

Traversing Poverty Alleviation Initiatives: A Comparative Analysis of the Welfare Card System in Thailand and Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines

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Abstract

Intensified by flawed program designs and implementation, the Welfare Card System (WCS) in Thailand and the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines have long lapsed in alleviating poverty in both countries. We attempt to elucidate these initiatives' operationalization by comparatively analyzing the two. Nevertheless, we contend that despite flawed and vulnerable operations, they aid impoverished households. This paper aims to (a) examine the WCS as part of the poverty-reduction initiatives in Thailand and the 4PS in the Philippines, (b) assess its challenges in the implementation, and (c) comparatively analyze these initiatives' efficiency. This paper uses new public administration theory to further understand the delivery and operationalization of the poverty alleviation initiatives in both Thailand and the Philippines by closely looking into the implementation of the programs. This paper utilizes a qualitative comparative case study design with secondary information from online databases to answer the research questions. The findings show that these initiatives have short-term positive effects on poor households as they provide subsidies for basic needs, financial and educational support, and transportation services; however, these so-called poverty alleviation initiatives did not genuinely aid Thailand and the Philippines in diminishing the entirety of poverty.

Keywords Poverty, Poverty-alleviation Initiatives, Welfare Card System, 4Ps

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1. Introduction

What about individuals who are disadvantaged and have limited access to resources? Poverty is the most devastating of all injustices and the worst of atrocities in all countries. Modern society is confronted with the enduring and urgent worldwide issue of poverty. It goes much beyond merely acknowledging the fact that poverty is a terrible tragedy that destroys the lives of countless numbers of people globally. Although the traditional understanding of poverty as merely a lack of money may be deeply ingrained in our thoughts, in the end, we need to regard poverty as a variety of forms of deprivation, including a lack of jobs, schools, healthcare facilities, and educational opportunities, as well as a lack of access to medicine and other basic necessities of life.

The notion that a country is experiencing economic growth while the impoverished population remains in a state of poverty, if not worsening, is puzzling to numerous individuals. This has been a genuine social problem because poverty, particularly in terms of unequal access to resources, prevents millions of Thai and Filipinos from living a dignified and healthy life. The truth is that the impoverished endure numerous struggles, including but not limited to starvation, malnutrition, neglected diseases, and early mortality. More so, they suffer from a lack of education and competencies needed to earn decent incomes further making lives more difficult.

According to the United Nations (n.d), the SDGs' main reference to combating poverty is made in the target of ensuring resource mobilization through improved cooperation to adequately provide means to developing countries in implementing poverty alleviation programs and policies.

According to statistics, high growth rates and structural change have helped the nation reduce poverty from 58% in 1990 to 6.8% in 2020, yet 79% of the poor still live in the countryside and predominantly in households involved in agriculture; following a slowdown in the economy, stagnant agricultural and company incomes, and the COVID-19 issue, Thailand's poverty reduction slowed from 2015 on, with poverty rising in 2016, 2018, and 2020 (World Bank, 2023). In just one year, Thailand's disadvantaged population grew by more than 1.3 million (World Bank, 2023). While, according to Macasero (2023), there was a decrease in the proportion of Filipino individuals identifying as impoverished, with the percentage declining from 51% in March 2023 to 45% by the end of June.

With this, the State Welfare Card Scheme, commonly known as “the card for the poor”, a poverty alleviation strategy in Thailand since October 2017 aims to provide a monthly allowance, between 200-300 Thai Baht (5.63-8.45 USD), to the beneficiaries, specifically, the low-income earners (Durongkaveroj, 2022; Kanmalay et al., 2022). The Nation (2023) reported 14.5 million Thai beneficiaries in the new batch of the State Welfare Card; making the project a crucial tool the government has been utilizing to strengthen the country's support

for the underprivileged (Bangkok Post, 2023). Similarly, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is a government-led project in 2007 (Official Gazette, n.d.), under the management of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) aimed at addressing poverty in the Philippines. This program provides conditional cash transfers to the country's residents, contingent upon their compliance with pre-established criteria and rules.

