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TRENDS FROM 2003 TO 2015**

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ABSTRACT

Central to the Philippine Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals is the reduction of poverty, whose measurement is ex post. The government, however, needs to broaden the scope of its assessments and take account of poverty dynamics in public policy. A critical dimension to the dynamics of poverty is vulnerability, which pertains to the risk of future poverty. This study continued previous work that involves estimating the level of household vulnerability to income poverty using a modified probit model incorporating income and other poverty data sourced from the Family Income and Expenditure Survey, as well as the country's official poverty lines. We first test out vulnerability estimation for panel data and show how the methodology manages to predict fairly well future poverty. Trends in vulnerability are then developed for cross sectional data from 2003 to 2015. The vulnerability assessment in this study provides inputs to forward-looking interventions that work toward building the resilience of households to future poverty. The study makes a case for the need to make use of both poverty and vulnerability estimates in programs and for coming up with differentiated actions for those highly vulnerable and relatively vulnerable.

1. Introduction

The eradication of poverty is at the heart of the development agenda both nationally and globally. The most recent Philippine Development Plan (PDP) mainstreams poverty reduction within socio-economic goals and targets (NEDA 2017). Further, the first of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that 193 nations, including the Philippines, committed to attaining by 2030 is a commitment to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” (UN 2015).

This paper firstly points out that the country's robust economic growth in the last decade has not translated into significantly reducing the proportion of Filipinos living in poverty. However, this lack of changes in poverty rates does not really no changes: some of the poor have exited poverty (from time to time, or even sustainably) but some of the non-poor have also fallen into poverty. The risks in income deprivation experienced by both the poor and non-poor are on account of events such as sharp rises in prices, natural disasters, job losses, health problems or death of a family's main income earner. Thus, we argue in this essay that poverty reduction should involve assessing not only poverty but also vulnerability. We make use of an approach to estimating household vulnerability, that involves income and other data from national surveys. We also discuss in this essay some policy implications: the need to craft a roadmap for poverty reduction that accounts for both poverty and vulnerability.

Poverty Reduction Lackluster Despite Robust Economic Growth

From 2003 to 2015, the Philippines had an average of 5.5% annual growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but this growth was not inclusive as it did not translate into substantial

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poverty reduction. While all major sectors in the economy had positive growth in output from 2003 to 2015, the agricultural sector, which most of the poor are dependent on for their livelihood, was considerably outpaced in its average annual growth (2.5 %) by industry (4.8 %) and services (6.0 %). Historically, the Philippines has always been dominated by the services sector, and in recent decades, the agriculture sector has been shrinking in terms of its position in both total output as well as total employment (Albert *et al.* 2015).

According to Ravallion (2013), while the growth elasticity of poverty (GEP)² averages 2.5% in recent years, but a 1% increase in incomes reduces poverty by only 0.6% in the most unequal countries, and by as much as 4.3% in the most equal ones. Estimates of GEP for the Philippines are rather low (at below 1.0% between 2006 and 2015) compared to the global average (of 2.5%). The low GEP in the Philippines suggests that despite the country's economic growth from 2006 to 2015 (especially in rather recent years), poverty has not been considerably reduced. This is, in part, because economic growth has not been pro-poor. Further, high income inequalities have prevented economic growth from benefiting the entire income distribution, especially low-income classes, thus minimizing the effects of economic growth on reducing income poverty (Albert *et al.* 2017). The poor and even those who are near-poor are likely to be poor in the future given the various macroeconomic and idiosyncratic risks to welfare they face.

2. Poverty Dynamics and Implications to Social Protection

An examination of the poverty status of “panel” households interviewed in the 2003 Family Income Expenditure Survey (FIES) that were further interviewed in 2006 and in 2009 suggests that some poor households in 2003 have exited poverty in 2009, and some non-poor households in 2003 have fallen into poverty by 2009 (**Table 1**). Among near-poor households (that are not poor but with incomes less than 1.5 times the poverty threshold) in 2003, 3 out of 10 fell into poverty in 2009. Thus, the near poor are more vulnerable to income poverty than the non-poor who are not from the near-poor.

