

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MEETING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE PHILIPPINES<sup>1</sup>

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Philippines is one of the United Nations member states that has committed to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets by 2030. Based on available data from national surveys and administrative data of government agencies, this paper aims to examine where the Philippines stand with respect to the targets and goals of the SDGs. Baseline data and recent historical data on SDG indicators were considered to assess the progress of the Philippines, and to identify statistical challenges and opportunities, such as data availability and granularity, in monitoring progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

## 1. Introduction

In September 2015, the Philippines, together with 192 other United Nations member states, has committed to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets by 2030. The SDGs are described as a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.”<sup>3</sup> It extends the unfinished agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and put forward a more ambitious number and coverage of goals and targets across economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions of development.

Since the adoption of the SDGs, the Philippine government has carried out several activities related to setting up the policy and enabling environment for the implementation of the SDGs. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) spearheaded that compilation of indicators for national monitoring of the SDGs. Meanwhile, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), as the cabinet-level agency responsible for economic development and planning, looks into synergies of the SDG indicator framework vis-à-vis monitoring of the country’s medium- and long-term development plans.

Further activities have also been conducted regarding compilation and analysis of data for monitoring the country’s conditions on the SDGs. All concerned government agencies have been enjoined to provide the necessary data support for monitoring the SDGs, while the PSA is designated as the official repository of SDG indicators for the country.

Based on available data from national surveys and administrative data of government agencies, this report briefly discusses the Philippines’ conditions and pace of progress towards achievement of the SDGs. Various statistical challenges and opportunities were also identified based on various consultation workshops conducted and attended by the Philippine Institute

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) retrieved on December 28, 2018 from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>.

for Development Studies (PIDS) with regard to the drafting of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) for 2019.

## 2. Sustainable Development Goals in the Philippines

In May 2017, the PSA Board (i.e. the highest policy-making body on statistical matters), by virtue of PSA Board Resolution No. 09, series of 2017, approved the list of 155 preliminary National SDG Tier 1 indicators, composed of 102 SDG global indicators as well as 28 proxy and 25 supplementary indicators (**Table 1**). This list of indicators is based on multi-stakeholder workshops with SDG stakeholders, including academia, research institutions, and civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as bilateral consultations of PSA with statistics producers in government.<sup>4</sup> The following indicators were selected based on their availability in the entire Philippine Statistical System.

**Table 1. National SDG Tier 1 Indicators**

Goal	Global SDGs	Supplementary	Proxy	Total
Goal 1	7	0	11	<b>18</b>
Goal 2	2	2	1	<b>5</b>
Goal 3	13	6	4	<b>23</b>
Goal 4	6	9	1	<b>16</b>
Goal 5	8	4	3	<b>15</b>
Goal 6	3	2	3	<b>8</b>
Goal 7	4	0	0	<b>4</b>
Goal 8	7	0	2	<b>9</b>
Goal 9	5	0	0	<b>5</b>
Goal 10	7	0	0	<b>7</b>
Goal 11	3	0	2	<b>5</b>
Goal 12	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Goal 13	4	0	0	<b>4</b>
Goal 14	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Goal 15	10	0	1	<b>11</b>
Goal 16	8	2	0	<b>10</b>
Goal 17	13	0	0	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>155</b>

Source: Authors' calculations based on the initial list of SDG indicators in the Philippines as downloaded in PSA SDG Watch

Based on recent historical data of selected National Tier I indicators, this section provides an overview of the progress of the Philippines towards the achievement of the SDGs.

### *Goal 01. No Poverty*

The proportion of the population in poverty has decreased from 2006 to 2015, although the rates of poverty reduction vary vastly across regions and social groups. The estimated proportion of Filipinos with incomes below the international poverty line (i.e. USD 1.9 per person per day in 2011 purchasing power parity prices) is estimated at 8.3% in 2015, down from 14.5% in 2000. Meanwhile, headcount poverty incidence (using national poverty lines) has dropped from 26.6% in 2006 to 21.6% in 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority. 2017. Approving and adopting the initial list of Sustainable Development Goals for monitoring in the Philippines. PSA Board Resolution No. 09.

Regional disaggregation of poverty rates exhibits wide disparities. In 2015, NCR registered about 1 out of 25 poor people (3.9%), followed by neighbors CALABARZON (9.1%) and Central Luzon (11.2%). In contrast, more than half of the population in ARMM are poor with 53.7% estimated to have income below the national poverty line, thus demonstrating the vast inequities in living conditions across the country.