However, these policies of both countries have different advantages and disadvantages. Starting with the advantages of the welfare card system in Thailand; this card allows low-income groups to buy things they need in their daily lives and have money to live on, which may help them overcome poverty, but these mechanisms still lack clarity in a context where citizens cannot reflect on their demands for policy. Moreover, it is possible that the state welfare card is being used as a tool for creating patronage relationships rather than as a policy for solving the problem of sustainable inequality (Phattarasukumjorn, 2021). Similarly, in the case of the Philippines, 4Ps provides cash grants to the poorest families, enabling them to meet basic needs like food, shelter, healthcare, and even cash transfers that lessen the burden of student-beneficiaries in their education. 4Ps has woven itself into the fabric of Filipino society, offering a lifeline to millions trapped in the clutches of economic hardship. Examining both its enduring importance and undeniable advantages reveals a program not just alleviating poverty, but fostering human capital and laying the groundwork for a brighter future. On the other hand, with limited resources and complex data, identifying the most vulnerable families remains a challenge. This creates a sense of injustice and undermines the program's credibility. Corruption and administrative inefficiencies further damage the program's image (Tulfo, 2022). Instances of bribery, ghost beneficiaries, and delayed payouts erode public trust and divert resources away from those in need.

While heralded for its results, it isn't without a shadow cast by its gaps. While it empowers, it can also create dependence. While it nurtures, it can also breed stigmas. Examining these downsides reveals a program in need of continuous improvement, lest it inadvertently perpetuates the issues it strives to overcome. Despite its initial success in terms of providing Thai and Filipino beneficiaries with subsidies for basic necessities, and financial and educational support, these initiatives have flaws in their program designs and operationalization leading to these initiatives' long lapse in alleviating poverty.

Hence, this study aims to (a) examine the WCS as part of the poverty-reduction initiatives in Thailand and the 4Ps in the Philippines, (b) analyze the challenges in the implementation of these poverty-reduction initiatives in Thailand and the Philippines, and (c) comparatively analyze the efficiency of the welfare card system in Thailand and the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines as the poverty-reduction initiatives in both countries.

In the succeeding parts, we will explain the theoretical framework; the state welfare card in Thailand, and the 4Ps in the Philippines including their positive impacts, negative impacts, and the gaps in the operationalizations. The comparative analysis, conclusion, and recommendations.

This paper is divided into six major parts: introduction, theoretical framework, state welfare card in Thailand, and the 4Ps in the Philippines (including their positive effects, negative effects, and gaps in implementation), comparative analysis, and conclusion and recommendations.

2. Theoretical Perspective

New Public Administration Theory

The emergence of new public administration occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time marked by political discord and turmoil. This development was prompted by various factors, including the Vietnam War, widespread confusion in the Western world, especially in the United States, ongoing racial tensions, and disenchantment with the goals and principles of public administration; massive unemployment prevailed, and conventional public administration nearly gave up trying to deal with the issues as emphasized by Frederickson (1980). The traditional public administration, which was founded on the principles of efficiency and economy, was unable to adequately address the growing unrest and the resulting issues from the instability in politics. Following this, several of the most competent young public administration scholars started to realize the truth and started to doubt their field and career. Eventually, within the field, a methodology was established to find a new public administration, one that was capable of addressing societal issues that had remained unsolved throughout the 1960s and sensitive to those issues (Frederickson, 1980). The subsequent principles are the fundamental doctrines of the novel new public administration theory.

Social Equity, the traditional goals and justification for public administration are practically invariably enhanced management—more economical and efficient; the new public administration, however, incorporates social equity. The goal of traditional public administration is to maximize economy and efficiency, but the new public administration also asks, "Does this service increase social equity? The term "social equity" encompasses a wide range of value preferences as well as preferences for management styles and organizational designs. Emphasis is placed on equal access to government services, public managers' accountability for decisions and system operationalization, modifications to public management, receptivity to citizen needs rather than those of public organizations, and an interdisciplinary, applied, problem-solving-oriented, and theoretically viable approach to public administration education (Frederickson, 1980).

Value-Free, following this principle, managers are not impartial. As ideals, objectives, or justifications, they ought to be dedicated to social justice and sound management (Frederickson, 1980). Most importantly, the new public administration forwards the mechanism of holding government officials accountable for their actions and decisions.

Innovation and Change, the emphasis of the new public administration is on innovation and transformation, as emphasized by Frederickson (1996) further delineating that its main characteristic is a keen awareness of and concern for contemporary socio-economic issues. In this context, novel organizational structures are developed to adapt to the rapidly evolving surroundings. According to the new public administration, social integration requires modification; fighting against powerful forces and stagnation is vital. It lays a strong emphasis on streamlining administrative tasks and lessening bureaucratic tendencies in governmental organizations and ensures the use of innovative solutions to address emerging problems that can respond to dynamics and evolving situations (Frederickson et al., 2016; Lamidi, 2015).

