

Disparity Between Rich and Poor: A Denial of Human Rights

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In today's world, wealth disparity has multiplied exponentially around the world particularly in most of the developing countries. There have been many individuals whose income far exceeds that of any monarch family who have inherited their vast wealth in the past. Despite declarations of equality, they do exert power that average people do not. The Forbes Magazine recently released the rich man of the world where many in the list are not a monarch family.

In the Philippine, wealth disparity is widely felt all over the regions. The family income gap between the rich and the poor has widened in the Philippines in the past four years, a recent government report showed, suggesting an urgent need for effective poverty-alleviation programs (Kyodo, 1998). Income distribution in the Philippines is substantially less equal than that in most low and middle income countries in Asia," a World Bank report on poverty said

The country's development problems find their roots in the colonization era, when foreigners invaded the Philippines. Spain was the first to colonize the country and did so for more than four centuries. The Japanese lorded over the Philippines after the Spaniards left, and finally, the Americans ruled over it for many years before allowing its people to form a democratic republic (McCoy & De Jesus, 1982).

The Philippines, which used to be an exporter of rice in the 1960s, has in recent years been unable to feed its own populace, since its productive and fertile lands are now owned by either the national elites or by the transnational agricultural corporations (Dahm, 1991; Hayami, Quisumbing, & Adriano, 1990, as cited in Miron, 1997) and are planted with cash crops such as pineapples and bananas. Moreover, the rice hoarders have contributed to worsen the situation on rice shortage. While corporations own vast farmlands, many citizens do not own any land and are unable to farm even for subsistence purposes. Agrarian reform programs that have been instituted in the country have been unsuccessful because they have not been accompanied by necessary agricultural support, such as irrigation systems, information about more productive farming techniques, and farm loans (Floresca-Cawagas & Toh, 1989, 1993). In fact, the Hacienda Luisita has been the subject for debate and controversy while the tenants have been moving heaven and earth to finally own portion of the land.

An estimated 8.9 million Philippine families live below the poverty line, a study of the U.N. Children's Fund said. Six out of 10 Philippine children are born to families who live near or below the poverty line, making poverty a major deterrent to child survival, growth and development, it said.

Studies predict that poverty will increase in urban areas as the population is expected to grow at a higher rate in those areas until the end of the century. "This will exacerbate the incidence of poverty among urban dwellers, raising the urgency of effective poverty-alleviation programs," one of the study reports said.

Poverty, however, is more extensive and severer in the countryside. The World Bank study said that more than half of the rural population -- accounting for nearly two-thirds of the country's total population -- is poor. The rural poor are mostly engaged in the agriculture, fishery, and forestry sectors and have at the best an elementary school education, it said. "The depth of poverty is nearly two-and-a-half-times worse in rural areas than in urban areas," the bank report said.

For the past years, government had prioritized projects to combat poverty. However, government effort became nil due to lack of measures for the check and balance in most of the government project on poverty alleviation all throughout the country. The Philippines is estimated to have lost 48 billion dollars due to corruption over two decades, draining the cash-strapped government of much-needed funds to finance programs to alleviate the plight of the poor.

Poverty alleviation also depends on equality in access to opportunities. If poor people have no access to income-generating opportunities because of a lack of education, training, mobility, or credit, growth is unlikely to benefit them. This also holds true for other segments of society that are discriminated against in access to resources: women, ethnic minorities, and indigenous groups.

In conclusion, if the trend is becoming high in terms of inequality, this can itself worsen poverty by lowering overall growth. An unequal society is susceptible to political instability, increased crime, and dysfunctional or easily toppled institutions. Unequal access to education, credit, and other resources is also inefficient for society as a whole because it blocks marginalized groups from increasing their productivity.

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