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Looking at conditions of persons with disability in Metro Manila

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The need to understand the conditions of persons with disability (PWD) is not only linked with the country's aim to reduce poverty and adhere to the goals stated in the 2000 Millennium Declaration but also and, more importantly, with the goal to improve the lives of PWDs in the long run. Persons with disability often belong to the poorest segments of the population as noted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP). Because of disability, the opportunities faced by PWDs are often far more limited than those by non-PWDs. In the Philippines, efforts to help PWDs were renewed via the amended Magna Carta for PWDs (Republic Act 9442) passed in April 2007. This legislation aims to fully integrate differently abled persons into the mainstream of Philippine society.

Studies that examine the conditions of PWDs have, however, been very limited, with only case studies being available and with statistics being very rare. In fact, the latest official estimate available on the number of PWDs in the country can be obtained from the 2000 Census, with the figure placed at 1.2 percent of the total population or 942,098.¹ This is 305,098 greater than the 1990 estimate and around 23,000 more compared to the 1995

¹ Several other entities have also estimated the number of PWDs in the country. The Department of Health conducted a registration of PWDs in 1997 and counted 469,707 PWDs, a number that was claimed to be an underestimation of the number of PWDs in the country. Thus, the government does not officially recognize this estimate.

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census.² Apart from these estimates, however, there are very scanty pieces of information about the PWDs. Even the latest census, the 2007 Census of Population, does not have information on PWDs because this variable, for some reasons, has been dropped from the questionnaire.

This lack of information on the conditions of PWDs becomes a problem in coming up with appropriate programs for them. In response to this, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) collaborated in August 2008 with the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) of Japan, a semigovernmental research institute working for international cooperation between developing countries and Japan, to undertake a survey on PWDs in Metro Manila. The survey covered four Metro Manila cities, namely, Makati, Pasay, Valenzuela, and Quezon City, and was conducted in partnership with the Social Welfare Office of each of these cities and various PWD organizations. The objective of the survey was to gather the socioeconomic profile and livelihood sources of PWDs as well as their access to programs and awareness of existing government policies aimed at improving their living conditions.

² In the census, the respondent is asked if a household member has any disability. The definition of disability adopted in the census refers to “any restriction or lack of ability (resulting from impairment) to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Impairments associated with disabilities may be physical, mental or sensory motor impairment such as partial or total blindness and deafness, muteness, speech defect, orthopedic handicaps, and mental retardation.”

³ For a more complete profile of the respondents in the survey, please see Yap et al. (2009), available at the PIDS website.

This *Policy Note* presents and assesses the key findings of this groundbreaking survey on PWDs. By profiling the PWDs, it is hoped that the government and other stakeholders will be equipped with the necessary information on how best to help them improve their well-being.

Key findings of survey

There were more than 400 respondents included in the survey whose types of disability were visual, mobility, and hearing impairments. There were also a few who had multiple impairments. In the survey, there were more male (62%) than female respondents (38%). Because the focus of the survey was on livelihood, the respondents included adults aged 15 years old and above. The discussions that follow briefly summarize the key findings of the survey.³

The common cause of mobility impairment was polio. Among the 147 respondents who suffered from mobility impairment, including those who had multiple disabilities, 57 (38%) reported that their impairment was caused by polio. Other common causes were stroke and lower limb amputation caused either by accident or disease.

Majority of the mobility-impaired were using assistive devices. The most popular devices used were manual wheelchairs and crutches. There was only one who was using a power wheelchair. A significant proportion of these devices (30%) have been provided by the government.

Half of the visually impaired respondents were totally blind. The other half were considered partially blind. Their literacy rate was high at 83

percent, with 43 percent of them being able to read Braille. When asked about the reason for being illiterate, the most common reason for those who were not literate was that he/she did not want to go to school. For others, the family did not allow the respondent to go to school; still others did not go to school because of lack of family support and resources.

The most common assistive device used by the visually impaired respondents was the Braille typewriter. This was followed by the slate and stylus to write Braille and cellular phone with screen reader. When the respondents were asked which assistive devices they wish to have for them to be more effective in communicating with mainstream society, they indicated the cellular phone with screen reader, computer with screen reader, talking book, and note-taker such as Braille Lite, among others.