Table 1. Poverty Transition Matrix (in Percent of Households in 2003): 2003 - 2009

Poverty Status in 2003	Poverty Status in 2009					
	Food-poor	Poor but not Food-poor	Near Poor*	Low income** but not near poor	Rest of Households	Total
Food poor	3.27	2.79	1.86	0.31	0.22	8.45
Poor but not Food Poor	2.25	3.32	3.34	1.38	1.11	11.41
Near Poor*	1.67	4.23	5.73	3.71	3.23	18.57
Low Income** but not Near Poor	0.34	1.58	4.04	3.54	4.84	14.34
Rest of Households	0.28	0.94	4.55	4.92	36.54	47.23
Total	7.81	12.86	19.52	13.87	45.94	100

Notes: (i) *Near poor households are defined in this study as those with per capita income greater or equal to the poverty line but less than 1.5 times the poverty line. ; ** Low income households are those with per capita income less than twice the poverty line. (ii) Figures here are authors' calculations from microdata of panel households interviewed from the FIES 2003, FIES 2006 and FIES 2009, conducted by the PSA.

² The GEP refers to the percentage reduction in poverty rates associated with a percentage change in mean (per capita) income.

Poverty is like a disease: it carries a stigma, and it also requires interventions. Approaches to poverty have largely been curative (i.e., alleviating the conditions of the poor, and/or helping them exit out of poverty, just like treating the sick), but they should also include preventive ones (i.e., protecting those vulnerable from the risks and harmful effects of poverty by building their resilience, just like enabling those at risk of getting sick from having better chances at not falling into sickness).

In the Philippines, social protection programs such as *Pantawid* and *SocPen*, both implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, are being implemented and communicated as poverty reduction programs. However, these interventions are actually meant to build resilience of the poor, especially as cash transfers are meager and are not going to change their poverty status (Orbeta and Paqueo 2016; Velarde and Albert 2018). Nonetheless, cash transfers, including the unconditional cash transfers for cushioning the impact of tax reforms, reduce the poverty gaps (i.e., the difference between the poverty thresholds and the poor's income) of the 4.4 million *Pantawid* beneficiaries and the indigent elderly among the 3 million *SocPen* beneficiaries. Government, however, will need to strengthen social protection to progressively include those vulnerable and implement specific programs that take account of varying circumstances of households that are either poor or vulnerable to poverty.

3. Estimating household vulnerability to poverty

Albert *et al.* (2008) as well as Albert and Ramos (2010) use a “modified probit model” on per capita income data to predict the probability that a household will be poor in the future. Following these previous studies but with a slightly modified model specification, estimation of these probabilities was carried out using data sourced from the triennial FIES for 2003 up to 2015, using a number of household characteristics, including employment, education, location, dwelling characteristics, experience in price surges, and experience of severe storms. Using the resulting estimates of the probability of a household being poor in the future, households are classified as vulnerable if they their chance of being poor in the future exceeds the national poverty rate, and as nonvulnerable otherwise. Further, the vulnerable is categorized into highly vulnerable if the probability of being poor is greater than 50 percent and relatively vulnerable if the probability is between the national poverty rate and 50 percent.

