

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mercedes B. Concepcion
 Peter D. Garrucho
 Alejandro N. Herrin
 Ernesto M. Pernia
 Ma. Socorro Camacho Reyes

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Virgilio F. Lacaba

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Alberto Diaz

GRAPHIC ARTIST

Dario B. Noche

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Roderick Toledo
 Amadis Ma. Guerrero
 Elizabeth Lolarga
 Wilma V. Lacaba

WRITERS

Roberto C. Navarro
 Louie-An Pilapil
 Perla Aragon Choudhury
 Bernard Supetran
 Laya Hasmin Diaz

PROJECT ASSISTANTS

Jocelyn Ladisla
 Frederico Salvania



**News
 & Features
 Services
 for
 Mass Media**

Tel.: 6350247 Fax: 631-9765
 Email: vflacaba@yahoo.com

Vol. 1, No. 2 Feb-Mar 2003
 ISSUE EDITOR: Wilma V. Lacaba

Most members of the influential Makati Business Club want the government to adopt a stronger population program.

Makati Business Club weighs in on population issue

By Bernard Supetran
PopDev Media Service

A recent poll among members of the Makati Business Club (MBC) showed overwhelming support for a stronger population program by the government. Ninety-six percent of those who took part in the survey conducted during the first half of December expressed concern about the size and rapid growth of the country's population..

“The survey is intended to basically feel the pulse of the MBC constituency on the issue and make our policymakers aware of the sentiments of the Makati business community so they can make the necessary actions,” MBC executive director Guillermo “Bill” Luz told *PopDev Media Service*.

Composed of the biggest business firms in the country, the Makati Business Club is regarded by many quarters as an influential voice in national policymaking and legislation.

Ninety percent of the survey respondents felt that the large and fast-growing population is detrimental to the country's fragile economy. The same number also believe that the government,

/...more

through the Department of Health, should actively promote and make all family planning methods (both natural and artificial) available to the public.

Asked what the members of the business club can do, Luz clarified that MBC's role is at the moment limited to making its position known to policymakers. "While we do not have the competency to implement a full-blown family planning program, we can support undertakings that would help curb the population growth rate," he said.

The active participation of the private sector will be a welcome development in view of the announced phasedown of contraceptive support from the United States Agency for International Development.

Luz pointed out that according to studies, a big number of families incur at least one unplanned birth each year due to various reasons such as lack of information on contraceptives and their unavailability. He thinks that people must be given the option, as well as the means, to avail of the family planning methods suitable to their needs without having guilt feelings.

With a population of 80 million at present and an annual growth rate of 2.36 percent, the Philippines can expect to hit the 97 million mark by the end of the decade, making the country one of the 20 most populous nations in the world.

Unchecked population growth exacerbates such problems as unemployment and the lack of basic social services in housing, health and education. It also negates the economic gains posted by a country and makes the prospects of long-term sustainability doubtful.

With respect to voting preferences, 57 percent of the executives said they would support a candidate espousing all methods of family planning compared to only 15 percent who said they would vote for advocates of natural family planning only.

Meanwhile, the remaining 26 percent said that a candidate's stand on the issue would not influence their election decisions.

/...more

Top-level management comprised 90 percent of the respondents. More than 70 percent were Filipino men whom Luz described as generally conservative.

The poll, part of the MBC's Business Opinion Survey Series, was conducted among 102 executives representing 12.8 percent of its general membership. The quarterly surveys that started in December cover a wide range of social issues that concern the business community.

The MBC recently commissioned Social Weather Station to conduct a parallel survey among 1,200 respondents from a cross-section of society to determine if the general public has similar sentiments.

“By the time the results of the SWS survey are available, we will have empirical data that the government and the business sector can take into serious consideration in economic planning,” Luz concluded.

Early last year, the results of the MBC Executive Outlook Survey likewise showed an overwhelming positive response to the question of whether or not the government should be more proactive in managing population growth.

