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## **LEVELING WITH THE ELECTORATE**

### **Political camps tackle tough questions on population and family planning - 1**

Views gathered by V.F. Lacaba and C.A. Diaz  
*PopDev Media Service*

**“Managing population growth  
 is key to strategic planning”**

**ALYANSA NG PAG-ASA**  
**Standard Bearer: Raul S. Roco**  
**Running Mate: Hermie Aquino**

Contact Person:

**DR. JAIME Z. GALVEZ-TAN, M.D., M.P.H**  
 National Campaign Manager

- 1. What is the stand of the Alyansa ng Pag-asa on the issue of population? Do you believe that rapid population growth is a major development problem in this country? If yes, why? If no, why not?***

The population growth rate in any country is always a factor in socioeconomic planning. A spiraling (and therefore, increasingly young) population means that the national government and the local government units must provide social and health services for families with young children, expand educational services and provide an increasing number of opportunities as young people born in the 1980s start looking for jobs.

Therefore, any action to manage the Philippine population (through fertility, mortality, migration policy interventions) will actually ease the burden for the Philippine government in 2020.

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Managing the population growth rate is key to our strategic planning. Such planning must also be in accord with the desire of our people for smaller families, evidenced in the last two National Demographic and Health Surveys which echoed the desire of married women for 2 or 3 children in their reproductive years.

**2. Do you believe that population growth is connected to the following? If so, how?**

- ***The high incidence of poverty in the country***
- ***The lack of jobs***
- ***The quality of education, of our graduates, and of our workforce***
- ***The growth of business and the economic health of the country***

Population pressures on government services rob an individual of the opportunities to improved health and education services. Poverty drives individuals and families into crushing debt when ill health and lack of education shut them out of economic opportunities.

The employers' confederation (ECOP) has linked directly GDP growth with job creation and an ever-increasing number of Filipinos looking for jobs every year means that we cannot live with GDP growth rates below 5%. The consequence for poor economic growth will be a larger army of the unemployed poor.

Population pressures from our young population mean that our budget for education will remain the largest part of our national budget for the next twenty years. Education must also be at the cutting edge of development, taking advantage of opportunities in information technology (IT) and our global 24-hour community to expand opportunities for our young people. Boosting teacher training and morale should be high on the agenda of our educators.

As noted above, our people need leaders in business who will create wealth not primarily for themselves but for the people. Washington Sycip has always acknowledged that conscientization of the elite so that they can contribute to nation building is sorely lacking in this country.

**3. Do you think it is the business of government to act on the population problem, or should the government just let this problem take care of itself?**

The Constitution asks the State to look after the welfare of its citizens, with a bias for the underprivileged and marginalized poor Filipinos. It is these very Filipinos who are saying that they want smaller families. Government should therefore serve them and in so doing it also serves the requirements of planning for the socio-economic welfare of all Filipinos. Government should contribute to increasing social justice through its bias for the poor.

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The Roco administration will support covenants with the legislature to give priority to long-term funding for programs that increase social justice and welfare. This should include guaranteed funding for programs that optimize population management, including fertility intervention to help Filipino couples achieve their desired family sizes.

**4. *What will be the population policy, if any, of an Alyansa ng Pag-asa administration? Specifically, will your policy be supporting (or not), any or all of the following:***

- *A national population program run by the government advocating and implementing measures to reduce population growth?*
- *The government promoting and providing information and services on all legally accepted family planning methods, natural and artificial?*
- *The government allocating and/or managing funds for the procurement and provision of contraceptives to individuals who wish to practice family planning?*

The Roco administration will re-invigorate and expand the Philippine population management program in three areas: fertility, mortality/morbidity and migration. The Roco administration will also broaden private sector participation in the program, including the various degrees of participation by different religions. If government efforts in making information and services for family planning available for all Filipinos results in reduced population growth, our resources will go further in serving our people's needs.

The Philippine government under Roco will offer information and services for all methods of family planning that are legal and scientifically proven to be effective, whether natural or artificial. Under no circumstances will abortion or abortifacients be tolerated by the Roco administration in its family planning program. Abortionists will face the weight of the law and will be put out of business because all newborns will be desired by their parents.

