



Dear Editor,

The persistence of the country's population problem, and its continuing influence on the ability of the Filipino family to advance in life, has prompted the revival of a 25-year-old news service, *Population Media Service* or *PMS*.

Recognizing the expanse of development concerns that are affected by and which affect population, we have renamed the service *PopDev Media Service*. This time we will be covering a wider range of topics, from the usual subjects of population, demography, reproductive health and family planning to concerns like gender equity, youth development, business and the economy, labor and employment, livelihood, education, environment, alternative lifestyles, even culture and tourism -- all as part of the intricate relationship between population trends and people's development.

We will also have more human-interest stories that tell of the impact of population and development in the context of ordinary people's most basic needs, and in a language they can best understand. Many of the articles will be based on interviews with both the stakeholders and the experts in the issues covered, as well as on survey and research results.

We would like to invite suggestions from you as to what topics would be most suitable to your publication's needs and the preferences of your readers. We shall accordingly research on and write about the topics you will suggest, provided they are within the scope of population and people's development.

Issues of *PopDev Media Service* will come out once a month for one year beginning this month. Each issue will contain six ready-to-print articles, one captioned photograph and one editorial cartoon.

Please let us know if you would like to continue receiving *PopDev Media Service* or if you would like us to send the succeeding issues to another editor in your news organization. If, at anytime, your publication would rather not receive *PopDev Media Service* anymore, simply advise us and we will delete your publication from our mailing list.

For your convenience, we have included in this first issue a form that you can fill up and e-mail back to us at vflacaba@yahoo.com. We may also be reached at PopDev Media Service, c/o Raya Media Services, Inc., 88 East Capitol Drive, Bgy. Kapitolyo, Pasig City, fax-phone no. (02)631-9765 or Tel. (02)635-0247.

We look forward to having you as a partner in our effort to raise consciousness, and hopefully elicit action among our policymakers, decision-makers and the Filipino public about the pressing population and development issues that confront our country.

Thank you very much. We hope to hear from you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Virgilio F. Lacaba".

VIRGILIO F. LACABA
Editor-in-Chief
PopDev Media Service



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The Cost of Sending a Child to School

By Laya Hasmin Diaz

Arvee is a grade four student at a public school in Metro Manila. Since public elementary education is fully subsidized by government, Arvee's father Noni Sebastian need not worry about her tuition fees. Without having to pay for Arvee's education, the family should be able to save enough to have a comfortable life. But this wasn't always the case.

Three years ago, five of Noni's six children were still in school, one in college, three in high school and Arvee in first grade. High school tuition was still relatively small at P500 a month, but the college tuition of Noni's eldest daughter cost a painful P13,000 per semester. Apart from these, there were the textbooks, school supplies, uniforms, and the children's daily allowances to think of.

If you do the math, you will wonder how Noni, a street sweeper who earns barely a few pesos above minimum wage, managed to keep all his children enrolled. For the typical poor family, the solution would be for one or more children to drop out of school.

But Noni, himself having reached only first year high school, knew the consequences of the lack of education, and had vowed to do whatever he could to give his all children at least a high school diploma. He now recognizes that had his family been smaller, this would not have been difficult to achieve. "*Baka nga maging mga professional pa silang lahat,*" he says.

Aside from his regular job, Noni had to look for other sources of income to keep his children in school. He worked as a part-time family driver, messenger and all-around helper. He even taught himself how to repair appliances and weld iron to generate more earnings. His wife

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Violy also earns a modest amount doing laundry and other household chores, but even their combined income is not sufficient to cover all expenses. Often they had to borrow money just to pay the children's tuition fees on time.

The children's education clearly a priority, Noni had to put off his other goals for his family, like owning a house, until after his children graduate. With all the extra jobs he had taken, he hardly had time to rest. Fortunately for Noni, his perseverance and hard work paid off and all but one of his children have already finished high school, and one of them even went on to get a college degree.

While Noni's determination to give his children proper schooling may serve as a good example to others, reality shows that Noni's situation does not represent the average indigent family. When money is scarce and parents have to choose whether to continue sending their children to school or provide them with decent food to eat, the typical and practical choice is the food, and the children's education becomes secondary. In many cases, children even have to drop out of school to work and add to the family income.

This reality is emphasized in the survey data released last year by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). Elementary and secondary school enrolments have increased significantly, but students have consistently shown poor performance in standardized tests, reflecting poor quality of education. Furthermore, survival rate is low -- only 67 percent of elementary school students finish grade school, and only 75 percent of secondary school students finish high school.