Some measures suggested were education and information campaigns and the grant of tax incentives to limit children to two. A few even said that the official stand of the Roman Catholic Church against artificial birth control methods should be ignored.

It was the first time the population issue was included in the periodic MBC survey. With the population problem – fraught as it is with religious and political implications -- getting complex by the day, it will probably not be the last time the subject will be the talk of the Makati business community. — *PopDev Media Service*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mercedes B. Concepcion
 Peter D. Garrucho
 Alejandro N. Herrin
 Ernesto M. Pernia
 Ma. Socorro Camacho Reyes

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Virgilio F. Lacaba

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Alberto Diaz

GRAPHIC ARTIST

Dario B. Noche

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Roderick Toledo
 Amadis Ma. Guerrero
 Elizabeth Lolarga
 Wilma V. Lacaba

WRITERS

Roberto C. Navarro
 Louie-An Pilapil
 Perla Aragon Choudhury
 Bernard Supetran
 Laya Hasmin Diaz

PROJECT ASSISTANTS

Jocelyn Ladisla
 Frederico Salvania



**News
 & Features
 Services
 for
 Mass Media**

Tel.: 6350247 Fax: 631-9765
 Email: vflacaba@yahoo.com

Vol. 1, No. 2 Feb-Mar 2003
 ISSUE EDITOR: Wilma V. Lacaba

A slowdown in population growth can curb the unemployment rate.

Fixing the job deficit

By Mydia V. Lacaba

PopDev Media Service

There was a time when a college degree from a good university all but assured eager young graduates of a job that would be the first rung on their successful climb up the career ladder.

Tell that to 22-year-old Anna dela Cruz (not her real name) who holds a degree in business management from one of the Philippines' top universities. She has been looking for a job for almost a year now after finishing a six-month contractual stint at a bank. She has learned the hard way that finding employment is not just a matter of displaying good grades and an aptitude for the work.

“There are a few openings,” Anna allows, “and I’ve had countless interviews, but the trouble is I’m competing with last year’s graduates and those from the previous batches who, like me, don’t have jobs right now. There’s a huge supply of workers but not enough demand.”

/...more

Recent graduate Ramon Corpuz (not his real name), agrees. “I thought that a college degree was enough, but there aren’t that many opportunities right now which are right for my educational background. I could choose to work, say, as a clerk, but that would be a waste of everything I studied.”

The numbers bear out their concerns. The Philippine labor force grew by an average of 2.6 percent annually in the past decade spurred in part by the steady increase in the number of working women. This means that the 32.2-million workers in 2000 were almost double the 1980 figure of 17.3 million.

Meanwhile, employment opportunities have not kept up with the rapid growth in the workforce. In the year 2000, more than one in every ten employable persons (around 3.6 million) were out of work. In contrast, the highest recorded unemployment rate in the 1970s was only one in six.

Underemployment is an even more widespread problem, afflicting an average of one in every five workers during the past two decades. These workers settled for part-time jobs (visible underemployment), or those that were not at par with their previous work experience and educational background or training (invisible underemployment). This implies that they did not work enough hours nor earn a sufficient amount of money, to make a decent living.

Underemployed persons grew in number from 3.6 million in 1980 to 6.3 million in 2000.

And while unemployment among 15-24-year olds has always been prevalent in the Philippines, these young workers had usually been educated only to the primary or secondary level. In recent years, though, there has been an alarming increase of unemployed youths like Anna and Ramon who possess a college degree. Their numbers rose from 8.5 percent in 1980 to 14.8 percent in 2000.

/...more

There are two primary reasons for the country's poor employment performance: weak economic growth and rapid population growth. Because the country's economy has continued to move at a snail's pace compared to the 2.3% annual growth in its population, more and more people are left jobless (or else, leave the country to work abroad) because there are not enough employment-generating investments or business establishments to hire them.

A study conducted by Dr. Ernesto Pernia, lead economist of the Economics and Research Department of the Asian Development Bank, and Dr. Alejandro Herrin, a professor at the University of the Philippines School of Economics, confirms the strong relation between the country's high population growth rate and unemployment.

