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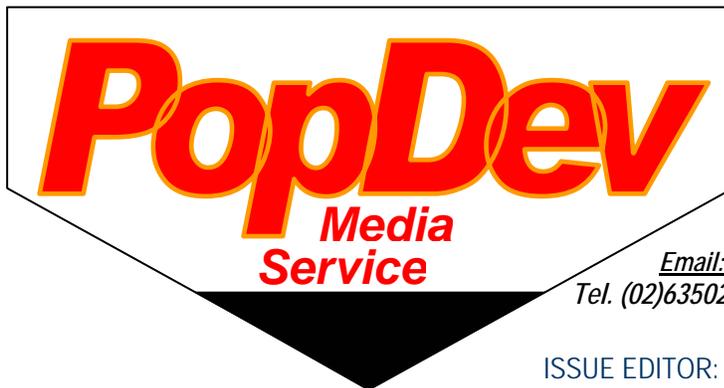
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ISSUE EDITOR: Raymond Lim Toledo

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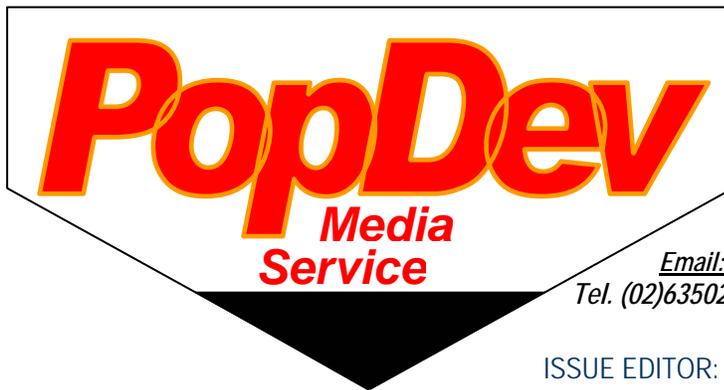
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*Once parents realize their responsibility to their children, family planning will logically follow, says the head of the congressional planning and budget office of the House of Representatives.*

## **Children are not parents’ tickets out of poverty**

**By Raymond Lim Toledo**  
*PopDev Media Service*

“For many poor families, the prevailing paradigm is that children are tickets out of poverty. The more children you have, the more potential OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) you have who can remit dollars back to the family, by working as domestic helpers or laborers in other countries.”

That, according to Director-General Rodolfo “RV” C. Vicerra of the Congressional Planning and Budget Department (CPBD), is the way most Filipinos perceive children, and it is a perception that needs to be changed for the country's family planning program to fare better.

“Given this mindset,” says Vicerra, “even if government makes all contraceptives easily available, poor couples will still prefer to have large families, in the hope that more children will mean greater chances of bringing the family out of poverty.”

“Thus, the thing to do is to change this paradigm. Make couples understand and support the concept of responsible parenthood, and help them realize that they should bear only the number of children they can fully support. Once you have this paradigm shift, then family planning will become a logical and natural consequence.”

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As the new CPBD head, Vicerra has big shoes to fill: No less than Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri headed CPBD before being appointed to the top post at the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

CPBD is the policy think tank of the House of Representatives of the Philippine Congress. It drafts the proposed overall legislative agenda for the House, especially relative to economic policy. At the time of the interview, CPBD was in the thick of preparations for the proposed legislative agenda for the new batch of legislators who won in the May 2004 elections.

The main question: Considering CPBD's influential and crucial role in the legislative process, what population policy will it recommend to the new Congress?

Vicerra's response: "First, we acknowledge that the nation's overly rapid population growth rate is a major hindrance to economic development."

He adds that, in his personal opinion, government should not focus too much on the debate regarding artificial versus natural family planning. "We should focus on the more basic task of creating a paradigm shift."

Vicerra notes that the deeply entrenched misconception of many Filipino couples that children have an obligation to support their parents is at the root of the selfish view that having more children will serve as greater insurance for the parents against poverty in old age.

When parents realize that it is their duty as parents to support their children to become productive adults and professionals, and that such parental support does not require "repayment" from the child, then they will realize that it is their responsibility not to have more children than they can fully support.

But for as long as children are viewed as a source of cheap labor (since unpaid) for farming couples, and as potential dollar-earners who will send money to their parents, then couples will do their best to have as many children as they can produce.

