

# The Youth: Our Responsibility and Our Hope



*WE BROUGHT THEM to our world to be the object of our love and responsibility, and our hope for a better world.*

*It is our responsibility to address the needs of today's youth. They had not chosen to be born, but they need choices to move on to a brighter future.*

## A. We Brought Them to Our World

### The Issue of Responsibility

In the recent past, about 15 to 25 years ago, we brought our present 15.1 million youth to our world; a political and social system constantly challenged by poverty, unemployment, political and social unrest, graft and corruption.

As parents and guardians of our youth, our greatest challenge is our responsibility to them: the responsibility to prepare them for productive and responsible citizenship; to provide them with homes and communities that will enable them to build a better world for their children and us in our old age. It is our hope that they will do better than we ever did in meeting challenges and responsibilities.

Individually and collectively, let us reflect on our responsibility to our youth, directly as their parents or guardians and indirectly as their teachers, as media practitioners, as officials of government and members of non-government organizations responsible for the formulation of policies

and the planning and implementation of programs and projects for youth development.

As government officials or private citizens, we are all connected as parents or guardians of our youth. We know and we must admit that the character and situation of our youth today: what they think and do, reflect (1) the character of the decision we made when we had them and (2) the way we cared for them as they grew up to be the young achievers or young rascals they are now.

Some of us brought them to this world with the best of intentions, prepared for the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood; the more sexually active among us, had them during our teenage years, out of wedlock or under difficult or embarrassing circumstances, without meaning to and not prepared for parental responsibilities.

Our youth today are in different life situations: three out of 10 are poor, two in five are in school, three in every 10 are gainfully employed, while the proportion of idle youth, neither in school or working ranges from 16 percent in Northern Mindanao to 29 percent in the National Capital Region.<sup>1</sup>

We brought them to this world; it is our responsibility to address their needs.

## **The Issue of Dependency and Opportunity**

The researchers among us say that there are around seven young and old dependents for every 10 working age persons (aged 15-64). But due to the inability of government or the private sector to create jobs for our young adults (20-24 years old) and adolescents (15 to 19), the real dependency ratio is 11 dependents for every six working persons.<sup>2</sup>



The large number of our youth if provided with employment opportunities will mean more productive or working people capable of supporting our young (aged 0-14) and old (aged years 65 and over) dependents.

Our challenge then is to mobilize our large youth population to help in the economic and social development of our country; and to invest in human capital development in the areas of education, nutrition, health, employment generation and reproductive health.

## **B. Let Us Help Them Build a Better World**

We have learned much from our experience. We have made a lot of decisions when we were young and we have learned from our mistakes. We are now in a position to help our youth make decisions they will never regret.

We could start by making ourselves the role models the youth will always respect, be proud of and emulate. By being respectable and responsible it will be easy for us to advise them when in need, and when we have to criticize, no distance will be created between the youth and ourselves.

The youth usually echo the predispositions, actions and values of their elders. They value education, being productive, being in good health, being responsible and being disciplined if we demonstrate our commitment to these values. By example, we could make them include among their values responsible love and sex, responsible parenthood and reproductive health.



## As Agents of Change

In 2004, 20 to 30 percent of voters will come from the youth sector. In the three forthcoming presidential elections, the proportions of voting youth to the total number of voters will be of similar levels. They will soon exercise their right to vote. We could provide them with some kind of political socialization to help them make a good choice.

In terms of participation in governance, former President Fidel Ramos in June 1995 approved the Philippine Republic Act 8044, otherwise known as the Youth in Nation-building Act. This placed youth issues high on the agenda and set about creating an environment conducive to youth empowerment and youth service. The National Youth Commission (NYC) was created as the policy-making and coordinating agency of government youth programs. An older organisation, the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK-Youth Council) was created in 1991.

The SK is the youth arm of local government, with approximately 840,000 members across a total of 42,000 *barangays*. Through this organisation, young people between the ages of 15 and 21 can directly participate at all levels of governance: *barangays*, municipal, city, provincial and national. The National Youth Commission works with the SK-Youth Council's extensive network, but the SK is criticised for not doing enough to mobilize young people politically; it puts most of its efforts into sports and sport competitions.

The Republic Act 8044 also made provision for the National Youth Parliament – a national policy-making body through which 100 young educated representatives are able to lobby the congress on youth issues.<sup>3</sup>

## As Future Parents

We have realized by this time that parenting is not only the most important job; it is also the most gratifying. The difficulties we experienced while parenting brought out all the best in us. Let us communicate to the youth the trials and joys of parenting because they are fast becoming parents themselves.

Childbearing among our youth is one of the largest sources of population growth in the country. Of the estimated 1.7 million babies being born every year, around 30 percent come from young women.<sup>4</sup>

The earlier our youth begin to bear children, the more rapidly this group will add new members to the population.<sup>5</sup> The timing of births then becomes most crucial. The National Demographic and Health Survey in 1998 reported that by age 24, each of our young women already bore one child.

Let us communicate to the youth the trials and joys of parenting. We also have to stress that good parenting requires responsible sexual decisions for the welfare not only of individual families but also for the welfare of our country, and that the subject of reproductive health is a must for effective parenting. ■



## Reproductive Health

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant. In line with the above definition of reproductive health, reproductive health care is defined as the constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being through preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counseling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.

International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, Paragraph 7.2.