Public Interest and Citizen Participation, the new public administration theory promotes a client-centric approach as highlighted by Lamidi (2015). It seeks to empower administrators to grant the people significant influence over the timing, manner, and content of the provisions. It is advisable to implement de-bureaucratization, participatory decision-making, and decentralization of administrative procedures to enhance the efficiency and human-centered delivery of public services. For a long time, open and fully democratic decision procedures have been considered essential principles of effective management. Therefore, new public administration commonly emphasizes citizen engagement, local management, decentralized management, and democratic work management. The target population's needs and preferences are taken into consideration by the programs. Other than that, Frederickson (1996) emphasized that it encourages feedback mechanisms that emphasize the responsiveness of the citizens and allow them to express concerns regarding the programs imposed by the public administrators.

The advent of the new public administration theory transformed the conventional approach to public administration by introducing a comprehensive viewpoint that integrates legislation, governance, and policy implementation as a unified and interconnected process involving all pertinent stakeholders. The aforementioned shift has effectively converted public administration into an academic discipline that exhibits a profound understanding of societal matters. New public administration seeks to redefine the field of public administration, highlighting the importance of a socially responsible and responsive government that prioritizes public interest and social equity over mere efficiency and procedural correctness.

Using the lens of new public administration theory in comparatively analyzing the Welfare Card System in Thailand and the 4Ps in the Philippines provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating these social welfare programs based on their adherence to principles of social equity, value-free, innovation and change, and public interest and citizen participation. By analyzing the study through the lens of new public administration theory, the researchers can provide a more informed comparative analysis between Thailand and the Philippines' poverty-alleviation programs, specifically on how they are different or similar from one another. Moreover, it enables a nuanced understanding of the positive effects, negative effects, and gaps in the implementation of these programs, ultimately contributing to comprehensive public administration practices.

3. State Welfare Card Scheme in Thailand

As part of this measure, the State Welfare Card Scheme, commonly known as “the card for the poor”, a poverty alleviation strategy in Thailand was first made available for registration by the Thai government in 2016 and went into effect in 2017 (Phattarasukumjorn, 2021). The card was available to those who did not possess valuable resources and earned less than 100,000 Thai Baht (2,815.67 USD) annually; with it, users may receive discounts on daily purchases. It aims to provide a monthly allowance, of between 200-300 Thai Baht (5.63-8.45 USD), to the beneficiaries, specifically, the low-income earners (Kanmalay, et al., 2022), the exact figure varies depending on the annual income of the beneficiaries themselves (Durongkaverroj, 2022). A decision approving 42 billion Thai Baht (1,182,765,402.00 USD) to cover the cost of the welfare card for around 12 million lower-class Thais was issued by the Cabinet on August 29, 2017. Additionally, every three months, members are eligible for a 45 Thai Baht (1.27 USD) discount on cooking gas transactions and they are entitled to 500 Thai Baht (14.08 USD) per month for trains, 500 Thai Baht (14.08 USD) for intercity buses, and 500 Thai Baht (14.08 USD) for city bus and electric train tickets (Jandaeng et al., 2019); furthermore, Chuensukjit (2023) reported that a 750 Thai Baht (21.12 USD) monthly travel subsidy for welfare card recipients will soon be available for use toward boat trips.

According to The Nation (2023), there are 14.5 million Thai beneficiaries in the new round of the State Welfare Card; making the project a crucial tool the government has been utilizing to strengthen the country's support for the underprivileged (Bangkok Post, 2023).

3.1 Positive Effects of WCS

Eleven out of fourteen million applicants were verified to meet the five requirements set forth by the government: they had to be citizens of Thailand, be at least eighteen years old, unemployed or earning less than 100,000 Thai Baht

(2,816.19 USD) annually, do not own real estate, and have no financial assets worth more than 100,000 Thai Baht (2,816.19 USD) (Kanmalay et al., 2022).

