

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program: Towards Women's Empowerment or Further Entrapment? (Voices of Beneficiaries in Legazpi City)

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This study focuses on the significance of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in the lives of mother-beneficiaries in Legazpi City. Data gathering methods included program documents review, interviews with mother-beneficiaries and focus group discussions. It is found that the program keeps mother-beneficiaries in their impoverished situations, hardly addressing, and even capitalizing on, their gender-specific poverty.

Introduction

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is one of the more recent government programs that took as its starting point the problem of poverty in the Philippines. Its mechanics are simple: provide cash for the poor amounting to as much as Php1,400 every month, and require beneficiaries to comply to certain conditions. These conditions include ensuring regular school attendance and health check up of children, seeking professional health care for pregnant women, and attending family development sessions. With these, it is expected that national indicators for health, education and nutrition will have been increased and the chances of intergenerational poverty will have been reduced significantly by 2014. Patterned after Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs from other countries, particularly in Latin America where such program have been in operation since the 1990s, the government is confident of the program's success in the Philippine context.

As a feminist, the researcher's personal interest in the program was drawn by the fact that the program relies on mothers of the beneficiary families to make the program work. Mothers are the ones primarily tasked to ensure the household's compliance to the education and health conditions of the program as well as manage the cash grants to be used in fulfilling the said conditions. The program also required pregnant mothers to be attended by professional health workers. These tasks carry an implicit demand that mothers stretch their time and energy to accommodate 4Ps responsibilities on top of their existing reproductive and productive work. On the one hand, the program claims to be anti-poverty yet on the other, it seems to ignore the dimensions of poverty from the context and experience of mothers. As a national anti-poverty program, the 4Ps has the power to affect the lives of many poor Filipinos, including the lives of marginalized women. But what exactly does it do for the women on whom its operation depends? With the program in full implementation, it is all the more imperative that its actual significance in the lives of its mother-beneficiaries be analyzed, through the mothers' own voices.

Related literature surface the problematic nature of the conditional cash transfer programs along the same line. Studies on CCTs in Latin America and Asia describe it as a mere attempt to cover up the roots of poverty resulting from neoliberal policies that deprioritize the interest of the poor, rather than truly address them. It also responds to the realities of poverty - high unemployment rates, low wage rates, inadequate social services, and continuous price hikes - with cash dole outs (DeBritto, 2004; Hutagalung, Arif, & Suharyo, 2009; IBON Foundation, Inc., 2010). In the face of persistent structural causes of poverty, the CCT is unsustainable at best. Because the program is funded by international loans, it can further exacerbate the conditions of the poor as it entails increased national debt. (IBON, 2010; Social Watch Philippines, 2010; Somera, 2010). There is also emphasis on how the program narrows down the solution of poverty to individual acts (Enriquez, 2011). It particularly burdens mothers in beneficiary families who are tasked to ensure compliance with its conditionalities when health and education facilities and services are actually inadequate (Hutagalung, Arif, & Suharyo, 2009).

Maternalism is a consistent feminist critique of the CCTs. These programs place the work involved on the shoulders of mothers who are assumed to be naturally altruistic and will place the interest of their own children above their own. Worse, CCTs also claim that women's empowerment can be achieved through such participation (Bradshaw, 2008; Enriquez, 2011; Hutagalung, Arif, & Suharyo, 2009; Molyneux, 2006; Soares & Silva, 2010). The same is observed of the CCT in the Philippines, where mothers are tasked with the operation of the 4Ps - all in a context of poverty that already places greater burden on them (Center for Women's Resources, 2011; IBON, 2010; Social Watch Philippines, 2010; Somera, 2010).

These studies point to the need to study further CCT program as an anti-poverty measure in the context of the Filipino women, especially addressing the issues of the program 1) placing additional burden on women, 2) reinforcing traditional roles for women, 3) providing one income source for women, 4) providing no exit strategies for women once their eligibility for the program has expired, and 5) affecting women's relationship with her community, husband, and self.

Background of the Study

This study aims to analyze the significance of the 4Ps as a development program in the lives of its mother-beneficiaries who are situated in a gender-specific poverty context through a privileging of the mother-beneficiaries' own voices. This study particularly focuses on mother-beneficiaries from Legazpi City, an area which has targeted by program since 2009. Interestingly, Legazpi City is the capital town of Albay yet it registers as the poorest in the province (National Statistics Coordination Board, 2009). From five barangays in 2009, all of its 70 barangays became beneficiaries to the 4Ps by November 2011, reaching a total of 6,693 beneficiary households, according to the city's Municipal Link Joan M. Ramos.

Two Gender and Development (GAD) tools were employed in this study. First was the identification of women's condition and position. *Condition* here refers to women's "material state" or "immediate sphere of experience," such as

their daily activities and needs while *position* refers to their "social and economic standing relative to that of men" such as differences in the valuation of their occupations (Connelly et al., 2000). The second GAD tool was the identification of women's practical gender needs (PGN) and strategic gender interests (SGI), which correspond to women's condition and position. Just as the identification of women's condition leads to the identification of their practical needs, identification of women's position leads to the identification of gender inequalities that need to be addressed. While PGN can be addressed more immediately, SGI are considered to serve the long-term interests of women as well as men (Connelly et al., 2000). The GAD framework ultimately holds that it is only when women's PGN and SGI are addressed that empowerment is achieved as well (Connelly et al., 2000). These are crucial tools in capturing the context of the mother-beneficiaries as well as in analyzing the program's gendered impact.

