Chapter 8

South-East Asia: Beyond the Economic Approach

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Poverty research in the Philippines

Most social scientists in developing countries have had their research training in the West. Filipinos usually trained in the United States, whereas Malaysians and Singaporeans mostly trained in England. This is why research on poverty in the Philippines is often conceptualized in the same ways as research published in North America. For example, local researchers tend to study who the poor are, and, characteristically, the pattern is to use income data similar to the 1990 US data, which showed that over 31 million Americans live in households with incomes below the official poverty level (US Bureau of Census 1991). The American poverty level is defined as the minimum income needed to feed, house and clothe household members (Hess et al. 1993: 188–9). Like their American counterparts, Filipino researchers are enamoured of finding the formula for establishing a poverty level, using surveys similar to those of the US Department of Agriculture that showed that families spend about one-third of their income on food. The Department of Agriculture in the USA determines the cost of a minimally nourishing basket of food and multiplies it by three, thereby coming up with a number that is usually adjusted yearly for changes in the cost of the food basket, but without considering that the cost of housing has been rising at a faster rate than the cost of most food items (Hess et al. 1993: 189). This poverty level has become the take-off point for discussion in the Philippines too.

The other recent popular concept or theme in the West is the feminization of poverty. This is a North American concept that is slowly being picked up in the Asian literature. In the USA, most of the poor are females with low incomes, e.g. teenage mothers, single mothers, divorced women of any age, and elderly widows. Increasingly, poverty in the USA has become feminized, with single mothers with young children and old women being among the poorest in the nation. There are still no available and comparable data in the Philippines or in South-East Asia, but soon local researchers will do something about this. The problems of poverty and the aged, which have been addressed by studies in the North American setting, are still to be addressed locally. Given the pronounced American influence on local researchers, it is not far fetched to expect a similar study in the near future.

Concepts of poverty

The literature indicates that researchers conceptualize poverty on many levels, but the predominant orientation of Filipino researchers on poverty is economic. Very few adopt a sociological point of view. Castillo's (1994) article on poverty research noted this lack of sociological direction. Based on the literature, there are certain identifiable poverty sectors (Abad et al. 1986; Andales and David 1985). Four such sectors are present in the Philippines: artisan or small-scale fishermen, upland swiddeners, scavengers, and sugarcane workers. Abad et al. (1986) provide a regional dimension to poverty; their study links development projects and technological changes. A more recent study, Adem (1992), focuses on still another poverty sector in the urban areas – railway squatters, who are mostly migrants to the city and who live along the railroad tracks. Balisacan (1991a,b,c, 1992a,b,c,d) and Abad et al. (1986) also see the farmers from the rural areas as belonging to the poor sector. Among the rural poor are the landless tenant workers, farm workers, farmers owning 5 hectares or less, marginal farmers, sugarcane workers, small-scale producers, and indigenous people/tribal groups. The city poor are railway squatters, scavengers, and migrants.

Poverty is viewed as both a condition and a process (Abad et al. 1986). As a condition, poverty is a "way of life", as displayed by persons lacking cash, capital, and other resources to meet economic demands. Abad et al. characterize the poor as those receiving low pay (if employed), mostly hungry and malnourished, and powerless and assetless. Powerlessness is a result of their being without education (human capital); consequently, they are without employment skills. They live in communities that are often deprived because neither the local nor the national governments have provided such basic goods and services as food, shelter, health, and educational services.

Arboleda et al. (1988) define poverty through certain objective criteria such as unemployment, the infant mortality rate, the prevalence of malnutrition, and a low literacy rate. These measures of poverty are easily calculable for decision makers to base their policies on.

Associated with the general concept of poverty is a concept of "mass poverty", articulated by Lichauco (1986) and Villegas (1986). It means a state of poverty that has been brought about by the colonial powers, with dire consequences for the people of the Philippines. According to Lichauco (1986), the Philippines is poor because of the existing economic structure, which generates profits only for the owners of industries. The profits earned do not filter down to the larger sector of the population. Industrialization is held back by the absence of "economic democratization". Although Villegas (1986) denies that his concept of poverty is coloured by ideological reasoning, he too sees economic development as a correct response to poverty alleviation issues.