The Roco administration will set aside the necessary funds to support a comprehensive family planning program that includes natural and artificial methods. Increasing participation by the private sector will be encouraged for the growing number of households who get health services from the private health sector. PhilHealth will start reimbursing family planning services and commodities.

**5. *If Alyansa ng Pag-asa presidential candidate Raul S. Roco wins, what is the first action he will take on the matter of population?***

First priority will be given to assuring contraceptive supplies are available for national, local government and private sector providers of family planning services. A policy on Contraceptive Self-Reliance will be on top of the agenda of the Population Commission.

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Second, a multi-sectoral summit on population and development will set the broad agreements for a reinvigorated population management program. This program will be submitted to Congress as part of the Roco Administration Medium Term Plan, ensuring Congressional support for the next five years of the administration.

**6. *What are the first two areas of priority in the Alyansa ng Pag-asa's agenda for development? How would you rank population management in your order of priorities?***

First priority will go to the fight against corruption, which will result in efficient governance.

Second priority will be improved frontline services for all Filipinos from the national and local governments.

The first priority will require the mobilization of the best and the brightest Filipinos for honest and corruption-free governance. The second priority will focus on efficient services for the people that will lead to more books, more health and population management services and commodities, more infrastructure for the most peripheral communities. A bias for the periphery and the poor will make the Roco government stand out among other governments of the past.

**7. *How will an Alyansa ng Pag-asa administration handle objections from the Catholic Church regarding the use of modern family planning methods other than natural family planning?***

The Pulse Asia survey itself shows that the people do not feel any pressure from their churches on family planning. At the level of the national government, any concerns coming from any sector will be listened to and discussed in the proper manner. While we may disagree on certain matters, we will focus on the areas that we agree and work together to make the agreements come to life in cooperative efforts.

**8. *What sectors, groups and organizations will an Alyansa ng Pag-asa administration be relying on in addressing the population issue?***

All sectors, groups and organizations will be welcomed in the national summit for population and development. The broadest agreement will be aimed for inclusion in the Medium Term Plan. Subsequent agreements will focus on other areas of population and development where people of different persuasions may cluster in agreement or agree not to participate or simply disagree and not participate in certain areas.

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## **LEVELING WITH THE ELECTORATE**

### **Political camps tackle tough questions on population and family planning - 2**

Views gathered by V.F. Lacaba, C.A. Diaz  
and Bernard Supetran (interviewer)  
*PopDev Media Service*

**“Government must stop denying  
the population problem exists”**

**BANGON PILIPINAS**  
**Standard Bearer: Bro. Eddie Villanueva**  
**Running Mate: None**

Face-to-face interview with  
**DR. CIELITO F. HABITO, Ph.D.**  
Economic Adviser

- 1. What is the stand of the Bangon Pilipinas on the issue of population? Do you believe that rapid population growth is a major development problem in this country? If yes, why? If no, why not?***

Yes. The stand of Bangon Pilipinas is that population is a major development problem in the country. We have to get away from the perennial treadmill of resources for social development and continuing growth of the population. We can barely catch up as we have very limited resources available for providing the social services our people need. Therefore, we have to face the problem of rapid population growth head on.

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Like other candidates who have spoken on the issue, we look at the population issue in a holistic manner. It's not just only population numbers but also migration, reproductive health, maternal and child health. All of these have to be addressed by a more holistic policy in population management.

We need to come up with very determined measures to achieve a proper balance among population, resources and our environment. In fact, this used to be the line I remember when I was still head of the NEDA in the Population Commission itself. The P-R-E framework was the battlecry and it looked at the whole question integratively and holistically. And this is now embraced by Bangon Pilipinas as the approach to managing our population.

**2. Do you believe that population growth is connected to the following? If so, how?**

- ***The high incidence of poverty in the country***
- ***The lack of jobs***
- ***The quality of education, of our graduates, and of our workforce***
- ***The growth of business and the economic health of the country***

Yes, definitely. There is economic poverty or lack of income or livelihood because of the lack of jobs, caused to a large extent by the rapid growth of our labor force. The growth of the labor force is much faster than our economy, ability to generate employment potentials.