Thus, according to DG Vicerra, CPBD will push for the allocation by Congress of more budget and resources for a very strong population education and advocacy campaign that will pave the way for a paradigm shift, from irresponsible to responsible parenthood.

Vicerra concludes: "Once we attain this paradigm shift, the demand for family planning will definitely increase, and we will no longer need to debate on artificial versus natural family planning. Couples will make their own choices, depending on their beliefs and preferences. The important thing is that they will all be supportive of responsible parenthood, of seeing to it that they will not have more children than they can fully support." — *PopDev Media Service*

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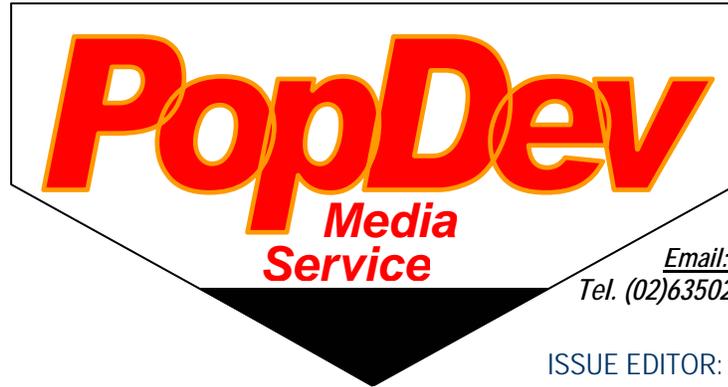
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*Local government officials need a great deal of capacity building in urban planning and management.*

## **Managing cities takes skill and political will**

**By Andrea Valdehueva**  
*PopDev Media Service*

Like giant magnets, urban centers continue to lure “provincianos” in search of better luck and a prosperous future. Multitudes of rural folks have come to the cities to pursue university studies, find jobs, set up a business, and so on. Some succeed, but a good number end up in squatter colonies.

People have their own reasons for migrating. That they add to the burgeoning urban population is of no concern to them. But from the perspective of certain sectors, such human concentration in the cities is seen in different ways.

Says Prof. Ernesto Serote, director for training of the University of the Philippines School of Urban and Regional Planning (UP-SURP): “Private business generally regards a large population as a big consumer market. Politicians like to exploit the potential power of big numbers. But to the local government, which is principally responsible for urban planning and management, a large and fast growing population represents a heavy strain on the local government unit’s resources and capacities to provide services and facilities that its constituents need.”

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As a consequence, he adds, a “fast-growing population increases the degree of uncertainty that in turn renders urban planning and management less effective.”

Another consideration, says Serote is the so-called “supply side” and “demand side” management of urban development challenges. “A fast-growing population represents a growing demand for urban services, jobs, housing and other services. When demand is not met adequately, then problems like traffic congestion, unemployment, sidewalk vending, squatting occur.”

“No solution, however, is adequate if it comes from the supply side alone,” Serote explains. “Solutions to urban problems come from managing or limiting the demand for urban services. A successful demand management is that of the new towns of the United Kingdom (U.K.). First, they restrained the growth of big cities by prohibiting the further location therein of manufacturing and office development and declaring green belts around the big cities. Then, they directed urban growth to planned new towns and to old small towns which they helped to expand to be able to accommodate more urban development.”

It appears that local government officials need a great deal of capacity building in the area of urban planning and management.

Serote continues: “By and large, cities and municipalities in the Philippines have not been able to manage their territories and constituencies properly, irrespective of their population growth.

“Urban planning is largely done by consultants who have no stake in the area they are planning. Planners in the LGUs lack the technical capability to analyze their area and to develop relevant and responsive solutions. Local politicians are either too busy with their own individual or family business or else they lack the political will to manage their territories.

“As a result, development is led and controlled by private property owners and business enterprises that have no mandate to promote and protect the public interest and the general welfare.

“In the face of government innocuousness and the callousness of private business, ordinary citizens are forced to fend for themselves even to the extent of engaging in illegal acts like sidewalk vending and squatting. The urban problems related to the population pressure are only symptoms of a deeper malaise, which is the inability of LGUs to manage their territories. LGU management capabilities are not related to population pressures.”

Serote is talking about the general situation. Of course, there must be a number of LGUs that have proved adept at urban planning and management. The ideal is to have top quality

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governance in place, whether the demands of the situation call for planning and managing a fast population growth scenario or provide one with the luxury of time to deal with a less densely populated city.