Another concept associated with poverty is "absolute poverty" (David 1989). Like Villegas and Lichauco, David (1989) subscribes to the idea that poverty is mainly a function of economic development and of the existing reproduction of gross economic and social inequality at all levels. David uses the quantitative definition of the poverty threshold of the Philippines' National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA): the "monthly income required to satisfy almost 100% of the nutritional requirements and basic needs of a family of 6 persons". According to this definition, the incidence of poverty in the Philippines in 1989 was estimated at 5.67 million, or 59.3 per cent of the total population. When President C. Aquino became President, she wanted to reduce it to 45.4 per cent by 1992. David's ideas were basically echoes of earlier writers, such as Tendero et al. (1984), Andales and David (1985) and Abad et al. (1986). The common theme underlying their studies, which were published over three consecutive years, was the important notion that poverty is a function of the lack of infrastructure, job opportunities, services, and facilities that "ought" to be provided by the government. Likewise, poverty is also the consequence of the overriding and persistent inequalities of land tenure and of an "institutionalized form of oppression" of the disadvantaged and vulnerable sections in Philippine society.

Hypotheses

Andales and David (1985) hypothesize that small-scale fishermen are poor because they lack the necessary capital to buy gasoline and modern fishing gear, and they lack credit facilities and/or storage and processing facilities. Balisacan (1991a–c, 1992a–d), on the other hand, points to the relationship between uneven income distribution and poverty. He also identifies a set of characteristics that describe the rural poor, and shows that household size and household composition are critical variables related to household production and household consumption. In a separate paper, Balisacan (1992a–d) argues that limited poverty alleviation took place in the 1980s as a result of the intrasectoral and general improvement in the distribution of living standards.

Constantino (1989) focuses on the relationship between poverty and the incidence of diseases, while David (1989) points out that low wages or low income have contributed to the emergence of new poverty in the Philippines, and adds that the inability of the government to intervene aggravates the continuing intensity of poverty. Like Mangahas (1984a,b), Veneracion (1985) examines the relationship between the landlessness of agricultural workers or land transfer and poverty incidence; she also raises the question of whether or not nutritional status or access to food is the best measure of poverty. If it is, then she argues that higher priority must be provided to food-related policies. Ortigas (1989) suggests that poor nutrition tends to contribute to poor intellectual development and is a factor in the rise in poverty among Filipinos.

Ellevera-Lamberte (1983) looks at the actual delivery of services and access to services in upland areas in relation to the incidence of poverty. Garcia and Militante (1986), other hand, believe that poverty in itself is one of several social problems of society. They include excessive population growth as an important factor in the persistence of poverty.

The early work of Ganapin (1987) examines the connection of forest depletion with poverty. He predicted that unchecked resource depletion would eventually have a corresponding negative impact, leading to worse cases of poverty among Filipino people.

Pineda's (1991) hypothesis points to how the national debt crisis directly influences the lives of the poor, bringing more hardship and consequently contributing to making more people poor. Santos and Lee (1989), unlike other authors, categorically state that women are the bearers of the burden of poverty; this approximates the "feminization of poverty" theme found in North American literature. However, Pineda (1991) holds the view that the marginalization of women is a function of the ballooning national debt. Thus, both Pineda and Santos and Lee argue that, as the national debt reaches crisis proportions, women assume the greater burden of poverty.

The dominant thinking is that poverty is related to five factors – socioeconomic, health, political, environmental, and agricultural. The socioeconomic factors are: the lack of resources (e.g. the necessary capital to buy essential inputs); income distribution and low wages; the national debt crisis; delivery of and access to services; and excessive population growth. The health factors are the incidence of disease and access to food. The political factor is the inability of the government to intervene meaningfully. The environmental factor is the depletion of the forest and other resources. Lastly, the agricultural factors are the large number of landless agricultural workers and the issue of land transfer.