The particular indicators used by the study in determining women's condition and position were based on the themes Enriquez (2011) identified to be most relevant in the issue of CCTs. She formulated key questions in response to the lack of focus in existing literature on gender equity and gender equality issues embedded in the CCT. These are: (1) What are the implications of CCTs on women's economic autonomy? (2) What effects and possibilities do CCTs have with regard to the redistribution of paid and unpaid work? (3) How [do] CCTs affect inter-household power relationships, and the decision-making negotiation process? (4) What effects do CCTs have on the social organization of care, and on the intra-household distribution of care responsibilities? (5) Do CCTs have any effect on women's physical autonomy? (6) Do CCTs promote women's political autonomy in any way? (7) What effects do CCTs have on women, children, and men's life opportunities?

To establish women's material conditions, the present study used the following indicators: 1) access to goods and services, 2) income-earning capacities, and 3) income-earning opportunities. Household dynamics and personal autonomy were used as indicators for women's social position. Household dynamics was further divided into 1) roles and responsibilities; 2) control over family resources;

nd 3) decision-making and bargaining power between women and men while personal autonomy is also further divided into physical, economic, and social autonomy of the women vis-à-vis men.

Methodology

An examination of the 4Ps documents from the DSWD and related policy documents formed the first part of the data-gathering methods of the study. The examination focused on the program's views on poverty and its gendered dimensions; the program's assumptions on women's role in development, the gender roles in the 4Ps, and the 4Ps specific approaches to helping women in poverty.

To determine the local context of mother-beneficiaries' lives, 10 mother-beneficiaries were engaged in separate in-depth interviews (IDI). The participants for this research were interviewed either in their homes or at the barangay day care. The interviews were conducted at the time preferred by the mothers as set during the preliminary interview with them. Aside from the preliminary and the in-depth interviews, follow-up interviews were also conducted as necessary. The interviews focused on their material situation, the dynamics in their household and their sense of autonomy.

The FGDs explored the mother-beneficiaries' views on and experiences with the program. As summarized by Sue Wilkinson (1999), FGDs create social spaces that are "relatively naturalistic," "offer context for meaning-making," and shift the balance of power away from the researcher toward the research participants," thus providing an ideal venue for feminist research. Aside from these, it is believed that collective sharing will ease the burden of being a research participant. Two FGDs were conducted, each with six participants. Nine of the 12 FGD participants were part of the IDIs as well.

Two validation sessions were conducted after the IDIs and the FGDs. The researcher presented a summary of the views and experiences they shared in

the IDIs and the FGDs which the participants affirmed, corrected or further clarified. This process not only secured the integrity of the research but provided for the participants a more comprehensive experience out of their participation.

The selection criteria for research participants were: that they are from 4Ps beneficiary families, they are married to and living with their husbands, and they have a child or children living with them. Diversity of participants was also a consideration in the selection, although not strictly a criteria. All the research participants from two of the five barangays where the 4Ps was initially implemented in Leagazpi City in 2009. They were identified through snowball sampling.

The researcher carried out the IDIs, FGDs, and validation sessions in settings that are most convenient for the participants, in the most efficient way and with the minimum number of times necessary, in order to avoid adding to their daily workload. The participants' consent were also secured by fully informing them of the rationale, purpose and process of the study before the actual research. It was emphasized that the mother's participation is voluntary and that they can choose not to join the research if they wished. Their choice of representation as participants was also respected. Finally, to address possible misrepresentation, the researcher made sure to keep herself in check of her purpose and processes and to be explicit about her limitations.

Presentation of Data

The Contextualization of Women Living in Poverty by the 4Ps

The 4Ps primarily looks at poverty as a household phenomenon. While it focuses on global crises as the reasons behind the manifestations of poverty in the Philippines, it considers the household to be the unit directly responsible for its persistence. It roots poverty in children's "lack educational preparation," which in turn causes or results to the family "lack[ing] the opportunity to improve its 'economic well-being'" (Pablo, Sampang, & Solloso, 2009). The 4Ps beneficiaries, who are assumed to be households in need of urgent intervention, are initially

selected based on the 2006 Family Income Survey data and the 2003 Small Area Estimates. For the second stage of the selection process, a survey is conducted on the following: household composition, education, occupation, socio-economic characteristics, housing conditions, access to basic services, assets, tenure status and regional variables (Fernandez, 2009). The gendered experience of poverty is not considered in the process, nor in its overall perspective on poverty.

The 4Ps places the household at the center of interventions to alleviate poverty in the country. It considers households trapped in poverty to be “chronically poor” and sees the provision of financial aid that would “cushion them from economic shocks” and enable them to invest in the education and health of the children more than they presently can to be “the only way they would be able to escape [such] poverty” (Senate Economic Planning Committee, 2010). The program both provides for identified beneficiary households P500 per month for health expenses of the children and the pregnant mother, and P300 per school month for education expenses of the children, subject to certain conditions. Women are direct and visible beneficiaries of the 4Ps, particularly the pregnant women and school-age girl children. This is in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which includes “Eliminat[ing] gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2015, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015”.

In practice, however, the program depends on women for its implementation. Identified as “the most responsible adult person in the household”, they are expected to manage the cash grants, manage membership requirements, regularly update membership information, attend monthly meetings, and oversee the compliance to the basic health and education requirements of the children (Pablo, Sampang, & Solloso, 2009). How these roles and the program in particular affect women, however, are not included in the program’s evaluation tools. Despite this gap, the DSWD lay claims that women are ‘empowered’ by the program. For instance, the DSWD mentions that, “Women, especially the parent/mother leaders felt empowered by the project. The community assemblies, meetings and seminars provided an opportunity to learn together and bond as a community group” (Pablo, Sampang, & Solloso, 2009).

