

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POVERTY MONITORING: THE CASE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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INTRODUCTION

Social Weather Stations (www.sws.org.ph) is a private, non-profit scientific institute that regularly conducts and reports national surveys in the Philippines for the sake of education, conscientization and analysis of social problems and issues. This paper shows that the SWS surveys of households have enabled the Philippines to have the world's most rapid system for statistically tracking national poverty (now with 86 observations) and hunger (now with 45 observations) over time. The SWS national surveys, done quarterly, have revealed critical episodes of poverty and hunger, unlike the official surveys done only once in three years. This paper discusses the methodology of measuring economic deprivation by the bottom-up approach. It shows the measures' internal consistency, their relationships to occupation, family size, and assistance to families from government and other sources, and their connections to anti-hunger programs. It advocates incorporation of poverty and hunger in econometric modeling, and points in particular to inflation in general prices and food prices as much more relevant than aggregate economic growth.

1. RAPID STATISTICAL REPORTING ON POVERTY AND HUNGER IN THE PHILIPPINES

1.1 Availability of regular survey statistics

Social Weather Stations (SWS), a private, non-profit scientific institute, was established in the Philippines in 1985 in order to regularly generate social survey data for the following mission: (1) *to stimulate eyes* into learning the extent of social problems, (2), *to influence hearts* or consciences into resolving to work harder in order to solve the problems, and (3) *to guide minds* into finding effective solutions for the problems. This follows the shift of the global social indicators movement from the *technocratic* model — which assumes that mere generation of data leads to technical solutions for social problems — to the *enlightenment* model (Land 1996), which emphasizes the placement of quality-of-life issues on the political agenda by supplying data for *public debate* through the mass media and professional channels. SWS is a conscious participant in *democratic discourse* [Mangahas, 2006].

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SWS believes that private institutions can and should play a role in generating, for public use, poverty incidence rates and other 'social weather' indicators that are meaningful, understandable, credible, frequent, and sustainable. It has actually *operationalized* social indicators in the Philippines (Mangahas and Guerrero 2008). SWS aims for its survey data to be socially relevant, simple to understand, up-to-date, and reliable. It practices *advocacy through statistics*, by deliberately bringing poverty and other conditions of the socially disadvantaged into public view through regular monitoring, so as to strengthen the competition of these conditions for the attention of all.

The official system for measuring poverty, being infrequently applied, has fostered an illusion that poverty steadily declines. Due to the official policy of doing the Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) only once every three years, the government has measured poverty merely eight times between 1985 and 2006, as of now (Chart 1). The first seven measurements, ending in 2003, gave a picture of steadily declining poverty, fostering the illusion that growth in the GNP was trickling down to the poor -- an illusion finally shattered by the NSCB's March 5, 2008 press release, "Poverty worsens between 2003 and 2006."²

The next scheduled FIES, for 2009, requires two surveys six months apart, in order to measure income and expenditures separately for each semester. Based on past experience, initial results are expected only in October 2010, and official poverty results only in early 2011. From 2007 to the present, or during the period of the global economic recession, there have been no other survey estimates of Philippine poverty aside from those of SWS.

1.2 Public reporting of the statistics

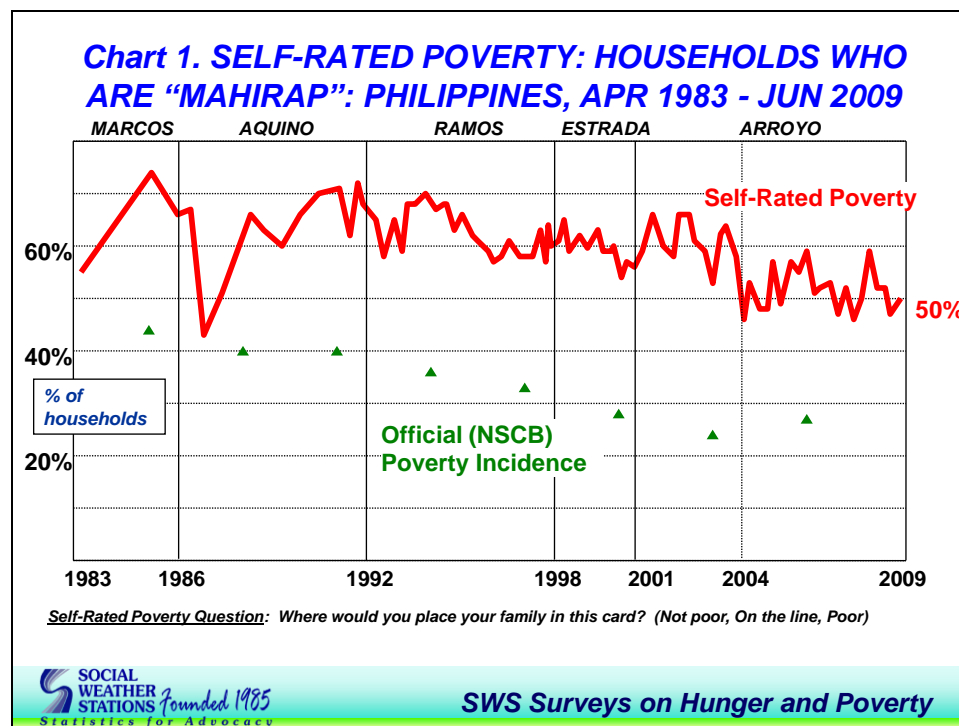
SWS has the most rapid system for statistically tracking national poverty in the world. From 1983 to mid-2009, the SWS series of surveys of poverty now has 86³ national observations (quarterly since 1992). The SWS series on hunger is quarterly from 1998 and now has 45 observations. It is, to my knowledge, the world's most rapid system for statistical monitoring of poverty and hunger in a country at the national level. [Mangahas, 2004]

In the long series of surveys on Philippine poverty, there appear to be as many as eight distinct turning points, marking off nine episodes with different trends (Chart 1). Since the Gross National Product per capita has been steadily growing each year in the past two decades, it cannot account for the following poverty episodes:

² The enormity of data processing required by orthodox poverty measurement is illustrated by the fact that it took up to March 2008 for the NSCB to confirm what was already obvious in the summary tables of the 2006 FIES, released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) on 9 October 2007. [Mangahas, 8 March 2008]

³ Including a 1983 survey by the Development Academy of the Philippines (a state institution) and a 1985 survey by the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference for Human Development (a civil society organization) that were also directed by the author, using the same methodology.