Under this initiative, cardholders may utilize their cards to make purchases at an authorized store called the "Thong Fah Shop," which offers subsidized prices on common consumer goods including rice, shampoo, and detergent. This guarantees that the recipients have supplies for their daily needs and something to put on their table for meals. The cards can also be used on Thailand's public transportation networks, which include buses, trains, and public transportation in cities, enabling the beneficiaries to travel without incurring large costs for transportation (Chuensukjit, 2023). To further ease the financial strain on financially challenged Thai residents, Phattarasukumjorn (2021) highlighted information that is compiled from Cabinet resolutions and documents that the government also credits between 200-300 Thai Baht (5.63-8.45 USD) every month to the cards; the precise amount varies based on the cardholder's annual income. Additionally, Jandaeng et al. (2019) pointed out that the state welfare card effort has initially addressed issues of inequality by improving people's quality of life.

3.2 Negative Effects of WCS

Not Promoting Purchases from Local Vendors

The majority of the funds will go to the 20,000 authorized businesses as well as particular manufacturers and distributors of the goods they stock, even though the program has the potential to inject almost 17 billion Thai Baht (478,886,770.00 USD) into local economies (Bangkok Post, 2017), street, and fresh market sellers, as well as other local businesses have less probability of gaining profits from the purchases of the cardholders since only a small number of retailers have installed welfare card-reading electronic data capture (EDC) equipment.

Restriction in the Purchase

In addition to the previously mentioned, the primary issue is a restriction on the locations where the 11.7 million registered poor people are allowed to shop. They are limited to purchasing only those goods that have been chosen for sale in those stores; once they enter the stores, they are only allowed to purchase the brands and categories of consumer goods that the state has chosen to stock (Kanmalay, et. al, 2022). Hence, if certain goods are not available in the authorized stores, they cannot buy them. Aside from that, customers can only use the money in specific retailers that have benefit card-reading electronic data capture (EDC) equipment installed. About 20,000 government-designated stores exist, and about 25% of them currently have the EDC installed adding to the problem of purchase restrictions due to the placement of the Thong Fah Shop (Bangkok Post, 2017).

Instrument for Patronage

In addition to the negative implications outlined in the preceding paragraphs, Kanmalay et al. (2022) stated that, from a different perspective, it might be contended that the Welfare Card System is employed as a means of bolstering the standing and popularity of certain political parties. Similarly, the summary of the study results by Phattarasukumjorn (2021) indicated that there was potential for WCS to have been utilized as an avenue to build patronage ties.

3.3 Gaps in the Implementation of WCS

To make the most economical use of the welfare budget, the government sought to more precisely direct financial support to those who truly needed it. However, whether the people who applied for the card had lower incomes was unclear.

Flawed Eligibility Screening System

Approximately 11 million people possess welfare cards, which is a far higher number than the 5.8 million persons classified as poor by Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board, and a sizeable portion of the country's 67 million inhabitants. To put it succinctly, Yang et al. (2020) found that more people qualified for the program than were considered impoverished according to the official national poverty line. This raises concerns about the reliability of the eligibility screening procedure.

It has been rendered quite clear in the eligibility requirements that jobless people may apply. Nonetheless, according to the CEIC Data (2023) report, Thailand's unemployment rate is extremely low, coming in at just 0.85% of the labor force in September 2023 as opposed to the previously stated 0.98% in August 2023. As a result, the number of cards greatly exceeds the number of people who require the program. Due to certain claims that the program was not adequately targeted and includes people who are not poor, it is unclear whether the policy's requirements reached economically deprived individuals (Yang et al., 2020).

Moreover, the findings of the study by Jandaeng et al. (2019) revealed the parameters used to select beneficiaries of welfare cards in 2017 were mostly based on property and income, and they did not make use of any other economic or social data that the government obtained through registration. As a result, these criteria have the potential to generate leaks. As an example cited by Jandaeng et al. (2019), students coming from well-to-do families can be beneficiaries if they have never opened bank accounts or are listed as the owners of assets. Due to a screening gap, wealthy individuals were able to obtain welfare cards.

4. Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in the Philippines (4Ps)

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, also referred to as 4Ps and previously known as Bangon Pamilyang Pilipino, is a conditional cash transfer initiative implemented by the Philippine government through the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The primary objective is to eliminate severe poverty in the Philippines through targeted investments in healthcare and education.

According to Diaz (2021), the Philippines launched the 4Ps, the nation's conditional cash transfer (CCT) program, with the goal of giving conditional cash grants to the poorest of the poor, due to the high prevalence of impoverished families and individuals in the country as a whole. Eligibility is limited to the most impoverished families, as determined by the 2003 Small Area Estimate (SAE) survey conducted by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB).