Other studies portray poverty not merely as a dysfunctional consequence but also as a necessary product of other social forces, such as the colonialism that took place in the past and the persisting inequalities in land tenure and gender. The majority of the writers and researchers frame their hypotheses in a fashion that states the obvious, i.e. poverty is caused by factors arising from the physical, sociocultural, economic, and political environment. According to Fernandez and de la Torre (n.d.), for example, these factors determine the intensity and structure of poverty in a community. These generalizations are inherent sources of weaknesses in past and current poverty research at the local level, because they present a merely unilinear view of poverty, leading to oversimplification and stereotyping.

One of the more interesting hypotheses generated from the literature is the association of poverty with "learned helplessness" (Licuanan, 1981). To understand the psychological dynamics of poverty, the following measures were designed to observe the psychological experiences of the poor as compared with the non-poor: feelings of self-worth (assertiveness, appreciation of criticism, self-confidence), orientation towards others (attitude towards authority, attitude towards peers, openness to innovation), orientation towards collective action (preference for collective action, belief in group's capability to influence), social responsibility (community participation, cooperation). However, it seems that what Licuanan (1981) presented as original studies were similar to the studies previously presented by the Singaporean researcher Kuo (1976), in his work *Families* *under Economic Stress* (1975). Kuo studied the relationship between poverty status and certain variables similar to those used by the Filipino researcher.

Data sources

In the Philippines, the family income and expenditure survey (FIES) is the most commonly used database for determining who is poor (Balisacan 1991a–c). Other important data sources are UN reports, such as those from UNICEF and the International Labour Organization. The National Census and Statistics Office and the Nutrition Research Institute are also popular sources of data for researchers.

For example, David (1989) used World Bank and NEDA figures for his concept of absolute poverty. Other poverty studies usually refer to income levels based on the 1980 Census. Figures for birth rate, unemployment rate, average income (which in 1989 was P 3,000 a month – c. US$150), and family income come from NEDA. Pineda (1991) used the 1988 World Bank *World Development Report*. This report indicated the percentage share of Philippine household income: the bottom 20 per cent pegged at 5.2 per cent in 1985, while the highest 10 per cent of households accounted for a hefty 36.4 per cent share. Pineda (1991) is a favourite source of data. One of its reports states that low-income families are characterized by a lack of productive assets or of control over such assets, limited use of modern technology in their production activities, limited access to basic economic and social services, and limited human capital (Pineda 1991).

Now there is a growing trend among researchers to do their own fieldwork. One example is the research of Veneracion (1985), who interviewed landless agricultural workers in three provinces of Central Luzon. Another result of field research is Andales and David's (1985) poverty profile of fishermen in Iloilo province Some of their findings show that most fishermen have a mean number of five years of schooling; their income ranges from P40.00 to – P80.00 a month; and the majority do not have contacts with or knowledge of government and political agencies or service organizations in the area. A third example of a study based on field research is that of Cadeliña (1986), who studied the lowland migrant swiddeners in the Balinsasayao Forest, Negros Oriental. The swiddeners had very little education, they engaged in farming purely for subsistence, and, on average, the family household head earned P90 a week. There were no appliances in the house and the diet was basically carbohydrate with minimal protein. The data sources, then, cover the range from use of secondary data to collection of primary and empirical field studies data.

Evaluation

The review brings out the different and varying approaches used by researchers on poverty, which would explain why comparative studies on the topic could be difficult. One reason is that the research and essay materials reviewed a mixture of definitions of poverty, some relating to causes and some to effects of poverty. This implies that there is a need to address such basic problems in poverty research as definition and measurement issues. The review also indicates that the Philippines is divided into separate spheres of rural and urban poor, which calls for a new conceptualization and makes it advisable in future poverty research to focus on the rural–urban differentials. In fact, Balisacan (1994) pays attention to this very dimension. It is also necessary to focus on the role of the national government and its inability or unwillingness to respond to the people's demand for basic social services, and its responsibility for the promotion of poverty in the region.