Moreover, whilst poverty rates by sex and employment status are relatively comparable, vast disparities exist in 2015 between the urban (11.5%) and rural (30.5%) populations, as well as across age groups, i.e. children (31.4%), youth (19.4%) and senior citizens (13.2%).

#### *Goal 02. Zero Hunger*

The Philippines exhibits mixed results in alleviating hunger and providing proper nourishment for the population, and especially across the regions. As of 2015, only about a third (31.0%) of Filipino households meet the 100% recommended energy intake. Regional disaggregation shows positive trends regarding meeting energy intake in some regions (Cordillera Administrative Region, ARMM, Zamboanga Peninsula, and NCR) and negative trends in others (MIMAROPA, Caraga, CALABARZON, Central Visayas, Ilocos, and Bicol).

Prevalence of stunting remains persistently at a third of children under five years old, estimated at 33.6 percent in 2011 to 33.4 percent in 2015. Central Luzon has the least prevalence of stunting at 23.1%, while ARMM has the highest rate at 45.3% in 2015. Meanwhile, prevalence of wasting is roughly steady from 7.3% in 2011 to 7.1% in 2015. Across regions, wasting is lowest in Northern Mindanao at 4.0%, and highest in MIMAROPA at 9.7%. Lastly, the prevalence of overweight children under 5 years old decreased from 4.3% in 2011 to 3.9% in 2015. Caraga registers the lowest rate of overweight children under five at 1.7% compared to the rates in Central Luzon and NCR at 6.0%.

#### *Goal 03. Good Health and Well-being*

Providing healthcare, especially for mothers and infants, has been an area of success in the Philippines in recent years, though challenges remain in addressing health issues like immunization, terminal diseases, use of tobacco and harmful use of alcohol. Greater healthcare access has been provided for mothers and infants, with the proportions of births handled by skilled personnel rising from 59.8% in 2003 to 84.4% in 2017.

There are also greater efforts to give access to modern reproductive health options for women, with the proportion of women whose need for family planning was satisfied rising from 46.7% in 2003 to 56.9% in 2017. These trends have also been consistent with the reduction of the adolescent birth rate per 1,000 women from 53.0% in 2003 to 47.0% in 2017.

There has also been significant reduction in under-five mortality rate (40.0% in 2013 to 27.0% in 2017), and some improvement in neonatal mortality rate (17.0% in 2003 to 14.0% in 2017). However, the country still faces issues in tobacco usage (23.6% among persons 15 years and older in 2015), harmful use of alcohol (55.2% in 2015), and mortality rates attributed to non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease (2.7% in 2016), cancer (1.0% in 2016), diabetes (0.6% in 2016), and chronic respiratory disease (0.3% in 2016).

#### *Goal 04. Quality Education*

Completion and survival rates in basic education have been significantly increasing from 2011 to 2017, while dropout rates have continuously declined in the same period. As of 2017, completion rates at the primary and lower secondary level were at 92.4% and 84.3%, while cohort survival rates were at 93.7% and 85.6%, and dropout rates were at 1.6% and

5.2%, respectively. Basic education performance varies largely according to development conditions, with CALABARZON being the best and ARMM the worst.

While access to higher education has improved due to the passage of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act in 2017, the quality of tertiary and technical-vocational education must also be ensured. In 2018, certification rates for technical-vocational education has been estimated at 92.4%, a slight decrease from previous year's 93.2%. Meanwhile, passing rates in licensure exams remains relatively constant through the years, averaging at 36.8% in 2017 across all disciplines.

#### *Goal 05. Gender Equality*

The empowerment of women to engage in economic opportunities and to fully utilize their civil liberties has been a strength for the Philippines. The country has also seen greater representation by women in the government throughout the years both in national parliament (12.44% in 2000 to 29.45% in 2018) to local government (17.16% to 21.3% from 2000 to 2018), though such levels are still far from parity. About half (48.9%) of managerial positions in the country are women, which suggests a relatively level playing field in career mobility between the sexes.

There have also been significant decreases in violence towards women, including physical (from 7.5% in 2008 to 4.3% in 2017), sexual (4.9% in 2008 to 2.2% in 2017), and psychological violence (4.9% in 2008 to 2.2% in 2017).

However, gender issues still persist given indicators on early marriages which is a driver of teenage pregnancy and a form of violence against girls with around 16.5% of women married before the age 18, while 2.2% are married before age 15.