However, I need to stress also that we in Bangon Pilipinas believe that we should go beyond economic poverty. Poverty is a six-dimensional concept that includes the social, environmental, political (in terms of political empowerment or the lack of it), cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Looking at those dimensions of poverty, population growth has something to do with it.

On the lack of jobs, we are open to various arguments and contrary positions on our human resources. People are resources. They are an asset and they should not be looked at simply as liabilities who will make use of our resources, but in fact they can generate resources. Still, one has to admit that we have a vicious circle of population and inability to generate enough resources and economic activity that has to be cut somewhere.

The management of population is the logical place where we can cut that vicious circle. We have tried for so many years to address that on the economic side. But because that is also tied with many non-economic concerns such as peace and order and political instability, which tells us that population should be the entry point in trying to break that vicious circle.

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So ultimately, it boils down to our inability to provide jobs, driving our people to seek greener pastures abroad.

On the quality of education, year in and year out, we get new entrants into our school system way beyond the capacity of our government to provide new classrooms and teachers. Leaving quality and focusing on quantity alone, we have been perennially on this treadmill where we have not been able to respond to the requirements of a good educational system.

Worth mentioning in the 1990s under President Fidel Ramos, we targetted having a school in every barangay, a high school in every municipality. But as we were getting closer, the gap widened again because of the rapid population growth. Our ability to provide quality of education has become a subordinate to even just providing quantity itself.

The growth of business is very much related to the other three mentioned earlier. Again, we should recognize people as assets and resources, but we are unable to provide them the requisite basic services of education and health. The quality of our workforce and the productivity of our economy have been declining and the numbers say it very clearly. We are the only country in the world where labor productivity and total productivity even declined in the 1980s, but luckily we slightly recovered in the 1990s. Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand have consistently increased their labor productivity, while the Philippines not only saw a drop in productivity but actually moved backwards.

We at Bangon Pilipinas believe that government should have the political will solve this resolutely, stop denying that we have a population problem, and address the unabated population growth.

**3. *Do you think it is the business of government to act on the population problem, or should the government just let this problem take care of itself?***

We believe that the problem will not take care of itself and that is why the government has an important role to play here. The other part of it is the need to highlight partnership not only within government, but also between government, civil society and the private sector in addressing this problem. That is the wave of the future as in the 1990s where there was a tripartite or three-folding partnership among the said sectors.

The answers are not all with the government, but obviously it has to play the prime mover to provide the impetus. That's because the others will not move if the government doesn't demonstrate that it is actually willing to tackle or accept the problem. We believe that the government has a very big responsibility here, but the others should be able to leverage or harness the energies and resources of civil society

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and private business in addressing this problem so it can become a more effective approach.

**4. *What will be the population policy, if any, of a Bangon Pilipinas administration? Specifically, will your policy be supporting (or not), any or all of the following:***

- A national population program run by the government advocating and implementing measures to reduce population growth?***
- The government promoting and providing information and services on all legally accepted family planning methods, natural and artificial?***
- The government allocating and/or managing funds for the procurement and provision of contraceptives to individuals who wish to practice family planning?***

This would be the ultimate effect of what Bro. Eddie Villanueva calls a family management program. We will go nationwide and touch every family in the country, impressing on them the value of responsible family management, and this is something that goes beyond just managing the size of the family, but also managing its resources and circumstances, which ultimately will be dominated by the consideration of what is the appropriate family size.

In pursuit of this, the government will be providing the necessary services and support in terms of budget to give the family the right information and orientation in exercising their judgment and provide choices in implementing family planning. This includes providing both natural and artificial means for as long as we abide by the constitutional, ethical and moral prohibition against abortion or any contraceptive that is abortifacient.

There is a whole menu of natural, artificial and modern family planning methods that should be made available to Filipinos, while allowing free play of those in society who believe they must use only a certain method. To put it more directly, if the Catholic Church believes that artificial methods should be avoided, by all means, let it exercise that advocacy in stressing more the natural family planning methods. However, the government should not stand in the way in widening the choices to all the legally and ethically acceptable methods. Again, Bangon stands for providing this range of choices.