- (1) **Downward** episode: between **mid-1985**, when the SWS measure of poverty was at its all-time peak of 74%, and dropped to its all-time low of 43% by **early 1987**.
- (2) **Upward** episode: up to **early 1994**, when it reached as high as 70%.
- (3) **Downward** episode: up to **early-1998**, falling to 57%.
- (4) More or less **flat** trend: **from mid-1998 to mid-2001**, fluctuating around 60%.
- (5) **Downward** episode: to **mid-2004**, to as low as 46%.
- (6) **Upward** episode: reaching 59% in **mid-2006**.⁴
- (7) **Downward** episode: again going as low as 46%, by the **end of 2007**.
- (8) A **spike** to 59% by **mid-2008**, very likely due to the severe rice price crisis.
- (9) Most recently, poverty settled **down** to 50% by mid-2009.



⁴ This upward episode in the SWS surveys is consistent with the NSCB report, based on the triennial Family Income and Expenditure Surveys, that poverty increased between the points of 2003 and 2006. In addition, the SWS series shows that the low point was in 2004 rather than in 2003. A triennial survey series is inherently incapable of timing the turning points in poverty as accurately as a quarterly series.

1.3 Public discourse of the statistics

The SWS surveys are specifically intended for dynamic analysis. The subjects of hunger and poverty are core components of the quarterly Social Weather Reports (Mangahas and Guerrero, 2008). They are statistically tracked on a quarterly basis in order to match the periodicity of the National Income Accounts. The question items and the national sampling methodology have been strictly maintained from quarter to quarter. The general results are released punctually as a public service.⁵

The express purpose of the SWS constructs of self-rated poverty and self-declared hunger is to create practical means of monitoring of the state of aggregate poverty and hunger regularly and rapidly over time. In order for the survey series to be financially affordable, this is being done: (a) only at the national level and for the broad geographical areas of Metro Manila, the Balance of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, using efficiently small, and hence replicable, sample sizes⁶ (national $n = 1,200$ households); (b) with simple, practical survey questions drawn from both social indicators research and opinion research; and (c) as part of a general quarterly omnibus survey of the quality of life, governance, and general public opinion, thus sharing the cost with other elements of the survey agenda, and funded by the general revenues of the omnibus.

The SWS data series on poverty and hunger is an original Philippine innovation (Abrera 1976, Mangahas 1976). It is produced by regular, self-sustained, survey operations; it is not a research experiment (Mangahas and Guerrero, 2008). The SWS poverty reports are regularly released to the mass media, discussed in academic and civic circles, and directly presented to high government officials concerned with poverty program-coordination.⁷

⁵ The SWS media releases on poverty and hunger during the past four quarters are cited in the list of references; all releases are filed on www.sws.org.ph. Starting in mid-2007, SWS assigned the right of first print publication of the quarterly poverty and hunger survey findings to the daily newspaper *Business World*. These findings are typically picked up and used by the broadcast media later on the same day, and printed in major newspapers on the following day. .

⁶ Standard SWS surveys use face-to-face interviews of efficient national samples of 1,200 statistically representative households (300 each in Metro Manila, the Balance of Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao), from 240 geographical spots selected from all regions. The sample spots and respondents are freshly drawn for each survey, rather than a fixed panel of locations or individuals. Error margins of $\pm 3\%$ for national percentages and $\pm 6\%$ for area-level percentages should be applied. The national sample size of 1,200 is slightly larger than the global 'gold standard' of 1,000 practiced by the quarterly Eurobarometer and virtually all regional barometers and cross-country survey networks. SWS is the Philippine member of Asian Barometer (www.asianbarometer.org) and the International Social Survey Program (www.issp.org), both of which are made up of civil society research institutes.

⁷ In particular, SWS makes periodic presentations to the government's Anti-Hunger Task Force, National Anti-Poverty Commission and the National Nutrition Council, discussing (a) the latest quarterly readings on poverty and hunger and (b) the findings of special survey modules commissioned by the government regarding some of its ongoing programs. Such commissioned modules are temporarily confidential and for the internal use of the government, but are archived in the SWS Survey Data Library and become available for public research after three years at most.

2. SOCIAL WEATHER STATIONS METHODOLOGY ON SELF-RATED ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

2.1 Self-rated poverty and food poverty

Self-ratings are bottom-up, rather than top-down, indicators. All poverty measurement approaches necessarily incorporate values or norms. The orthodox approach which uses a predetermined poverty line is ostensibly objective but actually depends on the subjective norms of designated government agencies or officials; thus it is a top-down approach. On the other hand, the candidly subjective, or self-rated, approach uses the bottom-up norms of ordinary citizens, either expressed by groups (for example community-values or norms), or by individuals. Respect for bottom-up norms in the construction of a statistical indicator is essentially *democratic*, whereas insistence on the primacy of top-down norms is essentially *elitist*.

In the SWS approach, the poverty self-rating does not depend on any predetermined poverty line. In each survey, the household head -- the respondent for poverty and hunger questions, speaking in behalf of the entire family -- is asked to point to where he/she thinks the household fares in a showcard featuring only the word POOR, the *negative* (not the opposite) term NOT POOR, and a line in-between. Half of the sample uses the left showcard seen in Figure 1, and the other half uses the right showcard, in order to eliminate positioning-bias. The word consistently used for POOR, *mahirap*, expresses the least degree of hardship among various Tagalog terms for poverty. The terms for POOR in other Philippine languages used in the SWS surveys are in the lower panel of Figure 1.

Unlike other approaches in the literature,⁸ the SWS survey question carefully avoids inclusion of any contrasting term such as *rich* or *comfortable*, and thus counts as poor only those who *absolutely* (in contrast to *relatively*) identify themselves as *poor*. Use of a contrasting term will subtly induce people to adopt the label of *poor* for themselves, in order to avoid a label of *rich* or *comfortable* out of simple modesty.⁹

⁸ **Case 1.** Eurobarometer (a system of cross-country surveys within the European Union) uses the survey question: "Taking everything into account, at about what level is your family situated as far as standard of living is concerned? You may answer by giving a figure between 1 and 7 — number 1 means a poor family and number 7 a rich family." From this, Riffault (1991) interpreted numbers 1 and 2 as self-rated poverty and reported that European poverty rose from 7.6% in 1976 to 10.7% in 1983. **Case 2.** Using the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey question -- "Please imagine a 9-step ladder where on the bottom, the first step, stand the poorest people, and on the highest step, the ninth, stand the rich. On which step do you stand today?" -- Ravallion and Lokshin (2002) likewise associate the lowest two rungs with poverty. Why the third or the fourth rungs may not also be interpreted as poor is a pure judgment call of the said researchers.