In a paper on population and basic education, Dr. Alejandro N. Herrin, a professor of the University of the Philippines School of Economics, traced these problems to the country's slow economic growth, the inefficient allocation of resources within the education sector, and the rapid growth of population particularly of school-age children.

Data from the 1998 Philippines Education Sector Study jointly conducted by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank show that combined public and private education spending has increased from 4.9 percent of the gross national product (GNP) in 1986 to 6.9 percent in 1997, which is at par with what other countries spend. The difference is that in Singapore, South Korea and Thailand, the population of school-age children has decreased as their population growth slowed down. Thus their governments were able to provide more resources for each child, resulting in better educational performance by the students.

In his paper, Herrin noted that with the current growth rate of school-age population, the allocation of resources in the education sector needs to be improved. One very important solution, he stressed, is to slow down the country's rate of population growth. If there were a smaller population of school-age children in the country, increased allocations for basic education "can be spent for further increasing participation rates, survival rates, and learning achievements."

The significance of slowing down population growth to improve education was emphasized by a former Secretary of Education, who once wrote:

"The most fundamental problem of the education system is that the rate of annual population growth is still at 2.3 percent... The net effect has been a strain on classrooms, teachers, textbooks, and science equipment, which call for more resources than the present 17 percent of the budget of P81.7 billion."

All parents dream of giving their children a proper education but many simply cannot afford to make their dream a reality. Unless government and the public work together to change the current situation, these dreams will remain dreams for the majority. — *PopDev Media*

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Most Filipino parents want to give their children a good education and make big sacrifices to give reality to this dream. But extreme poverty has forced many children to drop out of school. Data show that total government and private spending for education has increased, but not enough resources are put to every student because of the fast increasing population of school-age children. As a result, the quality of education is low and a large percentage of school enrollees do not get to finish elementary or high school. — **PopDev Media Service**

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Rice: Can We Ever Have Enough?

By Wilma V. Lacaba

Here's disturbing, if hardly surprising, news: Filipinos are reproducing faster than they are producing rice, the staple food.

In the last decade, the population grew at a yearly average of over 2.3 percent while rice production grew by an average of only 1.9 percent.

“Stagnant growth in rice production, combined with rapid growth of population, explains why the country has lost its self-sufficiency in rice,” said V. Bruce Tolentino, Ph. D., former undersecretary for policy and planning at the Department of Agriculture and now a consultant and economic policy adviser at the office of the prime minister in Cambodia.

Philippine agriculture, notably the rice sector, has lagged behind most Asian nations for at least the past 20 years. Since the mid-70s, the country has gone from being marginally self-sufficient to become a regular importer of rice, and in increasing quantities. For the period 2000-2001 alone, rice imports jumped to over 8 percent of total requirements from less than 2 percent in the 1980s.

Worse, Filipinos pay more for the rice they buy despite the low, stable trend in the price of the commodity in the world market.

“Over the 1990s, domestic consumer prices have been two to three times those of Vietnam and Thailand and also more volatile,” Tolentino said in a recent forum on population and food security organized by the Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD).

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Since rice takes up a hefty slice of a household's food budget in the Philippines-- and as much as two-thirds of the expenditures of the poorest fifth of the population go to food -- expensive rice translates to high living costs. An increase in the price of rice also exerts upward pressure on wages and other key economic indicators.

The problems go beyond the economic. Because rice is costly and its supply inadequate, Filipinos consume less of it compared to their other Asian counterparts. Consider: A Filipino eats 95 kilos of rice a year while a Vietnamese takes in 165 kilos. This explains the worsening problem of malnutrition in the population (especially among the young) which source over one-third of its caloric requirements from rice.

"Current rice sector policy in the Philippines is dominated by pervasive rice price interventions... coupled with weak implementation of rice production-enhancing programs," explained Tolentino, who also sits as agriculture team leader in the Presidential Committee on Effective Governance.

According to him, the dismal performance of the National Food Authority (NFA) over the past several decades only serves to show that the *status quo* -- with its tight restriction on rice imports and costly, but ineffective, subsidies -- is no longer tenable.

To achieve sustainable food security, Tolentino suggested this alternative: The implementation, over the long term, of a full-scale program of public investments and support in rice productivity (to include irrigation, transport infrastructure, research and development). This can be financed in the short term, he said, by adopting a pragmatic trade policy that would generate tariff revenues from rice imports as well as savings from discontinued NFA subsidies.