The 4Ps program offers two categories of financial grants that are distributed to eligible households. The health grant provides a monthly amount of P500 (10.72 USD) for each household, resulting in a total of P6,000 (107.25 USD) annually. The education grant provides a monthly allowance of P300 (5.36 USD) per kid for a duration of ten months, resulting in a total of P3,000 (53.67 USD) annually. A household can enroll up to three children in the program. A household with three children is eligible to receive a monthly cash award of P1,400 (25.02 USD), amounting to a total of P15,000 (268.35 USD) per year for a duration of five years, through the two available cash grant programs (Official Gazette, n.d.).

The most impoverished individuals are identified using a proxy-means test. Proxy variables, such as asset ownership, home type, education level of the household head, family livelihood, and access to water and sanitary services, serve as economic indicators to determine the economic category of a family. Households are eligible if they have children and/or if they have pregnant women at the time of the evaluation. Applicants are required to comply with all the conditions established by the government to participate in the program.

Hence, the 4Ps has stood as a beacon of hope in the Philippines' fight against poverty. This conditional cash transfer program, aimed at the country's poorest families, has received both praise and scrutiny. While acknowledging the challenges and potential pitfalls, examining the undeniable advantages of the 4Ps reveals its profound impact on human capital development, economic empowerment, and community well-being.

4.1 Positive Effects of 4Ps

The Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program, also known as 4Ps, is a governmental initiative that offers conditional cash assistance to the most impoverished individuals in the Philippines. The 4Ps aids in ending the cycle of poverty. Additionally, the program improves households' capacity to meet the needs of their families and children. In general, the 4Ps concept seeks to enhance

the quality of life by giving the poor the tools, resources, and support they need to prosper. The program aims to disrupt the cycle of poverty by ensuring the physical well-being and educational continuity of children aged 0-18, enhancing their prospects for a more favorable future (World Bank, 2017). Moreover, it has the objective of social assistance and social development. Social assistance refers to a program that offers financial aid and monetary assistance to impoverished households, enabling them to alleviate poverty and fulfill their fundamental and urgent requirements, such as housing, nourishment, and clothes (Talimio & Salagubang, 2019).

The program possesses an exceedingly extensive poverty-targeting database, which currently encompasses 75% of the nation's populace. It has been widely utilized to determine those who are economically disadvantaged to qualify them for national and local government initiatives (World Bank, 2017). The 4Ps initiative aims to empower beneficiaries by informing them of their entitlements, offering social assistance, facilitating access to economic resources, promoting professional growth, and equipping them with skills necessary for self-employment and revenue generation. The talents they gain can be shared with others, creating a domino effect that empowers everyone in society.

Moreover, according to Sy et al. (2019), the majority of students concur that the 4Ps help them stay motivated to attend class, drive themselves academically to excel in their classes, encourage them to complete all of their coursework, and give them financial support to meet their basic needs. Thus, by promoting school attendance, this investment in education paves the way for higher future earning potential, improved social mobility, and a more skilled workforce.

Furthermore, the program's focus on proactive healthcare has resulted in a rise in the utilization of health services, enhanced rates of child immunization, and a decrease in childhood mortality. Regular access to check-ups and preventative actions not only enhances individual well-being but also alleviates the long-term strain on the healthcare system.

At the heart of 4Ps' enduring impact lies its unwavering commitment to human capital development. The program's conditional grants incentivize education and healthcare, fostering a generation equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to break free from the shackles of poverty. The program's focus on education and healthcare strengthens community bonds by promoting shared values and collective well-being. It can also contribute to reduced crime rates and a more stable social environment.

4.2 Negative Effects of 4Ps

Unequal Distribution of Resources and Opportunities

The 4Ps is receiving criticism for its apparent incapacity to alleviate widespread poverty. This is extremely peculiar given that the program was never

intended to accomplish this goal. Reyes (2022) states that former Social Welfare Secretary Judy Taguiwalo stated that the 4Ps should not be seen as a "stand-alone" program that will instantly alleviate poverty. According to Lalu (2022), there may have been oversights in the program's execution, as evidenced by complaints from beneficiaries. These complaints include but are not limited to, issues with receiving monthly financial benefits on time and reductions in the amounts received in various areas across the country covered by the poverty initiative program.

Navigating the complex bureaucratic machinery of 4Ps can be a daunting task, particularly for the poorest and most marginalized families. Delayed payouts, convoluted registration processes, and lack of accessible information can discourage even the most determined recipients.