Valencia (1994) lists the basic concepts utilized by poverty researchers in the Philippines as: rural poverty, urban poverty, mass poverty, absolute poverty, poverty as a process and as a condition, and poverty as an "institutionalized form of oppression". Valencia examined the published materials on poverty prior to 1985 and found that as early as 1978 Alburo had already examined a range of poverty definitions provided by poverty researchers. Alburo concluded that the definitions, even at that time, were already suffering from serious theoretical weaknesses, prompting him to say that the definitions were inadequate, and thus insufficient to provide a basis for policy options for government to direct resources towards poverty alleviation. The following year, Alburo and Roberto (1979) reiterated the arguments, saying that alternative poverty measures related to energy use, source of drinking water, toilet facilities, size of households, type of tenancy, and occupation would strengthen a methodological approach that could provide a better definition of poverty among certain groups. Alburo's analysis was reproduced by Aldaba-Lim (1986), who argued for the utilization of the same type of data on the plight of women and children all over Asia as a measure of poverty and development in the region. In 1976, a survey team led by Almario studied the poverty profile of rural Philippines (Almario et al. 1976). They observed that most of the research on poverty that they reviewed lacked any coherent theoretical perspective. To arrive at a better understanding of poverty in rural areas, Almario and his team proposed a three-pronged theoretical approach: historical, structural–functional, and cognitive.

This criticism regarding the inadequacy of theoretical frameworks on poverty is just as valid among researchers today. One reason for the lack of a clear theoretical perspective may be the oversimplification of the causal links between poverty and other variables. Another reason is the excessive use of economic approaches to the study of poverty, which is in fact a multiple affliction caused by a plurality of forces. The shortage of other social science approaches to the phenomenon of poverty may be traced to the minor and peripheral interest expressed by social scientists (other than economists) in embarking on field studies on poverty. Most of the time, discussion about poverty among social scientists is merely a serendipitous occurrence.

Poverty research in South-East Asia

Because of a dearth of materials, only a modicum of analysis is possible here. Because there are too few materials to enable the selection of basic concepts, hypotheses, and data sources, the presentation of this section of the paper will be different from that of the first section. Valencia (1994) provides a profile of four countries (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore) and highlights some of the common indicators of comparisons to assess poverty.

Table 8.1 shows some basic indicators for the period 1965–87. Among the four countries, Indonesia had the highest population and the largest area. On the other hand, Singapore had the highest GNP per capita, average annual growth rate, and life expectancy. Malaysia and Singapore had the lowest average annual inflation rate from 1965 to 1980. Malaysia had the lowest average annual inflation rate from 1980 to 1987.

The growth of production was different in the four countries. In terms of GDP, Singapore had the highest growth rate from 1965 to 1987. In agriculture, the Philippines had the highest growth rate from 1965 to 1980, and Malaysia had the highest growth rate from 1980 to 1987. In industry, Indonesia and Singapore had the highest growth rate from 1965 to 1980, and Malaysia had the highest growth rate from 1980 to 1987. In manufacturing, Singapore had the highest growth rate from 1965 to 1980, and Indonesia had the highest growth rate from 1980 to 1987. In services, Singapore had the highest growth rate from 1965 to 1987.

Table 8.1 South-East Asia: Basic indicators

Country	Population (millions)	Area ('000 km^2)	GNP per capita		Average annual rate of inflation		Life expectancy at birth (years) 1987
			Value (US$) 1987	Ave. annual growth rate (%) 1965–80	1965–80	1980–87	
Indonesia	171.4	1,905	450	4.5	34.2	8.5	60
Philippines	58.4	300	590	1.7	11.7	16.7	63
Malaysia	16.5	330	1,810	4.1	4.9	1.1	70
Singapore	2.6	1	7,940	7.2	4.9	1.3	73

Source: World Bank (1989: 164–5).

Table 8.2 indicates central government expenditures. Singapore had the highest percentage of total expenditure earmarked for defence in both 1972 and 1987. Malaysia had the highest percentage of total expenditure going to education in 1972, whereas Singapore had the highest percentage in 1987. Singapore also had the highest percentage of total expenditure used for health in 1972; whereas in 1987 the Philippines had the highest percentage. Malaysia had the highest percentage of expenditure on housing amenities in 1972, while Singapore had the highest percentage in 1982. In 1972, Indonesia had the highest percentage of total expenditure going to economic services, while in 1987 the Philippines had the highest percentage.