Resources are normally limited on the part of those who will employ various methods. Natural family planning almost doesn't cost anything except the education of the people, but in those methods that would require materials such as condoms, contraceptives, and others that are scientifically determined to be not abortifacient, the government should play a role by helping lower the cost to the users. If we just allow things to operate in a free market fashion, the worry is that those who need family planning, especially the poor, may not be able to access the method of their choice. There is always this unmet demand for these kinds of family planning methods, and the government should meet that. Part of that unmet demand is

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accessibility in itself—market prices, and through government direct provision, we can make it accessible to the needy.

**5. *If Bangon Pilipinas presidential candidate Bro. Eddie Villanueva wins, what is the first action he will take on the matter of population?***

Like all issues confronting the government, Bro. Eddie would like to start with a determined effort to study in a very consultative and participatory way what the true nature of the problem is, and what people's preferences are in approaching this issue. The population issue has been very, very well studied with so many researches done before. By study, we mean taking stock of our level of knowledge on the issue, including what people say.

As a new government comes in, we cannot go immediately into implementation of programs without being convinced that this is the greatest good for the greatest number. I don't want to be misunderstood as soft-pedaling on the issue. Bro. Eddie's position in most things including Charter Change is, we should be sure that we are serving the preferences of the majority of the Filipino people.

Bro. Eddie will launch a family management program nationwide, which will be part-and-parcel of the over-all approach to poverty. He has constantly said that Presidential Proclamation Number 2 will be declaring an all-out war against poverty—and this program will be part of that war against poverty. The holistic approach to poverty includes looking at our population management policy—looking at the balance between population, resources and the environment.

**6. *What are the first ten areas of priority in the Bangon Pilipinas' agenda for development? How would you rank population management in your order of priority?***

I would certainly have it within the top ten, but we have to break up our agenda for action into the short-term, medium-term and long-term. In terms of our overall development, the economic dimension takes some kind of precedence because that is our weakest link right now, especially with the fiscal situation of the government. If we are able to address the fiscal constraints, a lot of things will fall into place, including addressing the population issue.

So, top of the list would have to be balancing the budget as soon as possible and addressing the fiscal problem. But then, overall development also requires that we broaden the base and participation of our development efforts so that we do not have a situation that we continue to have right now wherein more than half of the output and income is generated in Metro Manila and surrounding provinces alone.

We have to be true to a broad-based development wherein geographically and sectorally, the wide majority of the Filipino people are participants and beneficiaries

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of that development. Part of that ten-point immediate agenda would be broadening the base—including putting up strategic economic growth centers all over the country and encouraging a massive entrepreneurial mass movement that will really reorient our people towards entrepreneurship rather than just seeking employment.

Part and parcel of that set of priorities would be meeting the basic needs of our people. The economic strategies have to relate very closely with the need for health and education and family planning as well. There is also a set of priorities that is underpinned with the fight against graft and corruption, which Bangon Pilipinas believes is the ultimate source of all our problems right now.

**7. *How will a Bangon Pilipinas administration handle objections from the Catholic Church regarding the use of modern family planning methods other than natural family planning?***

This objection of the Catholic Church has always been there and this has been a continuing debate. The stand of *Bangon Pilipinas* is to continue encouraging and maybe challenging the Church to exercise its responsibility in advocacy for our people. If there is a strong belief that family planning should be limited to natural methods, the *Bangon Pilipinas*-led government will actually challenge the Church to play their role in advocating that position. We are in effect saying that we are not necessarily going to carry the line of the Catholic Church in our approach to population. We need to be broader in our approach to it and Bro. Eddie is ready to assume that kind of a posture, but certainly we would not want to be in effect contrary to the Catholic Church on this particular issue. Therefore, the way to do it is to work in partnership with them so that their position on this matter is freely promoted and promoted by them, while at the same time the other non-Catholics can also work in partnership with them in addressing the problem. They may have different approaches or emphases, but certainly they need not be inconsistent.

In fact, the only point of difference with the Catholic Church is the use of artificial contraceptives. Other than that, there's so much commonality. I think we ought to stress the fact that there is so much more in common with the Catholic Church and the non-Catholic members of the population than differences, so it is very easy to work out this collaborative partnership in addressing the problem. We need not be confrontational on this.