Dependency on the Cash Grant

Tulfo (2022) states that the 4Ps aims to assist families in coping with severe poverty. However, it has been exploited by numerous families and individuals. Buenaagua (2022) reported that the Commission on Audit (COA) has lately advised conducting a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of this government initiative. According to its findings, almost 3.82 million or 90% of the 4.26 million households receiving benefits from the program are still living below the poverty level, even though they have been enrolled in the program for a maximum of 13 years. Parent beneficiaries are no longer employed and are solely reliant and dependent on government financial aid. Given that the 4Ps were implemented to address specific issues, evaluating their effectiveness using ambiguous criteria over a limited timeframe may be unjust, particularly for impoverished households who depend on the program to cope with escalating expenses for food, fuel, and essential items.

However, the constant flow of assistance can also create a sense of dependence, potentially discouraging recipients from actively seeking employment or developing income-generating strategies. This trap of passivity, if not addressed, can impede their long-term climb out of poverty.

Internal Deception in PH Government

According to Tulfo (2022), several officials within the DSWD displayed indifference toward the government being deceived, as long as they could ensure the satisfaction of their families, friends, or acquaintances. Some of the funds may have been appropriated for personal gain. The 4Ps initiative is a catalyst for corruption within the DSWD. The idea for the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to involve the barangays in purging the list of undeserving beneficiaries under the 4Ps is flawed due to the prevalence of favoritism among barangay officials, who may even include fictitious beneficiaries under their jurisdiction.

Corruption, though present in every system, can be particularly devastating in a program targeting the most vulnerable. Instances of bribery, ghost beneficiaries, and misappropriation of funds erode public trust and divert resources away from those in dire need, deepening the wounds of poverty and injustice (Tulfo, 2022).

In line with this, one of the primary factors to be taken into account while putting the 4Ps program into practice is high-level political support for the initiative. Such political backing is essential since the 4Ps program necessitates collaboration between various government agencies, especially those that deal with social welfare, health, and education.

Discrimination of Beneficiaries

In relation to the economic domain, being a beneficiary often has a social stigma. Recipients may encounter prejudice and marginalization within their communities, being stigmatized as freeloaders who exploit the efforts of others (Tulfo, 2022). The stigma, which is based on misunderstandings about poverty and reliance, diminishes self-confidence and obstructs complete assimilation into society. Even the offspring of recipients might experience the full impact of this social stigma, including harassment and exclusion inside the educational system. The act of stigmatizing individuals in society with negative labels contributes to the continuous and harmful patterns of poverty, while also eroding the fundamental sense of worth and respect that the program aims to maintain.

4.3 Gaps in the Implementation of 4Ps

Beneficiaries Not Complying to Eligibility Criteria

There are requirements that a household must fulfill in order to be eligible for any grants under the 4Ps program. Generally speaking, a household must meet specific requirements in order to be eligible as a recipient or beneficiary of this program, as specified by the DSWD, the program's legal organization (Salva et al., 2023).

The poverty registry, known as Listahanan, has served as a crucial instrument for identifying recipients and enhancing the credibility of the 4Ps program. Some beneficiaries failed to meet all the conditions. The situation is worrisome because it may lead to noncompliance among certain household recipients, as indicated in Sections 11 and 12 of RA 11310. Furthermore, some recipients exhibited a deficiency in understanding the fundamental ideas of the 4Ps program.

Thus, according to dela Torre (2016), the eligibility system exhibited deficiencies, permitting the inclusion of unfit individuals as recipients and lacking comprehensiveness in encompassing all those who genuinely require assistance, particularly those without permanent residence or housing. Unqualified beneficiaries refer to those in the community who are considered wealthier than

the recipients themselves. This includes individuals who own substantial farms and lands, have professional occupations, and earn stable and higher monthly incomes.

Lapses in Selection Period

At the core of concerns lies the delicate issue of targeting and inclusion. Identifying the most vulnerable families remains a complex dance, fraught with limitations. Data inaccuracies and bureaucratic hurdles can create exclusion errors, leaving the truly destitute clinging to the brink of survival while aid flows elsewhere (Department of Social Welfare and Development, 2020). Conversely, the inclusion of ineligible beneficiaries dilutes the program's resources and undermines its effectiveness, leaving less for those who truly need it. This fosters resentment and a sense of injustice within excluded communities, jeopardizing the program's social legitimacy.