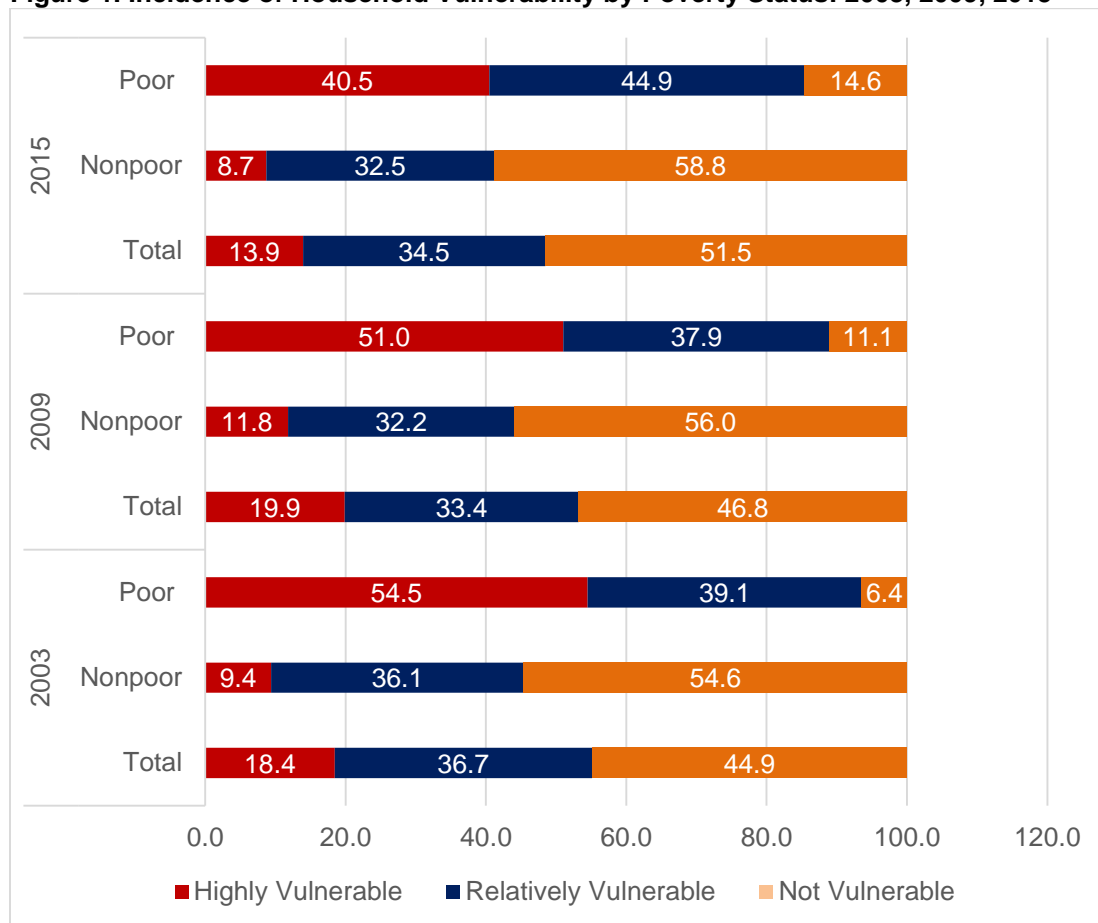
The estimation model was firstly tested on panel data pertaining to households interviewed in the 2003 FIES, the 2006 FIES and the 2009 FIES to determine the extent to which the vulnerability managed to actually predict poverty. Results showed that nearly half (47.4%) of households identified as highly vulnerable in 2003 were poor in both 2006 and 2009, and more than a quarter (28.1%) experienced poverty either in 2006 or 2009 but not both. Among the relatively vulnerable households in 2003, about two thirds (65.4%) were low income (and possibly poor) in either 2006 or 2009 or both. Four-fifths (81.4%) of not vulnerable households in 2003 were not low income in both 2006 and 2009. The empirical results on the panel data suggest that the vulnerability estimation model employed in this study has very strong predictive power of identifying the future poverty status of households.

Proportion vulnerable even higher than proportion in poverty

The proportion of households that are vulnerable across the population for the years 2003, 2009, and 2015 by poverty status is shown in **Figure 1**. Across the years, the proportion of households in the Philippines that are vulnerable to income poverty has been around double to triple the corresponding official estimates of the proportion of households in poverty. Household vulnerability rates, however, have been steadily declining from 55.1 percent in 2003 to 48.5

percent in 2015.

Figure 1. Incidence of Household Vulnerability by Poverty Status: 2003, 2009, 2015



Note: Authors' calculations based on 2003 FIES, 2009 FIES and 2015 FIES, PSA.