And, "to ensure that the gains from improved productivity translate into improved welfare for the population, efforts toward increased productivity must be complemented by a sustained program that would give individuals and couples choices about childbirth and family

size," Tolentino concludes. This would lead to population growth moderation that should help the country feed its people adequately. — ***PopDev Media Service***

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The Philippines has lagged behind most Asian countries in rice production and has not been self-sufficient in rice since the mid-70s. Agriculture team leader in the Presidential Committee on Effective Governance and former undersecretary of agriculture V. Bruce Tolentino suggests a full-scale program of public investments and support in rice productivity and population growth moderation as solutions. — ***PopDev Media Service***

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Business Leaders Step in on the Population Issue

By Albert Avenir

The country's development is being held hostage by rapid population growth. This singular perception has prompted top leaders in the Philippine business community to get involved in finding solutions to the population problem.

Heads of some of the biggest business organizations in the country are getting to be more and more concerned about the country's population situation. They know that population growth is affecting the country's economic performance, and that it is closely related with poverty incidence.

Organizations like the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) and the Philippine Exporters' Confederation (PhilExport) are looking into ways by which they can participate more actively in population management efforts.

The announcement by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that it is phasing down its contraceptive assistance to the Philippines within the next few years has lent even greater urgency to the business sector's decision to get involved. The USAID has been supplying the contraceptive requirements of the Philippine family planning program for the past 30 years.

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Now in a plan for contraceptive self-reliance jointly arrived at with the Department of Health (DOH), USAID will increasingly reduce its contraceptive supply starting this year up to 2007. This limited supply will be provided only to the poor family planning users served by public health facilities and who cannot afford to buy their own contraceptives. The program is now counting on the private sector to take care of the contraceptive requirements of the rest of the population.

Donald Dee, president of ECOP, says the organization intends to use its facilities and networks to reach out to more people and mobilize the private sector for population initiatives.

Philippines, Inc. president Miguel Varela says his group has already invited some government officials and senators to orient them on the problem and awaken the private sector for possible areas of collaboration. Among them was Senator Viravaidya Mechai of Thailand, who visited the country recently.

"The national chambers of commerce and industry and even their local chapters have the capability to help the population program," says Sergio Ortiz-Luis, Jr., president of PCCI and PhilExport, "but we need to build a consensus within the private sector."

"Networking is very important," says Dee. He believes there should be a tie-up of population initiatives, not only among business groups and with USAID and the government, but also with other international organizations like the Asian Development Bank (ADB). He also suggests a forum between business and civil society groups, as well as between company management and labor unions.

How to entice the other key players in the private sector into the population program is the main concern of Vicente Lim, PCCI member and a director of the

Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD). One way, he says, is to show them how the program can help improve productivity and increase company earnings.

Clearly, education, communication and advocacy are needed, both within the business community and with the population at large. The business leaders are thinking of putting up family planning education programs within the industries, advocating with company owners and educating them on the effects of high fertility on business performance, conducting a mass media campaign with entertainment celebrities endorsing family planning, and getting big commercial establishments to put out advertisements supporting population management.

The business leaders agree in promoting a business environment conducive to family planning and population management -- an environment where family planning education and discussion can freely take place, and where individuals and couples can exercise their options and have access to the means to achieve their plans, for their family, their company, and their own personal development. — *PopDev Media Service*

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Joey Ayala: Being Unnatural to Preserve Nature

By Cynthia Alberto Diaz

"Sometimes we have to adopt unnatural discipline in order to save nature." This statement, ironic as it may sound, is actually very true and logical. Ask Joey Ayala, artist, composer, environmentalist.

"Humans are consuming more than they are producing for the environment," Joey observes. By producing for the environment, he means contributing to the environment's resuscitative or recuperative capacity. He uses the example of the earthworm to illustrate. "The earthworm, while it eats, produces waste that fertilizes the environment. But we humans, we consume the resources of the environment but our wastes do not help resuscitate the environment; on the contrary, our wastes even do damage to the environment."

"And for as long as we are more of a consuming species than a producing one, we have to control the growth of our numbers," he points out. Without giving any technical explanation, Joey was of course alluding to the degree of environmental exploitation that is happening now in the world, and what the growth of the human population has to do with it.

In the Philippines, the rapid growth of the population has been directly associated with the exploitation and destruction of the country's major ecosystems and critical resources. Among the serious problems that impair the country's capacity for sustainable development are

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deforestation, agricultural land conversion, soil erosion, solid waste accumulation, and water pollution.

Forests are being destroyed much faster than they are getting replanted. In 1998, forest destruction hit a total area of more than 52,000 hectares. Similarly, vast areas of agricultural land are being converted every year for residential, industrial and other economic uses due to increasing population and industrialization. Improper land use and cultivation practices, extensive deforestation and excessive use of chemicals have eroded our soils. More than 22 million hectares of land are now classified as eroded. Meanwhile, large volumes of domestic, industrial and agricultural wastes brought about by increasing population and intensified economic activities are polluting our waters and threatening marine life.