According to the study, the Philippines' economic development, and consequently, its employment rate, has been gradually lagging behind its neighbors such as South Korea and Thailand because of the government's failure to effectively address population growth. While the three countries were comparable in terms of GNP per capita in the 1960s, the significantly lower population growth rates of South Korea and Thailand in latter years have contributed to lower unemployment rates and much higher GNP per capita figures than those of the Philippines.

Clearly, the Philippines must do something about the fundamental problem of population if it hopes to fix the escalating job deficit. Meanwhile, Anna and Ramon might just have to pound the pavement for those elusive jobs some more. — *PopDev Media Service*

(30)

***N.B.** An accompanying 570-kb illustration, done by Dario B. Noche and also available for free, may be emailed to you upon request. Please send request to: yflacaba@yahoo.com*

EDITORIAL BOARD
Mercedes B. Concepcion
Peter D. Garrucho
Alejandro N. Herrin
Ernesto M. Pernia
Ma. Socorro Camacho Reyes

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Virgilio F. Lacaba

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Cynthia Alberto Diaz

GRAPHIC ARTIST
Dario B. Noche

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES
Roderick Toledo
Amadis Ma. Guerrero
Elizabeth Lolarga
Wilma V. Lacaba

WRITERS
Roberto C. Navarro
Louie-An Pilapil
Perla Aragon Choudhury
Bernard Supetran
Laya Hasmin Diaz

PROJECT ASSISTANTS
Jocelyn Ladisla
Frederico Salvania



**News
& Features
Services
for
Mass Media**

Tel.: 6350247 Fax: 631-9765
Email: vflacaba@yahoo.com

Vol. 1, No. 2 Feb-Mar 2003
ISSUE EDITOR: Wilma V. Lacaba

Parents must prepare to be their children's source of information, support and guidance especially on matters related to sexuality.

We want parents to teach us about sexuality -- youth

By Cynthia Alberto Diaz
PopDev Media Service

It may come as a surprise, but Filipino youth want their parents -- more than anybody else -- to educate them about sex and to guide them on how to manage their sexuality.

A recent review of literature conducted by the Foundation for Adolescent Development (FAD) revealed that young Filipinos expect their parents not only to listen to them and be sensitive to their needs, but also to be able to tell them what to do when they have problems, especially about relationships and sexual matters.

The literature review thus validated the views expressed by youth participants in a 2001 FAD-managed conference on shared visions for Filipino youth. In that conference, youth participants from various organizations and walks of life singled out their parents as their preferred source of information about sex. They want to be told that the sex act is part of love.

/...more

They also want to see from the way their parents treat each other that there is equality between men and women and that the woman's body should be respected.

In many cases, however, this is not what happens. The subject of sex is considered taboo by many parents. When young people ask them about sex, the parents often misconstrue that their children are already engaging in sex or are interested in doing it -- and they start scrutinizing their children's activities and friends.

The literature review, which covered various research studies about the parents' role in adolescent health and sexuality, supported these findings.

Although adolescents see their parents as the proper source of information about sex, they are either afraid or shy to ask their mothers and fathers about it. This is because they believe: (1) parents consider them too young; (2) parents suspect they want to have sex or might be tempted to do it; (3) parents might think they are being malicious and scold or even hurt (slap, spank or cuff) them; (4) they do not know how to ask the question; (5) they might lose their parents' trust or be imposed stricter rules; or (6) they are not that close to their parents to be talking to them about such matters.

Not getting answers to their questions, many young Filipinos are frustrated as a result. Most of them discuss their problems with their peers who barely know more than they do. What's worse, many of them go about entering into relationships and engaging in sex without adequate knowledge of the possible consequences and the appropriate precautions to take.

A significant percentage of Filipino youth aged 15-24 are sexually active and are exposed to the risks of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive health problems. They need information and guidance on how to manage their sexual urges if not protect themselves and, more important, how to plan their lives as they prepare for their future.