The Everyday Lived Realities of Mother-beneficiaries: Material Situation

Limited Access to Goods and Services. Who to turn to and where to go for services are the most common health-related decisions of mothers. Most of the time families turn to traditional health workers such as the town "hilot" and go to public facilities such as barangay health centers and hospitals as these are the cheapest option available to them. However, in emergencies, people are forced to go to the nearest hospital which is a private hospital. For those who have access to PhilHealth insurance or have relatives to help them shoulder expenses, private hospitals and private clinics become first choice. Not only do they feel that patients are better attended to here; but they believe that private hospitals are better equipped with facilities and medicines. Yet even for those with PhilHealth insurance or support from relatives, private health facilities can also be inaccessible at times. They sometimes have to borrow money because private hospitals require immediate deposit.

Health center services are free, including checkup and vaccinations. However people often have to bear with the irregularity of services (due to the unavailability of the health care provider or the supplies) and the long lines and waiting periods. They are also charged for certain services and drugs at the barangay health center.

The mothers have different experiences when it comes to reproductive health services, with some being able to get services for free while the others had to pay for them. This limits their options as a result. Some mothers simply adopt whatever is available and given for free, regardless of what they need or want. For instance, women may "opt" for natural family planning methods because contraceptives are not given out for free. Women who want to use contraceptives have to purchase them from pharmacies.

The town "hilot", or traditional health worker, and herbal medicines are the first choice for the mothers when it comes to simple illnesses like coughs, fevers, and body aches. Not only do they feel comfortable seeking help from one, but the services and the recommended remedies are also more affordable.

For their children's education, public schools are their only choice. This is hardly free, however. Families pay as much as Php1,455 to Php1,905 for a school year in the barangay day care center; around Php2,830 per school year plus a daily Php5 to P30 *baon* for children who go to the elementary school; and Php2,450 per school year plus a weekly minimum of Php50 for projects and Php20 for *baon* for those who go to high school. Mothers with children in college students feel the financial stress more acutely and often have to find remunerated work to pay for their tuition.

Most of the mother-beneficiaries live on lands they do not own or rent. All of them, however, stated that they built or improved their houses with their own labor and/or money. Housing arrangements include living in houses previously owned by their parents, expanding their parents' houses to accommodate the extended household, and constructing their own houses. Most of them do not expect to live permanently where they are right now.

Because of their limited finances, affordability is the main consideration with regard to utilities. Many still get water from wells and springs, although some households also buy their weekly distilled water for Php25 or have piped water from NAWASA which costs at least Php200 per month. All the mothers found using LPG for cooking too expensive at Php750 per tank. Most of them now use charcoal which costs Php5 to Php15 per bag or Php100 to Php200 per sack. Firewood is an even cheaper option, but one that also takes more time and effort to gather from the forest.

All the mother-beneficiaries' households are serviced by the Albay Electric Cooperative. Their bills depend on their consumption. One beneficiary household used electricity very sparingly and pays only Php50 per month, while another's bill could run as much as Php1,000 per month.

Some of the mothers benefit from other public service programs aside from the 4Ps, which also help them with their daily expenses for goods and services. The mothers cite welfare agencies such as the Child Sponsorship for Community Development Program by the Children Institute, an international NGO; the local

government's Sagip Kalusugan program; and the feeding program by the DSWD in day care centers.

Existence of Income-Earning Capacities. The educational attainment of mother-beneficiaries interviewed ranged from elementary to high school. The reasons for not studying further included: financial constraints, they had to work to augment family income, and getting married or pregnant. While the mothers are interested to pursue higher education, they did not think it is necessary nor possible now. It would be better to focus on their children now, they said.

A few of the mother-beneficiaries have worked or are working for wage income as waitresses, shopkeepers, mall salespersons, laundry women or house helpers, making Php50 to Php210 per day. None of them worked fulltime, however, because the expenses related to of working (e.g. transportation fares, food) began to exceed their income or they had to stay at home to take care of their children. Some women were also engaged in small businesses such as keeping sari- sari-stores, cooking and selling food, selling Avon, MSE and Natasha products, buying and selling charcoal, making rags for sale from clothes bought from the *ukay-ukay*, gathering and selling shellfish and firewood, raising and selling one or two pigs. The mother-beneficiaries also have various crafting skills which they acquired from their parents, learned through barangay seminars, or else taught themselves. These include making rags, beads-making, making abaca handicrafts, and cooking rice cakes.

Limited Income-earning Opportunities. The mothers identified a number of possible income-earning opportunities but which they cannot engage in for various reasons. Keeping a sari-sari store is one example. While this is good business in an area with a growing population, there are too many sari-sari stores in their community. Neighbors also usually buy on credit thus income can also be irregular.

Mothers living near the city proper can set up food carts for business, or get work in malls as salepersons, shop baggers or cleaners. However, these jobs

are paid little while demanding much of their time and energy. Working abroad is another option identified by one of the mothers. She believes she can work and earn better as a domestic helper or waitress in other countries. But this is not possible for her now because she has small children to take care of, and her husband is against it. Mother-beneficiaries living in the countryside draw from natural resources to earn extra income such as gathering shellfish and firewood for selling.

Borrowing money to make ends meet is common to all mothers. They borrow from lending institutions or private individuals at varying interest rates. Other ways mothers cope with their financial constraints is through of joining a *paluwagan* or joining raffles and promos in town.