Local governments will do well to deepen their understanding of the interrelationships of physical factors, demographic processes and socioeconomic processes. Such knowledge—combined with fairness, transparency and accountability— will be a perfect formula for good governance. — *PopDev Media Service*

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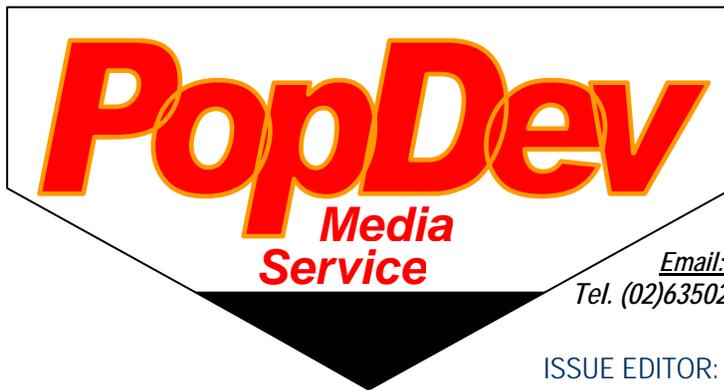
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*The Philippines continues to have a large share of young dependents relative to workers.*

## **RP suffering from demographic onus**

**By Francis Bacaron**  
*PopDev Media Service*

The Philippines is now virtually alone among the middle-income developing countries in terms of achieving any significant demographic transition. If our Asian neighbors, including less developed countries like Bangladesh and India, are benefiting from demographic bonus, we continue to suffer from demographic onus.

Dr. Ernesto Pernia of the University of the Philippines School of Economics defines demographic bonus as the sharp increases in the share of workers (population aged 15-64) relative to young dependents (ages 0-14), and demographic onus as the continuing large share of young dependents relative to workers.

The single most important challenge for the Philippines has been and continues to be high poverty incidence. Meeting this challenge has been a tall order, given the low and erratic growth rates of the economy for the past two to three decades. In the other East and Southeast Asian economies, sharp reductions in poverty have occurred as a consequence of rapid and sustained growth, which may be attributed to sound economic policies coupled with strong population policy.

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Because births (fertility) remain high when deaths (mortality) have declined, the Philippines' population growth rate is higher than many of its neighbors. What is disturbing, says Pernia, is that the continued high fertility rates will also mean long years of high youth-dependency burden. This situation will rob the Philippines of the chance to cash in on the demographic bonus that allows other East Asian countries to increase their savings rates, and physical and human capital investments to spur their economic growth.

The Philippines' average per capita income and labor productivity (average output per worker) today are at the same levels as in the early 1980s. Pernia reasons out that population indeed plays a role, especially on whether the Philippines will remain in a low-level equilibrium trap, a vicious cycle characterized by low rates of economic growth, high rates of population growth and poverty, and low levels of savings and investment.

Technically, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, which has increased in a rather insignificant growth of 1.5 percent, could not sustain and meet the demands of the population growth, which registers at 2.36 percent.

Pernia likens the GDP growth to a pie, from which every citizen should have a better and bigger share to experience an improved state of living, but can't because of the ever-growing millions of people to share it with. It is worth noting that changing age structure towards increased working age population and less youth dependents was one of the explanations for the rapid economic growth in East Asia in the past two decades.

Pernia adds that the growth in per capita income is also affected by physical and human capital investments.

A fast-growing population means big increases in overall human capital expenditures (aggregate expenditures on education and health). Translated to individual benefits, however, these increases hardly count and, in fact, could even imply negative impact on education and health outputs. Improvements in the lives of the Filipino people, if any, are inconsequential.

Clearly, the challenge facing the Philippines now is how to change demographic onus to demographic bonus. A careful and honest review of where we have gone wrong—and where our more progressive ASEAN neighbors have gone right in this regard, may be the key to the puzzle.— *PopDev Media Service*

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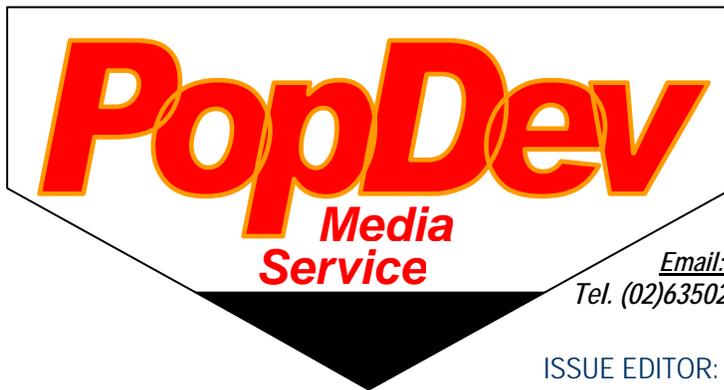
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*Business, labor, media, government, religious sectors join efforts to help solve the population problem.*

