

Featuring Poverty: An Analysis on the Knowledge Formation of Poverty During the Coverage of Philippine Calamities in 2013

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how knowledge on poverty is formed through news media during the coverage of the 2013 major calamities in the Philippines, particularly, Typhoon Santi, Bohol Earthquake and Super Typhoon Yolanda. We carried out content analysis to identify how the Philippine news media framed the causes and solutions to poverty experienced by victims of these calamities. Results reveal that media primarily portrayed poverty as a problem caused by the devastation of the calamities. The lack of urgency to inform the public on the structural causes of poverty indicates complacency in addressing the problem through sustainable solutions. Moreover, the coverage of pro-poor efforts such as rehabilitation and policy reforms were far less than the coverage on immediate short-term solutions. The study also interviewed officials from various government agencies to shed light on current programs addressing the problem of poverty. The findings reveal that there are sustainable pro-poor solutions being implemented but these solutions were not highlighted in the news. Despite the lapse in journalism ethics and widespread use of sensationalism in the media, government officials deemed the media as a powerful source of information especially on propagating pro-poor solutions. This study provides recommendations on how the media, together with the government, can maximise its role as a catalyst for public knowledge on poverty alleviation.

Keywords: Media framing, poverty, disaster coverage, knowledge management

1. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, poverty is one of the major problems faced by the Philippines. With a poverty incidence that has changed very little over the years, that is, 28.8% in 2006 and 27.9% in 2013, the progress of poverty alleviation seems to be very slow. Efforts towards poverty alleviation have been incessantly impeded by calamities that plague the country year in, year out. According to a report by Overseas Development Institute (ODI) published in October 2013, the intensifying natural disasters can cancel out poverty reduction progress in the year 2030 as calamities severely damage livelihood assets and human capacity of a country (Shepherd et al., 2013).

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In the last quarter of 2013, three major disasters hit the country: from Typhoon Santi in October that killed 15 people and destroyed fertile lands in the Luzon regions, to the Bohol earthquake in the same month that left 222 dead, and lastly, Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in Eastern Visayas in the following month that reached a death toll of 6,201 (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Many Filipinos found themselves desolate and poor due to the tremendous damages that affected their livelihood. According to the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), the poverty level in the Yolanda-affected area rose from 45.2% in 2012 to 54.9% in 2014 which may be primarily due to unemployment and infrastructure damage (Gabieta, 2015).

Since day one, the media has been instrumental in informing the public of these disasters. The media stood in the frontline, reporting news of these disaster-stricken areas. It is at times like these that the media plays a crucial role in providing the public with information about the devastation brought on by disasters. Since communications were disrupted and roads were blocked, the media became one of the main sources of information to aid relief operations and responses especially in far-flung areas. Not only does it present the hard facts of the situation, but also provides stories that were devastating at best and harrowing at worst. Among these, the plight of a couple and their eight children who survived the earthquake but now question their future as they still live in a Red Cross tent and only make Php100 a day with the meagre “*pandesal*” (bread) they sell, an architect whose entire house that also functioned as his office was completely washed out by the storm surge, and the story of a mother who endured hunger for three days due to the delay of relief packages. Although these stories emphasise on the tragedy, the media triggered the public’s emotional side that instigated the provision of relief and aid, and sustained change, evidenced by the government, civil society and even foreign volunteers.

Past studies indicate that poverty portrayal in the news media can affect public understanding of the issue. Utilising theories of news framing and agenda-setting, public action towards poverty has been found to be dependent on the way it is portrayed by the media (Bullock et al., 2001; Van Heerde and Hudson, 2010; Hodgetts et al., 2005; Rose and Baumgartner, 2013). The media plays an essential role in the formation of public opinion as it directs the public on what to think about and how it should be understood. The media is recognised for its capability in shaping the public perspective on any issue that leads to policy making and long-term institutional reforms in the country.

This research aims to delve into the role that broadcast media has played in poverty alleviation in the Philippines. Specifically, the researchers aim to assess how the coverage of the 2013 calamities in the Philippines on television news programs has become a catalyst for public knowledge regarding poverty alleviation and pro-poor policies.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Media Framing and Agenda-Setting

Studies have attested the important role of the media in informing and relaying knowledge regarding pertinent issues and problems in society which could potentially

engage the citizens to act on the problem. Media coverage of disaster-related news has elicited action from the government because of the growing sentiments of the public. This exemplifies the role of the media in policy making.

Several scholars of media research support the notion that the media influences the formation of public opinion (Calder et al., 2011; Vreese, 2005; Huang, 2009; Iyengar, 1990; Kennedy and Hill, 2010; Ladd and Lenz, 2009). This belief can be traced to the origin of agenda-setting.

Agenda-setting was first introduced in the groundbreaking research of McCombs and Shaw (1972) who focused on the effect of salient broadcasting of particular news stories that influenced the opinion of voters in the 1968 USA presidential election. Related to this is the concept of media framing which recognises the power of the media to choose a certain perspective when featuring an issue or a topic which then shapes the individual's understanding or perception (Scheufele, 1999).

2.2 Framing Poverty in the Media

Studies on media portrayal of poverty argue that the manner of portraying an issue can shape audience perception (Iguarta et al., 2011; Iyengar, 1990; Kennedy and Hill, 2010; Lecheler and Vreese, 2012; Nelson, 2012). Rose and Baumgartner (2013: 29) formulated five frames that present the poor. These frames identify the different kinds of approaches used to present poverty issues such as “misery and neglect, social disorder, economic and physical barriers, laziness and dysfunction, and cheating”.

In terms of getting information about poverty, the media may refer to the following institutions to formulate their news framing: the government, civil society organisations, research institutes, private consultants, universities undertaking research on poverty and even the private sector. The government is the most heavily relied as a source of information for poverty (Wood and Barnes, 2007).

Media frames are also studied in terms of how they present causes and solutions to poverty. Identifying the frames used to portray causes of poverty can shed light on possible solutions that can address these causes. Moreover, identifying the salient frames used to portray the solutions to poverty may give the audience a better grasp of the form of civic engagement they may wish to pursue (Davids, 2010; Baquino et al., 2013).

Iyengar (1990) categorised poverty framing into two types, episodic and thematic. Episodic frames refer to texts showing poverty in a microscopic view, highlighting the individual's background, characteristics and behavior more than the issue itself. Thematic framing, on the other hand, focuses on the macroscopic issue of poverty, portraying poverty caused by societal and institutional problems — the issue of poverty goes beyond the individual. Iyengar further claimed that media's utilisation of the episodic frame of poverty causes viewers to regard poverty alleviation as a responsibility of the individual rather than institutions.

