

Depending on agriculture to alleviate poverty

Philippine Daily Inquirer · 9 Apr 2018 · B2-4 · ROLANDO T. DY

Is there a relationship between farmers' poverty and the degree of agriculture income dependency? Let that be the issue we will tackle. From a cursory look at the official data, it appears so.



a. Regions with high dependency (Bicol in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao regions) have a high poverty incidence.

b. Regions with low dependency (Central Luzon and Calabarzon) have low poverty rates.

However, a paradox exists in two regions: Cagayan Valley and Ilocos. Most families have strong dependence on agriculture income, and yet farmers' poverty levels are very low: 8.8 percent for Cagayan Valley and 12.2 percent for Ilocos in 2015, compared to the average 34.2 percent.

Why?

High dependency

Take the case of Cagayan Valley. Almost all families derived their incomes from agriculture, yet poverty incidence was only at 8.8 percent. Cagayan has the highest dependency, after ARMM which registered farmers' poverty rate at 46 percent. Soccsksargen is third with a poverty rate of 46.7 percent. Landing at fourth is Mimaropa with a poverty rate of 26 percent.

Medium dependency

Ilocos has the highest medium dependency with almost 81 percent of families sourcing their livelihood from agriculture. It has a poverty rate of 12.2 percent. Bicol is next with 73 percent of families depending on agriculture, while registering a poverty rate of 34.9 percent. Tied for 3rd and 4th are Eastern Visayas and Caraga (71.2 percent of families), but with poverty incidences of 46.6 percent and 59.4 percent, respectively.

What would explain these disparities?

This article ventures into simple analysis. I will leave the robust analytics to econometric experts.

Perhaps one explanation is the level of employment and unemployment of families of the agriculture regions. Cagayan has more family members employed compared to the three other regions cited above. Similar evidence exists concerning Ilocos and the other sample regions.

There is also this: farm productivity. Cagayan Valley and Ilocos registered high productivity when it came to the main crops. High productivity could easily translate to more jobs and other multiplier effects. High productivity also means greater marketable surplus and higher income.

Is there a relationship between farmers' poverty and the degree of agriculture income dependency? There is a correlation, but there are exceptions.

What can be inferred from the data? First, farm productivity is key to poverty alleviation. Second, and related to the first, job creation means higher income for farmer families. Third, interventions in irrigation are important to raise productivity and cropping intensity. Fourth, a shift to yellow corn from white corn yields dividends. This article reflects the personal opinion of the au-

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