## **84 million Filipinos: A cause for unity**

**By Haydee Parras**  
*PopDev Media Service*

Eighty-four million today. In less than 30 years, over 169 million. Even now, two out of five Filipinos are poor. One million children drop out of elementary school every year while half a million drop out of high school, mostly due to poverty.

Various sectors have expressed concern over the state of the Philippine population.

For the newly elected senators, the issue transcends political parties. Senators Lito Lapid, Alfredo Lim, Jamby Madrigal, Aquilino Pimentel and Jinggoy Estrada share the view that population should be managed by government now because of its alarming growth rate, one of the highest in the world. Tyro senators Mar Roxas, Ramon Revilla, Jr. and Pia Cayetano along with reelectionist Miriam Defensor Santiago support the implementation of a family planning program.

The Makati Business Club (MBC), one of the most influential business groups in the country, sees the large and fast-growing population as a detriment to the country's fragile economy. MBC is strongly urging the government to implement a stronger population program supported by such measures as education and information campaigns, and the granting of tax incentives to limit the number of children to two.

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Former Senate President Jovito Salonga, head of Kilosbayan—a non-profit, non-partisan organization that encourages people’s participation in matters of public policy—has said, “Overpopulation implies not only massive poverty but also more corruption and criminality.” He is urging the government to implement a real population policy that is not influenced by the Catholic Church.

The American Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Philippines (AmCham), the biggest foreign trade group in the country, shares Mr. Salonga’s views and is urging the private sector to spearhead the move to rein in the country’s rampaging population growth.

The need to reduce poverty and ensure economic survival, recovery and growth by promoting an effective population program is one of the priority measures listed in the Reform Agenda of the *Bangon Pilipino Movement* (BPM), a multisectoral initiative of various religious groups, labor organizations, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), the Bishop-Businessmen Conference (BBC), the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCCI), the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas (KBP), and various transport groups like the Integrated Metro Bus Operators and the Pasang Masda.

Others have come up with their own efforts to help solve the problem.

Washington Sycip, one of the Philippines’ top business leaders, aptly stated it when he said: “Business and government must pool their resources and work as partners on a population program which will balance economic and population growth. Considering the resources required, government cannot do it alone; nor can business.”

The Employers’ Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) is now using its facilities and networks to reach out to more people and mobilize the private sector for population initiatives.

Meanwhile, some 46 manufacturing companies in the Philippines through their association, the Responsible Parenthood-Maternal and Child Health (RPMCHAPI), are already implementing their own family planning program in their respective workplaces.

BPM member El Shaddai is pushing for responsible parenthood and natural family planning among its members while the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, another member, will be working for the provision of family planning services in their collective bargaining agreements with various companies.

Hope is not lost for the Philippine population. Various sectors of the country, particularly the business sector and numerous nongovernment organizations, together with concerned government institutions, are all coming into the picture and are participating actively to advance the country’s population program. — *PopDev Media Service*

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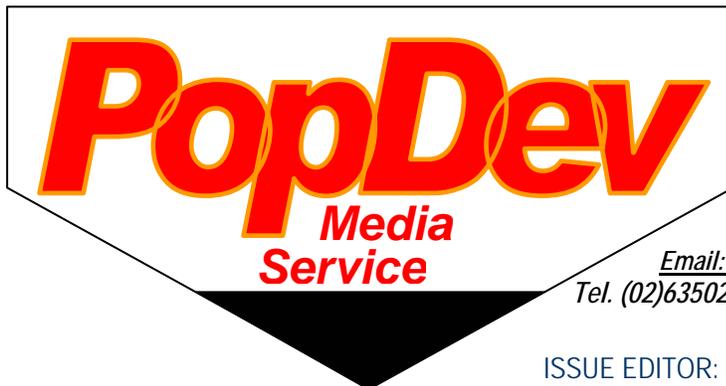
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*Urban pollution is doing serious harm to people's health.*

## **Purple haze is not just a song**

**By Antonio Ortiz**

***PopDev Media Service***

In the 1960s, American rock icon Jimi Hendrix wailed along with his electric guitar:  
*"Purple haze, all around....Don't know if I'm up or down....Purple haze is in my  
brain....Everythin' don't seem the same!"*

Hendrix was singing of a hallucinogenic experience. A few years later, he did die of drug overdose.