Majority of the hearing-impaired respondents were born deaf. The rest, meanwhile, became deaf before they reached the age of 3. In terms of the degree of deafness, majority are totally deaf in both ears.

The deaf respondents were more knowledgeable in the English language than in Filipino. Sixty-three percent of them can actually write in English while only 16 percent can in Tagalog or Filipino. Less than half of them (45%) indicated that they did not know both spoken and written Filipino/Tagalog while only 13 percent did not understand written or spoken English. Fortunately, majority of them could communicate in Philippine sign language.

The average educational attainment of PWDs is low. Only a third of the respondents have reached or completed high school level. About one-fourth of them have also either reached or finished college education. Another one-fourth, on the other hand, have only gone as far as elementary level (24%) while 8 percent did not even complete any grade. Those with mobility impairment had the highest average number of years of schooling while those with hearing impairment had the lowest. Men tended to have higher average years of schooling compared to women. About a third of the PWDs had Special Education, with about three-fourths (74%) among those with hearing impairment having had it while only a third of the visually impaired had it. Meanwhile, only 1 percent of the mobility-impaired took it.

The PWDs have a low employment rate. Only half of the respondents had income-generating jobs and half were looking for jobs. A greater proportion of men (57%) had jobs compared to women (40%). The visually impaired had the highest proportion with jobs (72%) followed by the mobility-impaired (44%) and the hearing-impaired (32%). Among those with jobs, 65 percent were visually impaired who work as masseurs and seem to have found their niche on this type of job. Because of this, their group had the highest employment ratio among the three types of impairment surveyed. On the other hand, 24 percent of the hearing-impaired with jobs worked as aide, helper, or messenger; 15 percent were working in the construction industry as helper, carpenter, maintenance worker, painter, or laborer; another 12 percent

worked as factory worker or supervisor while 9 percent were employed in ICT-related jobs. Meanwhile, 18 percent of the mobility-impaired with jobs were engaged in selling or vending; 12 percent were storekeepers or store managers while another 12 percent were self-employed (sari-sari store owners, barbers, tricycle operators, among others). Others were employed as technicians or electricians.

Among the types of impairment, the mobility-impaired had the largest percentage (at 30 percent) inclined toward some types of business. The visually impaired came next at 25 percent while the hearing-impaired had the lowest proportion at 16 percent. Among the business ventures that they were engaged in were stores, street vending, room/house renting, umbrella repair, water delivery, electronic repair, junk collection/shop, shirt printing/printing press, bird trading, and home-based food business.

Major sources of income differed according to the types of impairment. For the mobility-impaired, the largest proportion of their income came from earnings in business while for the visually impaired, wages and salaries mattered the most. On the other hand, the hearing-impaired obtained most of their income from money received from family and friends. The hearing-impaired therefore can be considered as the least independent among the PWDs interviewed.

The visually impaired PWDs have higher average incomes than the hearing-impaired and mobility-impaired. The average income for the year of the visually impaired with jobs was P76,270 while it

was P45,667 for the hearing-impaired and P55,681 for the mobility-impaired. Note that 69 percent of the mobility-impaired earned higher than the poverty threshold. Among the visually impaired, 65 percent of them did while among the hearing-impaired, only 44 percent earned higher than the poverty threshold.

Unfortunately, only 29 percent of the PWDs with jobs earned equal to or more than the minimum wage. Only a fifth of both the mobility-impaired and hearing-impaired individuals earned at least the minimum wage. The visually impaired were better off, with 37 percent of them earning at least the minimum wage.

The key to determining the income of PWDs are gender and education. In a deeper analysis of the survey data, Soya and Yamagata (2009) concluded that female PWDs are less privileged than male PWDs even with the same level of education, age, marital status, and type of disability. There is a large variation in terms of income and level of education among PWDs. The higher the educational attainment, the higher the income. Highly educated PWDs earn substantially higher incomes than those with little or no education. Their study also revealed that both the incidence and depth of poverty are higher among sample PWDs than those of the total population in Metro Manila.