**8. *What sectors, groups and organizations will a Bangon Pilipinas administration be relying on in addressing the population issue?***

There is a very rich community of civil society in the country. We have as much as 70,000 non-government organizations at this point in time, many of them working in this area of environment, natural resources and population. We will harness the goodwill coming from this sector. The private sector has to be challenged to play a

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more active role in providing the materials needed or assistance to the advocacy work that is required.

Having a national family management program will take dramatic resources of the government, and obviously it cannot finance this kind of a program alone. It will really have to work in partnership with civil society, NGOs, and the private sector. The academe and research institutions will have a strong role to play here because of the kind of information and research needed to support the advocacy for a family management program. The media is also very important. All these must come into the picture in our rational approach to the management of our population.

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## **LEVELING WITH THE ELECTORATE**

### **Political camps tackle tough questions on population and family planning - 3**

Views gathered by V.F. Lacaba and C.A. Diaz  
*PopDev Media Service*

**“K4 is for a population policy based on free choice  
and family planning based on Christian values”**

### **K4 COALITION**

**Standard Bearer: Gloria Macapagal Arroyo  
Running Mate: Noli de Castro**

Contact Person:

**DR. RENATO S. VELASCO, Ph.D.**

K4 Coalition

- 1. What is the stand of the K4 Coalition on the issue of population? Do you believe that rapid population growth is a major development problem in this country? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

Yes. The population issue has a fundamental impact on development. In fact it is perhaps one of the reasons why the growth of our economy is not felt among the people. We have achieved a GNP growth of 5.5%, but because of our population size, such growth translates to only about 2.5%. Simply put, if the economy were a pie, the slices will be thinner if you have, say, ten people among whom to share with compared to only five people. Thus, aside from addressing the population, we must also focus on enlarging the economic pie so that more Filipinos can avail of their rightful share of the national bounty.

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Responsible population policy is not just about birth control but also about creative programs like population dispersal, responsible parenting and Christian formation.

2. *Do you believe that population growth is connected to the following? If so, how?*

• *The high incidence of poverty in our country*

Population is only one of the factors crucial in the fight against poverty. UN reported in 2003 that 39.4% of our population or almost 31 million Filipinos are living on less than 38 pesos a day.

Poverty incidence is greater among families that have more children. In 2000, only 15.7% of two-child families are poor; by contrast, almost half or 48.7% of the families that have seven children are poor.

To really win the war on poverty, our approach has to be holistic with economic and political reforms working hand-in-hand to achieve population outcomes that are in harmony with available resources and environmental conditions.

• *The lack of jobs*

In relation to employment, population growth is not as crucial as we'd like to believe. The US, for example, also faces the issue of unemployment despite its huge demand for nurses and teachers not only from the Philippines but from other Asian countries.

The latest Philippine Labor Force Survey of the NSO reported a labor force of 35.4 million people, and 11% of this—or 3.9 million—are unemployed. We have to look at the demographics of this figure. For one, 38.8% were females. That means more women are now looking for jobs, which may include potential housewives. If these women had chosen to be housewives, they would not be even included as part of the labor force. It is also interesting to note that 25.5 % of the 3.9 million unemployed are 25-34 years old (not fresh graduates).

• *The quality of education of our graduates and of our workforce*

As we said earlier, the bigger the population, the thinner the slice. About 37% of the population belongs to the 0-14 age group. That is why in the past, students had to share textbooks and be jam-packed into one classroom instead of two. But the Arroyo Administration has begun to address that. Now, there is a 1:1 student-textbook ratio. And the distance education program is slowly solving the problem of lack of classrooms. Unfortunately, only one-third of students who enter grade 1 complete the elementary level.

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And this is confirmed by the Labor Force Survey. Only 15.8% of the total unemployed are college graduates. Like the case of the US, unemployment persists because the unemployed lack the skills necessary to fill in the jobs that are available.

• ***The growth of business and the economic health of the country***

Our large population impacts on the government's capacity to provide for basic social services. There is only 1 government doctor for every 28,493 people; 1 government nurse for every 16,986; and 1 rural health unit to provide service to 29,746.

Although the country posted a robust GDP growth of 4.5%, per capita growth is less than 1.5%, the lowest in the region. Thailand and the Philippines had almost the same population size in 1965, but by 2000, the country had about 14 million more people than Thailand.

