*; *pasagad* with their carabao or cow and there are others who resort to borrowing these equipment.

The farmer-respondents said that for capital, most of them rely on middle man, neighbors or relatives or landowners rather than cooperative banks (i.e. Quendancor or rural banks) because of the paper requirements or collateral.

The farming group encounter perennial problems like: a) low price of farm products, b) high price of input especially fertilizer and fuel, c) lack of irrigation water particularly during the dry season in the rainfed upland areas (Sacritan, Pinili, Sta. Cruz, Currimao and similar areas in rural Batac), d) soil problems i.e. some farms are being scoured (river flooding) or eroded (soil erosion), e) no market outlet for farm products especially squash and corn, f) bad condition of farm to market road, g) lack of capital, h) flood, typhoon and other calamities (crop insurance), h) no off-farm or non-farm employment (especially during rainy season) for both head and household members.

The local government particularly the Department of Agriculture (DA) has extended irrigation pumps and accessories, constructed small water impounding (SWIP), shallow tube wells (STW), seed/seedling/fingerling dispersals. The respondents claim that the well-to-do farmers have benefited much with these services compared to the poor farming groups especially those in the more remote areas.

4.b2 Small scale livestock raisers. It is noteworthy that majority of the rural households have hogs, poultry (chicken, duck) and goats/sheep in their backyard. Although these are not at commercial scale, they claim these as sources of income. The main problem of this group is the very high price of feeds.

The government has extended livestock dispersal (piglets, Kabir chicken and goats). Some were successful, others failed. The main problem aired by the Municipal Agricultural Officers (MAO) is non-payment of loans and recipients just declare them dead without notifying them. On the other hand, the recipients claim that no training on raising Kabir chicken was conducted and some said that they were not aware that the dispersals are for loan but were “dole outs”.

4.b3 Fishing LS. Majority of the fishermen-respondents in Currimao are members of an association of fishermen in their barangay. With a modest starting capital the association was able to sustain its 72 members with soft loans

The FGDs reveal that the government has extended motorized boats, bancas for the barangays. However, these were not utilized as intended because only one family is using the equipment as this is not strictly being monitored. The supposed rent is not fairly collected and most of the time the unit is not in use. The DSWD has also extended loans for SEA-K but was not sustained because many of the recipients were hesitant to pay back. Moreover, livestock dispersal were extended but like other programs it failed. For the out-of-

school youths, skills trainings were offered but the target participants were not interested to attend. Other problems of the fishing group include: a) no start up capital for entrepreneurial activity, b) gambling is prevalent in the area which are bad influence for the younger group, c) school children are not interested to study, they prefer to join family members in fishing activity especially at peak season as this gives them immediate money, d) no alternative livelihood to fish vending or “compra”.

The main concern of the group of fishermen in Gaang and Victoria Currimao is their tenurial status in their residence. They claim that they are the third generation of fishing families in that area and they are aware of their present condition. Now that there is a plan to convert the area into a commercial one, the 62 fishermen-respondents were told to vacate the area. To them, this will aggravate their poor condition because they are landless and if ever the government will relocate them, their fishing livelihood will be much affected.

4.b4 Small Scale Entrepreneurs. This group is further sub-divided according to the products they sell: groceries and (sari-sari stores) – urban and rural barangays of Batac, farm products, *gamet* and salt-making for Burgos respondents, firewood/charcoal making for Nagbacalan- Batac and rural barangays of Burgos, and fish vending in Victoria and Gaang – Currimao.

The *gamet industry* is an alternative source of income for the families in the coastal areas and is considered one of the high valued products in Burgos. However, the *gamet* is seasonal and these appear only during rainy season, and drying is their main problem. The respondents requested for a technology to improve the drying process of *gamet*. This livelihood is sure to alleviate the condition of the poor families. Meanwhile, the Department of Science and Technology extended a training for the salt-makers in Burgos but their main problem is no sure market of their product.

Firewood collection/charcoal making is also one of livelihood activities of the respondents in the upland/agricultural areas. It should be noted that most of those engaged in this kind of livelihood are the older women in rural areas residing the mountainsides. Income from such activity is only dependent on the availability of woods collected. Their main problem is the small amount they earn from charcoal making is not enough to augment the respondents basic needs.

For Camandingan in Batac and Sta. Cruz in Currimao where dumpsite is located, the poverty condition is common. Some 14 families in Camandingan and few in Sta. Cruz are engaged into scavenging. The children who are supposed to be in school are forced to join

their family members in collecting iron scraps etc. which they can sell. The respondents claim that there is higher income they get here than farming especially that they do not own farm. However, the residents nearby complain of air pollution and diseases occurring in the sites especially during the rainy season.

V. Summary

In all the livelihood systems studied, poverty is much emphasized in the rural and coastal areas, from poor physical and human resources, lack of infrastructure, facilities and basic services, unavailability of employment opportunities and inadequacy of opportunities for people's participation in local government and decision-making.

The socio-economic condition among households, their parental families, geographical environment, the socio-cultural system, and political climate where they live, greatly affect poverty on the individual, family and barangay levels, collectively or individually. In order for household incomes to make both ends meet, the poor resort to other strategies for survival: economic (backyard poultry or pig raising or carpentry, buy/sell, employment of the minors including scavenging), and socio-cultural (reliance from relatives, neighbors, friends etc.).

Moreover, the social, economic and political conditions of the family and the community, influence the kind of innovations or interventions to poverty reduction that maybe introduced in an area. These conditions, in turn, affected the perception and response of poor households to these changes and to their present and future conditions including their aspirations. And if the interventions geared towards improving their family and community welfare turn out ineffective, the result is intergeneration or chronic poverty.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The province of Ilocos Norte is not one among the top in terms of poverty incidence. This is attributed to its high Human Development Index (HDI) compared to the other provinces in the country (NSCB, 2007). Profiling the poverty of selected fifth class municipalities of Currimao, Burgos, and Pinili and first class municipality of Batac, however, reveal that poverty conditions in these areas are almost similar regardless of income classification of the municipality.

Findings from the study brought out some of the inconsistencies between the perceptions of representatives of institutions and reality as experienced by resource users.

The responses of the different livelihood groups tended to be more factual than analytical, using personal experiences to illustrate a trend. Such responses were crucial to build the overall picture of poverty and vulnerability on household and community level. They were also used to cross check and validate statements obtained from the representatives of formal institutions, to understand the variability of situations on the ground, and to clarify how people perceived the impacts of large-scale policies, laws, regulations and development programs at the grass-root level. Holding separate group discussions with different sectors of the population enabled differential, contrasting, and conflicting views of reality to be obtained. Asking respondent about their lives, why they are into poverty and how they want their present conditions changed, provided the answers as to why interventions were successful and others were not.

Meanwhile, the current data collection, processing, and analysis systems in Ilocos Norte do not provide the necessary information to decision makers. The available information, for instance, on agriculture, population, etc. are mostly estimates and sometimes with conflicting figures circulating at the same time. Even though the investment effort is very high, baseline data is still necessary and that a common understanding on some methodological issues has to be reached.

It is also recommended that labor, which is the only major asset of the poor, should be the focus of the government. Improvement in the quality of this asset through human development is required by the different livelihood groups.

This study suggests the importance of poverty profiles adopting the modified livelihood system approach in designing well-targeted poverty reduction strategies in order to reach the intended beneficiaries most effectively.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Map of Ilocos Norte showing the study sites

