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An *ayuda* to the least advantaged: providing a program for those who were hit the hardest during the COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRACT

In a recent article, it was reported that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the economic situation of some countries. It led to some people losing jobs amidst the difficult situation that the pandemic caused. Thus, this paper discusses the need to provide a program for the least advantaged citizens so that they can still experience their basic liberties. The least advantaged citizens, as Rawls deem them, are the ones who lost jobs and incomes were hit the hardest during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords *ayuda*, COVID-19, distributive justice, least advantaged, well-being

The previous article discussed that the emergence of the COVID-19 brought an inverse socioeconomic gradient in Barcelona, Spain.¹ The results showed that those with lower income had a higher COVID-19 incidence, and those with higher income had a lower COVID-19 incidence. It highlighted the importance of good health strategies for the entire population particularly from the most deprived areas, not only focusing on the citizens with the virus. With this, the pandemic did not just disturb the healthcare system, but also the economic plane of different countries. Part of taking care of the physical and mental well-being of the citizens is by providing them with the basic primary goods of society. Thus, this setting calls for a program that prioritizes the citizens most affected by the pandemic.

In the Philippines, some citizens complained about the unjust distribution of *ayuda* (financial assistance). They accused government officials of corrupting the supposed aid to the citizens.² For this reason, the question that government officials must ask themselves in a time of scarcity is how resources can be allocated fairly.

John Rawls' *difference principle* argues that inequalities can only be arranged if it will be in favor of the least advantaged. He proposes that it is the duty of the state to form a social institution wherein one can work out these inequalities to make the social structure advantageous to everyone. He identifies that the least advantaged are the ones who are deprived

of the basic primary goods of society. These goods, as Rawls enumerates, are the basic rights or liberties, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect.³ By looking at the basic primary goods of society, the state can identify who is to be prioritized.

Considering this, the government should identify the least advantaged during a pandemic. Those most affected by the financial discrepancies brought about by lockdowns should be the ones to be prioritized in the distribution of *ayuda*.⁴ These are people who lost their jobs because of company closures, contractual workers, micro-entrepreneurs, private school workers whose workplace closed, the agricultural sector, flight attendants, Overseas Filipino Workers, factory workers, jeepney and tricycle drivers, and real estate renting owners. These are the people who are denied the basic primary goods; hence, they are the least advantaged during the pandemic. *Ayuda* should be given to those who are not fully experiencing the basic primary goods. This is necessary because the basic primary goods are the basis for promoting fairness.

To conclude, since the pandemic provided many inequalities within different countries, as part of taking care of the well-being of their citizens, governments must respond to those who are financially incapable. For Rawls, the least advantaged, which we identified in this paper, are to be

prioritized. Rawls' theory is different from the Social Amelioration Program in the Philippines because Rawlsian distributive justice gives weight to the well-being of the least advantaged. It shows no bias to any member of society.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this paper.

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