/...more

Although teenagers complain about their parents' persistent nagging about school, they appreciate their being around to listen and give them advice when they have personal problems. Although they want to be given the freedom to be with their friends, they say their happiest moments are those spent in activities with the family. And although the youth want the chance to discover their own individuality, studies indicate that they consider the family central to their lives, and the home as their refuge. One study showed that family concerns rank first among the values of today's youth.

A separate study done by the University Center for Women's Studies (UCWS) of the University of the Philippines arrived at similar findings. The youth generally consider parents as the most important people in their lives. Many of them, however, do not feel inclined to open up their problems to their parents, particularly on matters of sex and sexuality.

Adolescents, as gathered by the FAD and UCWS studies, appreciate their parents for giving them life, taking care of them, sending them to school, and providing for their needs. They also see their parents as the persons who can give them advice and help them whatever the situation may be. No wonder it is a source of disappointment for the youth when they seldom see their parents or are able to interact with them for only a limited time each day. Or when they approach and seek deeper intimacies with their parents but do not receive the attention, the understanding, and the wisdom they expect.

Some parents are seen as not equipped to answer the youth's intellectual and emotional needs, either because they lack the knowledge themselves or have other priorities. The youth, therefore, do not feel inclined to open up and discuss their emotional, especially sex-related, concerns with their parents.

FAD, a non-government organization dedicated to the advancement of Filipino youth's sexual health and development, has initiated efforts to empower parents so they can provide their

/...more

adolescent children the support and guidance they need as they mature sexually, physically, psychologically and socially.

If parents learn more about their teenage children -- how they behave, how they feel and what they need and value -- they can be expected to respond to their children's sexual needs and problems more sensitively and competently. By becoming more capable and caring parents today, they can raise their children to be better parents for tomorrow. — *PopDev Media Service*

(30)

N.B. *A captioned photograph (file size: 1132kb), which may be published for free to accompany this article, may be emailed to you upon request. Please send request to: vflacaba@yahoo.com*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mercedes B. Concepcion
 Peter D. Garrucho
 Alejandro N. Herrin
 Ernesto M. Pernia
 Ma. Socorro Camacho Reyes

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Virgilio F. Lacaba

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Alberto Diaz

GRAPHIC ARTIST

Dario B. Noche

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Roderick Toledo
 Amadis Ma. Guerrero
 Elizabeth Lolarga
 Wilma V. Lacaba

WRITERS

Roberto C. Navarro
 Louie-An Pilapil
 Perla Aragon Choudhury
 Bernard Supetran
 Laya Hasmin Diaz

PROJECT ASSISTANTS

Jocelyn Ladisla
 Frederico Salvania



**News
 & Features
 Services
 for
 Mass Media**

**Tel.: 6350247 Fax: 631-9765
 Email: vflacaba@yahoo.com**

**Vol. 1, No. 2 Feb-Mar 2003
 ISSUE EDITOR: Wilma V. Lacaba**

The benefits of practicing family planning outweigh the costs.

2 out of 10 married Pinays have ‘unmet need’ for family planning

By Jenny Romero Llaguno
PopDev Media Service

Girl meets boy: they fall in love, get married, have children. But what if, as in many cases, they have more than they really want or can afford to have? What if the wife wants to space her pregnancies, or stop giving birth altogether -- but is unable to practice contraception?

This phenomenon is what population experts refer to when they speak of the “unmet need” for family planning.

In the Philippines today, almost 20 percent of all married women of reproductive age (i.e., those in the 15-45 age bracket) find themselves in this situation.

They are more likely to be found in the rural, rather than the urban, areas especially in the least developed regions of the country like Eastern Visayas and the ARMM. They also tend to be younger, poorer and less educated than other childbearing women.

/...more

Fertility surveys show that the average married couple in the country has one child more than they, in fact, desire in terms of family size (actual total fertility rate is 3.7 as opposed to the wanted fertility rate of 2.7). What's distressing is that a number of women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant resort to induced abortions, which, besides being illegal, can cause fatal complications.