Fast-forward to 2004, Metro Manila, Philippines. The drug scene's still around, still producing people who cannot tell where's up and where's down, whether it is yesterday, today, tomorrow or just the end of time. But there is also this grayish black haze over the city that is very alarming. That's the haze or smog brought about by air pollution. Gray haze. Purple eyes. Hazy lungs. Stunted brains. Soot in the nostrils, to say the least.

The Philippines' major cities are natural magnets for in-migration. Higher population density translates to higher human activity per square kilometer. The daily productive work of millions of human beings results in economic output and benefits but it also has adverse

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cumulative effects on the urban environment. Noxious vapors from factories, fossil fuel-powered vehicles and cigarette smokers gradually poison the air that people breathe.

As early as 1990-1991, a study conducted by University of the Philippines College of Public Health, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), found that jeepney drivers were the most susceptible to chronic respiratory diseases.

A follow-up study in 1994 found that the pulmonary functions of school children in Metro Manila were more compromised than those of children in rural areas.

More recently, environmental health consultants Professor Elma Torres and Dr. Ronald Subida completed a study for the Department of Health in February 2004. The Asian Development Bank-assisted study focused on public health monitoring for the Metro Manila Air Improvement Project. The study, says engineer Rene Timbang, aimed to identify low, medium and high-risk areas for exposure to air pollution, and to assess the effects of air pollution in selected localities. Timbang is the supervising health program officer of the Department of Health's Environmental Impact Office.

Here are some of the 2004 study's major findings:

- Particulate matter or suspended impurities in the air is of serious concern in Metro Manila.
- Motor vehicle transportation is the major source of particulate pollution.
- A reduction of 10 micrograms per cubic meter of particulate matter in Metro Manila will produce a corresponding reduction in respiratory ailments and respiratory-related deaths.
- While lead has been banned from gasoline, 14.5 percent of the children monitored were found to be above the WHO standard for tolerable level of blood lead.
- In households where there is at least one household member who smokes, 60 percent have smokers who smoke inside the house, thus contributing to indoor particulate pollution.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)—through the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) - Air Quality Management Section, together with other organizations—is implementing strategies to reduce air pollution. The strategies include policy reforms and investment requirements integrated within the Air Quality Action Plan.

The programs consist of various components, namely, motor vehicle inspection system, an industrial air emissions pollution abatement program, production of clean fuels, introduction of anti-pollution devices, a traffic management and road rehabilitation program, ambient air quality

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monitoring, raising public awareness, capacity building, and institutional development, according to an EMB update.

It would be myopic to simply localize the subjects of population pressure, pollution, and public health. There has to be perspective. Arthur Lyon Dahl, in his book *Unless and Until* (1990), stated, “We are no longer merely consumers but polluters: our habits of a lifetime, our domestic, commercial and leisure activities must all now be evaluated in terms of their ecological safety. Whether we like it or not we are all collectively guilty of the crime of ‘ecocide’—the murder of the environment.”

The fast-growing human population of the country’s cities must overcome environmental neglect and predation. Filipinos cannot simply content themselves with marketing hyperbole about “environmental friendliness” of products and the expedient political posturing of parties that claim to have a ‘green’ agenda. They must be open to changes of a much more fundamental nature—changes that are bound to be painful, and bound to be resisted, but necessary for health and survival. — *PopDev Media Service*

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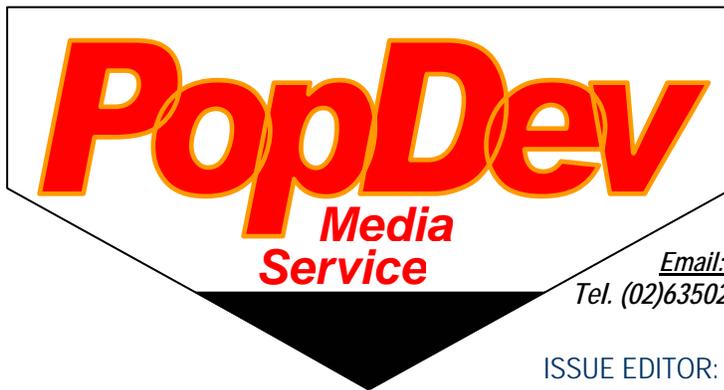
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*Student leaders are learning about the consequences of STIs, and teaching fellow youth how to prevent them.*

## **Sexually transmitted infections: The risks and costs to the youth**

**By Perla Aragon-Choudhury**  
*PopDev Media Service*

Painful sex. Sores in the scrotal area and in the palm of the hands. Highly infectious rashes, breaks and lesions. Painful wounds. An itchy pubic area. And infertility, ectopic pregnancy and other complications.