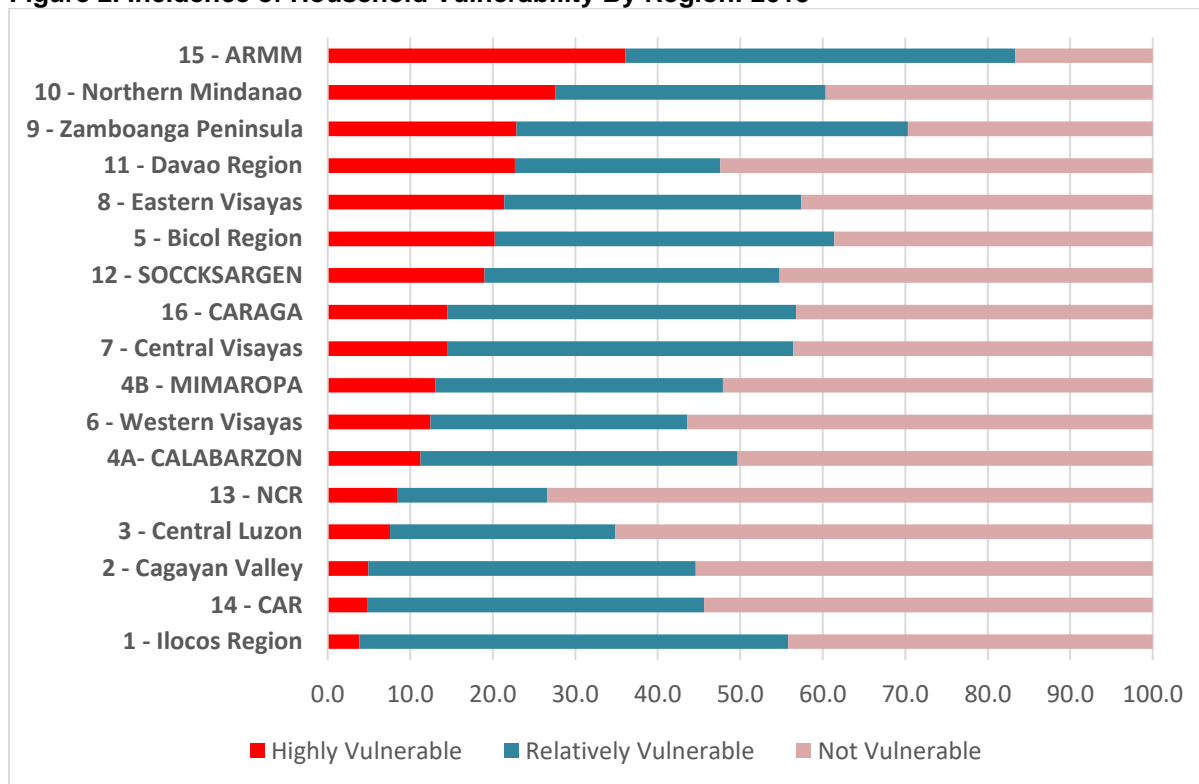
The proportion that are highly vulnerable to income poverty has also decreased among poor households from 54.5 percent in 2003 to 40.5 percent in 2015 (**Figure 1**). The overall percentage of households that are relatively vulnerable has also decreased but at substantially lesser rates from 36.7 percent in 2003 to 34.5 percent in 2015, on account of the increase in the proportion of poor households that are relatively vulnerable, which offset the decline in the proportion of non-poor households that are relatively vulnerable.

As of 2015, about three-fifths (58.8%) of non-poor households are classified as not vulnerable to poverty. However, the bulk of vulnerable households continue to be non-poor households which accounted for 71.0 percent share of all vulnerable households. In 2015, about one-seventh (13.9%) of households throughout the country are highly-vulnerable and about a third (34.9%) are relatively vulnerable. Thus, as of 2015, about half (48.5%) of Filipino households are vulnerable to income poverty, a third of which are highly vulnerable.

The rural population is more vulnerable than its urban counterpart, with vulnerability rates at two thirds (69.3%) of all households at in rural areas, compared to two-fifths (40.4%) of urban households, as of 2015. Although vulnerability is a largely rural phenomenon, the proportion of highly vulnerable households in rural areas has declined by 7.1 percentage points from 27.6 percent in 2003 to 20.5 percent in 2015.

Across the regions, ARMM is the most vulnerable region (83.3%)– more than two fifths of these are highly vulnerable (**Figure 2**). Ilocos Region has the lowest proportion of households (3.8%) that are highly vulnerable among the regions but as much as 52.0% of its households are relatively vulnerable, putting it in the middle among regions as far as vulnerability rate is concerned. The NCR (26.6%) and Central Luzon (34.9%) are the only regions with (overall) vulnerability rates below 35%.

Figure 2. Incidence of Household Vulnerability By Region: 2015



Note: Authors' calculations based on 2015 FIES, PSA.

Fishermen, farmers, and children are most vulnerable among the basic sectors

The government's framework for social protection and defining poverty is based on Republic Act 8425 or the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act. Of the 14 basic sectors identified by this law which require focused intervention for poverty alleviation, PSA has obtained estimates of poverty for 9 sectors using the merged Labor Force Survey (LFS)-FIES data (PSA 2017): (1) Farmer-peasant; (2) Artisanal fisherfolk; (3) Workers in the formal sector and migrant workers; (4) Workers in the informal sector; (5) Women; (6) Senior citizens; (7) Youth and students; (8) Children; and (9) Urban poor.