As for the total external debt for the four countries, in 1987 Singapore had the lowest and Indonesia had the highest public and publicly guaranteed long-term debt. In the same year, the Philippines had the lowest and Indonesia had the highest private non-guaranteed long-term debt. In addition, Indonesia had the highest and Singapore had the lowest short-term debt. All in all, Indonesia had the largest total external debt, while Singapore had the lowest total external debt.

Table 8.3 indicates the population growth and projections for the four countries. In terms of average annual growth of population, the Philippines had the highest rate from 1965 to 1980; Malaysia had the highest from 1980 to 1987 and will still be the highest up to the year 2000. In terms of population size, Indonesia had the largest population in 1987 and will still have the biggest in the years 2000 and 2025.

Table 8.4 indicates the demography and fertility of the four countries. In 1987, Malaysia had the highest crude birth rate per thousand population, while Singapore and Malaysia had the lowest crude death rate per thousand and Singapore had the highest percentage of women of childbearing age. The Philippines had the highest total fertility rate, but Malaysia was projected to have the highest rate in the year 2000. In 1985, Singapore had the highest percentage of married women of childbearing age using contraception, while the Philippines had the lowest percentage.

As regards health and nutrition indicators (Table 8.5), in 1984 Indonesia had the highest population per physician, and the Philippines had the highest population per nurse. Singapore had the highest daily calorie supply per capita. In 1985, the Philippines had the highest percentage of babies with low birth weights, while Singapore had the lowest percentage.

Table 8.6 shows the education indicators of the four countries. In 1986, Indonesia had the highest percentage enrolled in

Table 8.2 South-East Asia: Central government expenditure

Country	Defence		Education		Health		Housing amenities; social security		Economic services		Others		Total expenditure % of GNP		Overall	
	As a percentage of total expenditure															
	1972	1987	1972	1987	1972	1987	1972	1987	1972	1987	1972	1987	1972	1987	1972	1987
Indonesia	18.6	8.6	7.4	8.8	1.4	1.5	0.9	1.7	30.5	23.5	41.3	55.9	15.1	24.0	−2.5	−0.9
Philippines[a]	10.9	9.2	16.3	18.0	3.2	5.5	4.3	3.8	17.6	50.5	47.7	12.9	13.4	13.5	−2.0	−5.0
Malaysia	18.5	–	23.4	–	6.8	–	4.4	–	14.2	–	32.7	–	26.5	31.9	−9.4	−8.2
Singapore	35.3	19.0	15.7	18.2	7.8	4.1	3.9	15.9	9.9	19.9	27.3	23.0	16.7	28.9	1.3	1.4

Source: World Bank (1989: 184–5).
Note:
[a] Refers to budgetary data.

Table 8.3 South-East Asia: Population growth and projections

Country	Average annual growth of population (%)			Population (millions)			Hypothetical size of stationary population (millions)	Assumed year of reading next reproduction Rate of 1	Population momentum 1990
	1965–80	1980–87	1987–2000	1987	2000	2025			
Indonesia	2.4	2.1	1.7	171	214	279	345	2005	1.7
Philippines	2.9	2.5	1.9	58	74	101	127	2010	1.8
Malaysia	2.5	2.7	2.2	17	22	30	37	2010	1.7
Singapore	1.6	1.1	0.8	3	3	3	3	2030	1.2

Source: World Bank (1989: 214–15).

Table 8.4 South-East Asia: Demography and fertility

Country	Crude birth rate per thousand population		Crude death rate per thousand population		Percentage of women of child-bearing age		Total fertility rate			Percentage of married women of child-bearing age using contraception[a]	
	1965	1987	1965	1987	1965	1987	1965	1987	2000	1970	1985
Indonesia	43	29	20	9	47	50	5.5	3.5	2.5	–	48
Philippines	42	30	12	8	44	49	6.8	3.9	2.7	2	44
Malaysia	41	31	12	6	43	51	6.3	3.8	2.8	7	51
Singapore	31	17	6	6	45	60	4.7	1.7	1.7	45	74

Source: World Bank (1989: 216–17).

Note:

[a]Figures include women whose husbands practise contraception.