3. ***Do you think it is the business of government to act on the population problem, or should the government just let this problem take care of itself?***

The government has the responsibility to provide information on medically safe and socially acceptable means to address our high birth rate and its consequences on maternal and child health as well as population growth. The Constitution states that "the State shall defend the right of the spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood."

But really, it is everybody's business to act on the population problem because the population is everybody – the private sector and civil society should play a more expanded role.

4. ***What will be the population policy, if any, of a K4 administration? Will it be the same as that of the present Arroyo administration? Specifically, will the K4 policy be supporting (or not) any of the following:***

- ***A national population program run by the government advocating and implementing measures to reduce population growth?***
- ***The government promoting and providing information and services on all legally accepted family planning methods, natural and artificial?***
- ***The government allocating and/or managing funds for the procurement and provision of contraceptives to individuals who wish to practice family planning?***

The policy that a K4 administration will adopt will first and foremost be faithful to the Constitution. The current Philippine Population Management Program of the Arroyo Administration is in consonance with the provisions of the Constitution on population. It advocates birth spacing as one of the means to help reduce population. It also promotes and provides information and services on natural family planning methods.

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Nevertheless, additional programs are necessary to make efforts more responsive to modern development trends and requirements that are applicable to our social context, and existing policies will be reviewed on this basis.

**5. *If K4 Coalition presidential candidate Gloria Macapagal Arroyo wins, what is the first action she will take on the matter of population?***

We need to empower couples through a more aggressive population plan that will involve massive educational and awareness campaigns on responsible parenting and birth spacing. Statistics show that only 49% of couples practice contraception, 30% of whom use modern artificial methods. If we can bring up the use of even the natural methods alone with the remaining 51% of couples, we might make a difference.

The next thing would be to look at new technologies in family planning that are applicable to our social context. One of the issues facing natural methods is their reliability, and developments to making them more reliable are most welcome.

**6. *What are the first ten areas of priority in the K4 Coalition's agenda for development? How would you rank population management in your order of priority?***

Population management is part of our bigger agenda of access to health. And among the health programs, national family planning program comes second. We want to focus on family welfare and health, through education and choice.

Other areas of priority for development are jobs, housing, education, clean water, property rights, agriculture, free enterprise, SMEs, peace and order and corruption (not necessarily in that order).

**7. *How will K4 administration handle objections from the Catholic Church regarding the use of modern family planning methods other than natural family planning?***

As much as we can, we shall push for a population policy that is based on free choice and family planning based on Christian values.

The decision to use modern family planning methods is the right of the spouses, and the Constitution provides that the State defend that right.

**8. *What sectors, groups and organizations will a K4 administration be relying on in addressing the population issue?***

More than anybody else, it is the couples that we want to reach out to for theirs is the ultimate decision to make. That is why we need to empower them by providing them with the necessary tools to make an informed choice.

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We will need to empower the women, but we also need to educate the men, because raising children is the responsibility of both men and women.

We will need the support of local government units to support and fund population and reproductive health initiatives. We will also call on women's groups and non-government organizations to develop networks and pursue these programs and initiatives to address the real needs of our Filipino families, especially the women and children.

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Virgilio F. Lacaba and Cynthia A. Diaz

**LEVELING WITH THE ELECTORATE**

**Political camps tackle tough questions  
on population and family planning - 4**

Views gathered by V.F. Lacaba and C.A. Diaz  
*PopDev Media Service*

**“Population management is a necessary component  
of the national economic development program”**

**LDP-LACSON FOR PRESIDENT MOVEMENT**

**Standard Bearer: Panfilo “Ping” Lacson  
Running Mate: None**

Contact Person:  
**MR. ERMIN GARCIA**  
Director, Media Affairs

- 1. What is the stand of the LDP-Lacson for President Movement (Lacson/LDP) on the issue of population? Do you believe that rapid population growth is a major development problem in this country? If yes, why? If no, why not?***

We consider the issue of population not only as a social concern but also as a vital economic issue that needs to be addressed fully and decisively by the government. Our high population growth is regarded by many authorities as the most urgent problem in the country.