Using the basic assumption in poverty estimation that individuals belonging to poor households are themselves considered poor, the share of the basic sectors that are highly vulnerable, relatively vulnerable and non-vulnerable to income poverty, are estimated sourced from merged LFS-FIES data (**Table 2**). We can observe that vulnerability rates for the populations of the basic sectors are much larger than corresponding shares of the population in poverty. Further, the vulnerability rates, and the proportions of the basic sectors that are highly vulnerable are consistently highest for fisherman, farmers and children. Consistent also with patterns in poverty rates, the lowest vulnerability rates are also observed for persons residing in urban areas,

and for senior citizens.

Table 2. Proportion in Poverty and Proportion in Vulnerability for Basic Sectors in 2015

Basic Sector	Poverty Rate	Proportion of Persons that are		
		Highly Vulnerable	Relatively Vulnerable	Non- Vulnerable
Farmers	34.3	24.7	48.2	27.1
Fishermen	34.0	33.4	50.5	16.1
Children	31.4	25.4	41.4	33.2
Self-employed and Unpaid Family Workers	25.0	18.3	42.5	39.2
Women	22.5	18.1	37.9	44.0
Youth	19.4	14.6	38.4	47.1
Migrants and Workers Employed in Formal Sector	13.4	11.5	35.0	53.6
Senior Citizens	13.2	7.5	31.5	61.0
Individuals in Urban Areas	11.5	14.7	23.2	62.1

Note: Authors' calculations based on merged 2015 LFS – FIES, PSA.

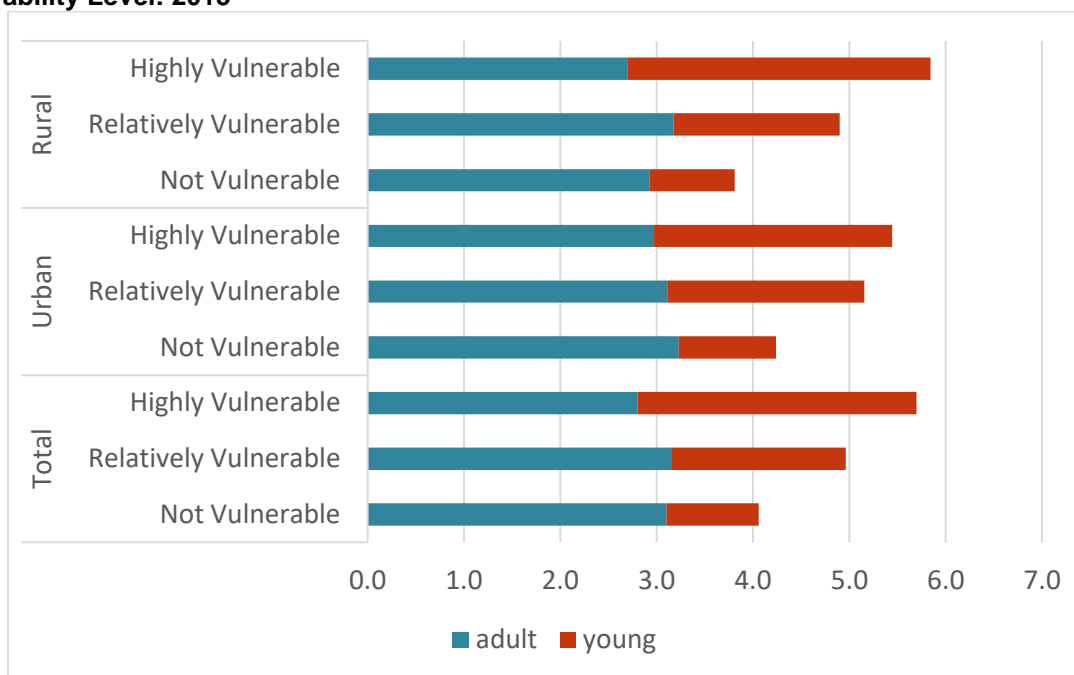
4. Key sources of income variability and shocks

Labor and employment, price, and demographic factors are key sources of income variability and shocks. While we can examine attributes of all household members based on information from the merged LFS-FIES, we limit our analysis to educational attainment, income sources and the major sector of employment of household heads but note that similar patterns can also be observed for all members of the household who are in the labor force.