Sometimes without being aware of it, "we are participating in the extinction of a number of plant and animal species without even having discovered their role in the overall health of the earth. But that is the natural thing for us to do because we have not yet understood what the disappearance of a butterfly or an insect would do in the long run," Joey explains. "That is why I said we have to develop an unnatural sensitivity to these things, evolve an unnatural discipline, to save nature."

"The dichotomy between natural and unnatural actually has a lot of gray areas. For example, throwing stuff on the ground, say a banana peeling, may be the most natural thing to do if you live in the wilderness because anyway, it will decompose or the animals will eat it. But if you live in the city, you don't want to be throwing banana peelings on the ground because they will not rot on the cemented pavement." So you have to adopt an unnatural behavior, which is throwing the peeling in a garbage can.

"We have to accept that sometimes, what is not natural is preferable because we are no longer in a natural environment. And sometimes, what is unnatural can be looked at as a natural extension of human ingenuity and ways of adjusting to an unnatural environment," Joey explains.

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"That is the case with contraception. It is an extension of human ingenuity and in that sense can be regarded as natural."

"All living things have that drive to propagate and the urge to have sex." But since our environment is no longer all natural (which means also the availability of advanced food production, industrial and medical technologies), this natural urge if allowed complete freedom, can lead to population increases beyond what is logical or in balance with available resources.

"Management is actually the key," declares Joey. This includes both managing the sex urge, and managing population and managing environment. At the macro level, it is often necessary to apply deliberate ways to manage the population and the environment so that society can evolve in balance with nature.

"The important thing is to find out and decide what is appropriate for our particular context. Rhythm or what you call natural family planning, for example. It may work for some people. But if you have tried it and it did not succeed for you, then try another method that is suitable for you."

"It is easy to say what is right and what is wrong, but what works for some people may not work for others. Overall, it is actually better for the evolution of responsible conscious beings for people to heed their own personal authorities, listen to themselves, assess their own experiences, accept their limitations and push their potentials to the limit."

Population, environment, human sexual behavior and contraception all converge, in Joey's view. To recap what he has said, uncontrolled growth of the population can lead to excessive extraction of environmental resources which can threaten certain life forms. Sex is necessary both for the preservation of the species and the environment, as well as of mental health, according to Joey, but control is also needed in order to temper the possibly unfavorable outcomes of a natural behavior in an unnatural environment. — *PopDev Media Service*

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Of Love and Early Marriage

By Louie-An Pilapil

“We’re getting married!” This announcement is every parent’s nightmare, especially if the ones making it are barely out of their teens.

We all know the feeling; the palpitations, the euphoria and the high all come with being in love. Youth has a way of making us brazen and leads us to doing things that would affect the way our lives would turn out. During the time of our grandparents, marrying early was common. Boy meets girl, boy and girl fall for each other and without much thought, plunge into marriage headfirst. That was what everybody did, anyway. Life was much simpler then and boy and girl, with their growing family, end up happily eating the bamboo shoots and kamote tops from their backyard. All was well and good. Or was it?

In the modern world, boy will meet girl, take her out to a movie or to the mall, go through a much more complicated courtship stage that involves mixed messages and unspoken rules. But adolescents are also becoming more aware of the consequences of carelessness and lack of common sense when it comes to relationships. They are aware that marrying early will clip their wings and prevent them from achieving their full potential.

Compared to older generations, today's Filipino youth are more likely to marry later in life, according to studies gathered by the University of the Philippines Center for Women's Studies (UCWS). However the Young Adult Fertility Surveys (YAFS) conducted by the

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University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) in 1982 and 1994 showed that the prevalence of adolescent pregnancy was higher in 1994.

Studies also revealed that as generations become younger, they are becoming less traditional in their views on issues regarding sexuality like homosexuality, premarital sex, virginity, single parenthood, marriage and cohabitation. Despite the permissiveness of modern society, however, more young people these days do not approve of premarital sex.

It appears that, if today's young Filipinos could have their way, and if they had the choice and the means, would actually want to marry late. Take the opinion of those who are young enough to remember their adolescent days and old enough to lecture the young ones who might still be trapped in the long-forgotten era of the *kundiman* and profess their youthful, undying love under the mango tree before heading for church.

So, what would young people be missing out on if they marry early?

“They would be missing out on the satisfaction of having a job and earning their own money since it is a fact that once a barely-out-of-their-teens couple start having a family, career and study plans fly out of the window,” says Hazel Villa, a 28-year-old journalist and high school teacher. “They would also be missing out on the joys of ‘growing up’ unencumbered.”