Lepianka et al.'s (2009) and Davids' (2010) analyses on poverty used thematic framing to depict poverty as a structural problem, putting the blame on “external,

social, and economic forces” (Davids, 2010: iii), while episodic framing presented poverty as an individual issue. Similar findings were found in Kim et al.’s (2010) study which also focused on the causes and solutions to poverty in the news. Similar to frames used in other studies, the personal-level frames were likened to episodic and individualistic frames while societal-level frames were related to thematic and structural frames.

2.3 *Media Coverage of Natural Disasters*

As this study also looked into poverty experienced by victims of calamities, it is necessary to include a discussion on the media coverage of calamities.

Muzamill (2012) analysed newspaper coverage of the 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods in Pakistan. He assessed relief and rehabilitation efforts and concluded that the media became a catalyst for social solidarity in the call for donations to the victims of these natural disasters. In Japan, Ainoya and Myrtle (2005) studied the critical media coverage of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake. The public questioned the legitimacy of the government during the crisis. However, it was then clarified that the unpreparedness of the government was warranted because the Hanshin-Awaji area is not usually prone to seismic activities, taking everyone by surprise.

Wood and Barnes (2007) posited the mutual partnership between the media and the government in heightening public awareness on policies to reduce poverty. They argued that journalists should be knowledgeable regarding the technicalities and complexities of such policies in order to portray it as sound as possible while ensuring that it remains comprehensible to the viewers.

2.4 *Formation of Public Opinion*

With widespread information dissemination by the media, the public including policy makers, inevitably consume these materials to understand the implications of a particular societal problem such as poverty. However, media framing does not only lend itself to the conceptualisation of ideas, but also takes on an essential role in inciting civic engagement.

Livingstone and Markham (2008) looked at how the media can influence audience engagement on civic affairs and found that media texts with high political/social content can lead to civic participation. Furthermore, they also found that people who watched television and consumed the said texts were more likely to engage in civic activities. These findings coincided with that of another research by Keum et al. (2004) that highlighted civic participation was also found to be more effective through news programs rather than entertainment shows. This was especially true for viewers who actively selected news to gain knowledge and information as opposed to viewers who consumed television leisurely. Television programmes such as dramas, reality television and comedy shows did not influence people to participate in societal matters. Television news was still found to be the most prominent influencer in promoting civic engagement.

With regard to poverty alleviation efforts, Hodgetts et al. (2005) argued that low

civic participation can be traced to a lack of media coverage that highlights ways to solve a particular social issue. The same was found to be true by Kensicki (2004), who concurred that lack of coverage on root cause(s) of a problem as well as its consequences, responsible agents and proposed solutions affected audience perception and involvement. Aside from insufficient information, exaggerated coverage also leads to public misconception. This was evident in Gilens' (2003) study on the racialisation of American poverty in the mass media. Due to the salient images of the poor which are often portrayed as black Americans, the public had a misconstrued idea of the real state of poverty. There was an apparent incongruence between the media coverage and the real state of poverty in America. This incongruence in the projected reality led to biased ideas on how to resolve the problem of poverty in their country. Taken together, these conclusions from past studies point out that the absence of collective action from the citizens could be associated with media's portrayal of poverty.

Although multiple studies suggest a relationship between media consumption and civic participation, other studies have posited the influence of individuals' personal background on their understanding of poverty. A study on media consumption and political participation by Bachmann et al. (2010) underlined the importance of considering the media behavior of the audience in analysing the motivations for their civic engagement. Moreover, the difference in age also suggested that demographics and background information of the audience are important factors in evaluating media consumption. Uslander and Brown (2005) also added personal experience as a factor affecting the initiative of individuals to help solve social problems while Reis and Moore (2005) argued that an individual's social class contributes to their perceived notions of poverty. In their study in the Philippines, Reis and Moore concluded that the Filipino elites would rather engage in the "patron-client" method of helping such as giving donations as opposed to participating in long-term programs (Reis and Moore, 2005: 76).

2.5 Pro-Poor Solutions

Poverty is recognised as a structural problem of society and a personal problem faced by individuals every day. Due to the varied views on poverty, designing policies to solve the issue has inevitably been a difficult task (Bautista, 2010). However, in their 2009 study, Asian Development Bank has proposed the implementation of pro-poor programmes to eradicate poverty.

Pro-poor as a concept is synonymous with inclusive economic growth and refers to policies or activities that mitigate poverty by prioritising the development of the poor more than any other members of the society (Pernia, 2003; Kakwani et al., 2007; Kakwani and Pernia, 2000; McCulloch et al., 2000; Son, 2007). Pro-poor policies essentially promote equitable growth in the society as they favour the underprivileged. Examples of such policies are "adequate public spending for basic education, health and family planning services, easier access to microcredit, promotion of small and medium enterprises, and infrastructure investments in bypassed rural area" (Pernia, 2003: 5).

These policies are geared towards poverty reduction that ultimately narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Pernia (2003) and Zohir (2010) enumerated activities that could possibly propagate pro-poor growth in a country, focusing on economic development as well as skills enhancement (Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of pro-poor activities

Pernia (2003)	Zohir (2010)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public spending for basic education, health and family planning services • Easier access to microcredit • Promotion of small and medium enterprises • Infrastructure investments in bypassed rural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro/household-targeted versus meso-level initiatives • Activities requiring land or water body • Activities perceived to provide supplementary income • Petty trade • Extractions from nature • Transport • Skill-based activities

The researches discussed earlier document the prevalence of media framing in portraying the causes and solutions to poverty via different media outlets. These studies also show that framing presents to the public a reflection of reality, thereby affecting their understanding of the matter, specifically their perceived notions of the root cause and possible solutions to, in this case, poverty. Thus, it is very likely that media portrayal strongly affects the poverty alleviation efforts that the society may choose to partake in. Past studies have also shown the importance of pro-poor programs to address the slow progress of poverty alleviation efforts. Based on this groundwork, the researchers aim to evaluate the media portrayal of the poverty landscape in the Philippines as the media is known to be instrumental in hastening poverty alleviation programmes.

3. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The researchers of this study recognise that knowledge is framed by exposure and consumption from different sources of information. In addition, meanings are shaped by a number of factors (i.e. media and non-media), and the media carries an important role in the way it frames news which shape public opinion. On the other hand, the understanding of an issue is also attributed to the audience's own reality and experiences.