#### *Goal 06. Clean Water and Sanitation*

Efforts continue to conserve and effectively utilize water and sanitation resources. The proportions of bodies of water in the country that have good ambient quality have increased, from 59% of dissolved oxygen and 57% biochemical oxygen demand in 2013 to 82.3% and 79.5% in 2016, respectively. The proportion of freshwater withdrawal to available freshwater resources are at 26.1% in 2016, indicating that the exploitation of freshwater resources for various means is only marginal. Meanwhile, as of 2016, 83.3% of major river basins have an updated Integrated River Basin Master Plan, and a total of 62 million dollars of official development assistance has been directed towards water and sanitation-related projects.

#### *Goal 07. Affordable and Clean Energy*

The Philippines is performing well in providing access and effectively utilizing energy resources, though it needs more vigorous efforts in increasing the share of renewable sources of energy. More Filipinos have access to electricity, from 73.46% of the population in 2000 to 90.98% in 2016. Alongside this is an incremental increase in the use of clean fuels and technologies, from 36% in 2000 to 43% in 2015, which helps improve energy efficiency, while reducing health externalities that arise from the use of unclean source of energy. The country has also translated this to a more efficient use of energy from 7.18 tons of oil equivalent per million PHP of real GDP (TOE/M PHP) in 2007 to 6.66 TOE/M PHP in 2017. However, the country must improve upon its use of renewable energy, as the share of renewable energy to total energy consumption has decreased from 30.22% in 2012 to 26.7% in 2016.

### *Goal 08. Decent Work and Economic Growth*

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the Philippines has robustly grown at above 6% for the seventh straight year in 2018. The growth of 6.2% in 2018, however, is lower than the 6.7% recorded growth in 2017. Growth in the country has averaged 5.3% from 2000 to 2018, peaking at 7.6% in 2010. This growth is dominated by the services sector, having the largest share of GDP at 48.3% and a relatively high growth rate at 6.8% in 2018. In terms of expenditure shares, exports, largely brought by consumer electronics, government services, bananas and automotive electronics, have made the biggest contribution to growth at 13.4% in 2018.

In terms of labor, labor productivity has been recording positive growth rates since 2010. In 2018, it slowed down to 4.1%, from the 8.4% growth experienced in 2017, which is the fastest recorded growth during the period since 2000. Workers account for an average of PHP 223,687 in gross value added (in 2000 prices) as of 2018. Meanwhile, unemployment rate is estimated at 5.7% in 2017, which is one of the lowest recorded rates since 2005. However, despite the decreasing trend in unemployment and the robust economic growth in the recent years, underemployment has remained persistently high, which is estimated at 16.1% in 2017.

### *Goal 09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure*

Challenges are faced by the Philippines in developing the manufacturing industry amidst improvements in transport infrastructure, research and development, and the disruptions from technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Incremental gains are observed in the transportation volume of the country, with all transport metrics exceeding their 2016 baselines in 2017. Passenger, container and cargo volume for the maritime sector are at 93.38 million, 7.93 million, and 292.97 million metric tons, respectively. Aviation passenger volume and cargo volume are at 75.2 and 962.25 M, whilst rail passenger volume is at 378.75 M.

Despite the presence of improvement in infrastructure, valued added in manufacturing as a proportion of GDP per capita is nearly stagnant from 24.47 in 2000 to 23.58 in 2018, while employment in manufacturing as a proportion of total employment is also similar from 9.97 percent in 2001 to 8.32 percent in 2016.

While these indicators show that the country still exhibits a relatively low level of industrialization, the government is working to implement an industrial policy through its Inclusive Innovation Industrial Strategy. Meanwhile, expenditure on research and development have been at less than a fifth of one percent of GDP through 2002 to 2017, beginning at 0.15 percent of GDP towards 0.17 percent of GDP.

### *Goal 10. Reduced Inequality*

Average per capita income has been growing at 1.7% in 2015 with the bottom 40% of the income distribution even growing faster at 2.4% in the same period. However, regional income disparities are stark, with average per capita income in NCR thrice of that in ARMM.

Disproportional development is also seen in relative poverty rates. Though the percentage of Filipinos with per capita incomes below half the median income has decreased from 21.0% in 2006 to 15.9% in 2015, vast differences exist across demographic groups. Moreover, poverty remains to be a rural phenomenon with 23.2% of rural residents being in relative poverty compared to 6.2% percent of urban residents.