Majority of the PWDs take three meals per day. The survey results revealed that 57 percent of the respondents had three meals per day. Only around 13 percent take less than three meals every day while around 30 percent even eat more than three meals per day.

Almost half of the respondents were involved in at least one disability self-help organization. When asked about the activities of their organization wherein they got involved, the most common activities mentioned were socialization (the most popular), occupational trainings and learning. Other activities included were advocacy campaigns and lobbying.

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program was almost nonexistent in the barangays as 92 percent of the respondents reported that they did not have knowledge of a CBR in their locality.

Only a very small portion (8%) of the respondents reported that a CBR program exists in their barangay. For areas with CBR programs, almost all (94%) of the respondents reported that they were indeed beneficiaries. However, when asked about the particular programs they had knowledge of, the following were listed: medical mission, reflexology training, livelihood training, health benefits, preparation of food basket/rice for the poor/free meals, *laktay saya*, gift giving, provision of seeds, free transportation and movie, and awareness/seminar. Several of these were not at all related to CBR which indicates that some respondents may not be aware of what CBR truly means or does.

Majority of the PWDs were not aware of the Magna Carta for PWDs and its amended version. When asked if they are aware of the Magna Carta, it was found that majority (68%) were not familiar with it and only 32 percent had knowledge about it. Likewise, majority of the respondents (79%) did not know about the amended Magna Carta which was implemented

quite recently in 2007. Majority do not also have knowledge that they can actually avail of discounts on a wide range of services such as in hotel and lodging establishments, on leisure and amusement, medical and dental services, professional fees of attending physician, and domestic air and sea travel. The most popular service where PWDs can avail of discounts is public transport (i.e., public railways, skyways, and bus transport). Of the PWDs who were aware of the discount, only 34 percent, however, indicated that they have actually enjoyed this benefit.

Not even half of the respondents have been issued PWD ID cards which were necessary for them to be given privileges. Apparently, there has been a slow rate of issuance of ID cards. A requisite to availment of privileges is the presence of a proof that the PWD is indeed a PWD. This is the ID card issued by either the National Commission on Disability Affairs (NCDA) (formerly called National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons [NCWDP]) or the local government. In the Magna Carta, the local government is the body tasked to issue identification cards.

Implications and recommendations

Based on the findings of the survey, the following recommendations are hereby offered: *It is very important for LGUs to accelerate the profiling of PWDs in their jurisdictions.* For LGUs still without a complete list of PWDs in their areas, this should start by having a clean and updated list. PWDs will also greatly benefit if LGUs (i.e., the social welfare office) can fast-

track the issuance of ID cards to them so that they can avail of the discounts for various services that they need. Key to this is the close coordination between the city social welfare office (CSWO) and the barangay/village health workers (BHW). What the survey found out was that the lists of PWDs in many parts of the cities during the time of the survey were still with the BHWs and were still due for submission to the CSWO. Fast-tracking this is very necessary for PWDs to be able to avail of discounts and other benefits due them as mandated by law. The profiling would facilitate the conduct of research on PWDs and could in turn provide inputs to policymakers in the formulation of policies and programs for PWDs.

There is an urgent need for more intensified dissemination of information on the programs and policies involving PWDs at the national and, more importantly, local level. At the national level, informing not only PWDs but also the general population on the rights and privileges of PWDs should be prioritized. The media can play a big role in this. The local government levels (both city and barangay levels), meanwhile, which have a closer proximity to the

PWDs themselves and their organizations, should ensure that their constituents are properly informed of the programs and policies concerning PWDs.

Enforcing anti-discriminatory laws and equal opportunities in the employment sector for the PWDs is a must. This should not only form part of the written laws but should also be enforced in the strictest way. This is definitely a vital component in helping PWDs live more independent lives.

Lastly, developing a physical environment that is conducive for all, PWDs and non-PWDs alike, is very important. This includes promoting barrier-free designs of housing systems and buildings, including schools, malls, streets, public areas, and offices, that guarantee continuity of space to ensure accessibility for all. Unless barriers are eliminated, people with disabilities will not be able to participate fully in various activities in society nor be able to avail equally of the opportunities that exist. 📄

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