The main focus of this study is to understand the knowledge formation of poverty and pro-poor policies from both the media and those involved in poverty alleviation efforts. Towards this endeavor, the researchers employed both communication and knowledge theories, namely: (1) the New Model of Knowledge Management, (2) Agenda-Setting, (3) Framing and (4) Public Opinion.

Walter Lippmann's theory of Agenda-Setting is used to analyse the media's role in setting the public agenda and its potential to influence the public discourse and policy making (Littlejohn, 1992). Integrating the Public Opinion theory further supports the premise that the mass media increases the discourse on a particular matter through salient

coverage. Lastly, with the need to understand the mass media and its consumption by the public, the Framing theory brings into light the concepts of media frames and individual frames in this study. Media frames pertain to the mass media portrayal of a certain issue while individual frames refer to the way individuals understand and construct what they consume from the media, thus recognising personal background as an important factor in considering perceived concepts of poverty in times of natural disasters.

To integrate all of these concepts and theories, the researchers employed New Model of Knowledge Management as the main backbone of the framework of analysis. The media theories mentioned supplement the framework to further explain how knowledge is formed. The New Model of Knowledge Management suggests that the production of knowledge is a continuous cycle of recreating and reifying knowledge (McElroy, 2003). At first, the media produces knowledge based on the information sought from various sources. The media uses this information and turns it into initial knowledge by presenting it in the news. The coverage of poverty is framed as per what is required to be understood by the public. The frames used are recognised as possible factors in forming the stakeholders' perception of poverty. The stakeholders validate what they learned from the media (as one of the sources of information) with their own experiences and opinions on the matter. Lastly, feedback allows the stakeholders' knowledge to become a source of information once again for the media in their coverage of poverty.

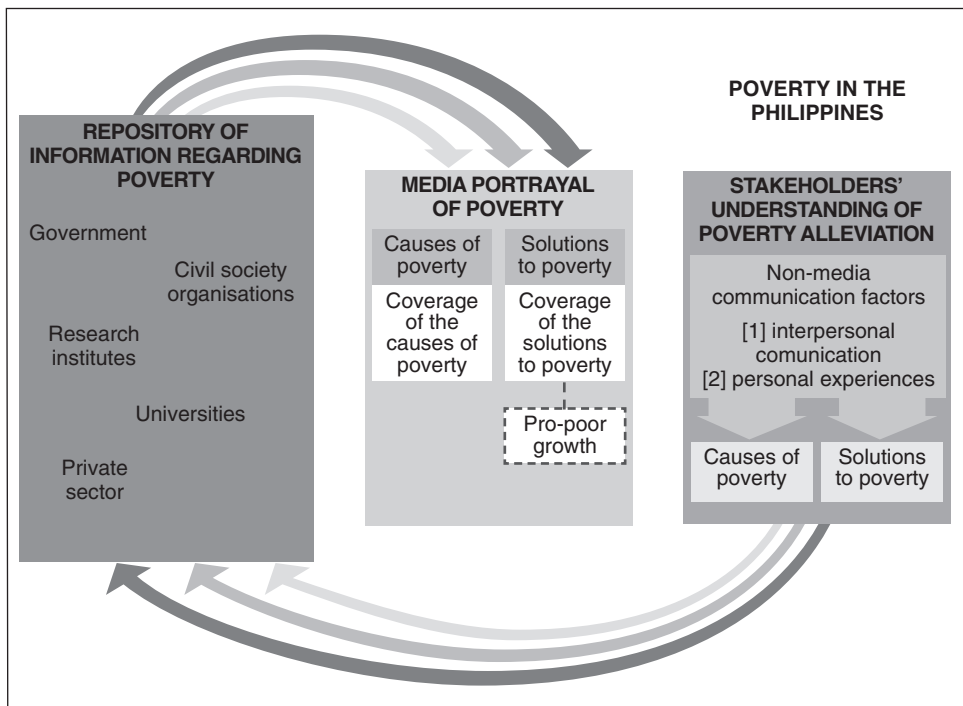


Figure 1. Conceptual model

4. METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study aims to provide insights on the media portrayal of poverty and the perception of the government officials on the same matter during the 2013 natural disasters. This research focused on the cause and solution frames used by the broadcast news media in portraying poverty. In addition, the research also looked at the discourse on pro-poor solutions in the media and the government. From an interactional perspective, the researchers recognise the role of the media as a channel to not only communicate poverty and pro-poor solutions but also as a receiver of information from stakeholders. As such, the researchers want to emphasise the role of the media as a potential catalyst for imparting public knowledge on poverty and pro-poor growth.

To assess media portrayal of poverty, content analysis was used to determine the different media frames used by the prime-time news programmes of the top two leading television networks in the Philippines. These programmes were “24 *Oras*” (24 Hours) of *GMA-7* and “TV Patrol” of *ABS-CBN-2*. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting relevant episodes as the scope of the study only covers news on the selected disasters. A total of 138 episodes from each news program were sampled.

To understand the role of the media as a catalyst for implementing long-term pro-poor solutions, interviews with related government officials were conducted. The respondents were sourced from different government agencies such as National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRMMC), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). The emergent themes from the respondents’ own understanding were then compared with the results of the content analysis. This is to explore the interaction between media and stakeholders in the knowledge formation on poverty.

5. RESULTS

5.1 *Philippine News Media Coverage of 2013 Disasters*

From 775 news segments analysed, 14.6% of the news segments featured only the causes of poverty experienced by victims of the disasters, 42.5% presented only the solutions available while 43.0%, the highest percentage, featured both the causes and solutions to poverty. The salient frames used, especially on the solutions to poverty, reflect the media’s agenda of giving importance and relevance to the practices of helping the victims. As most news segments featured different relief operations, call for aid and volunteer programs, the media prompted solidarity amongst the public to help the victims, thereby playing an instrumental role in the provision of solutions to the poverty faced by the victims.