⁹ The meaning that Filipinos give, in financial terms, to the term *mayaman* (rich) in particular is another interesting matter, that has also been measured in the Social Weather Surveys [Mangahas, 2002], but is outside the scope of this paper. A survey question containing contrasting labels is said to use the *semantic difference* approach. SWS has not used semantic differences to measure either poverty or wealth

Figure 1. SHOWCARDS FOR THE QUESTION ITEM ON SELF-RATED POVERTY

Self-Rated Poverty Question: *Saan po ninyo ilalagay ang inyong pamilya sa kard na ito?*
Where would you place your family in this card?

Hindi mahirap (Not poor)	MAHIRAP (Poor)
MAHIRAP (Poor)	Hindi mahirap (Not poor)

<u>Languages</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Not Poor</u>
Tagalog	<i>Mahirap</i>	<i>Hindi Mahirap</i>
Cebuano	<i>Pobre</i>	<i>Dili Pobre</i>
Bicolano	<i>Pobre</i>	<i>BacongMahirap</i>
Ilocano	<i>Napanglaw</i>	<i>Saan nga Napanglaw</i>
Ilonggo	<i>Imol</i>	<i>Indi Imol</i>
Pangasinense	<i>Mairap</i>	<i>Aliwan Mairap</i>
Waray	<i>Pobre</i>	<i>Diri Pobre</i>
Maguindanon	<i>Miskinan</i>	<i>Dikena Miskinan</i>

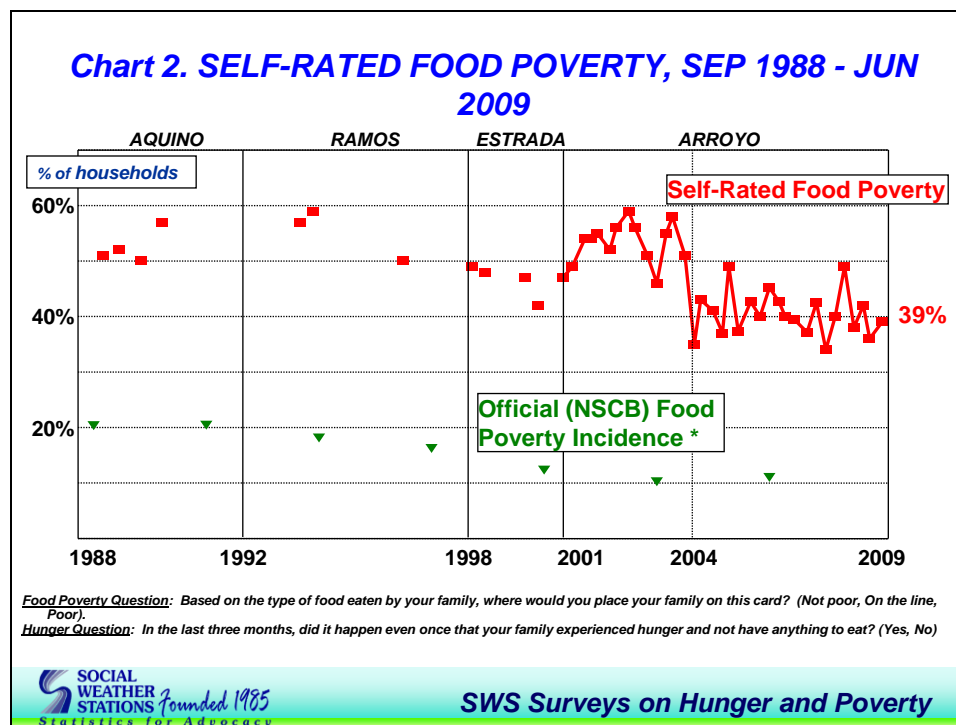
The SWS Self-Rated Poverty incidence is the proportion of household heads who point to word *mahirap* or POOR, when presented with the showcard. This measure of poverty is subjective from the viewpoint of the household head, and not subjective from the viewpoint of research. The research is objective, because it can be validated by independent surveys using the same approach, just as the subjective expression of voting intentions in one survey can be validated by other independent surveys.

Obviously, the self-rating approach is much more economical on interviewing and data processing effort than the orthodox approach which requires that *family income and/or expenditure* be surveyed in order to compare it with the official poverty line. Questionnaires for income or expenditures surveys routinely consist of dozens, if not hundreds, of items needed to measure the many individual components of these variables; they are very tiring (not to mention somewhat threatening) for respondents to answer. The required data processing effort is correspondingly quite large.

Self-rated food-poverty. The self-rating technique can also be applied to poverty along a particular *domain*, such as food, housing, etc. Thus the SWS surveys ask where the household fares *according to its food*, using the same showcard.¹⁰ The SWS national

¹⁰ Examples in the literature of subjective-poverty survey questions for particular domains are: (a) “I would like to ask your opinion about your family’s standard of living. Concerning *your family’s food consumption over the past one month/your family’s housing/your family’s clothing/the health care your family gets/your children’s schooling*, which of the following is true? Answers: It was less than adequate/just adequate/more than adequate/not applicable for your family’s needs.” – Pardhan and Ravallion (2000), using the 1993 Jamaica Living Conditions Survey and the 1995/96 Nepal Living Standards Survey. (b) “Please answer by using the following scale in which 0 means totally unhappy and 10 means totally happy: How happy are you at present with *your life as a whole/your job/your financial situation/your housing/your health/your leisure/your environment?*” –

time series on self-rated food poverty is in Chart 2, with the official (NSCB) food poverty incidence for comparison.



2.2 Self-rated poverty and food poverty thresholds: coping by belt-tightening

Poverty thresholds. In the SWS surveys, the household heads who rate their families as POOR are asked this next question:

KUNG MAHIRAP: Upang di na masabing mahirap kayo, magkano sa palagay ninyo ang pinakamababang panggastos sa bahay sa isang buwan na kailangan ng inyong pamilya?

IF POOR: In your opinion, how much money would your family need for home expenses each month in order not to be called poor anymore?