Table 8.5 South-East Asia: Health and nutrition indicators

	Population per						
	Physician		Nurse		Daily calorie supply per capita		Babies with low birth weights (%)
Country	1965	1984	1965	1984	1965	1984	1985
Indonesia	31,700	9,490[a]	9,490	1,260[a]	1,800	2,579	14
Philippines	–	6,700	1,130	2,740	1,924	2,372	18
Malaysia	6,200	1,030	1,320	1,010	2,247	2,730	9
Singapore	1,900	1,310[a]	600	–	2,297	2,840	7

Source: World Bank (1989: 218–19).
Note:
[a] Figures for years other than those specified.

Table 8.6 South-East Asia: Education indicators

	Percentage of age group enrolled in education													
	Primary						Secondary						Tertiary	
	Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
Country	1965	1986	1965	1986	1965	1986	1965	1986	1965	1986	1965	1986	1965	1986
Indonesia	72	118	79	121	65	116	12	41	18	45[a]	7	34[a]	1	7
Philippines	113	106	115	107	111	106	41	68	42	66	40	69	19	38
Malaysia	90	101	96	100[a]	84	99[a]	28	54	34	54	22	54	2	6[a]
Singapore	105	115[a]	110	118[a]	100	113[a]	45	71[a]	49	70[a]	41	73[a]	10	–

Source: World Bank (1989: 220–1).
Note:
[a]Figures for years other than those specified.

primary education, while Singapore had the highest percentage enrolled in secondary education, and the Philippines had the highest percentage enrolled in tertiary education.

One of the few studies that discusses poverty in three of the countries is Mehmet (1979). Another study is the one by James (1981) on regional inequalities. Both articles represent the usual economic approach to poverty, using some of the above indicators, and the two authors agree that the incidence of poverty in South-east Asia is significantly greater than in other regions of the world.

More in-depth material is provided by Kuo (1976) who, unlike Mehmet and James, defines a sociological study of poverty as one that involves more variables than the income level and the expenditure pattern of households. Although the economic situation, including material deprivation, is crucial, a study should explore both the possible causes and the likely consequences of economic stress. Education and occupation, for example, are brought in as important elements in explaining the poverty status of the individual. For instance, Kuo (1976) states that, in an urban industrial society, education determines to a great extent the type of occupation one is likely to get in the labour market. A person with a low level of education gets less pay, less stability, and lower social prestige, and is more likely to face temporary or constant economic difficulties.

Kuo also explored the relationship between poverty status and various variables related to the following major areas of interest: income, expenditure, and possession of household items; feelings and responses to inflation; perceived well-being and relative deprivation; education and occupation; and marital relationships, including marital disorganization, interactional patterns, division of labour, and decision-making. Since most of the other studies reviewed are economic in context and approaches, many of the relationships posited by Kuo need to be explored.

Poverty is expressed in different conceptual terms in Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In Singapore, one index of poverty indicates a strong correlation between slum living conditions and a high incidence of gastroenteritis. Another index measures poverty in terms of certain minimum standards of nutrition, clothing, household expenditure, transport expenses, and rent (Kuo 1976). A third measure of poverty is the "disposable income ratio", which determines the extent to which disposable income (net of rent and transport expenses already incurred) is sufficient to provide for a minimum standard of living, excluding the costs of supporting outside dependants, medical expenses, and luxuries such as entertainment and cigarettes.

"Living in poverty" then refers to households whose disposable income ratio is less than 100, or whose income was less than that required to support a strictly defined minimum standard of living. The "poverty line" is set in the range of S$2,040–2,280 per year for a family of six (including a working man, a working wife, one child aged below 7, one child aged between 7 and 11, and two children aged 12 or over – i.e. five equivalent adults).

In Indonesia, the poverty gap index is the average of the gap between poor households' standards of living and the poverty line, as a ratio of the poverty line. Related concepts are depth of poverty, severity of poverty, direction of poverty change, and aggregate poverty. Such concepts are usually missing in the literature from the Philippines, owing to the lack of exposure to problems of measurements, noted specially among those researchers trained in the "soft" social sciences. The coping strategies studied among the poor, such as increasing hours of work, taking a second job, drawing on savings, or obtaining assistance from a network of friends and relatives (community safety-nets), as discussed by Ravallion and Huppi (1991), may be used as a take-off for interregional comparisons of the poor in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. The associated concept of informal social insurance arrangements in the region could be studied to understand poverty as it exists in these countries.