The Commission on Population (Popcom) sums up the damage resulting from non-contraceptive use in its *State of the Philippine Population Report 2000* as follows: "Unmet need translates into unplanned pregnancies, closely spaced births, larger family sizes, more abortion cases, higher infant mortality rate, higher child mortality rate, higher maternal mortality rate, and poorer nutritional status of mothers and their children."

Yet, despite the array of methods-- whether natural or artificial-- that are available, non-contraceptive use persists. Among the reasons cited in surveys are lack of knowledge, opposition to family planning, religious conviction, expense of contraception, difficulty of access, health-related side-effects and inconvenience.

Gender relations, in particular the power imbalance between men and women when it comes to decision-making about reproductive matters, is found in studies to be a significant factor accounting for unmet need. The wife, for instance, may want to postpone giving birth; but if the husband prefers to have another child, more likely than not, his wishes will prevail. Also, if the wife does not have her husband's support in her practice of family planning (more men than women tend to view contraception as socially unacceptable and potentially damaging to the latter's health), she will probably discontinue contraceptive use.

"What stands out in recent studies is that men tend to be the ultimate decision-makers in sexual relations, childbearing and child-rearing... among most couples," the *SPPR 2000* concludes. This is ironic if one considers that "the burden of contraception invariably falls on the woman."

/...more

Clearly, education is key to addressing the problem of unmet need—whether it is in the form of advocacy to promote gender equity and reproductive health or simply to explain the advantages and disadvantages of certain contraceptive methods so couples can make informed choices. Indeed, unmet contraceptive need declines in relation to educational attainment (the unintended fertility level of those with a college education is 0.4; those with elementary schooling, 1.1 to 1.7).

The high costs associated with practicing contraception or accessing the service delivery system also poses a major problem especially among poor women. In response to the phasedown of contraceptive support from such donor agencies as the United States Agency for International Development, Popcom has launched the Contraceptive Interdependence Initiative, which is intended to raise the government's budgetary appropriation for the family planning program.

“The goal is to funnel funds to poor women with unmet needs,” says Mia Ventura, Popcom deputy director. This is estimated to cover some two million women belonging to the E social bracket; the rest would have to rely for their contraceptive needs on other sources like the private sector (e.g., the workplace) or the commercial market (i.e., drugstores).

Hopefully, the challenge of satisfying the unmet needs of women for family planning despite many constraints -- such as that of limited access to information and services -- will prove surmountable.

As the *SPPR 2000* points out, “women who are contraceptive users say that the benefits of contraception outweigh the costs.” — *PopDev Media Service*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mercedes B. Concepcion
 Peter D. Garrucho
 Alejandro N. Herrin
 Ernesto M. Pernia
 Ma. Socorro Camacho Reyes

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Virgilio F. Lacaba

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Alberto Diaz

GRAPHIC ARTIST

Dario B. Noche

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Roderick Toledo
 Amadis Ma. Guerrero
 Elizabeth Lolarga
 Wilma V. Lacaba

WRITERS

Roberto C. Navarro
 Louie-An Pilapil
 Perla Aragon Choudhury
 Bernard Supetran
 Laya Hasmin Diaz

PROJECT ASSISTANTS

Jocelyn Ladisla
 Frederico Salvania



**News
 & Features
 Services
 for
 Mass Media**

Tel.: 6350247 Fax: 631-9765

Email: vflacaba@yahoo.com

**Vol. 1, No. 2 Feb-Mar 2003
 ISSUE EDITOR: Wilma V. Lacaba**

The Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council makes decent housing available to the underclass.

Housing the homeless

By Louie-An M. Pilapil

PopDev Media Service

Their makeshift shanties can be found all over the metropolis -- under bridges, near garbage dumps, by the riverbanks, along railroad tracks, on privately owned vacant lots or government property. Mostly migrants from rural areas who have come to the city in search of a better life, these squatters live in overcrowded slums where, besides the threat of eviction, they face the many problems posed by poverty, crime, disease (and in some cases, flooding or getting hit by a speeding train).