Thus it is a Minimum Home Budget Question. If asked what the term “home budget” means, the interviewer explains that it does not include expenses involved in earning the household’s living, such as the cost of commuting to work. The SWS questions for both self-rated poverty and the self-rated poverty line deliberately use the literal words “not to be called POOR” (“*upang di na masabing mahirap kayo*”) rather than attempt to translate familiar English idioms such as “getting along” or “making ends meet”.

Van Praag, Frijters and Ferrer-I-Carbonell (2003), using the 1992-97 German Socio-Economic Panel.

The median poverty thresholds regularly reported by SWS come from the responses of those who rate their families as poor. Respondents who rate themselves as NOT POOR or as ON THE LINE are asked a slightly revised question, as follows:

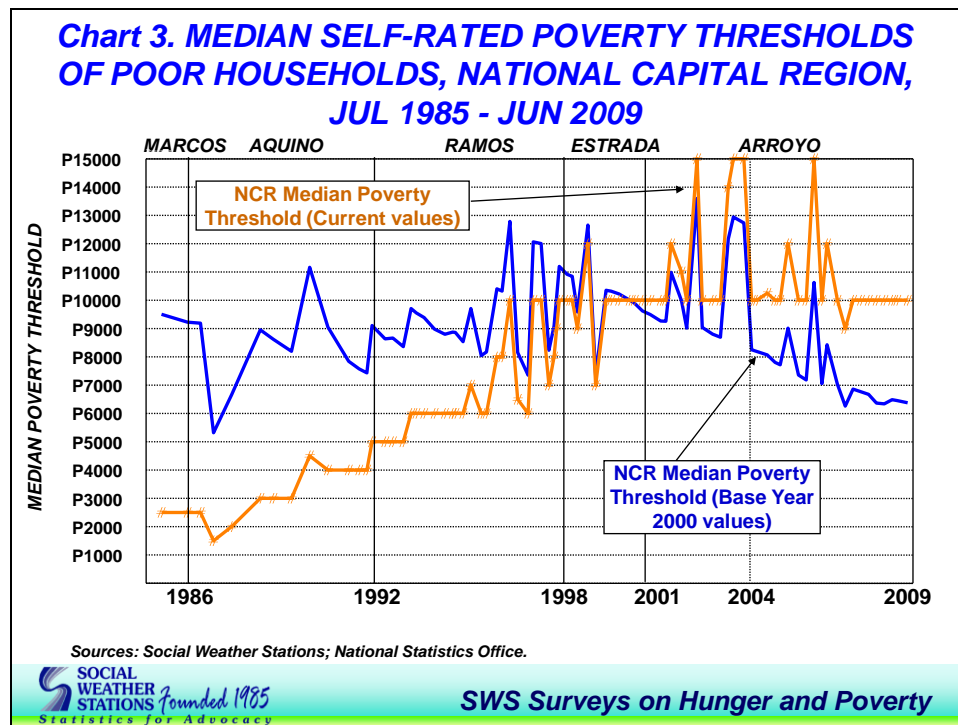
KUNG HINDI MAHIRAP/SA LINYA: Halimbawa po sa pamilyang kasing dami ninyo ngunit mahirap, magkano sa palagay ninyo ang pinakamababang panggastos sa isang buwan na kailangan nila upang hindi na masabing mahirap sila?

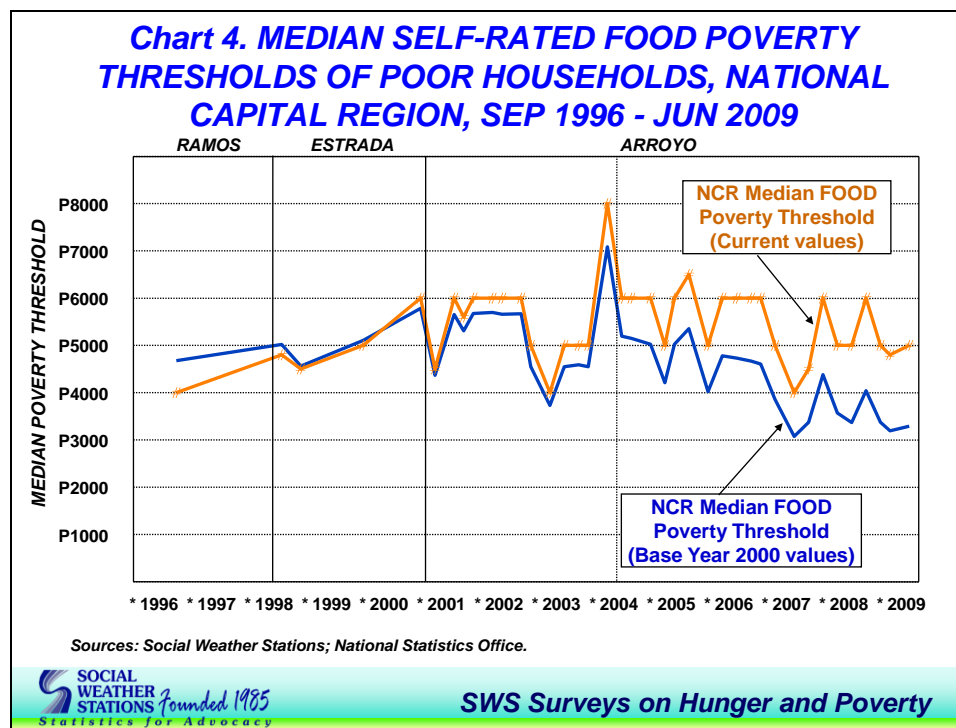
IF NOT POOR /ON THE LINE: For a family as large as yours but poor, how much money do you think would it need to spend each month for home expenses in order not to be called poor anymore?

In general, NOT POOR/BORDERLINE respondents tend to state slightly higher thresholds than POOR respondents.

As of June 2009, the median poverty thresholds are P10,000 in Metro Manila, P6,000 in the rest of Luzon, P8,000 in the Visayas, and P5,000 in Mindanao [SWS, 4 August 2009]. The median threshold signifies the amount that will satisfy exactly half of the poor in these areas.

The sad thing about these thresholds, in recent times, is that they are sluggish in money terms, and hence are falling in real terms over time [Chart 3]. In Metro Manila, the median poverty threshold has been more or less steady at P10,000 since 2000, even though the Consumer Price Index has risen by 56.8% since then, i.e., P15,680 is now needed to buy Metro Manilans what P10,000 bought in 2000. If the poor still say that P10,000 is enough, then the difference of P5,680 measures by how much they have tightened their belts.





