

## Summary and Conclusion

Since the 1980s, reducing poverty has been the stated priority of successive Philippine governments. What continues to hamper anti-poverty efforts is the absence of legislation that addresses the intimate relationship between poverty, development, and population – notwithstanding the country’s high fertility rate, consequent rapid population growth, and the socio-economic pressures that these exert on national resources.

This is why the Philippine Population Management Program (PPMP) continues to be a strong advocate for the enactment of a comprehensive population bill. The PPMP is a component of the Philippine Medium Term Development Plan under the National Economic and Development Authority. Managed by the Commission on Population in partnership with many government and civil society groups, the PPMP’s vision is improved reproductive health of women, men and adolescents and guaranteed access to family planning information and services especially for poor couples (POPCOM, 2001a). This vision is consistent with the goals of various international agreements on reproductive health and population. The Philippines subscribes to these goals through the PPMP. These include the goals set in the Bali Declaration, the ICPD Program of Action, and the Millennium Development Goals.

Overall, the country has achieved modest gains in reducing fertility, infant and under five mortality; empowering women; responding to unmet need for family planning; putting in place measures to keep HIV/AIDS at its “low and slow” infection stage; and improving the policy environment for population and gender equity through IEC, advocacy and information communication technology.

Serious issues and challenges, however, still remain. From the viewpoint of the PPMP, the most crucial is the lack of a firm approach to the country’s high fertility and rapid population growth situation. Some related issues include inadequate response to the desire among the majority of Filipino couples for fewer children, the increasing size of the youth population and consequent impact of this on RH/FP services and employment, and the relatively weak enforcement of existing population-related laws.

Following are recommendations both in terms of policy measures and program actions that could address these and other issues:

- Work strategically toward multi-stakeholder collaboration approaches to ensure continuous access to family planning goods and services by the majority of the population, especially poor households, in order to achieve the desired fertility rate of 2.7 children and, ultimately, replacement fertility of 2.1 by 2015;
- Provide measures that will ensure the availability and accessibility of RH/FP supplies and services, in view of the diminishing and eventual phase-out of USAID contraceptive donations, to help Filipino couples space pregnancies and have only the number of children that they want;
- Work in partnership with civil society to significantly reduce maternal mortality, infant mortality, and child mortality;
- Foster a more balanced spatial distribution of the population by promoting population-sensitive development policies and strategies, installing mechanisms to monitor population movements and institutionalizing the conduct of a national migration survey to regularly assess interrelationships between migration, urbanization, poverty, employment and human settlement patterns;
- Enact laws and implement programs that will benefit the older persons, including: the development of a database on older persons; establishment of gerontology centers to provide much needed research and training; legislation of a Magna Carta for older persons; and, strengthening the advocacy capabilities of organizations involved in ageing;
- Pursue the recently formulated Strategic Operational Plan of the PPMP that will address the unmet needs for FP among poor couples and sexuality and fertility information needs of adolescents/youths especially among those who are poor;
- Formulate clear, appropriate and responsive policies on the provision of adolescent RH information and services that will guide the action programs of the national government;
- Enforce the Philippine AIDS Law and sustain the HIV/AIDS-related activities of both NGOs and local governments, to help prevent an HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country;
- Sustain advocacy efforts to mainstream gender equality and reproductive rights in government agencies, industry, private corporations, and the grassroots;
- Assess the impact of Gender and Development or GAD-related programs and projects in minimizing or eliminating discriminatory policies and practices against women;
- Generate a GAD database with sex-disaggregated data to support the development of more effective and responsive laws and programs;
- Initiate a strategic alliance with concerned stakeholders to overcome the continuing problem of policy ambivalence on the issue of population; and,
- Strengthen IEC and advocacy efforts to reach industry-based managers and workers.

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