Slum-dwellers constitute over one-third of the entire urban population of the country. In Metro Manila alone, squatter households as of the year 2000 numbered over 700,000, with Quezon City having the highest share.

The task of formulating policies in order to provide decent shelter to these so-called informal settlers belongs to the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC).

/...more

“We estimate the number of squatters requiring new housing units to be about 1.4 million,” says Zacarias Abanes, director of the agency’s Policy Formulation and Review Group. “These are the families whose houses need upgrading because they are not suitable for human habitation.”

The national government does not have sufficient resources to breach the huge demand-supply gap for shelter (just a little above one percent of the total annual budget is allocated to the housing sector). The HUDCC has thus decided to tap private-sector funding through the securitization of housing bonds.

“In this scheme, we will issue an investment instrument that we will sell to the private sector. Whatever amount is generated out of the sale of the housing bonds will be re-channeled to the government’s housing program,” he explains.

Besides funding, another problem that had to be addressed was the red tape involved in securing necessary documents from such agencies as the DENR, the DAR, the DILG and the HLURB. With the issuance of an executive order prescribing the time period for processing the permits, the process now takes a maximum of six months instead of two years.

Who are eligible to apply for the low-cost housing units under the socialized housing program? First, they must be considered “underprivileged” -- that is, those whose annual family income falls below the poverty threshold (placed at P13,916 in the year 2000). They also must not own any real estate property.

“Professional squatters are banned,” warns Abanes. He refers to people who make money by renting out units illegally occupying space in government or private land or those who have sufficient income but opt to remain squatters.

To make the cost of housing affordable, two schemes were devised. In one plan, an amortization support subsidy is given in declining amounts for the first five years. In the

/...more

graduated amortization plan, on the other hand, the beneficiary makes smaller payments during the first five years of the loan; he is then required to make bigger payments afterward on the assumption that his income will likewise increase.

Abanes says that it is not enough to provide the poor with affordable homes. It is equally important to assure them that their way of life (e.g., access to means of livelihood) will not be affected by their relocation.

Above all, the root of the problem -- poverty made worse by the country's runaway population growth -- must be addressed:

“There are many reasons why people from the rural areas flock to the city,” says Abanes. “The lack of employment opportunities, the absence of basic services like adequate water supply or amenities like malls. In the case of Mindanao, it's the peace-and-order situation.”

He concludes: “We must attend first to countryside development and address other issues like peace and order. Otherwise, they'll continue to migrate to Metro Manila.” — *PopDev Media Service*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mercedes B. Concepcion
 Peter D. Garrucho
 Alejandro N. Herrin
 Ernesto M. Pernia
 Ma. Socorro Camacho Reyes

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Virgilio F. Lacaba

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Alberto Diaz

GRAPHIC ARTIST

Dario B. Noche

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Roderick Toledo
 Amadis Ma. Guerrero
 Elizabeth Lolarga
 Wilma V. Lacaba

WRITERS

Roberto C. Navarro
 Louie-An Pilapil
 Perla Aragon Choudhury
 Bernard Supetran
 Laya Hasmin Diaz

PROJECT ASSISTANTS

Jocelyn Ladisla
 Frederico Salvania



**News
 & Features
 Services
 for
 Mass Media**

Tel.: 6350247 Fax: 631-9765

Email: vflacaba@yahoo.com

Vol. 1, No. 2 Feb-Mar 2003

ISSUE EDITOR: Wilma V. Lacaba

As agreement is reached among various sectors about the gravity of the population problem, more open discussions and debates can be expected to find ways to solve it.

Population problem demands urgent action

By Gerardo R. Anigan

PopDev Media Service

“Promote a population program anchored on the principles of responsible parenthood, reproductive health care and respect for religious convictions.”

This is one of the priority measures listed in the Reform Agenda of the *Bangon Pilipino Movement (BPM)*, a multi-sectoral initiative launched in mid-January to, among others, "reduce poverty" and "ensure economic survival, recovery and growth."