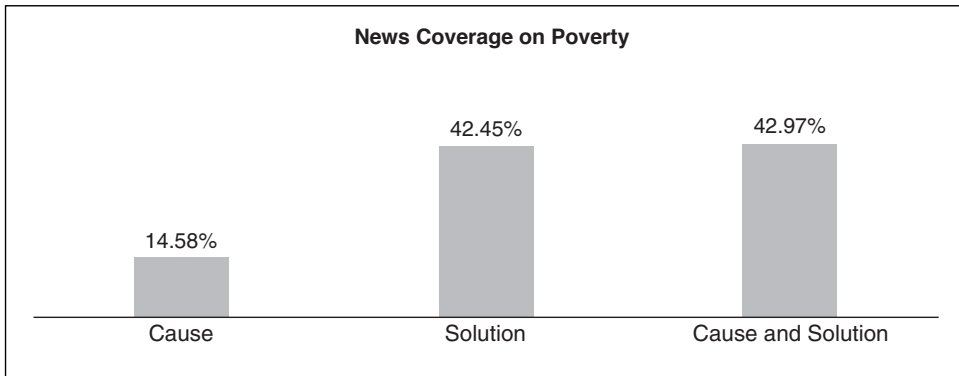
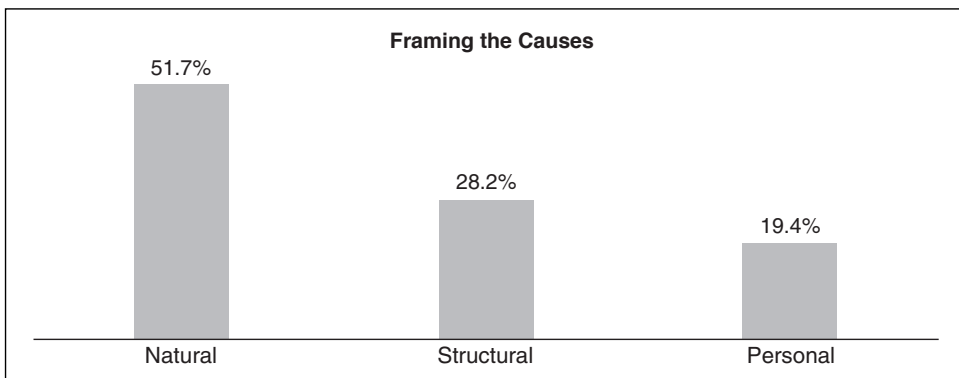


Figure 2. News coverage on poverty

While past studies suggest that poverty is framed either through personal or structural frames, the subject of poverty in the context of disasters is a unique element of this study and has led to the emergence of a new category, identified as “natural” causes. The emergence of such a category is due to media portrayal that explains how poverty is caused by fatalistic factors independent from the actions of individuals or institutions.

Figure 3 shows that the majority of analysed stories attributed the cause of poverty to devastation brought by natural disasters. This kind of framing suggests that poverty is inevitable when a natural disaster strikes. However, other angles need to be looked at as well in order to explain why poverty persists at times of calamities despite being a regular occurrence in the country. Meanwhile, the structural frame pertaining to national government aid (14.8%) looked at mainly the slow efforts in providing assistance to the victims. Very little news focused on the lack of disaster preparedness.



Note: See Appendix A for details. Total percentage = 100.1%. Values rounded off to decimal places.

Figure 3. Framing the causes

In all three disasters, the devastation brought on was deemed to be the main cause of poverty. This kind of framing was evidently salient throughout the two-month coverage. However, an increase in the portrayal of structural causes during the Yolanda coverage may be due to the number of stories regarding the government’s failure to provide immediate relief instead of the lack of long-term solutions put forward. In view of the widespread devastation brought about by Yolanda when compared to the other two disasters, the government was scrutinised for not being responsive to the needs of many of the victims. This observation was also noted in the study of Ainoya and Myrtle (2005) in their evaluation of the media after the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake. The media is deemed to be an important source of information and this includes communicating to the public about the efforts being made or efforts that need to be done to resolve the problem of poverty experienced by the victims of calamities.

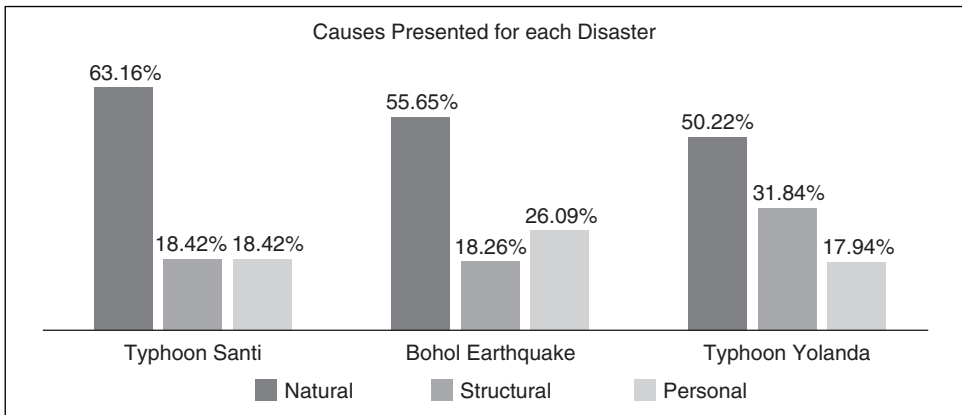


Figure 4. Causes presented in each disaster

The media also focused on the victims in telling the news of the disasters. The media was inclined towards making the disaster stories relatable by putting a “face” (i.e. victims) to it. These stories involving human interest are emotionally appealing because the public can easily sympathise with the victims’ experiences. The victims (i.e. poor and new poor) were in the forefront (37.8%) of the news coverage, followed by officials from the national government (17.2%). By involving individuals from the government, the media attempted to educate the people of the duties and responsibilities of this institution during times of disasters.

The prominence of victims in the media coverage could also be related to the different nature of the three events. Typhoon Yolanda incurred the most number of affected families and the highest death toll. Typhoon Santi’s devastation was more focused on the agricultural side; however, the affected farmers were not given much priority in the media. In the case of the Bohol earthquake, much of the news focused on the destruction of houses and heritage sites.