In Malaysia, "shared poverty" as discussed by Mehmet (1979) is a concept earlier espoused by Clifford Geertz to represent a social response to agricultural "involution" (*sic*). It also implies that there is apparent harmony and harmonious accommodation of the poor in a society. The term "poverty" implies not only a state of material deprivation, but also a way of life, and a complex nurturing set of social, economic, cultural, and political relationships and institutions evolved to find security within an insecure situation (Buchanan 1972: 225). Buchanan also says that one can define and measure poverty statistically as a state of existence, and one can analyse it (but not quantify it) as a kind of culture, or subculture, within the wider society. Thus, the term "poverty" essentially means economic deprivation to a level below adequate subsistence.

Regarding data sources, in Singapore, Buchanan (1972) used the 1966 Sample Household Survey, which provides limited data on the income level of household heads; official health statistics record notifiable diseases such as cholera, diphtheria, and smallpox. In 1950–3 there was a Social Survey of Singapore. The data obtained from this survey estimated that in nearly 90 per cent of all urban households no income-earner earned more than S$400 a month. Singapore regularly conducts sample surveys amongst people in squatter slum areas and low-cost housing estates. In addition, Singapore also conducts so-called general surveys. For instance, general surveys were made of some 500 households living in slum conditions in the Kallang-Tanjong Rha Area in order to determine the pattern of employment and household composition. Data from the Research and Statistics Department of the Ministry of Education are also used by researchers. Mehmet (1979) used budget data from 1957 and household savings in 1970 to estimate the average monthly income of households.

In Indonesia, Ravallion and Huppi (1991) decry the difficulty of analysing the effects of policy changes on the poor because of lack of data on poverty. The authors maintain that a useful indicator of a household's economic well-being must be readily quantifiable, and must reflect the range of different sectors, regions, and periods. This quantification of an economic well-being indicator is lacking in social science approaches. Another measure of poverty is a head-count ratio which measures poverty simply as the proportion of the population whose standard of living lies below a given poverty line.

Ravallion and Huppi (1991) used household survey data for 1980, 1984, 1987 to determine indicators of economic well-being and poverty lines, and to make some assumptions about the poor. The Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics is consulted by writers on poverty as often as they consult World Bank data. Indonesia's national socio-economic surveys were consulted to produce data on consumption from both market expenditures and production for 50,000 randomly sampled households comprising 250,000 persons.

In Malaysia, Hainsworth's (1982) article is the only one that touches on absolute poverty as it exists in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Citing a World Bank report, he said that there were 17 million poor in the Philippines in 1975. Hainsworth tried to trace the roots of poverty in the three countries in an effort to understand how the phenomenon became part of the larger scenario. He used data from the Asian Development Bank (1971–5) and the UN Protein-Calorie Advisory Group.

In Indonesia, a new poverty measure was generated based on income, food expenditure share, and calorie intake as indicators of level of living. Actual household consumption levels can be expected to correspond to a given food share and will generally vary according to relative prices, demographic factors, and tastes. The poverty measure is based on the distribution of household consumption per person, adjusting for inflation by using the consumer price index and modifying the underlying expenditure weights to correspond more closely with the spending patterns of the poor. Not surprisingly, poverty and undernutrition are directly related, and a correlation is demonstrated between the incidence of poverty and ownership of land.

From Singapore's available materials, there is a clear correlation between low per capita income, low occupational status, and low levels of living. The poorer 50 per cent tend to be those whose breadwinners have irregular or casual employment and low occupational status, and those with below minimum daily food expenditure, high living densities, and disposable income ratios of well below 100.

So, summing up, it can be said that researchers from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore tend to explore approaches besides the economic one in their studies of poverty. Because poverty is a multi-faceted and complex human condition, it cannot be understood by a simple and myopic research tool. Only by adopting a multidisciplinary approach and imaginative perceptions can research cut deep into the heart and soul of poverty.

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