### *Goal 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities*

The Philippines struggles to make communities safer and more inclusive. A considerable number of the population in the country do not have access to decent housing, with 7.53% of urban residents being informal settlers in 2016. The country needs to make bolder moves in creating healthy and sustainable cities given that only 47% of major urban centers in the country follow ambient air quality guidelines. Concrete steps are being undertaken, however, in building resilient communities through the adoption and implementation of synergized national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.

### *Goal 12. Responsible Consumption and Production*

The Philippines needs to vigorously implement policies for reducing pollution and mitigating its harmful effects. The country produced 0.008 hazardous waste per capita in 2012. In terms of waste mitigation, the country only had 56.93% of its hazardous waste treated, thus leaving the remaining waste to cause environmental damage.

### *Goal 13. Climate Action*

The country faces challenges in build economic resilience given its high-risk exposure and vulnerability to natural disasters. The Philippines has consistently placed 3<sup>rd</sup> globally in the World Risk Index (WRI) ranking from 2015 to 2018. Despite this vulnerability, trends in disasters have largely been decreasing, except for a spike in 2013 due to super-typhoon Yolanda.

The country stands to greatly benefit from a coherent disaster risk management policy, particularly with the passage of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 that mandated the crafting and implementation of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (NDRRMP). Institutional roadblocks persist, however, in the law's implementation. Hitherto, only 8 out of the 17 regions have all LGUs that have made local DRMMPs.

### *Goal 14. Life Below Water*

Marine conservation is one of the country's relative strengths. According to recent data, about 220 million of marine areas are protected in the entire country. Meanwhile, the coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas, National Integrated Protected Areas System and locally managed Marine Protected Areas is 0.0064.

### *Goal 15. Life on Land*

More work is needed in protecting the country's forests and terrestrial sites. The Philippines has seen some success in rehabilitating its forests with the proportion of forest area to total land area increasing from 23.75% in 2000 to 26.96% in 2015. However, protected area percentages for both terrestrial and freshwater sites remain at 41.7% and 48.1%, respectively.

### *Goal 16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*

The country's initiatives against violence has seen mixed results. Both the number of murder and homicide cases decreased from 9,348 and 4,947 to 6,866 and 2,592 from 2009 to 2018, respectively. However, the number of murder cases has a more sporadic trend, rising to as many as 11,379 cases in 2016. Meanwhile, annual number of rape cases have increased from 5,813 in 2009 to 7,349 in 2018, peaking at 10,298 in 2015.

### Goal 17. Partnerships for the Goals

The country has continued to exhibit strong fiscal management. Government revenues in relation to GDP have increased from 13.4% in 2010 to 15.6% in 2017. While the proportion of domestic resources funded by domestic taxes has decreased albeit slightly from 74% in 2016 to 71.7% in 2017, this has been bolstered by FDIs and ODAs in 2016, which comprised 17.7% and 5% of the domestic budget, respectively. Moreover, debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services has decreased to 8.3% in 2017 from 13.6% in 2010. This signals that the Philippines is consistently able to sustain long-term foreign debt.

### 3. Statistical challenges and opportunities

Based on PSA Board Resolution No. 09, series of 2017, 155 indicators were identified and classified as National Tier I Indicators. This means that all of these indicators have a clear and established methodology and are regularly collected (i.e. available in the Philippine Statistical System). This is in contrast with Tier II (i.e. have an established methodology by not regularly collected) and Tier III (i.e. do not have established standards and/or estimation methodology) indicators. Subsequently, the PSA has compiled data on these indicators from its own data sources, as well from pertinent data producers. Data compilations have been available by the PSA in an information portal, called the SDG Watch.

Upon examination of the actual availability of these indicators, only about 80% (i.e. 126 out of 155) have available baseline data (**Table 2**). Moreover, less than half (i.e. 71 out of 155) have historical data (i.e. at least two data points). This is based on data from censuses and surveys of the PSA and administrative data of various government agencies, as provided directly to PIDS or consolidated from the PSA SDG Watch website, as of first quarter of 2019. Baseline and historical data are important in establishing trends and in determining the targets

**Table 2. Data availability of National SDG Tier I indicators**

Goal	National Tier I Indicators	With baseline data (at least 1 data point)	With historical data (at least 2 data points)
Goal 1	18	16	13
Goal 2	5	5	4
Goal 3	23	21	10
Goal 4	16	14	9
Goal 5	15	11	9
Goal 6	8	3	1
Goal 7	4	2	3
Goal 8	9	9	8
Goal 9	5	5	3
Goal 10	7	6	2
Goal 11	5	5	1
Goal 12	1	1	0
Goal 13	4	4	1
Goal 14	1	1	0
Goal 15	11	4	1
Goal 16	10	7	4
Goal 17	13	12	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>71</b>