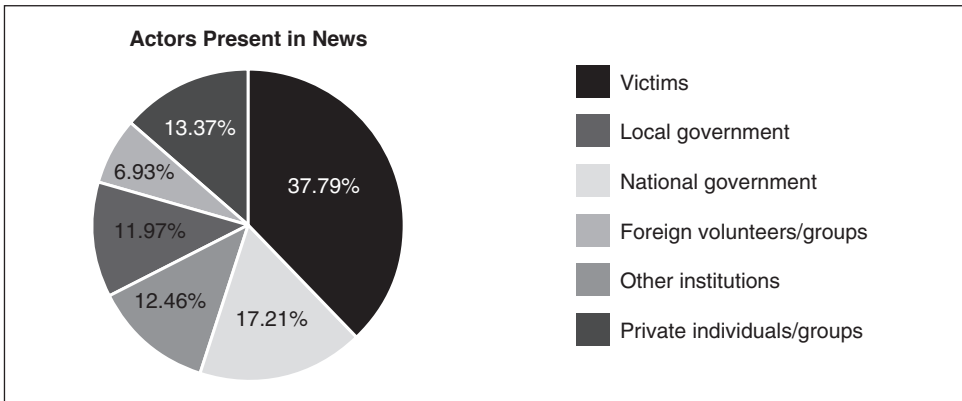


Figure 5. Actors present in the news

The presence of victims or the poor is inevitable in any disaster coverage. In framing these actors, the constructed image or face of poverty is reflected in the news. Past studies reveal that victims depicted as helpless and dependable may not help in forwarding sustainable solutions because viewers may think of them as desperate or needy. These portrayals suggest that the poor are highly dependent on people who are capable of providing the needs they lack (e.g. government, media, foreigners, etc.). It also relates to the earlier assumption that the media is inclined to present news revolving around human interest. The majority of the news featuring victims portrayed them as being miserable and neglected (58.7%). This reinforces the image of the poor depending on others for help. In putting forward this image of poverty, the media is not addressing the underlying root causes of poverty.

There were also reports that portrayed the poor as looters, specifically in the Yolanda coverage which led to a shift in the tone towards disaster victims. These stories focused on the immoral acts of the poor when in fact, this was triggered by the lack of assistance and resources and the need to survive at any cost.

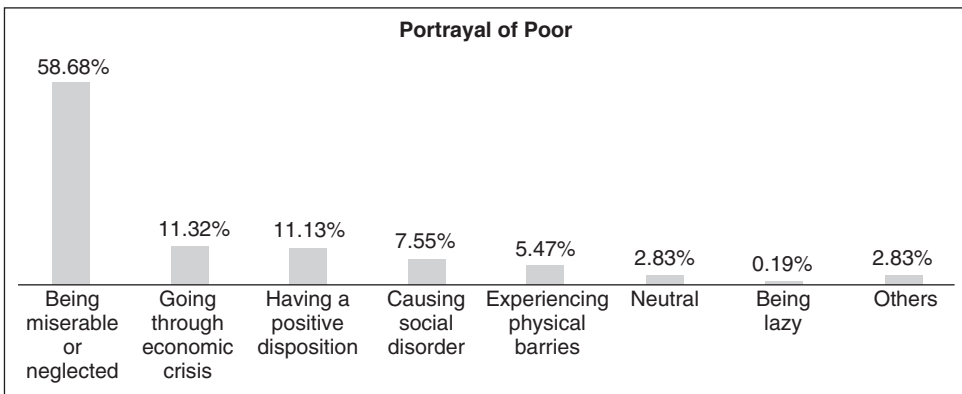
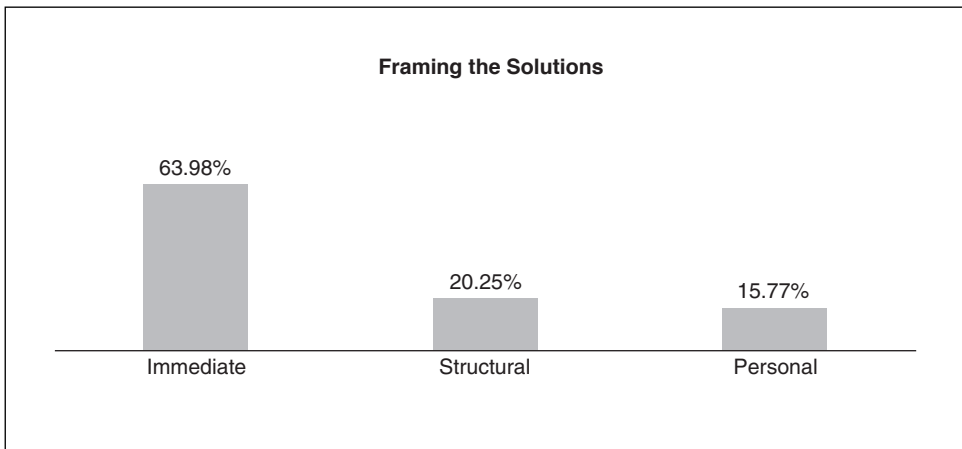


Figure 6. Potrayal of the poor

Similar to the frames on the causes of poverty, another category emerged for the solutions to poverty which is “immediate solutions.” This pertains to solutions that were provided as an immediate response to the needs of the poor. These cannot be equated to structural solutions because they do not propagate long-term institutional solutions. As for personal solutions, these immediate solutions were afforded by external forces that do not account for the victims’ personal decision to alleviate themselves from poverty.

Figure 7 shows that a big majority (63.9%) of the coverage of solutions consisted of immediate efforts. Giving out relief goods and rescuing those in need were featured prominently in the news. Monetary and in-kind donations were also highlighted, mostly coming from other institutions, private individuals and foreign volunteers or groups.

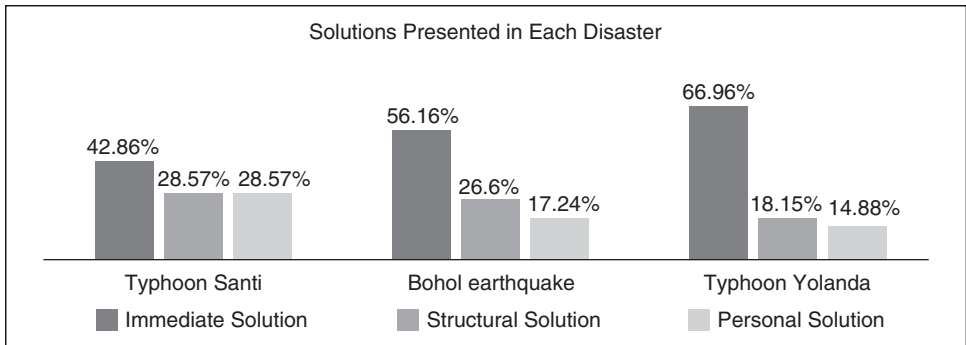
In addition, the media tends to show the public tangible and on the ground solutions as opposed to reporting on the urgency of rehabilitating areas and pushing for reforms. Rather than highlighting sustainable means as important, the media mainly focused on immediate but temporary solutions.



See Appendix B for Full Table.

Figure 7. Framing the solutions

Regardless of the nature of the natural disaster, immediate solutions were highlighted the most. These frames emerged as the most salient and most emphasised form of solution as indicated in Figure 8. Furthermore, the solutions undertaken by the victims themselves (i.e. personal solutions) are given almost equal value in comparison to efforts from organisations. This finding reveals that the media treats structural frames on the same level as individual frames. This kind of framing is problematic because there is no focus in providing solutions when in reality, long-term solutions have been found to be more sustainable and beneficial in the long run.

