

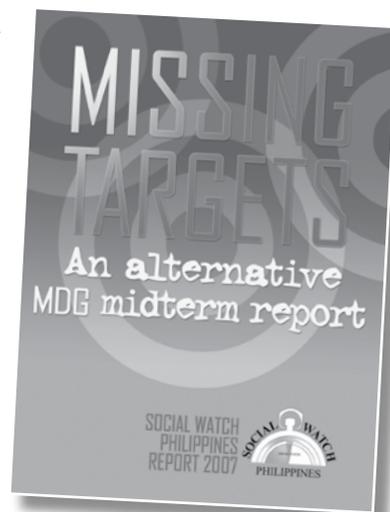
The MDGs and Social Watch Philippines

► By Professor LEONOR M. BRIONES

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have always been the focus of Social Watch Philippines (SWP) even before the formal launching of the Millennium Campaign in 2000. Social Watch Philippines started its advocacy for financing the MDGs during the preparations leading to the Millennium Declaration before 2000 up to the present.

SWP has single-mindedly advocated and campaigned for the MDGs since its inception. In the Philippines, it has been active at the national, regional and local levels.

Its activities range from research and publications, campaigns and awareness events, capacity-building and training, and partnerships with government agencies, legislators, the private sector, local government units, academic institutions, and civil society organizations. One popular output of SWP research and publication work is coming out with MDG reports from a civil society perspective.



Localizing and Monitoring MDGs

When Most Outstanding Governor George Arnaiz was asked how he learned about the MDGs, he had only one answer: “from Social Watch!” The goals of the multi-awarded province of Negros Oriental are aligned to the MDGs. Social Watch Philippines has worked with civil society organizations, municipal and city officials and academics of the province in localizing and monitoring the achievement of MDG goals.

These activities have directly impacted on poverty reduction through increased food production, more attendance in public schools, healthier children and

mothers, and protection for the environment. Concrete achievements in these areas have been validated by external institutions like the University of the Philippines.

Negros Oriental is only one of many local government units who have benefited from the pioneering work of Social Watch Philippines in localizing and monitoring MDGs. Three municipalities in still another multi-awarded province—Bohol—have successfully installed a local monitoring system on the MDGs and mainstreamed them in the local plan and budget. The municipality of Orion in Bataan has had the same success.

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Financing the MDGs and Developing the Quality of Life Index (QLI)

The most sustained campaign of Social Watch Philippines is on financing the MDGs. Since 2000, SWP has consistently engaged the government on the need to increase financial allocations for the MDGs.

Using the studies of Dr. Rosario Manasan, SWP has identified gaps in budget requirements viz-a-viz actual budget allocations. Last year, in cooperation with graduate students of the U.P. National College of Public Administration and Governance, and with the support of the United Nations Development Program, SWP co-published *May Pera Pa Ba?*. The book is now widely utilized by academic institutions and civil society organizations in their MDG campaigns and capacity building programs.

SWP is also well known for its contributions to sharpening tools for measuring progress in the MDGs. *It has developed the Quality of Life Index (QLI) in cooperation with Action for Economic Reforms*. Provinces were ranked in terms of Quality of Life Indicators based in terms of elementary cohort survival, attended births, and under-five nutrition.

The Quality of Life Index was used as the basis for the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) which was developed by International Social Watch. The BCI is used in ranking the performance of countries in various aspects of social development, including the MDGs.

Working with academic institutions

SWP works with leading academic institutions in the field of governance like the National College of Public Administration and Governance and Silliman University. Through the initiative of the Silliman SWP, a teaching module on the MDGs was developed and adopted by the Association of Schools of Public Administration in the Philippines (ASPAP).

A historic first: the alternative budget

All over the world, the trend is towards participatory and alternative budgeting. Last year, SWP successfully partnered with 22 CSOs, 10 Congressmen, and the Senate Committee on Finance headed by Sen. Franklin Drilon in developing alternative budgets for education, health, agriculture and the environment.

The campaign started in the House of Representatives and moved on to the Senate, and finally the Bicameral Committee. SWP contributed in no small

measure to the increased budget allocations for MDGs, particularly P5.5 billion for education.

The Alternative Budget for 2008 is now conducted on a much broader scale, with more CSO's and legislators participating. Engagement is not only with the legislature but with the different departments as well.

Participating in the national discourse

SWP participates actively in the national discourse on political, economic and social concerns which in the end impinge on the attainment of MDGs.

Facing poverty reality

The death by suicide in November 2007 of a twelve-year old girl from Davao due to extreme poverty has touched the collective conscience of the country. People of consequence, from the President down to bureaucrats, social anthropologists, civil society organizations, and media personalities have endeavored to explain why a child would commit suicide.

For a young girl, twelve years is a time of magic and dreaming. It is the magical time of transition from childhood to womanhood, from fifth grade to sixth grade. It is the time for dreaming of parties, of clothes, and yes of boys.

When a girl is twelve years old, she should not be scrounging for fare, *baon*, and funds for school projects. She should be sighing over her crushes, shopping for geegaws and dreaming of going on to high school and college.

What were the items in the child's wish list? A bicycle, a bag and a pair of new shoes. Well-off twelve year olds have closets overflowing with bags and shoes. They can ask for a bicycle any time. A poor child literally gave up her life because she could not have them.

People commit suicide out of despair and frustration. In a country which adores and worships children, even one child driven to self-destruction is an indictment on our economy and society.

For years, civil society organizations like Social Watch Philippines have been challenging official statistics about poverty. They produced tons of literature, power point presentations and statistical tables. They have engaged the government in public debates.

However, it took one child, one statistic to prove in the most brutal and stark terms that poverty does exist. Anti-poverty activists say that poverty has the face of a woman. In the Philippines, poverty has the face of a desperate, despondent child. ■