Household Dynamics

Domestic Roles and Responsibilities. All the mothers interviewed do all the work of taking care of the family's needs at home. This includes budgeting the family income, buying and/or cooking food, cleaning, doing the laundry, washing dishes, fetching water, taking care of the baby, getting children ready for school, and taking the children to school. This is true whether the mothers have regular remunerated work outside the home, have regular remunerated work inside the home, have sporadic and various income-earning occupations, help out with a family livelihood, or exclusively do house work for the family. For those who have children of elementary school age, they have someone to run errands for them or take over other simpler housework such as cooking rice, fetching water, washing some dishes, cleaning up a room and looking after the baby for a while. If their husbands have no paid work, some of them help the mothers in buying and cooking food, doing the laundry and minding the children. The husbands' involvement in household work decreases when they have paid work, however some still help in buying or cooking food.

Little to No Control over Resources. Between the mothers and their husbands, it is usually the husband who decides how the family money will be

spent. In some cases, women's opinions were completely disregarded where it concerns the family budget. There are cases of husbands purchasing food himself, or giving the woman only the exact amount needed for specific expenses. Some women do not know how much their husband earns as they are only handed money which the husband thinks is adequate for daily expenses. Still, in some families, the husband talks to the woman and they agree on how much should be spent daily.

How to spend the money earned by the mother through her work is her decision. It was noted that mothers usually use her income on basic family expenses. However many mothers do not have income-earning activities at present because of their husbands' wishes, their obligations at home, or the lack of livelihood opportunities in their area.

Little to No Decision-Making and Bargaining Power. The mothers shared that they do take part in family decision-making, such as on budgeting their family income. It is the husbands, however, who ultimately make decisions regarding large-purchases and long-term expenses. The mothers, on the other hand, usually end up implementing this budget, and tend to make decisions only on the family's immediate needs such as food, school, and household maintenance.

Personal Autonomy. The mother-beneficiaries shared their daily routines to illustrate how "a woman's work is never done." Their day would start as early as 3:00 a.m. and end at 10:00 p.m. Their whole day is filled with household chores from keeping the house to taking care of the children and husband's immediate needs.

With their day always full, the mother-beneficiaries have little time for themselves or for activities of their personal interest. The breaks they take within the day are spent watching television, listening to the radio, resting or grooming. However, looking into this further, it was revealed that women were also working during their "breaks". That is, they were doing light household chores like folding and mending clothes, waiting for rice to cook, or soaking the laundry. Many of the mothers

thought it is not possible for them to engage in paid work outside their homes because of their chores, especially the mothers who have very young children.

The mother-beneficiaries rarely have control over the family resources. This was mainly because with little income, they also have little choice on how to spend it. Their expenses are set: food, the children's needs at school, utilities, and emergency expenses such as medicines and hospitalization.

As their family incomes are barely enough to cover their basic needs, they have no choice but to forego anything they might personally want or desire. The personal things they are able to purchase include necessities such as shampoos and clothes which they also share with or buy for other family members. However some of these personal expenses were also part of the family's coping strategy. For instance, they buy clothes from *ukay-ukay* stores because they use the cloths for making rags to sell. They keep clothes which are still good or needing only minor repair for themselves and their children to wear.

As mothers constantly seek ways to earn money or to make ends meet, they have little time and energy left to participate in wider social concerns. They have a certain degree of awareness of how social changes affect their daily lives. For instance, they frequently cited how the increasing prices of the basic goods and services make life even more difficult for them. However, they have very little idea what they can do to address the problem beyond working harder to care for their family in their given situation.

Their interactions with others in their community were very limited. The only times they participated were in their children's school activities that encouraged or required their attendance, barangay invitations to programs, seminars and workshops, and activities such as community clean ups. They would also participate if there were clear benefits to their families like meetings called by the 4Ps, CSCD and Sagip Kalusugan, meetings in credit institutions they are part of. Most of the women did not want to join organization because they were already very busy with household and livelihood work. But they also indicated interest in joining a livelihood group or program.

Mother-beneficiaries' Views and Experiences in the 4Ps

Lowered Expectations

The mother-beneficiaries knew that the 4Ps was a government program. They knew it was help for selected poor families, but they have no clear idea what kind of help would be given. Some of them also knew that the 4Ps focuses on the health and education of the children because they learned about it from a local radio program.

The mothers did not expect much from the 4Ps as they – and the community in general – were used to receiving relief goods and assistance especially in times of natural disasters. But they were also interested to become beneficiaries and had looked forward to the program being implemented in their area.

Anything for the Family

There was some tension between mothers whose households were selected for the 4Ps and those whose households were not. Non-beneficiaries made sarcastic comments about not being selected because they were already “rich”. Some questioned the selection process. These eventually died down but some doubts remained even among the mother-beneficiaries. They too think that some beneficiaries did not deserve to be in the program, while others who qualified for the 4Ps were not selected: *“Dai man nakaiba su mas pobre pa ngani...halos nagkakuruha pa ngani...may mga kaya man, may mga trabaho...Su iba ngani nailing mo tiusunon talagang dai makaiba talaga* [Those who are even poorer than us didn’t make it ... those who were selected were almost better off and have jobs...you see some who are extremely struggling but they didn’t make it].” Fairly selected or not, the beneficiaries all agreed that the cash grants from the 4Ps is a boost to their finances. The mother beneficiaries have known each other for a long time. They did not perceive any change in their relationship with fellow beneficiaries except maybe they see them in the monthly meetings for 4Ps beneficiaries.

As part of the program, mothers have to take their children to the health center for regular checkups, enroll their children as young as three years old in school, and see to it that their children achieved an attendance rate of 85 percent in their classes. They also attended monthly meetings with the rest of the mothers they were grouped with.