During its recent action-planning workshop, BPM member El Shaddai vowed to push for responsible parenthood and natural family planning among its members. Another member, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), said they would include the provision of family planning services in their collective bargaining agreements.

Aside from religious groups and labor organizations, the BPM includes among its members business associations like the Philippine Chamber of Commerce (PCCI), the Bishop-Businessmen Conference (BBC), and the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce

/...more

PopDev Media Service

Vol. 1 No. 2 / page 17 of 20

and Industry (FFCCCI); transport groups like the Integrated Metro Bus Operators Association (IMBOA) and the Pasang Masda; and the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP).

These developments highlight the increasing agreement that massive poverty in the Philippines is, to a large extent, due to overpopulation.

Indeed, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo recently announced that a nationwide information campaign would be launched emphasizing “responsible parenthood, respect for life, birth spacing and informed choice.” She said that spouses should “choose the means by which to implement their decision according to their cultural and religious beliefs,” even as she herself expressed a preference for natural family planning as espoused by the Catholic Church.

Areas of Agreement

What appears to have set off these developments was the Philippine Business Conference (the 28th of an annual series convened by the PCCI) in December where one plenary session saw business leaders discussing population concerns with a bishop, an economist and a politician.

Bishop Teodoro Bacani stressed that the Church has been aware for a long time about the existence of a population problem. He quoted a Vatican II document which, as far back as 1965, declared: "There are also serious and alarming problems arising in many parts of the world as a result of population expansion."

He also cited guidelines of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, which expressly said that, the “Church does not forbid the advocacy of the acceleration or deceleration of our population growth” and actually cautions couples "to bring into the world only those that they can raise up as good human beings."

Newly installed as archbishop of Novaliches, Bishop Bacani reiterated these sentiments in a media statement made at the 4th World Meeting of Families. He also explained that the

/...more

Church supports responsible parenthood and does not want people to “propagate simply like Catholic rabbits.”

Asian Development Bank economist Dr. Ernesto Pernia, in the same forum, explained the dynamics of population and poverty in the Philippines.

According to him, rapid population growth increases the dependency burden on the working and earning population, leading to low savings and investment rates, as well as increasing demand for publicly funded social services. In turn, low rates of economic growth decrease employment opportunities, and foster child labor and migration, with all their attendant social ills. Lower amounts available for human capital investments, particularly for education and health, further contribute to the decline in labor productivity. And, with nominal wages increasing, such decline further impairs the international competitiveness of the economy.

For his part, Congressman Nereus Acosta pointed out the fact that the Philippines, with its population of more than 80 million, is now the 14th most populous country in the world with the highest fertility rate in Asia. "A decent quality of life, which every government on earth professes is integrally connected to the sound management of a society's population and its resources," he cautioned.

PBC Resolution

After the discussions, the PBC issued a resolution which was submitted to the President calling on government and the private sector to join efforts in, among others, “recognizing the principle of responsible parenthood and the right as well as the duty of each couple to decide the number of children they will have in accordance with their religious and moral convictions.”

There still remain some rose-tinted views that see opportunity in our overpopulation. One such argument cites the increased demand for overseas Filipino workers brought about by declining population in developed countries.

/...more

But these views are now the minority. We have a population problem.

To business, there are clear benefits of family planning by their workers: increased productivity and reduced absenteeism with lesser concerns about pregnant mothers and growing children, on top of avoiding costs associated with childbirth: SSS benefits, health insurance, maternity leave, paternity leave, and temporary replacement of workers on leave.

To female workers and their families, family planning addresses the problems of childbearing among women, encapsulated by population planning advocates into the “Four TOOs” — having children too many, too often, too early or too old.

Now that action on the problem is starting, the next areas for discussion will be the efficacy of communication and the efficiency of method. We can expect more open discussions and debates on the appropriate ways and means of population management in the days to come.

— *PopDev Media Service*

(30)

The author manages policy projects at the Philippine Exporters Confederation Inc. (PHILEXPORT).