Households with larger family sizes are more vulnerable to poverty

Vulnerable households, especially highly-vulnerable ones, noticeably have larger family size compared to non-vulnerable households. The disparity between vulnerable and non-vulnerable households in 2015 is largely on account of the number of young members in the household (**Figure 3**). Among relatively vulnerable households, there are about twice as many adults (3.2) than young members (1.8). For non-vulnerable households, there are more than three times the number of adults (3.1) than young (1.0). These observations are consistently noticed in both urban and rural areas across the country. Thus, demographic patterns such as family size, particularly the number of young household members appear to be contributing to additional risks for vulnerability to poverty regardless of area where the household resides.

Figure 3. Average Number of Young and Adult Members in Urban and Rural Areas by Household Vulnerability Level: 2015



Higher educational attainment correlated with lower risk of vulnerability

The vulnerability rate of households drop with increasing educational attainment of the household head (**Table 3**). Due to limited income among poor households, these households usually have more difficulty in making investments in the schooling of their young household members. Thus, the decision to invest little in schooling of household members and to prioritize more pressing immediate needs given their limited incomes, puts them to increased risks of vulnerability. This suggests the importance of human capital investments, not only by government but also by the households themselves. However, it should be noted the association between education and vulnerability is not just one-way, i.e., the higher the income of a household, the more likely that the household invests in the education of the children. This two-way causation is more serious for children and youths.

Table 3. Incidence of Vulnerability Among Households, by Highest Educational Attainment of the Head: 2015

Highest Educational Attainment	Highly Vulnerable	Relatively Vulnerable	Not Vulnerable	Total
None	53.2	24.8	22.0	100.0
Some elementary to elementary graduate	20.1	46.0	34.0	100.0
Some high school to high school graduate	10.9	33.1	56.0	100.0
Some college and beyond	5.1	19.6	75.3	100.0
TOTAL	13.9	34.5	51.5	100.0

Vulnerability varies with main source of income of households

In 2015, vulnerability rates of over 25% are observed among households whose heads have major income sources from fishing, forestry, mining, income from family sustenance activities, wage/salaries from agricultural activities, crop farming and gardening (**Table 4**). On the

other hand, low vulnerability rates are noticed among households whose heads have major income sources from wage/salary from non-agricultural activities; from wholesale and retail; community, etc. services; construction entrepreneurial activity not elsewhere classified (N.E.C.), Net Share of Crops and others, and Assistance from Abroad; in addition, the proportion of households that are highly vulnerable are at around 10% or less.

Table 4. Household Vulnerability in 2015 by Major Income Source of Household Heads

Major Income Source	Highly Vulnerable	Relatively Vulnerable	Not Vulnerable	Total
Wage/Salary from Agri. Activity	27.8	43.3	28.9	100.0
Wage/Salary from Non-Agri. Activity	10.5	31.9	57.6	100.0
Crop Farming and Gardening	27.3	46.4	26.4	100.0
Livestock and Poultry Raising	21.4	47.4	31.2	100.0
Fishing	37.2	46.9	16.0	100.0
Forestry and Hunting	33.1	55.7	11.1	100.0
Wholesale and Retail	7.9	34.5	57.7	100.0
Manufacturing	12.2	32.8	55.0	100.0
Community, etc. services	8.0	26.1	65.9	100.0
Transport and Communication	11.6	39.9	48.5	100.0
Mining	17.3	60.5	22.2	100.0
Construction	7.6	14.4	78.0	100.0
Entrepreneurial Activity N.E.C.	5.8	24.3	69.9	100.0
Net Share of Crops and others	10.3	39.4	50.3	100.0
Assistance from Abroad	10.4	32.2	57.4	100.0
Assistance from Domestic Source	19.7	39.4	40.9	100.0
Rental of Lands and other Properties	6.2	14.1	79.7	100.0
Interests from Banks / loans	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0
Pensions and retirements benefits	2.9	16.8	80.3	100.0
Dividend from Investments	5.5	31.5	63.0	100.0
Rental value of owner-occupied dwelling unit for income	4.6	19.7	75.8	100.0
Income from family sustenance activities	29.8	48.9	21.3	100.0
Received as Gifts	10.6	35.0	54.5	100.0
Other Income	55.1	34.1	10.8	100.0
TOTAL	13.9	34.5	51.5	100.0

Notes: (i) Authors' calculations based on merged 2015 FIES, PSA; (ii) NEC = not elsewhere classified

Those engaged in mining are not highly vulnerable, but they have the biggest incidence of relative vulnerability as disaggregated data suggests that about 7 out of 10 are either self-employed or work without pay in a family business. Furthermore, least vulnerable are households with heads whose major income sources are interests from banks / loans, pensions and retirements benefits, rental of lands and other properties, construction rental value of owner-occupied dwelling unit for income, entrepreneurial activity not elsewhere classified (N.E.C.), community, etc. services, dividend from investments, wholesale and retail wage/salary from non-agricultural activity, assistance from abroad, manufacturing, received as gifts, net share of crops and others. Disaggregated data on highest grade completed suggest that these household heads have the highest educational attainment, thus supporting the correlation of human capital

development with sustainable income.