Mother-beneficiaries have different experiences regarding the monthly meetings. Some saw the meetings as dragging and irrelevant to their realities. They would much rather talk about topics that would help them in dealing with their everyday needs, like livelihood. Others however expressed appreciation of the modules particularly on how to manage the family better, as well as certain laws that concerned them such as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act and the Anti-Child Labor Act.

The cash grant they received may only be spent on their children's health and education expenses, and indeed they would usually spend it on school fees, milk, vitamins, and groceries. "*Kahit sa Mama wara na* [It does not matter if there is none for the mother]," one mother said. The cash grant also enabled them to buy food they otherwise would not have bought or spent money for. Most of the group kept notebooks where they recorded how the cash grant they received was spent in case they would be questioned on it.

The mothers did not mind doing these conditionalities at all. Taking their children to the health center and keeping them in school were important to mothers in any case. They did not feel the 4Ps conditions were particularly burdensome since these were necessary and relatively simple to do, took very little of their time, or were the same things they did even before the program like keeping a meticulous budget.

Instead, it is in dealing with the program systems and procedure where the mothers felt stressed the most. First, they find it difficult to work with health workers and teachers who sometimes did not properly record their compliance to activities. This could lead to deductions from their cash grants as the program

would assume they had not complied with the 4Ps conditionalities for the month. Second, cash grant releases do not follow the schedule set by the program. For instance, they only received in February 2012 what they should have received in December 2011. This ruins their budget, and makes the cash grant too late to help them with the expenses they need it for, which are the children's school expenses. Third, there are sometimes discrepancies in the amount of cash grants the beneficiaries receive. Even households which have complied fully to the conditionalities sometimes have deductions in from their cash grants. There were also instances when the beneficiaries' names do not appear in the payroll at all. Finally, technical difficulties in getting the cash grant are also common, particularly withdrawing money from the ATM.

There were also some policies mothers felt were unfair. For instance, they did not understand why deductions were made on the two months' worth of cash grants even when they failed to comply with conditionalities in only one of those months. It also felt unfair for them that the cash grant for health, which was Php500, was affected even if they missed only one of the many health conditionalities e.g. the monthly check up for the child aged 0 to 2, the bi-monthly check-up for the child 3 to 5 years old, and the deworming for the child aged 6 to 14 twice a year.

They had already raised these concerns to the Parent Leader (PL) or Municipal Link (ML), but neither were able to do anything about it, nor at least explained why these happened. The mothers usually let these go, as they did not feel they were in any position to ask or demand explanations. They felt that they were after all already receiving cash for free and it would be greedy to ask for more. Aside from that, they were not very surprised about these problems. "*Dai mo man 'yan maali sa gobyerno* [You cannot eliminate that from the government]," one mother commented on the inefficiency of the 4Ps system.

Better than Nothing

The mother-beneficiaries were grateful to be part of the program because it provided an additional source of income. As previously mentioned, meeting the

conditionalities was not particularly burdensome to them. They understood that it was their counterpart in the program and that they had to do these in order to get the benefits. They felt, however, that the teachers and health workers are the ones who are having a hard time with the additional work they had to do.

Regarding the Family Development Sessions (FDS), mothers in groups where there were more varied topics discussed, expressed that the meetings were interesting and helpful. They even shared their lessons with their husbands. However they observed the sessions as all on children, saying, "*Puros sa aki...ta pampamilya бага* [It is all about the child because it is for the family]." In contrast, mothers in groups which lagged behind discussions were unmotivated to participate, sharing that they could not connect the discussion or see its relevance to their everyday lives. However common to all mothers is their interest on topics relating to livelihood and income generation, and family planning. They would like to have these discussed in the FDS.

Despite the clear benefits of the program to the beneficiaries, the mothers interviewed felt that there is little room for them to control or influence the program. It seemed all about luck, passivity or both. For instance, their selection to the program had been more because of luck than anything else, especially when they consider that there are people in their community who also deserved (if not deserved more) to be included in the 4Ps. They also have little control over the 4Ps implementation and how to address its issues like delays in the release of cash grants and unexplained deductions. Some mothers shared that they were told computer lapses are to blame for the discrepancies in cash grants, and that they will not be get the remaining balance of their grants (for those who experienced unfair deductions from their cash grants) or compensation for the inconvenience caused by delayed payments. One also could not expect that the health worker or teacher monitoring their compliance to conditionalities to be objective or considerate – this too was a matter of luck.

Mothers stated that they are now resigned to accepting the situation. Their lack of influence over the process also hinders them from complaining or

demanding explanations for inconsistencies in program implementation. They fear being de-listed or taken out of the list of beneficiaries. During the validation, the mother-beneficiaries added that they never saw the cash grant as something they earned or deserved, much less as their own money. Instead, it is DSWD money which was given to them to manage the way the program required it to be. They would much rather have jobs and small businesses which they could proudly say is theirs and that they worked hard for.

The Family Needs the Extra Money

When asked what changes in their everyday lives occurred because of the 4Ps, the mothers replied that their lives were generally the same as before. With or without the 4Ps, the mothers will still continue to send their children to school and to health centers for checkups, struggle to make ends meet and look for opportunities to increase family income. They will still attend community meetings and join barangay activities and programs. Without the 4Ps there will still be free health services in the barangay health center, as well as the public health programs channeled through schools (e.g. nutrition and weight evaluations). Access to health care without the 4Ps could be supplemented by the medical missions that come to their area.