Food poverty thresholds. When the SWS surveys obtain food-poverty self-ratings, the corresponding follow-up food-threshold question refers to the home budget needed ‘in order not to be poor in terms of food’. The Food Poverty Threshold is the amount that the family needs for its monthly food budget in order not to consider its food as *mahirap*.

Food poverty thresholds are also sluggish in money terms, and hence also falling in real terms over time [Chart 4]. The description of “belt-tightening” applies even more when it comes to food poverty, since it means that many people are probably economizing not only in terms of food quality but also in terms of food quantity.

2.3 Hunger

The SWS hunger indicator is the proportion of household heads reporting that their families had experienced hunger, without having anything to eat, at least once in the last three months. The unavailability of food to the family is a critical condition, which ensures that it excludes cases of voluntary fasting, for instance the annual fasting of Muslims between sunup and sundown during the month of Ramadan, as well as voluntary dieting merely to improve health or personal appearance.

The SWS surveys then ask, in a second question, for the frequency of the experience, thus obtaining a classification hunger into *moderate* (if it happened “only once” or “a few times”) and *severe* (if it happened “often” or “always”) *This measure of hunger is not subjective.* It is as objective as the standard survey measures of unemployment and underemployment, which also rely on self-reporting by survey respondents and are in principle verifiable by observers. *Survey responses on the experience of hunger are just as reliable as, for instance, the self-reporting on personal work, or lack of it, on which standard unemployment statistics are based.* To downgrade SWS measures as mere

of 20.3% for June 2009 is fully four times what it was in the low point of 2003 [Mangahas, 1 August 2009].

Obtaining high percentages of hunger is not peculiar to SWS, but has also been obtained by government surveys. In 2003, the Food and Nutrition Research Institute asked the following question of mothers/caregivers in a survey of 6,683 households: "In the last 6 months, were you ever hungry but did not eat because there was no food or no money to buy food?"¹¹ How frequently did this happen?" Those who said it happened at least once were 24.4%.¹² In April-June 2006, the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics replicated *the exact SWS questions* on hunger on a very large nationwide sample of 12,857 households, and obtained Moderate Hunger of 15.0%, Severe Hunger of 3.6%, and Total Hunger of 18.6%, thus strongly validating the SWS hunger surveys.¹³

3. Examples of analysis of self-rated economic deprivation

This section gives some examples of analysis of survey data on self-rated deprivation, in order to show that the data are internally consistent and plausible, and have much potential use for understanding, planning and implementing anti-deprivation programs.

3.1 The relationship between poverty and hunger

In the first place, the self-rating or bottom-up approach, like the orthodox top-down approach, in all surveys finds that *the food-poor are less than the general-poor*. Food is the most basic among all the basic needs, and thus households will try to satisfy their food needs (the need to avoid being food-poor) before they satisfy their other needs.

Chart 6 illustrates, using the December 2007 survey, the general finding that self-reported hunger is always greater among households who rate themselves as food-poor than among those who rate themselves as simply poor.

3.2 Hunger by occupation.

The plausibility of the SWS hunger measure is also supported by its breakdown by occupation. This is done in Chart 7, using the September 2007 survey, a point of relatively high hunger.

In September 2007, hunger among households with working heads was 23.2%. When ranked by occupation, the hard-hit were those headed by agricultural hired workers, unpaid family workers, non-agricultural skilled workers, and non-agricultural unskilled workers, with hunger rates of 26% or more. Hunger among agricultural operators and clerical/administrative/sales workers was about average, at 21-23%. It was below

¹¹ The qualification "because there was no food or no money to buy food," observes the general principle that the deprivation being measured is *involuntary*. The FNRI survey's other questions on whether the respondent "ever missed a meal" and "ever did not eat for a whole day" are also acceptable variants for surveying suffering due to lack of food.

¹² See FNRI (2006). Since the FNRI survey's reference period is six months, this should be halved to 12.2% in order to put it on the same basis as the SWS hunger indicator which has a reference period of three months.

¹³ See SWS Media Release of 23 July 2007.

average, at 13-20% among non-agricultural entrepreneurs, purely property owners and community workers, and a very small or non-existent 0-8% among professional/technical workers and managers.

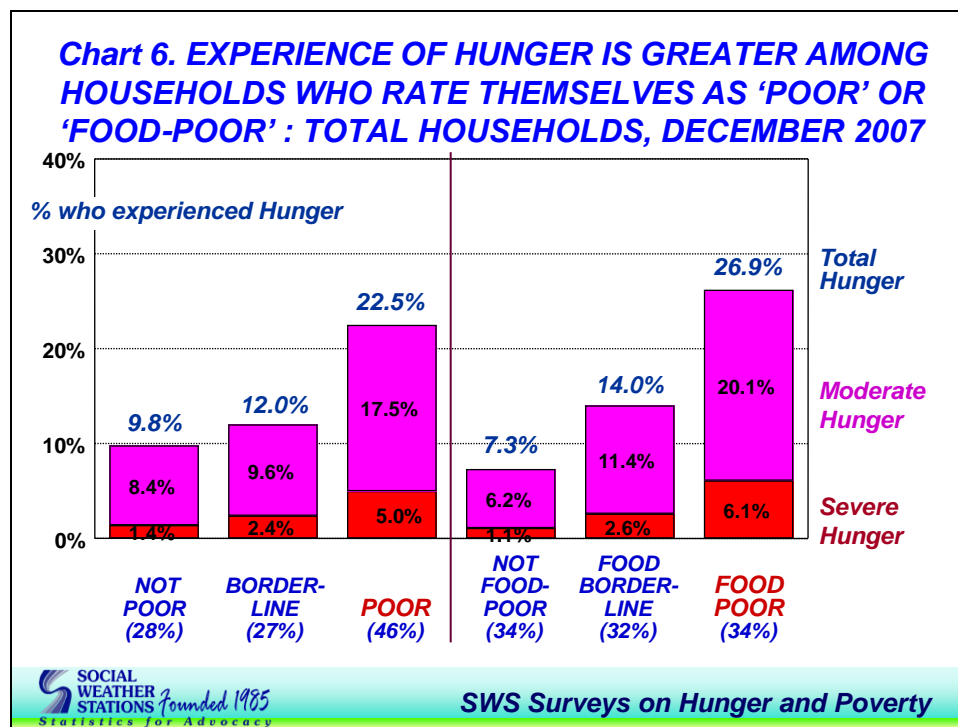
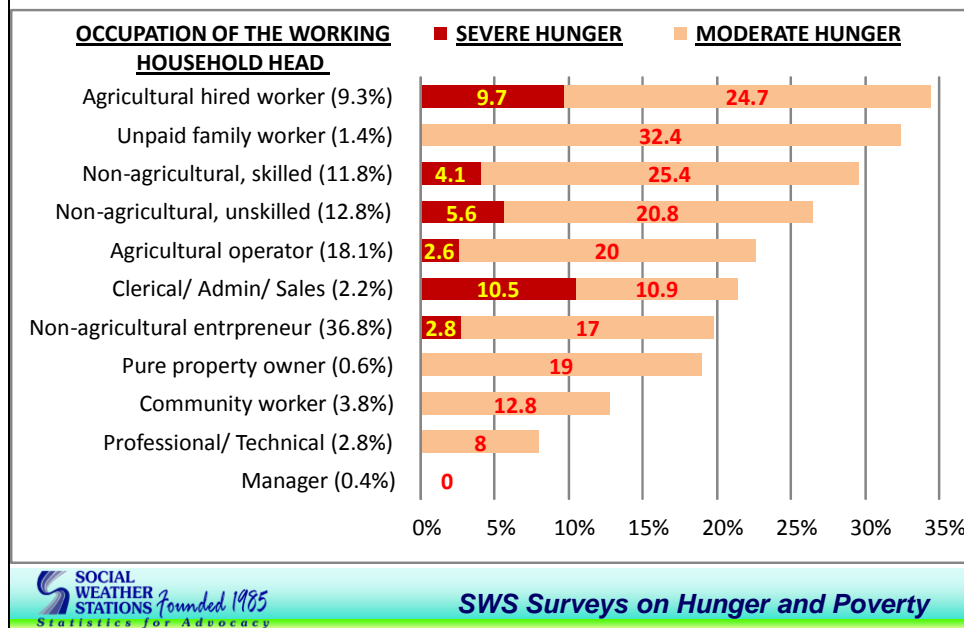