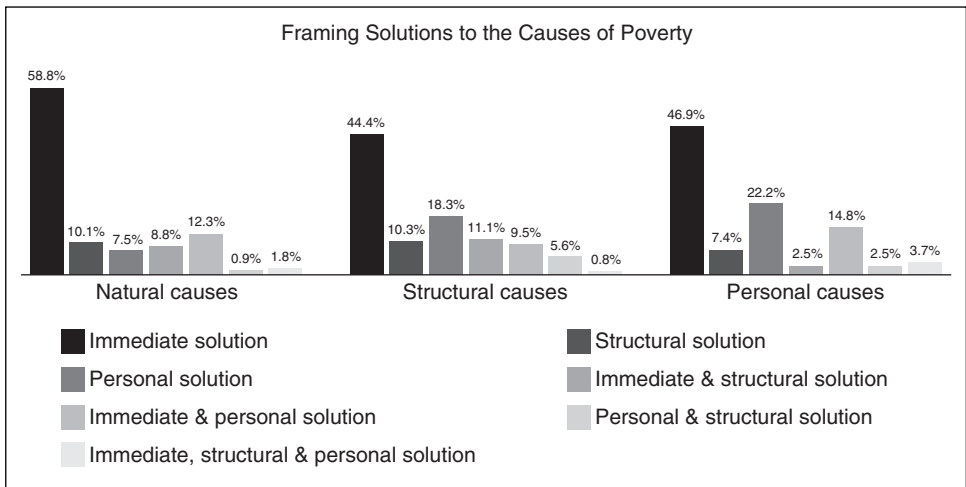


Note : Total percentage (Typhoon Yolanda) = 99.99%. Values rounded off to two decimal places.

Figure 8. Solutions presented in each disaster

As mentioned earlier, poverty is a structural problem and as such, it is expected to be addressed by game changers pushing for structural solutions as well. The same principle goes for personal causes. The results of the present study deviate from the findings of the literature. The media was inclined to show immediate actions (e.g. relief operations) regardless of the kind of problem it sought to address throughout the coverage of the three disasters. Figure 9 shows the comparison of the different causes and solutions.

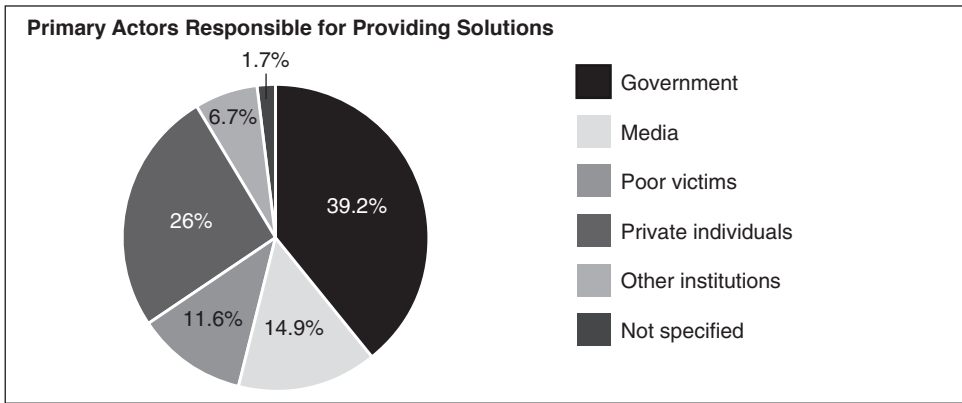
Structural solutions were not emphasised when in fact, these are the solutions which could most likely help solve the issues. Instead, there was more focus on personal solutions or solutions carried out by the victims themselves despite the presentation of the cause as structural in nature.



Note: Total percentage (structural and personal causes) = 99.99%. Values rounded off to two decimal places.

Figure 9. Framing solutions to the causes of poverty in the three disasters

Consistent with past studies, the present results reveal that the primary institution responsible for poverty alleviation efforts is the government (39.2%). However, with regard to the other parties involved in poverty alleviation efforts, there was not much difference. The media did not focus on pointing out the leading force in solving poverty and did not capitalise on its power to shape the public agenda on the effective and efficient means to eradicate poverty. Instead, it presented a wide range of responsible individuals, groups and institutions without giving much emphasis on the central or main party. The government has the greatest responsibility because individuals or other groups do not have the authority and resources to change policies or direct wide-scale rehabilitation efforts.

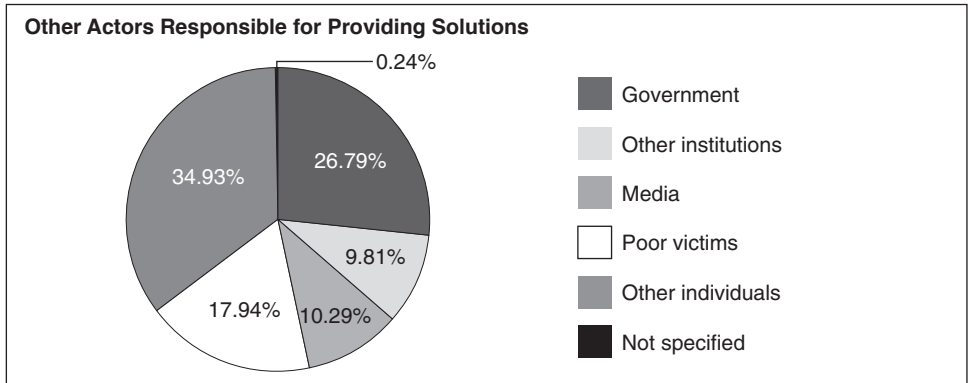


Note: See Appendix C for full table. Total percentage = 99.99%. Values rounded off to two decimal places.

Figure 10. Primary actors responsible for providing solutions

What is more striking here is that there was more exposure on the victims who resolved poverty compared to institutions. This could imply that the media wants the public to see their resiliency and hard work in overcoming their situation. Another possible angle is that by focusing on their resilience, viewers may think that the poor are capable of handling their situation. However, such coverage may lower the sense of urgency for greater solutions.

There were other individuals who were featured in the news as game changers because they provided the means to assist victims under poverty conditions. The media also portrayed civic engagement, especially the efficient aid from foreign volunteers and groups that assisted in improving the tragic situation of the victims. However, these efforts were mostly short-term solutions (i.e. relief operations). There were minimal reports of people pushing for long-term and sustainable reforms. With this in mind, it is implied that the media does not see the importance of effectively changing the current affairs on poverty alleviation due to the low salience of pro-poor solutions in the news.