As of 2015, close to 10% of households have at least one member working as an Overseas Filipino worker (OFW). Studies have shown the important role of OFW members in economic mobility among Filipinos (Ducanes & Abella 2008). **Table 5** shows that households among those with at least one OFW member are not only less poor, but also their overall vulnerability rate is lower (43.8%) by 5.1 percentage points, compared to households without an OFW member (48.9%). Among the non-poor, overall vulnerability drops across income strata. Among the poor, overall vulnerability does not drop, but the incidence of high vulnerability can drop significantly with the presence of an OFW member.

Table 5. Household Vulnerability in 2015 by Presence of an Overseas Filipino Worker

Presence of Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW)	Income Group	Vulnerability Level			
		Highly Vulnerable	Relatively Vulnerable	Non-Vulnerable	Total
Households without an OFW member	Poor	40.7	44.8	14.6	100
	Low Income but not Poor	13.9	44.9	41.3	100
	Low middle income	5.4	27.8	66.8	100
	Rest of Households	2.9	15.4	81.7	100
	Total	14.2	34.7	51.1	100
Households with at least one OFW member	Poor	31.3	51.4	17.3	100
	Low Income but not Poor	15.9	48.0	36.0	100
	Low middle income	10.3	33.9	55.9	100
	Rest of Households	6.5	23.2	70.3	100
	Total	10.7	33.1	56.2	100

Note: Authors' calculations based on merged 2015 FIES, PSA

Bird (2009) noted that while the distribution of families with at least one member who is an OFW show that these families are more likely to be non-poor, at least 5% of the population would have been poor in a counterfactual scenario without the remittances. In 2015, about three in ten families received remittances from abroad. **Table 6** shows that foreign remittances contribute to reducing vulnerability to income poverty. In a future study, this may also be considered as part of the model specification for the vulnerability estimation.

Table 6. Household Vulnerability in 2015 by Type of Remittance Received by Household

Households by Remittances Received	Poverty Rate	Vulnerability Level			
		Highly Vulnerable	Relatively Vulnerable	Non-Vulnerable	Total
Domestic Remittances Only	32.7	23.5	41.1	35.4	100
Foreign Remittances Only	3.1	8.1	28.3	63.6	100
Both Domestic and Foreign Remittance	11.8	13.8	38.2	48.0	100
No Remittances	12.8	10.4	31.6	58.0	100
All Households	21.0	17.1	37.0	45.8	100

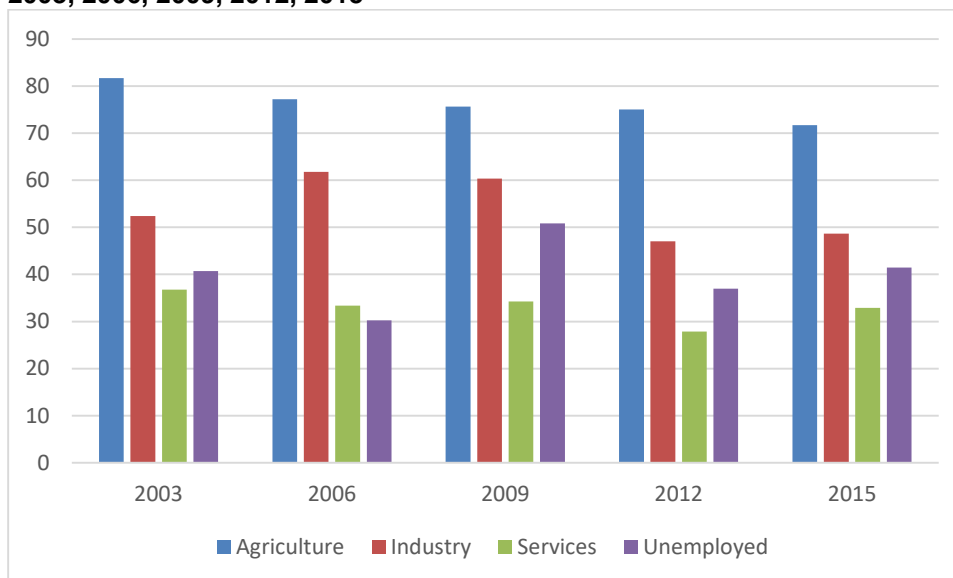
Note: Authors' calculations based on merged 2015 FIES, PSA