This is not to say that the mothers were not appreciative of the 4Ps. The cash grants helped alleviate some the financial pressures particularly with regard children's education. This includes being able to give a child enough *baon* so she would not have to walk to school, as well as being able to pay for school expenses. Some mothers, also appreciated the things they learned from the FDS, saying they otherwise would not have learned or have time to learn them had it not been for the 4Ps.

The mothers wished though that the program would be more accurate and consistent with the release of the cash grants. Although they are now able to buy more food with the cash grant, the irregular release of cash grants (and discrepancies in computations) also meant that they cannot fully depend on this

to meet their expenses. At times they had to borrow from moneylenders to pay for school fees, then used the 4Ps cash grant to pay the loan. The grant does not even last a month in their hands but just a few days. "*Garò uminagi sana* [It is as if it just passed through]," one mother said. There were also other program conditionalities like sending 3-year old children to day care which increased the workload of parents and teachers.

Looking for Sustainability, Comprehensiveness and Accomplishment

Nothing much has changed for them since they became part of the 4Ps; and when the program ends in 2014, they would still be concerned about their husband's finding a job and getting a decent salary and making do with a meager amount for all their household needs. As one mother said, "*May 4Ps o wara, nagtitios man giraray* [With or without the 4Ps, we are still struggling]." The mothers commented laughingly that the government cannot be depended on anyway. They believed that government assistance was all a matter of luck more than anything else. However, they also stated that they do not wish the program to end. The cash grant represented a significant amount in their family budget. Losing it might mean that some families will no longer be able to keep their children to school. Asked how the 4Ps can be improved, the mothers suggested that it should follow the schedule of payments and keep their records updated so that the mothers receive what they should. Moreover increasing the cash grant and releasing it monthly rather than every other month would also help them better financially. They also suggested that the government could also provide them jobs as an alternative to the cash grants. A daily salary of Php100 would be adequate for their needs.

The mothers consistently expressed the need for a regular source of income – something they could depend on — whether this income be through the 4Ps or not. Second, the mothers wanted help that was sustainable. Finally, they wanted something they can consider 'theirs,' or the fruit of their own labor. Employment or livelihood, they said, is still more important than hand outs: "*Dawa*

dai mo na agadan. Sa trabaho na sana talaga [Never mind asking them for help; employment's more important]." The mothers said that if they had jobs, then they could afford to pay for their health, education and housing needs. Moreover the mothers who have skills and experiences in livelihood, should be given a chance for them to compete in the market is what they need.

Analysis of Findings

The 4Ps neglects the realities of the women's gender-specific poverty, reinforces existing gender relations within the home and adds to their lack of personal autonomy. It thus acts only as a palliative response to women's gender needs, while capitalizing on women's subordinate gender position. The following discussion is anchored on these two points.

A Palliative Response to Women's Practical Gender Needs

Analysis of 4Ps documents revealed that the 4Ps looks at poverty as something that simply exists and takes what are actually its defining features as merely aggravating factors, including the increase in prices of goods and services and worsening unemployment rates. Consequently, the 4Ps poses a solution that neglects or downplays these factors by focusing on poverty as a household phenomenon whose greatest problem are the "shocks" and "risks" brought about by global economic crises. With such limited view on poverty, the 4Ps indeed does not only distract people from the real problem of poverty but shifts the burden of solving poverty to the people. By treating children's health and education as the only indicators of poverty, people are forced to turn to themselves as the cause of and the solution to their own poverty. The "cycle of poverty," as the 4Ps defines it, is pinned on the household's inability to prepare children for economic productivity that would save the household from poverty.

But the in-depth interviews with the mother-beneficiaries from Legazpi City showed that the poverty they experience is rooted in the systematic inaccessibility to goods and services. On the one hand, the 4Ps households rarely

have the means (e.g. income) to afford basic goods and services; on the other, these goods and services continuously move out of their reach. Their family's food, utilities, health, education and housing needs are thus a burden in themselves.

This does not mean however that mother-beneficiaries take these situations sitting down. In fact, they have a variety of survival strategies including stretching the family budget, saving on expenses, finding employment and coming up with some livelihood activity. There are barriers though: limited employment and livelihood opportunities in their communities and in the rural areas in general; and the social constraints on them because they are mothers.

The focus group discussions with the mother-beneficiaries further revealed that the 4Ps barely made an impact on their material condition since it fails to capture its dynamics. The cash grants is a palliative remedy to the financial constraints of households, and even then it is not sufficient (Php300 and Php500 for education and health expenses respectively) or reliable (due to deductions and delays in payment).

The mother-beneficiaries were clear on what they need: help that is sustainable, comprehensive, and over which they have ownership or can claim to have achieved for themselves. The women specified that more than cash grants over a period of time, they need access to more affordable goods and services, and stable income-earning opportunities in the form of small businesses or jobs.

Capitalizing on Women's Subordinate Position

The 4Ps focuses on the household by treating it as a homogenous unit where gender-specific poverty is invisible. In this scheme, the government's "investment" in the children of the household is equated to investment in the household as a unit. However, it is the women who are singled out to ensure program conditionalities are fulfilled because they are the "most responsible member of the family" (Pablo et al., 2009). In contrast, the 4Ps did not specify a role for fathers, although it mentioned that a "parent" (a gender neutral term) should

attend monthly meeting. Apart from this, all the 4Ps documents referred to women and mothers in relation to program-related activities, from attending meetings to managing the cash grants. Clearly, the roles that the 4Ps specifies for mother-beneficiaries in the program are the same roles they struggle with inside their households. First, traditional motherhood poses restrictive roles and responsibilities for the women that keep them from looking for and taking advantage of development opportunities. Mothers are compelled to give up their paid work outside the house in favor of childcare, regardless of their financial contributions to the household. Second, they have very little control, if any, over household resources. Women's needs – whether for personal things or capital to establish their own businesses – take second place to the needs of other household members. In contrast, husbands can easily justify setting aside a portion of his wages for income generating activities. Third, mothers have little or no decision-making and bargaining power at home, especially when they do not have their own income-earning occupation. For instance, those who have absolutely no income-earning occupation hardly take charge of deciding how the family income will be spent. Finally, people also assume that women “do nothing” or have more “free time” than men and impose on their time. Similarly the 4Ps also assume that it is the women's natural role to take care of the children thus targets them as implementers of the program.

