

## Why we should support the 4Ps (by Ronald Mendoza)

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At a recent forum on the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (or 4Ps) held at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, experts from different government agencies and academic institutions discussed the rationale and the feasibility of extending and expanding the program.

Under the management of Department of Social and Welfare Development (DSWD), the 4Ps is widely known to be the lynchpin of the government's anti-poverty efforts. One of its key interventions is the provision of small cash transfers to mothers, as long as they commit to investing in their children, such as by ensuring their children go to school, as well as get deworming, vaccination and regular health check-ups to name a few other aspects of the program. 4Ps operates in 79 provinces covering 1484 municipalities and 143 key cities in all 17 regions nationwide.

As of June 2013, the program covered almost 4 million households. The planned extension of the 4Ps program will include an additional 2 million children to the current 8.5 million in the program. A special emphasis will be placed on providing additional support to children from poor families who would like to go to high school.

Yet, even as the budget for 4Ps is set to increase, some people seem impatient about its pay-off, which most assume will be immediate—such as reducing the number of poor and hungry people in the country. Several opposition politicians have even resorted to calling the government program a “dole-out”. And some question the size of the allocations dedicated to the 4Ps. Their typical argument is that there are better alternative uses for these funds.

At that forum, I argued otherwise—noting that the 4Ps program is and continues to be a good investment. Here's why.

### Ending poverty



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Features	4Ps	Patronage Politics
Coverage	Poor households	Primarily political allies and supporters and they are not necessarily poor
Depth of cash transfer	Adequate to make a difference in child investments; but small enough in order to mitigate dependency	Typically small, and meant as a do
Conditions for access	School attendance, deworming, vaccination and regular health check-ups for children, etc.	Voting for the patron
Targeting	Based on rigorous impact evaluation methods	Based on actual or potential allegiance to the patron
Evaluation of impact	Based on evidence of poverty, as determined by the data	Evaluation not necessary if the patron (and his/her family) keeps on winning elections
Risk of dependency and moral hazard	Careful effort in the design of the program to mitigate the risk of dependency	Dependency of the client on political patrons is advantageous for the patron; indeed dependency is probably promoted
Communication: Who is extending help?	Taxpaying citizens helping fellow citizens and their children to live a decent life and increase their chances of breaking free from poverty	Patron is providing the help--and this is EPAL in nature

**Source:** Author's elaboration.