It seems many young Filipinos share her view. Other studies gathered by the UCWS reveal that adolescents consider having a job and being financially stable a prerequisite for marriage. Many young men and women want to be able to stand on their own two feet before they marry. They also value education and respect their elders, two major hindrances to early marriage.

“If I were married early, I wouldn't be doing what I am doing now — working overseas, meeting new and exciting people, discovering different cultures, savoring my global citizenship,” says Diane Jorolan, 26, an editor for a financial publication in Singapore.

When is the best time to get married, then?

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“I think what's more important is the intellectual and emotional age of a person. Meaning, his/her level of maturity and his/her ability to cope with the idea that his/her life will be moving in sync with someone else's for the most part of his/her life,” Jorolan says.

What do we need to have to know that we're ready?

Karla Mallari, a 22-year-old college student, has this list of necessities: “Commitment, shared interests, unselfishness, physical attraction, communication; they should have fun, surprises, understanding, forgiveness, faith, respect and, of course, they have to love each other!”

You can't have that after getting or giving a few lollipops and roses. — ***PopDev Media Service***

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Population and Poverty: Not the Weakest Link

By Miguel Licsi

The Philippines has the worst poverty incidence in Southeast Asia, and the rapid growth of its population is not helping at all to improve the situation.

In 2000, two out of five people (39.5%) in the Philippines were poor. Indonesia's poor was only one out of four (23.4%); Thailand one out of eight (12.9%); and Malaysia one out of 12 (8.1%). Singapore, not surprisingly, had no poverty incidence.

The higher population growth rate of the Philippines, 2.36 percent in 2000, can be blamed — at least in part — for the high poverty incidence in 2000. The population growth rate of Thailand is 1.05 percent; Indonesia, 1.49 percent; Malaysia, 2.6 percent; and Singapore, 2.8 percent.

According to Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Dante B. Canlas, the fast population growth in the Philippines erodes growth achieved by the economy. Naturally, the more Filipinos there are to share the fruits of economic development, the less there will be for every Filipino.

Compared to neighboring countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, the Philippines had the second lowest GDP per capita of US\$979.21, only besting Indonesia's US\$728. Thailand had twice more income per person than the Philippines, while Malaysia had almost four times as much. Singapore, by far the richest in the group, had a GDP per capita of more than US\$23, 000. The fact that Indonesia had the highest population of more than 206

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million and Singapore the lowest of only four million contributed to their very low and very high GDP per capita, respectively.

For the GDP per capita to increase, the growth in output must be higher than the population growth rate, or it will not be enough to catch up with the rate the population is growing. There will be less pie for everyone if the increase in its size is less than the increase in the number of people sharing it.

Aside from the obvious effect of having a low per capita income, a high population puts pressure on domestic savings. Philippine households have a high age-dependency ratio, the proportion of persons under 15 years and over 65 years who are economically dependent on working members. There are roughly 2.6 dependents for every working member. Given this, personal spending on basic goods and services—milk, rice, clothes, rent, medicine, utilities--absorbs much of household income, leaving very little savings.

Savings are necessary to finance investments to further increase productive capacity. A family that is able to save enough to start a small business has a chance to increase its earnings. If domestic savings are low, the economy's capacity to produce more goods and services cannot expand substantially. Although investments that cannot be financed by domestic savings can tap foreign savings, this can only be done up to a certain point, not indefinitely. Excessive foreign borrowings lead to huge interest payments that could trigger all sorts of repercussions, including the depreciation of the peso and a shortage of dollars or foreign exchange. In the same way, a family that resorts always to borrowing to pay for its expenses will eventually find itself unable to even pay the interest on its debts.

A big population also requires a lot of basic services from government, including health, education, and even socialized housing. With around 40 percent of our population heavily dependent on government for direct assistance, the pressure on our national budget becomes more pronounced.

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The situation becomes even more dramatic from the household level. Latest data from the National Statistics Office show that the lowest 40 percent of families only had less than 12 percent share of total income. This roughly translates to P12, 500 per household member per year or P34 a day. This amount is pitifully low for a decent existence. Naturally, some basic needs have to be sacrificed to give priority to food, the most pressing survival need. Education, which normally gives a poor person a fighting chance to escape poverty, is usually the first victim. Shelter, medicine, clothing and other needs follow.

And so the downward spiral continues. Those who are poor to begin with have a tendency to remain poor and get even poorer, from generation to generation.

To break this trend, the government must work further in managing the country's population. The most promising starting point is to bring down actual total fertility rate (TFR) of about 4 children per woman to only 2 or 3, which is actually what Filipino women want based on the 1998 National Demographic Health Survey. — *PopDev Media Service*