Traditional ideas of women's role in the household and motherhood are reinforced by the 4Ps. It is not surprising that mother-beneficiaries did not find the 4Ps as extra work because it capitalizes on existing gender roles and relationships which unfortunately keep women at the margins of economic and social development.

There are issues however in the compliance to conditionalities vis-à-vis problems relating to cash grant availability and sufficiency which stressed mother-beneficiaries. First, the cash grant is not sufficient to cover all the expenses which the compliance to conditionalities entails. For instance, the 4Ps only allots Php300 for monthly educational expenses of one child whereas the monthly transportation cost to the nearest high school from Barangay A alone is around Php400 per child.

School fees are also higher in high school than in elementary school yet the 4Ps seemed to be more focused on supporting elementary school children. A second issue raised was dealing with difficult health workers and teachers who are responsible for keeping the records of compliance. A wrong entry could result to a deduction to the cash grant, or in some cases because the records were not updated, some mother-beneficiaries found their names missing from the list of beneficiaries. Third, women were also stressed when the release of cash grants was delayed since their ability to fulfill the 4Ps conditionalities depended on the timely availability of the grants. In this case, some mother-beneficiaries resorted to borrowing money with interest.

Ironically, the 4Ps assumed that the cash grants will convince and motivate families to keep their children in school and bring them to health centers for checkups. In reality the cash grants only *enables* families rather than motivates them. Mothers-beneficiaries stated that they want and do strive to send their children to school and keep them healthy – and they will continue to do so with or without the 4Ps. What they lack is the means – and this is what the cash grant is for.

Women are also particularly placed in the 4Ps as workers but not as direct beneficiaries of the health and education goals. The one health goal for women, which is regular checkups before, during and after pregnancy, is still attached to her role as a mother. Beyond their role as child-bearer, women's health needs are largely neglected by the program. As with other CCTs, there are no mechanisms in the program that actually looked into how the mother-beneficiaries are affected by the program.

Another thing which mothers stated as a need was for adequate reproductive health services. Many do not have access to information and services or else do not see the local services as reliable ones. As a result, they would pay for such services with their own money, or altogether push it at the back of their concerns. While the mothers did not express resentment over having more children than they can handle, some were very vocal about how child bearing and rearing

had prevented them from looking for income-earning opportunities. They also said that having a lot of children makes it harder for a mother to manage the household and that pregnancy and child-bearing are very hard for them to go through.

The cash grants managed by the women had little impact on their economic or personal autonomy. They did not consider the cash grants their own money, or money they can decide over because it is such a small amount and is intended for specific expenses predetermined by the program. As cash from the 4Ps is meant only for the children's immediate needs, it actually fits right into women's traditional role in the economics of the household. Rather than truly change their role in the household, the 4Ps served only to latch onto and thus strengthen existing ones. Instead the women identified the following factors which affect their household status and personal autonomy: access to income-earning occupations, number of children, especially young children, and the division of work in the household. All these factors are not addressed by the program.

Another singled out experience was the monthly meetings, family development sessions or mothers' classes that "parents" are supposed to attend. While Pablo et al., (2009) say that these make the women feel empowered and allow them to bond and build a sense of community, such did not surface from the mother-beneficiaries interviewed. First, while the contents of FDS modules may indeed be very promising in terms of the additional learning for the women, it does not include or only have limited discussions on topics which matter to women the most; i.e., livelihood and reproductive health. Second, there is no clear monitoring system to check if the FDS is achieving its objectives and contributing to the program goals. There are reports that the monthly FDS, far from increasing the knowledge mother-beneficiaries and strengthening relationships among them, are venues to talk about 4Ps updates. This is again a one-sided arrangement where the needs of the program are prioritized over the needs of the women. The mother-beneficiaries also noted that the 4Ps also had a negative impact on the relationship between beneficiary and non-beneficiary members of the community, especially during the early stages of 4Ps implementation.

The relationship between the conditionality of the cash grant and the mothers also takes away whatever limited autonomy they have over their resources. For instance, the 4Ps also requires the mothers to justify a child's absence from class. This means that they have to secure medical certificates, for instance, every time their child is absent from school. This actually takes away the mothers' sense of authority over their children's welfare as they now have to answer to the program. In fact, it is not only health problems that keep the children from going the school. For example, the mothers also cite delinquent teachers who do not show up in class. But when that happens, the children are automatically marked absent as well. That mothers keep a record book of all the financial transactions they have under the 4Ps is also another indication of their sense of lack of autonomy over the money they receive. The money was granted to them, but it is not theirs to spend really as they felt that they will have to answer to the program authorities about whether they spent it 'properly' or not. Not only are these once again additional burdens to the mothers, but it also takes away what autonomy they have over their already limited resources.