Note: As of first quarter of 2019

Source: Authors' calculations

Further, of the 126 indicators with available data, data disaggregation is only available for a few indicators, majority of which (38 out of 126) are mostly on location or geographic breakdowns (e.g. urban/rural, regional or provincial levels), while 18 have available sex disaggregated (i.e. male/female) data and 16 are gender-relevant indicators (i.e. indicators specific to a certain gender such as adolescent birth rates, and proportion of women in national parliaments and local governments). Meanwhile, data disaggregation is sparse for other subpopulations (e.g. by age group), and even absent for disability status, migration status, and ethnicity and indigenous status.

**Table 3. Available data disaggregation of National Tier I indicators**

Goal	With baseline data	SEX	AGE	LOC <sup>1</sup>	MIG <sup>2</sup>	EIS <sup>3</sup>	DIS <sup>4</sup>	INC <sup>5</sup>	OTH <sup>6</sup>	Gender-relevant <sup>7</sup>
Goal 1	16	4	4	11	0	0	0	2	3	2
Goal 2	5	3	1	5	0	0	0	4	1	0
Goal 3	21	4	4	9	0	0	0	6	6	4
Goal 4	14	7	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	1
Goal 5	11	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	9
Goal 6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 8	9	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	3	0
Goal 9	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 10	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 11	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 12	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 13	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 14	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 15	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 16	7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 17	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>

Notes: As of first quarter of 2019

<sup>1</sup>LOC = location or spatial disaggregation (e.g. urban/rural, regional, provincial)

<sup>2</sup>MIG = migration status

<sup>3</sup>EIS = ethnicity and indigenous status

<sup>4</sup>DIS = disability status

<sup>5</sup>INC = income quintiles or deciles

<sup>6</sup>OTH = others

<sup>7</sup>Indicators that are not sex disaggregated, but gender-relevant

Source: Authors' calculations

These issues of data availability and data granularity pose challenges for key stakeholders in setting numerical targets and in analyzing trend of national performance. Moreover, data granularity is vital in attaining the overall aim of the SDGs in seeking to leave no one behind. For instance, performance indicators in basic education have been significantly improving in the past ten years. Achieving the global goals of achieving universal basic education will be difficult if the key planners and implementors do not have any idea on where and who are the children that do not have access to basic education. Having the necessary data disaggregation will help in targeting efforts of the government towards leaving no one behind.



The government, through the PSA as the agency designated as the official repository of SDG indicators in the Philippines, might need to explore the possibility of harnessing data from non-traditional sources to supplement gaps from the existing data collection systems, such as the frequency, availability and granularity of data. These sources include registries, citizen-generated data, private sector data such as those coming from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and big data. Although these data may not conform to the current methodologies of indicators in the Philippine Statistical System, these data may provide a snapshot of what is happening on the covered population, which will be helpful in monitoring the country's progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

In addition, the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) offer huge potential in addressing data gaps. By virtue of Republic Act No. 11315 enacted on April 2019, CBMS, which merges geo-tagging and the methodologies used in data collection activities of national agencies, will now be conducted in every city and municipality every three years or less.

CBMS, which is intended to “serve as basis for targeting households in the planning, budgeting and implementation of government programs geared towards poverty alleviation and economic development,”<sup>5</sup> involves collection of data encompassing different dimensions of poverty (e.g. health, nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter, education, income and employment, security and participation). Given that these dimensions are also measured and monitored by the goals of the SDGs, CBMS data can be used to provide baseline and historical data for unavailable SDG indicators, and provide more frequent data for indicators that are not regularly collected.

Lastly, CBMS also provides the needed disaggregation by ethnic groups, sex, age group, urbanity, and other necessary disaggregation, which will facilitate monitoring of vulnerable population sub-groups. Moreover, disaggregated data can be provided even up to the local level, which will provide an avenue for localizing the SDGs, making local government units informed of the current situation within their jurisdiction and capable of contributing to the attainment of goals and outcomes of the SDGs.

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<sup>5</sup> Republic Act No. 11315. 2019. An act establishing a Community-Based Monitoring System and appropriating funds therefor.

## References

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