See Appendix C for full table.

Figure 11. Other actors responsible for providing solutions

5.2 *Insights from Government Officials*

To investigate the knowledge management of the concept of poverty and providing pro-poor solutions, insights from government officials were analysed. A total of four interviews were conducted involving respondents from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and the Department of the Internal and Local Government (DILG). They were identified as game changers because of their direct involvement in the immediate relief and rehabilitation of the disaster victims.

From the interviews, the respondents shared similar views on poverty such as lacking basic necessities, including shelter, food and clothing; they were agreeable with the definition provided by Bautista (2010) and Davids (2010). They described poverty on a personal level as they defined the concept through situations faced by individuals, giving a microscopic view of the problem. However, they admitted that opportunities and services afforded to the poor was lacking reflecting their structural framing of poverty. In this manner, their individualistic definition of poverty takes on a macro perspective dimension as they identify its broader causes and solutions. For all four respondents, the structural problems caused by the government are the root causes of poverty and they identified programs done or need to be done by their respective agencies to help solve the problem.

Although these agencies were planning to implement long-term solutions, there were those that mainly focused on providing immediate relief. These included emergency employment by DOLE and cash for work, temporary shelters and relief operations by NDRRMC. Although the effect is momentary, these efforts cannot be discredited altogether because there is still a need to respond immediately to the needs of the victims. However, these government officials also recognised that short-term solutions should not be mistaken as an alternate for long-term ones, but ideally done simultaneously to properly ameliorate the plight of the victims.

Long-term solutions consist of providing infrastructures that will help communities to be sustainable again in terms of economy and governance. These include the infrastructure built by the DILG such as government halls, civic centres and economic facilities. For NDDRMC, there are plans for reconstructing roads and bridges for devastated areas. DA is focused on the creation of public goods such as an irrigation system and mills to develop the local farmers while DOLE provides livelihood restoration through training workshops for employment.

The long-term projects implemented by the four agencies mentioned are characteristically pro-poor. As these projects invest in infrastructure, provide easier access to microcredit, and promote small and medium enterprises, they can certainly be identified being pro-poor. Although these government agencies are providing pro-poor solutions to the victims of natural disasters, the results revealed a lack of their coverage in the mainstream news media. Knowing the potential of the media to set the public agenda on pro-poor solutions, the respondents criticised the media for prioritising other aspects irrelevant to poverty alleviation and national development.

In the recent coverage of post-Yolanda situations in different areas of the country, one respondent mentioned that while the media covered relief operations, it also focused too much on sensationalised stories — stories with characters such as a protagonist and antagonist, to stir the interest of the people. Another respondent did not like the idea that the mass media can influence the public agenda. This opinion is a clear example of the conflict and tension that occurs between the media and government officials who are one of the key sources of information especially on poverty matters. The respondent added that he believes he can “turn off” the faucet of information from the government when the media does not cooperate. This negative reception to media is likely rooted in the multiple times he has had to correct the erroneous reporting of the media on DOLE programmes.

Other respondents shared their disappointment over the highly critical stance of the media against their agencies in their news coverage, in particular, for Typhoon Yolanda. Knowing that the government has been criticised for its less than satisfactory performance, they argued that the government could not have been prepared for the magnitude of calamity brought about by Typhoon Yolanda. They also commented that there has been news that contained unverified information which led to more confusion amongst different stakeholders. However, the respondent from NDRRMC did recommend that the media had obtained his office’s perspective on certain stories before they broadcasted.

These game changers, with regard to poverty alleviation and nation-building, had their own insights on ways to improve the Philippine media. Based on the dynamics of the agenda-setting theory and the new cycle of knowledge management, there seems to be a dissonance between the media and the government in terms of poverty alleviation in the country. From the insights gathered, it is implied that the unethical, erroneous and sensationalised coverage by the local news media led to the demoralisation of these government officials and ultimately, their loss of confidence in the Philippine media. Essentially, this highlights the importance of improving the relationship

between the media and the relevant government agencies in order to effectively and efficiently combat poverty in the Philippines; more so than coverage of long-term and pro-poor solutions.

6. DISCUSSION

Across the coverage of the three disasters, the media mainly framed poverty as a result of devastation from natural phenomena (i.e. caused by disaster, geographic problem) as compared to other structural or personal causes. Poverty was associated with the losses caused by the disaster itself. The agenda forwarded by the media did not go in-depth in presenting the larger implications of why poverty remains a problem knowing that the country is backed by years of experiencing the same kind of tragedies from disasters. This is due to the lack of examining institutional problems that have affected or caused poverty. This shows that the media constructs poverty as something that cannot be prevented when disasters strike.

The human aspect of the issue was highlighted by having the poor at the forefront, telling stories about poverty. They were depicted as miserable and neglected, focusing on their grief and hopeless situation in the aftermath of the disaster. The news media recognises that there is more impact on the story when the victims' impoverished situations are made salient; it is one way to get the public to sympathise and engage in the matter. However, the news coverage simply depicted the stories of their experiences as opposed to relating it to the bigger picture of the poverty situation.

In helping the victims and the poor, immediate and short-term solutions (e.g. relief operations) provided by different institutions were highlighted as the main approaches in addressing the problem of poverty. While it is a known practice to send immediate help to disaster victims, there is also a need to provide reports regarding long-term and sustainable solutions to inform viewers' about the efforts being done to solve this inevitable annual problem. By doing so, more participants (e.g. public and private sectors) can be engaged to contribute their resources to alleviate poverty.

There was minimal emphasis on the importance and benefits of structural solutions such as reforms and rehabilitation. Although the media gave prominence to the government's actions of providing relief and rescue operations, their efforts on rehabilitation and reforms were kept to a minimum. News on rehabilitation received less than 20% of the total coverage on solutions and news on reforms did not even reach 5% of the total coverage. This apparent lack of news on structural solutions suggest that the media agenda does not prioritise long-term solutions; it rather focuses on presenting tangible, quick and short-term solutions.

If the media chooses to give prominence to structural causes, this would necessitate a call for structural solutions and possibly greater involvement from institutions. The public would eventually get a sense of urgency to actually implement or start pursuing these type of poverty alleviation efforts. This could affect the public agenda, pushing for more action towards achieving pro-poor growth in the future. Instead, there was more coverage on personal solutions or solutions carried out by the victims themselves despite the stories presenting the cause as structural in nature.