Agriculture consistently the most vulnerable among major sectors

Figure 3 provides a historical portrait of household vulnerability rates by sector of employment of household head from 2003 to 2015. While the vulnerability of households with

heads dependent in agriculture has declined from 82 percent in 2003 to 72 percent in 2015, but the agriculture sector still the highest vulnerability rate among household heads primarily dependent on each of the major sectors. Households with heads employed in services has consistently been found to be least vulnerable at 33 percent in 2015. As of 2015, half (49%) of households with heads working in industry sector are vulnerable to poverty, and about two fifths (41%) of households with unemployed heads are vulnerable. While it may seem surprising why those engaged in industry have higher vulnerability rates than those in services especially as the average basic pay per day in industry is the highest among those with permanent jobs, disaggregated data suggests that the a much higher proportion of those in services are in permanent jobs (and with much higher hours at work) than those in industry.

Figure 3. Household Vulnerability Rates by Major Sector of Employment of the Household Head: 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015



Note: Authors' calculations based on 203 FIES, 2006 FIES, 2009 FIES, 2013 FIES and 2015 FIES, PSA.

5. Policy and program implications to the war on poverty

While the country has had some progress in reducing poverty from 1990, the rate of reduction has been rather minimal in recent years, with a substantial proportion (16.5 percent) of households remaining poor as of 2015 and about three times as many (48.5 percent) vulnerable to poverty. To overcome obstacles in reducing poverty, government and all poverty stakeholders needs to see the importance of forward-looking planning and risk resilience building in a context of uncertainty.

Poverty alleviation and social protection efforts have typically revolved around the formulation and implementation of “one size fits all” strategies. For instance, social protection actions involve the provision of a uniform cash assistance to all beneficiaries, rather than accounting for differentiated needs. SocPen, for instance, provides Php500 monthly pensions for all beneficiaries, who are by law, supposed to be indigent senior citizens. *Pantawid* provides Php300 monthly education grants for pre-primary and primary students, Php500 monthly education assistance for high school students and Php500 monthly health grants to households, without recognizing differences in opportunity costs for schooling between boys and girls. Support from the development community during extreme crises, such as unconditional cash transfers (UCT) of monthly USD100 assistance provided by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to 10,000 poor households in the aftermath of the effects of super typhoon Yolanda have

themselves been one size fits all, in both the assistance and the payment modes (Reyes *et al.* 2018). The TRAIN law also provides cash support of P200 per month for this year (and P300 monthly in 2019 and 2020) for 10 Million lower income beneficiaries, including the over 4 million *Pantawid* beneficiaries, and 3 Million SocPen elderly beneficiaries (Velarde and Albert 2018).

To get more impact in efforts to reduce poverty, government needs to build an enabling environment for shared action and responsibility with local governments and other stakeholders. Further, we need to formulate an action agenda that addresses all relevant risks to vulnerability jointly seeing synergies, tradeoffs and priorities in policy interventions, using all available resources, institutions and means of implementation across different contexts. We not only have to “cure” poverty, but also “prevent” it, or at least mitigate its harm to people who are likely going to suffer from this disease.

The National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) currently espouses a comprehensive, universal, and transformative social policy, including a rights-based approach, to ensure that reaching zero (poverty) becomes the cornerstone of the country’s development policies (NAPC 2018). The NAPC has taken cognizance that poverty has many faces, including vulnerabilities stemming from risks to welfare such as uncertainties from lack of decent work and educational attainment of household members, insecurity from land tenure and lack of productive assets, imperfect and asymmetric information on opportunities, as well as food insecurity, uncertain access to public goods, and asset damages from disasters and violence.

Differentiated (rather than one size fits all) interventions are required to manage risks better among various vulnerable groups. Risk resilience measures based on an examination of data on both poverty and vulnerability will allow vulnerable households to reduce the effects of adverse events (e.g., natural calamities, price shocks, and idiosyncratic shocks) on their conditions but also empower them to seize the moment and take advantage of opportunities for improving their prospects for a better future today.

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