On top of these experiences, the mother-beneficiaries are overwhelmed with problems within the program itself. Specifically cited were the delays in the release of cash grants, cases of disappearing names from the beneficiaries list, unexplained deductions from cash grants, problematic grievances and redress systems, and the irregular and ineffective FDS . These experiences do not only demonstrate the reinforcement of disempowering situations for women, but also recreate disempowering feelings in the mothers. For one, they developed a further sense of desperation over their material conditions, so that they feel grateful for whatever amount they receive. They also felt helpless about achieving decent standards of living, saying for instance, "*Dai ka naman kaiyan maginibo... kung anong mag-abot, iyo na* [There is nothing you can do about it...whatever comes, then that is it]." They became afraid that the consequences of standing up for themselves will ruin the smallest chance at survival they have, "*Marureklamo ka...matangkas ka na sana* [You go and complain...and you will just get delisted]." Finally, the non-validation of themselves as individuals instead of only as mothers is strengthened. One mother makes this most apparent by equating the family's

survival to motherly sacrifice, "*Puros sa aki...ta pampamilya бага...Kahit sa Mama wara na* [It is all about the child because it is for the family...it does not matter if there is none for the mother]."

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study found out that the 4Ps keeps mother-beneficiaries in their impoverished situations as it treats them only as women defined by their traditional role as mothers. It does nothing to improve their material condition or their social position and in fact reinforces and adds to their disempowerment.

First, the 4Ps fails to capture the gender-specific poverty of its mother-beneficiaries. It focuses on poverty as a household phenomenon thus the solution lies in how households are able to invest in their children's ability to be economically productive in the future. Similar to CCTs in other countries, the 4Ps is also a maternalist program where the experience of poverty by mother-beneficiaries is assumed to be the same as that of other household members. Moreover, the CCT programs direct benefits to children but the work is shoulder solely by the mothers. It identifies mothers to be the "most responsible adult" (Pablo et al., 2009) in the household and makes them responsible for managing the cash grant and seeing to the compliance with the conditionalities of the program.

Second, mother-beneficiaries continuously struggle to survive as they are trapped by their material conditions and social positions. Between them and their husbands, they are the ones even more likely to be without employment or livelihood because they are forced to give up any activity that would require the same resources they could be spending at home as the mother. This further keeps them in roles and responsibilities bound to the home, diminishes their contribution to family resources, limits their decision-making and bargaining power, and compromises their personal autonomy.

Third, views and experiences of mother-beneficiaries indicate that the 4Ps is just another relief program for them. The mother-beneficiaries mostly

appreciate the cash grant as a relief, temporary as it may be, from the financial insecurity. The cash grant per se does not determine the mother-beneficiaries' willingness to comply with the conditionalities. It is what helps the mother-beneficiaries pay for some of the health and education expenses of their children; it is money the family lacks. It is for this reason that mothers-beneficiaries interviewed endure the technical problems they encounter in the program, as well as keep them from actively challenging the shortcomings of the program. Hence, while the program offered some relief from the mother-beneficiaries' expenses for the household, it does nothing to improve their impoverished material condition as it neglects the factors that make this possible. These factors include the inaccessibility of goods and services and the absence of stable income-earning occupations. The mothers' experiences concurred with this when they identified sustainability, comprehensiveness and achievement in their income sources as what they need to escape poverty but unfortunately were not covered by the 4Ps.

The relief provided by the 4Ps also comes at a price, as it reinforces women's subordinate position within the household. It recreates the dynamics of their social position as it tasks women to receive, budget, and spend the family resources while neglecting their own needs; obliges women to stretch their own resources in order to do all that is required of them for the sake of their family's daily survival; and further pushes them to restricting themselves and their involvements to the household. On top of these, the technical problems women experience within the 4Ps create in them feelings of helplessness, fear, and resignation to neglect, which further disempower them.

This study surfaced a number of problems with the 4Ps that puts into question its effectiveness and value as an anti-poverty program. The gaps identified by the mother-beneficiaries challenges the administrative capabilities of the DSWD in implementing such a large-scale and high-budgeted program. Second, there is the disconnection between where the beneficiaries are and where the program supposes they will go because of it. The program aims at poverty reduction and social development, yet it fails to capture the full realities of poverty as the people experience it, especially the women. This has significant implications on the

effectiveness and value of many of the program's components including the conditional nature of the cash grant, the amount of the cash grant, the eligibility requirements of beneficiaries, and the exclusive nature of the program. Finally, some problem areas of the 4Ps that are beyond the scope of the present research but were manifested in the data gathering process are also worth considering. These include the question of the cash grant being conditional; the particular focus of the program on children's education and health so as to neglect other dimensions of poverty such as age or women's reproductive health needs outside of pre- and post-natal care; and the views and experiences of other women involved in the program, the teachers and health workers, who are similarly burdened with their additional responsibilities because of the program.

In place of the 4Ps, the views and experiences of mother-beneficiaries surfaced a demand for a more comprehensive approach to addressing poverty and ensuring development. One, access to goods and services must be secured. This demands that the prices of basic commodities be affordable and that adequate social and utility services must be in place. Two, there must be opportunities for them to improve and make full use of their capabilities. This would include jobs, financial assistance and technical support for small entrepreneurs, and education and training services for women as well as men. Three, there needs to be active sensitization of men in the community regarding gender issues, which could be achieved through barangay-level gender sensitivity trainings. Four, there needs to be support, financial and otherwise, for the women to organize themselves that will enable them to further identify, analyze, and seek solutions to the gender needs and interests that they have. A genuine women's organization will also make consultations with policy makers possible and effective. Finally, a comprehensive national policy that would enable women living in poverty to experience motherhood as a choice rather than a forced occupation, such as the pending Reproductive Health Bill, must be implemented.

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