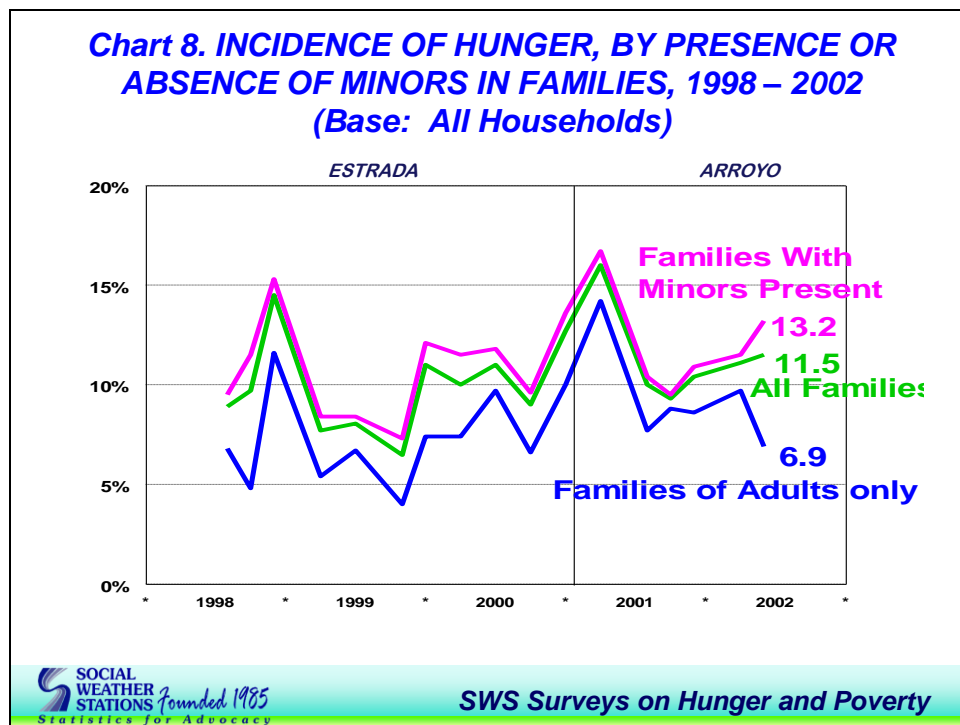
CHART 7. Hunger among households whose heads are working, by occupation of the household head, Philippines, September 2007



3.3 The child-hunger gap

In 2002, an analysis of the series of hunger surveys available at that point discovered that hunger was always greater among families with minors (children of age 17 or less) than among families consisting entirely of adults (persons age 18 and up). [Chart 8], In 1998-2002, an average of 11.2% of families with minors suffered from hunger, compared to only 8.0% of families consisting only of adults. The difference of 3.2% is called *the child-hunger gap* [Mangahas and Asis, 2002].

The child-hunger gap was inversely related to the education of the household head. Among families whose heads only reached elementary school, 16.3% of those with minors suffered hunger, compared to only 11.8% of those without minors, thus producing a gap of 4.5%. Among families headed by college graduates, on the other hand, 3.2% of those with minors suffered hunger, compared to 2.6% of those without minors, or a gap of only 0.6%. This shows that access to education not only increases the capability to reduce hunger in the family but also lessens the relative vulnerability to hunger of families with young children.



3.4 The relevance of public and private economic assistance.

Given that such large proportions of households were suffering from poverty and hunger, the SWS surveys inquired, from time to time, into how many households were receiving any economic assistance, and, if so, in what forms and from what sources. The proportion of households receiving some help was as low as 12% in 2002, but went as high as 38% in 2007. Mostly, such help is in the form of money, either given or lent, and comes from relatives and friends. In 2007, only one out of about eight households who were helped said they got the assistance from the government.