5. Comparative Analysis of the Efficiency in the Implementation of the WCS in Thailand and 4Ps in the Philippines Based on the Four Principles of New Public Administration Theory

Thailand and the Philippines, despite the fact of being considered as developing nations, face pervasive socioeconomic challenges which adversely affect the healthcare systems, education, and the overall standard of living of the citizens in both countries, making the efficiency of the operationalizations of the poverty alleviation initiatives of utmost significance. This section presents the comparative analysis of the efficiency of the WCS in Thailand and the 4Ps in the Philippines based on the four principles of new public administration theory: social equity, value-free, innovation and change, and public interest and citizen participation. By utilizing this theoretical perspective, the authors can present a comparative analysis of the efficiency of these two poverty-alleviation initiatives together with a new perspective based on the results of the analysis.

5.1 Social Equity

In Thailand, its Welfare Card System aims to provide subsidies for essential goods and services to low-income individuals, promoting social equity by ensuring fair access to basic necessities, essential resources, and services for all citizens, particularly those in vulnerable and marginalized sectors. However, challenges such as delays in card distribution and system errors, more specifically the inclusion-exclusion errors may hinder equitable access to benefits, highlighting areas for improvement. According to Phattarasukumjorn (2021), screening problems exist as people who are not actually poor are able to receive cards, and people who are actually poor are not able to receive cards making the Welfare Card System to not reach all target groups which somewhat fails to promote social equity.

Similarly, the 4Ps in the Philippines targets impoverished households with conditional cash transfers, aiming to alleviate poverty, improve education and health access, and enhance socio-economic conditions. While the program is designed to address social inequities, there are several challenges related to broader socio-economic factors that affect its implementation and outcomes. Accurately identifying and enrolling eligible households is a complex process. The program has faced challenges with both exclusion errors (eligible households not being included) and inclusion errors (ineligible households being included), which can undermine its effectiveness in promoting social equity. Moreover, according to Bongon (2015), there has been discrimination and bullying against the beneficiaries which entails that being part of the lists means experiencing the social stigma eroding the self-confidence of the beneficiaries.

5.2 Value-Free

The implementation of the Welfare Card System in Thailand reflects the values that are being prioritized by the government such as minimizing corruption, improving efficiency, and providing welfare benefits to those who are most in need. However, its implementation may not always adhere strictly to this principle as there may be biases or subjective judgments in the administration process, affecting how benefits are distributed and who receives them. In an article regarding the State Welfare Card Policy by Phattarasukumjorn (2021), it was emphasized that there is a possibility that the program is being used more as an avenue for fostering patronage relationships as it has been used to target specific groups of people for gains in short-term politics. This practice does not comply with the Value-Free principle of the new public administration theory which highlights that managers are not impartial and their objectives and ideals should be dedicated to social justice and management. In simple terms, although the implementation of the program in the country is rooted in values that aim to reduce poverty and help the marginalized sectors, there are parts of its implementation that highlight areas for improvement, more specifically the portion where the program is being used as a tool for patronage ties.

In the Philippines, the foundation of the 4Ps is rooted in value-laden goals—reducing poverty and improving health and education outcomes for children in low-income families. Using NPA, the 4Ps is designed to serve the needs of all eligible beneficiaries, regardless of political affiliations or socio-economic status. NPA places a strong emphasis on the value of democratic governance, making sure that initiatives like the 4Ps are sensitive to the interests and voices of the communities. Resources ought to be distributed with no corruption or money diversion in order to maximize benefits to the target population. Given the fact that the 4Ps is closely associated with institutionalized legislation and government norms, it appears that it does not follow the principle of value-free and value neutrality. Nevertheless, whatever form of deceit occurred

within the program, government officials are responsible for their actions and decisions as they are the ones that executed the program, starting with the national government down to the local government unit.

5.3 Innovation and Change

Thailand modernizes the implementation of its Welfare Card System with technology, enhancing efficiency and reducing fraud through electronic databases and biometric identification systems. The state welfare card offers cashless transactions allowing beneficiaries to purchase at authorized vendors. This innovative feature of the program implementation provides convenience reduces cash diversion and misuse, and promotes financial inclusion by allowing beneficiaries to access formal financial services via card. Other than that, the government also collaborated with different private sectors including banks and retailers in the operationalization of the initiative. The collaborations expand the reach of the program and offer better access to goods and services to the beneficiaries. Thailand's state welfare card implementation demonstrates a commitment to innovation in public service delivery, utilizing technology, partnerships, and data-driven approaches to improve welfare distribution efficiency.