These are just some of the physical manifestations of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). But STIs also have social, economic and opportunity costs. And STIs can lead to life-threatening conditions, like HIV infection and AIDs.

At the training on peer counseling and education being conducted by the Foundation for Adolescent Development (FAD), college students are learning the facts and consequences of STIs, and how to prevent them.

FAD is training student leaders in partner schools to be peer counselors and SEXTERS, or Socially, Emotionally and Sexually Responsible Teeners. The partner schools include the Far Eastern University (FEU), Lyceum of the Philippines, Mapua Institute of Technology (MIT), Technological University of the Philippines (TUP), and Philippine Women's University (PWU).

Studies have shown that the number of sexually active Filipino youth is rising. This means that more and more youth are getting exposed to the dangers of STIs.

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STIs can cost a pretty penny, warned Dr. Ronald Quintana, training facilitator and consultant for the World Health Organization and PATH Foundation, during a FAD training at the FEU.

Clinics of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) usually charge P200-500 for STI tests, but private laboratories may ask for more. Medications for pus and infections may cost as much as P10,000 to P15,000.

“It’s good if your STI is curable and you have the money for it,” Quintana pointed out. “It is important to treat STIs early on so that we can prevent the successful entry of HIV into the bloodstream. As of now, HIV infection has neither cure nor vaccine but its transmission can be prevented by a number of ways. One of these is the early treatment of STIs. ”

An HIV-infected person can take the “cocktails”—a combination treatment that slows down the increase of the virus so that it does not become AIDS. The treatment is expensive but eventually, it cannot fight AIDS-related complications like pneumonia and tuberculosis, according to Quintana. And as persons living with AIDS battle these, they lose a number of economic and other opportunities. Most of the 1,866 HIV cases reported to the Department of Health from January 1984 to April 2003 are young—20-39 years old, the age group acknowledged as the productive years of life.

HIV and other STIs do have an economic cost that cannot but impact on development. They demand from government and the private sector resources that are already scarce.

The data from the HIV/AIDS registry of DOH may be just the tip of the iceberg, FAD executive director Cecille Villa pointed out. “Based on estimates, some 10,000-20,000 Filipinos may be already infected with HIV. She warned that the number of HIV infections is still going up, and not plateauing or decreasing. This is a trend-taking place in a country that seems to give little importance to protected sex.

FAD is therefore asking the youth to refrain from unprotected sex by adhering to the ABC of AIDS prevention popularized by Sen. Juan Flavio Velasco when he was still with DOH—A for Abstinence, B for Be Faithful, C for Correct Use of Condoms. Michelle Sanchez, project director of FAD’s Youth to Youth Campus-Based Program on Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health, adds D for Don’t Use Drugs! Sharing syringes and needles is one way of getting infected.” And Dr. Quintana adds E for Education and Awareness.

“HIV infection is incurable but both HIV and STIs can be avoided by avoiding unprotected sex. The best cure is still prevention,” Quintana explained.

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Indeed, preventive education makes sense in talking to teen-agers—the age group immediately preceding the 20-39 years age group most stricken with HIV infection. How can they become familiar with the issues of sexually transmitted infections and deal with sexual freedom? How do they avoid peer pressure to try ‘it’? What situations put them at risk?

In FAD's partner schools, there are SEXTERS Corners that offer focus group discussions and symposiums on boy-girl relationships, sexuality and parent-child relationships. There is also face-to-face peer counseling, a place for wholesome games (chess, scrabble), and educational materials on teen concerns.

Students with problems are referred to other FAD partner agencies dealing with violence against women and children, HIV/AIDS/STI, responsible parenthood, substance abuse, temporary shelter, educational assistance, legal assistance, and counseling.

SEXTERS in the partner schools help fellow youth learn correct information about sex through various ways, such as through enter-educate videos, discussions, stage presentations, and songs. — *PopDev Media Service*