In September 2007, help in the form of food was received by 18% of families suffering from hunger, compared to only 10% of families not suffering from it. [Table 1] On the other hand, help from the government was received by 7% of families suffering from hunger, compared to only 4% of families not suffering from it. [Table 2]

Table 1. FORMS OF HELP RECEIVED BY THE FAMILY IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS, BY EXPERIENCE OF HUNGER: PHILIPPINES, SEPTEMBER 2007
(Base: Total Households; Multiple response)

	<u>RP</u> (100%)	<u>TOTAL HUNGER</u> (21.5%)	<u>Moderate Hunger</u> (17.4%)	<u>Severe Hunger</u> (4.1%)	<u>Did not experience hunger</u> (78.5%)
Money that was given	19%	16%	14%	22%	20%
Money that was lent	13	13	14	12	13
Food	11	18	20	9	10
Job	3	4	3	10	2
Schooling/training	2	1	1	1	2
Non-food items	2	2	2	0	2
Any kind of service	1	2	3	0	1
None	62	57	57	62	63

Note: Figures in parentheses are national proportions.

HH/Q10. Nitong nakaraang tatlong buwan, nakatanggap po ba ang inyong pamilya ng kahit na anuman sa mga sumusunod na tulong? [PERA NA BINIGAY, PERA NA PINAUTANG, PAGKAIN, IBA PANG BAGAY NA HINDI PAGKAIN, TRABAHO, SUPORTA SA PAG-AARAL O PAGSASANAY, KAHIT NA ANONG SERBISYO, WALA].

Table 2. SOURCES OF HELP RECEIVED BY THE FAMILY IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS, BY EXPERIENCE OF HUNGER: PHILIPPINES, SEPTEMBER 2007 (Base: Total Households; Multiple response)

	<u>RP</u> (100%)	<u>TOTAL HUNGER</u> (21.5%)	<u>Moderate Hunger</u> (17.4%)	<u>Severe Hunger</u> (4.1%)	<u>Did not experience hunger</u> (78.5%)
Relatives	24%	23%	21%	28%	25%
Friends	7	8	8	11	7
Government	5	7	8	1	4
Private persons	4	6	7	4	4
Private companies	2	3	4	0	2
Religious organizations	2	3	4	0	1
NGOs	1	2	2	3	1
None	62	57	57	62	63

Note: Figures in parentheses are national proportions.

HH/Q17. Sinu – sino po ang nagbigay ng mga tulong na ito? (SHOWCARD - ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSE)
[MGA KAMAG- ANAK, MGA KAIBIGAN , PRIBADONG TAO NA HINDI KAMAG-ANAK O KAIBIGAN, GOBYERNO, MGA PRIBADONG KUMpanya, NON – GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS O NGOs, RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS]

3.5 The relevance of anti-hunger programs

To learn how effective any particular program is in fighting hunger, one should obtain and study data about hunger in conjunction with data about the program. For example, the SWS national survey of June 2006 looked into the public's interface with (a) the Tindahan Natin convenience stores and (b) the government's school feeding program, in order to assess the connection with hunger. At that time, hunger in the Philippines was already a serious, above-average, 13.9%.

Tindahan Natin. In June 2006, 40 percent of household heads, nationwide, knew about the existence of the government's Tindahan Natin (TN) stores, but only 6.6% said there was such a store in their locality, and only 3.0% had actually bought something from it. Thus, out of 17.3 million households in the country, 1.1 million had access to a TN store, and about 500,000 households had actually ever used it.

Among those who used a TN store, overall hunger was 12.1%. This was below the 18.6% among those who did not use it though it was available, as well as the 12.7% among those who knew of it but had none in their area to go to, and the 14.4% among those who never heard of a TN store at all.

School feeding. In June 2006, when SWS did the survey, it was informed that school feeding was available only to children in public schools at the levels of day-care and Grade 1. The survey estimated that 3.65 million households (21% of the national total) had children qualified for school feeding according to the said criteria. However, of those entitled, only the children of some 360,000 households actually got free rice in school. Among households whose children got free rice, hunger was 8.7 percent, or below the 14.0 percent among those whose children were entitled but did not get any. Hunger among those without children entitled to school feeding was also 14.0 percent.

The June 2006 survey results suggest that TN stores and school feeding reduced hunger to some extent, even though the numbers of households reached by these programs were much less than the number suffering from hunger. The data should help in evaluating whether the impact was close to what these programs expected to achieve, given the resources expended, and whether the costs were reasonable.

Home production of food. In times of high food prices, the government commonly urges the public to try to produce their own food, such as through gardening, raising livestock and poultry, and starting a fishpond. An analysis of hunger in September 2007 (Mangahas, 2008) shows that families with such sources of food suffered slightly less from *severe hunger* (by 1.6 points if with a garden, by 0.4 point if raising animals, by 0.9 point if with a fishpond) than families without the said sources. *Moderate hunger* was less (by 2.6 points) among families with a *fishpond* than among those without one. On the other hand, having a garden or raising food-animals was not particularly advantageous in avoiding moderate hunger. The evidence suggests that obtaining the means to purchase more food is probably a more effective route to reducing hunger, for most families.

Conditional cash transfers (CCT). To evaluate this promising new program, SWS is examining, in cooperation with the Department of Social Work and Development, poverty and hunger in its survey spots that also happen to be CCT-program areas.