NPA emphasizes a results-oriented approach that continuously seeks new and improved ways to deliver services. In the Philippines, according to the Landbank of the Philippines (n.d), LANDBANK has made it easier and more convenient for the 4Ps beneficiaries to access their benefits. Since 2008, LANDBANK, in partnership with DSWD, has distributed cash grants for the 4Ps beneficiaries via different modes of payment: (a) LANDBANK Cash Cards, (b) FCB PITAKArds, and (c) Conduits such as Rural Banks and Cooperatives). Grant recipients have safe and easy access to cash grants through LANDBANK, an authorized government depository bank. This emphasizes that the 4Ps implemented electronic payment mechanisms, including cash cards and mobile money transfers, to provide cash grants to beneficiaries in an efficient and secure manner. This unique strategy lowers transaction costs, decreases leakage, and assures that qualified households receive payments on time which demonstrates commitment to innovation and change.

5.4 Public Interest and Citizen Participation

In Thailand, the implementation of its Welfare Card System already serves the public interest as it helps the public, more specifically the poor, in alleviating poverty. Aside from that, the operationalization of the program requires citizen participation for its effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness to the population's needs. For Thailand's Welfare Card System to be implemented in a way that promotes accountability, transparency, and beneficiary needs-responsiveness, citizen participation is crucial. Through proactive citizen engagement during the implementation process, policymakers may optimize the

efficacy of the program and guarantee that it genuinely caters to the needs of the target community further promoting the delivery of service for public interest.

In the Philippines, by eliminating poverty and advancing human development, using the NPA framework, the 4Ps is intended to serve the public interest. The 4Ps's efforts to enhance democratic governance, equity, and accountability are highlighted by an analysis of public interest and citizen involvement utilizing the NPA framework. The program seeks to enhance the well-being of underprivileged individuals and contribute to the larger societal objectives of social justice and poverty alleviation by offering conditional cash transfers to qualified families. Moreover, according to Dungog-Cuizon, Cuizon, and Jardin (2021), the 4Ps is considered decentralized because of the role of the LGUs in identifying the pockets of poverty in which areas are being shortlisted by DSWD. Decentralization of administrative procedures is being practiced and utilized in the 4Ps, which range from the national government down to the local government unit, to improve and accelerate the delivery of public services that are human-centered and efficient. The concerns of the individuals are taken into consideration by the program, which also serves to highlight the responsiveness and provide the individuals the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding the programs that are being imposed by the government.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the implementation of the Welfare Card System in Thailand and the 4Ps in the Philippines as poverty alleviation initiatives in both countries. Using the lens of the new public administration theory, the comparative analysis showed that while both initiatives adhere with the principles of the theory, it also highlights lapses in Thailand's WCS and the Philippines' 4Ps, revealing the negligence in some aspects of the implementation of these initiatives that eventually contribute to its ineffectiveness in alleviating poverty.

In understanding the operationalizations of these two poverty alleviation initiatives in Thailand and the Philippines, the new public administration theory highlights four fundamental principles: social equity, value-free, innovation and change, and public interest and citizen participation. Social equity aims to guarantee equitable access to resources and services, especially to the marginalized groups; value-laden highlights the absence of personal biases and subjective values of the administrators when implementing programs and initiatives; innovation and change prioritizes on the innovative feature in adapting the evolving and changing needs of the beneficiaries towards a more improved public service delivery; and the public interest and citizen participation highlights the importance of people-centric approach in implementing programs and initiatives. Through the lens of the new public administration framework, the WCS and 4Ps helped in addressing the issues of poverty in both countries, but

despite the fact that these initiatives achieved their immediate objectives, the comparative analysis shows that there are areas that need more attention. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the role of collaborative work among the different actors such as the civil society organizations, government agencies, and public administrators to expand the reach of these initiatives and genuinely serve the people. More importantly, the analysis demonstrates that the goal of eliminating poverty in both countries will remain a dream as long as public administrators and government officials do not acknowledge the lived realities of the people on ground to evaluate the efficiency of these initiatives. Applying the principles of social equity, value-free, innovation and change, and public interest and citizen participation in the actual implementation of these initiatives will be crucial in contributing to the efficiency of the programs. Therefore, the main focus is to enhance the operational effectiveness of WCS and 4Ps to guarantee the long-term efficacy of these initiatives and to address the systemic challenges in their implementation.

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