Another important point that emerged is the lack of knowledge regarding pro-poor solutions in the news media. These solutions were not promoted as the primary means to solve poverty during natural hazards. Short-term solutions were given more prominence compared to long-term solutions. Education and livelihood related solutions (e.g. training for work, providing work, providing the means to get back to work, etc.) are characteristic of pro-poor but were not frequently reported. Furthermore, not all rehabilitation programs presented in the news were found to be characteristic of pro-poor solutions. Some were temporary rehabilitation efforts. Reforms for disaster preparedness were only focused at the local level, not considering the necessity of implementing the solutions at the national level due to the fact that disasters could happen anywhere in the country.

The findings imply that the media finds no urgency to re-evaluate current policies and guidelines that would help solve poverty in the long run. Consequently, the public may likewise not get a sense of urgency towards this issue since it is not made salient or important in the news. When the media does not promote pro-poor solutions in respect to policy making, it reinforces the status quo. There is complacency towards the current policies with regard to disaster prevention and poverty alleviation. It also suggests that implementing pro-poor solutions may not be as immediate as it should be. It is apparent that the media's public agenda is not to lobby for reforms or urge institutions to look at the issue on a grander scale to see the relevance of employing sustainable solutions to poverty.

Government officials were interviewed to get their insights of the issue, particularly analysing their constructs on poverty and specific actions on alleviating poverty in the context of natural disasters. The respondents, known as game changers, relied on their own experiences and interpersonal communication with victims to form their understanding of the current landscape of poverty enveloping their community. The media use of these respondents is considered to be of low reliance especially because their positions in their offices allow them to form their understanding of poverty through their personal experience and interpersonal communication with colleagues. However, contrary to their role in the media, they acknowledged the strength of the media in shaping public opinion as well as having the capacity to set the public agenda.

Regarding their knowledge on the poverty concept, the respondents went beyond quantitative factors (e.g. poverty line) or even the common notion of lacking basic needs. All of them defined poverty on a personal level, such as not having the capacity to make own rational decisions, lacking in human and social capitals, and not having the skills to create income for themselves or for their family. While these attribute to the personal frame of cause of poverty, they linked these problems to the structural causes. The respondents cited the government, or rather the lack of the services provided by the government, as a primary cause of poverty.

With regard to providing solutions, these game changers mentioned that their agencies are providing both short-term and long-term solutions for the victims of Super Typhoon Yolanda. While short-term solutions were provided as an immediate relief, long-term structural solutions involved provision of infrastructure, livelihood improvement programmes and education on disaster preparedness.

Although the importance of the media in aiding the implementation of government's long-term solutions is well-recognised, it is unfortunate that the results revealed that the media did not relay much information regarding this.

More importantly, the results provide insights into the relationship that the media has with the government regarding the coverage of their projects in the news. The findings reveal that the relationship needs improvement due to the antagonism that exists on both ends.

7. CONCLUSION

Information delivered by the media through news programmes harnesses public knowledge on certain issues. Its broad reach all over the Philippines makes the media a very significant influencer on issues most relevant to society through its salient coverage. The public knowledge harnessed is useful especially as it influences public agenda, an invaluable capability of the mass media, especially on matters of nation-building. The study shows the integration of the media and the government, as well as civil society, in providing solutions to poverty resulting from the disasters Typhoon Santi, Bohol Earthquake and Typhoon Yolanda. The extensive coverage of the media has led to a widespread social solidarity of the civil society and international organisations for the immediate relief of these survivors.

However, the researchers also found out that there was a lack of coverage of long-term and sustainable pro-poor solutions. Although the government had actual projects to address these concerns, there was insufficient focus from the media and from the government. The media did not prioritise news that looked at the urgency of long sustainable pro-poor solutions, thereby creating a gap in public knowledge on how to solve the issue of poverty in the long term.

It is evident that there is a discrepancy between the coverage of short-term and long-term solutions implemented by the government. The researchers conclude that the media coverage should also highlight these forms of solutions offered by the government to further engage civil society in forming a sustainable public agenda to alleviate poverty in the country. As such, a call for a better relationship between the media and the government is in order. Only then do the researchers believe that the majority of the Filipinos can partake in the efforts of the government to ultimately end poverty in the country through the aid of the media. With this public agenda, the media would serve as a catalyst for public knowledge regarding poverty alleviation and pro-poor growth.

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APPENDIX A

Causes of poverty (Figure 3)

Causes	Percent
“Natural” causes	
Destruction caused by nature	50.75
Geographic problem	1.00
TOTAL	51.75
Structural causes	
Ineffective national government aid	14.80
Economic problem	7.46
Ineffective local government aid	4.31
Ineffective institutional aid	1.66
TOTAL	28.19
Personal causes	
Broken family	9.29
Bad decision-making	6.30
Physical conditions	2.16
Destruction caused by man	1.49
Lack of education	0.17
TOTAL	19.41
Others	
TOTAL	0.66

APPENDIX B

Solutions to poverty (Figure 7)

Solutions	Percent
Immediate solutions	
Relief operations	37.92
Rescue operations	12.19
Monetary and in-kind donations	7.49
Moral support	4.14
Others	2.24
TOTAL	63.98
Structural solutions	
Local rehabilitation	14.09
Local reform	2.46
National reform	1.79
National rehabilitation	0.56
Others	1.34
TOTAL	20.25
Personal solutions	
Better decision-making	9.40
Religion	3.47
Crime (looting)	2.35
Education	0.56
TOTAL	15.77

APPENDIX C

Primary responsible individual, group or institution (Figure 10)	Percent	Other responsible individual, group, or institution (Figure 11)	Percent
Government		Government	
National government	29.41	National government	12.9
Local government	9.80	Local government	13.9
TOTAL	39.22	TOTAL	26.8
Media		Other institutions	
Media	14.93	NGO	1.7
TOTAL	14.93	Businesses	3.1
Personal		Hospitals	1.4
Victims	11.61	Others: Church	3.6
TOTAL	11.61	TOTAL	9.8
Other private individuals		Media	
Foreign volunteers/groups	8.30	Media	10.3
Private individuals/groups	17.50	TOTAL	10.3
Others: Teachers	0.15	Personal	
TOTAL	25.94	Victims	17.9
Other institutions		TOTAL	17.9
NGO	0.90	Other private individuals	
Businesses	1.66	Foreign volunteers/groups	11
Hospitals	1.81	Private individuals/groups	23.7
Others: Church	2.26	Others: Teachers	0.2
TOTAL	6.64	TOTAL	34.9
Not specified		Not specified	
TOTAL	1.66	TOTAL	0.2