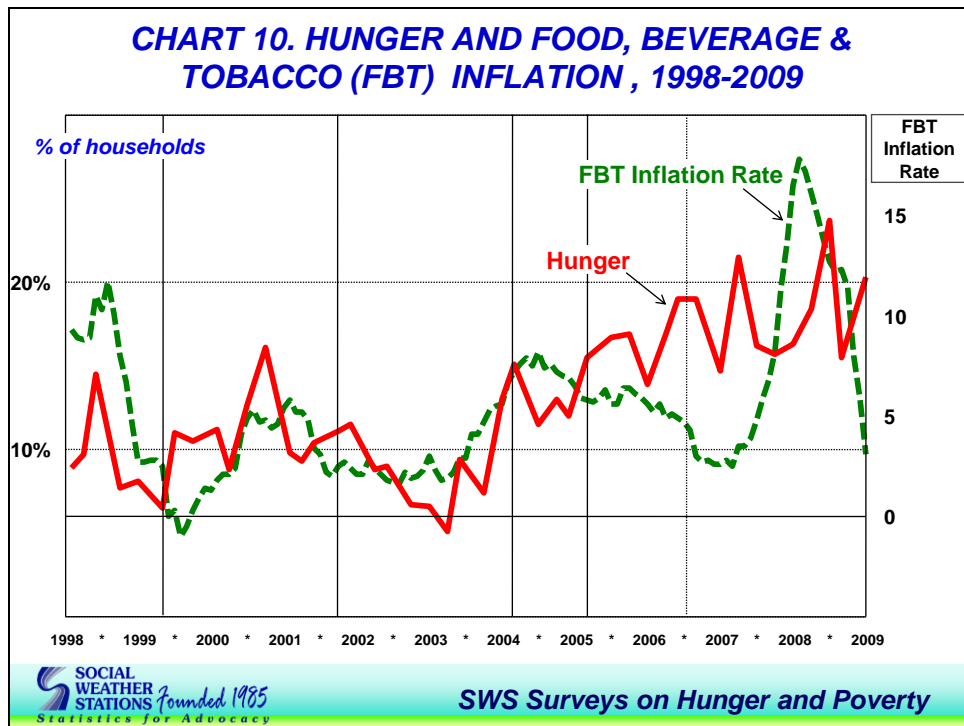
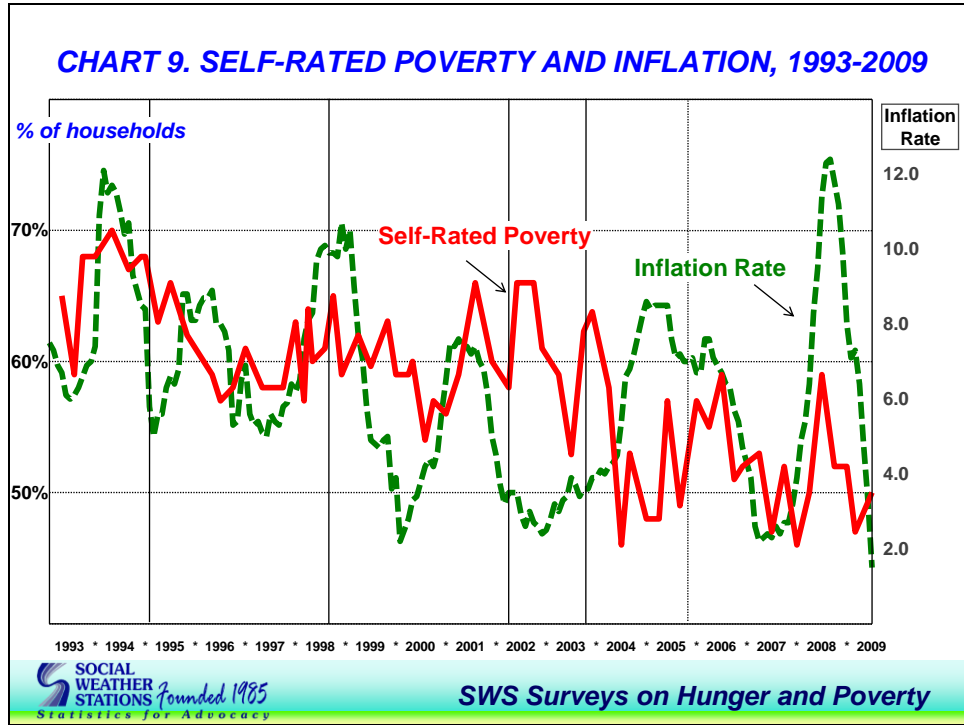
Recently, SWS was commissioned by the government to add to its sample spots certain areas of the Anti-Hunger Mitigation Program, of which CCT is a component (though not applied in all AHMP areas). SWS maintains a strong interest in applying its survey expertise in further research in support of the CCT.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Econometric modeling of poverty and hunger is called for. Government and private research institutes, including those in universities, should analyze the SWS time-series data together with candidate determinants of poverty and hunger. They should aim to discover the favorable factors in periods when poverty and hunger declined, and the unfavorable ones in periods when they increased. They should continuously study the dynamic movements in hunger in line with movements in general inflation, inflations in critical items such as food and fuel, wage rates, unemployment, social welfare and safety net program operations, and other candidate determinants.¹⁴

To find the determinants of a volatile variable, one must consider factors which are also volatile. My first candidate to explain the volatility of poverty is the factor of inflation. The record-high 74 percent self-rated poverty in 1985 occurred after hyperinflation of two years. In later years, general inflation fluctuated between zero to 20 percent. Obviously, a gain in the income of the poor can be wiped out by a burst of inflation. The association of self-rated poverty with general price inflation over time is in Chart 9; the association of hunger with inflation in the food, beverage and tobacco price index over time is in Chart 10.

¹⁴ In the course of presenting SWS poverty and hunger trends to government managers over the years, I have heard them cite (a) the meteorological weather, (b) the capability of the National Food Authority's distribution system, and (c) the status of armed conflict (especially in Mindanao) as other important explanatory factors. These could be brought into play by introducing appropriate dummy variables in the econometric modeling.



GNP is probably only a long-term determinant of poverty. Discounting its seasonality¹⁵, Philippine GNP has been rising steadily for two decades. But, since Philippine poverty has NOT been falling steadily, it follows that the impact of GNP on poverty is rather small. The SWS surveys show that poverty is quite volatile; within two quarters, its percentage is capable of falling from 60 to 50, as well as rising back up to 60. Only because the last time it hit 70 was 15 years ago, can one concede that steady economic growth eventually lowers poverty. The other side of the coin is the good news that perhaps poverty and hunger are equally insensitive to short-term reductions in GNP, as threatened by the world recession.

More time series on poverty and hunger should be collected, at both national and local levels. SWS aims to provide *alternative statistics*, rather than *adversarial statistics*. In-between the years when the triennial FIES are reported, when there happen to be no alternative data on national poverty, those who ignore the signals of the SWS surveys are, in effect, flying blind. Yet SWS is not comfortable about being a sole provider of data. As more institutions, public and private, get engaged in scientific survey work, their findings are bound to converge, and thus increase the public's confidence in such research.

Without changing its orthodox system of measuring poverty, the national government can afford the financial cost of producing annual time series, by reducing the sample size per national survey. I believe that it should sacrifice geographical detail for the sake of generating up-to-date data, and recommend that provinces and chartered cities, rather than the national government, be made responsible for surveys at their own level.

Finally, I think that research institutions, at all levels, will readily discover the great practicality of subjective indicators for monitoring poverty, hunger, and other aspects of the quality of life. They are most welcome to make use of the SWS questionnaire items, or borrow items from others here or abroad, or to design entirely new items.

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¹⁵ Philippine GNP always peaks in the fourth quarter (Q4), and then subsides in Q1. It rises a bit in Q2, is steady or else falls in Q3, and then peaks in Q4 again. On the other hand, neither poverty nor hunger has noticeable seasonality.

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