The Philippine population stands at 84 million in 2004. Our population growth rate is one of the highest in the world, having grown by 25.8% in ten years, from 60.7

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million in 1990, to 76.4 million in 2000. The average annual increase in population growth stood at 2.36% as of the year 2000 and there is no sign of it being under control in any way.

Generally, the country has quite a young population, wherein adolescents and youths comprised 31% of the population, 23% by children aged 5-14 years old and 17% by children six years and younger. The fertility rate is 3.7, higher than that of Thailand's 1.8, Vietnam's 2.3, Malaysia's 3.2, Indonesia's 2.6, China's 1.8 and even Bangladesh's 3.3. The projected population of the country by mid-2015 is 115.5 million, as compared to Thailand's 72.1 million, Vietnam's 104.1 million and Malaysia's 35.6 million.

The country's urban population is rising faster than its rural population. Between 1960 and 1995, the urban population grew at an average annual rate of 5.1%, one of the highest rates in Asia. By mid-century, the urban population will be 127 million, when the Philippines shall have been fully urbanized.

On the other hand, over a span of two decades, from 1980 to 2000, annual GDP growth averaged only 3.7%. From 1990 to 2000, our GNP increased at an average annual rate of 3.4%. Growth peaked in 1996 at 7.2%. However, the Asian financial crisis of July 1997 halted the upward trend, causing GNP growth to fall to 5.3% that year, and to drop further to 0.4% in 1998. In 1999, the economy showed signs of recovery, and after posting a 3.7% growth, rose to 4.5% in 2002.

Given the rate of GDP over the last three decades, it is estimated that per capita GDP would have been 50% higher than it now stands, had population only grown at the same rate as Thailand's, the fertility rate of which is 1.8, as against the Philippines' 3.5. An estimated 40% of Filipinos now live below the poverty line, which internationally is pegged at an income of one dollar (\$ 1.00) a day. Only 13% of Thais live below such a poverty line.

Faced with the grim prospects of a population approaching 100 million Filipinos by 2010, the Lacson administration is determined to embark on an enhanced population management program.

Thus, we have to empower couples to make an informed choice among legal and studied options are available to them that would make for responsible parenthood, perhaps tempered by their own religious beliefs. A Lacson administration shall likewise seek to promote a fertility rate of 2 children per couple but not to such deleterious extent as is now being experienced in Singapore, Japan and most European countries where the population is aging thereby having a negative impact on their own workforce.

Without a doubt, the Lacson administration shall oppose any move to legalize abortion. We will not tolerate abortionists. We will arrest and prosecute them.

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2. *Do you believe that population growth is connected to the following? If so, how?*

- ***The high incidence of poverty in our country***

It is pretty obvious that with a finite resource pie, more people would mean smaller portions available to every individual. In a developing society like the Philippines, rapid population growth means lower per capita income. This translates to smaller savings and grinding poverty. The government needs to address some demographic trends which pose a threat to the goal of development of equity (Population Commission, *State of the Philippine Population Report 2000*).

An estimated 40% of Filipinos now live below the poverty line, which government officials define as an income of 50 pesos a day. (*Inquirer News Service*, 03/14/2004). Increasing population further puts a strain on interrelated factors that contribute to increasing poverty such as: more unemployment; low quality of education; strained delivery of public utilities and services such as clean water, electrification, decent housing, health services and waste management.

- ***The lack of jobs***

Some argue that a booming population might even be advantageous to the Philippines as its workers, some 8 million of whom already work overseas, will be in greater demand in countries where population growth is falling. (*Inquirer News Service*, 03/14/2004) The truth is, the booming population is only a reflection of the country's incapacity to provide jobs to its people, hence, forced to go abroad to seek work whether legally or illegally.

It has been noted that people have been leaving jobs in agriculture mainly because real wages and productivity are either stagnant or deteriorating, owing to the lack of improvements for agricultural productivity and a rapidly growing population. The high incidence of poverty in the country is caused not so much by high unemployment as by the low quality of employment, which manifests in high underemployment rates.

The structure of the economy is such that jobs created are not enough and not the kind that address poverty. Over the last 20 years, from 1981 to 2001, the share of agriculture to GDP has decreased from 25% to 15%. The services sector is now the largest contributor to GDP, rising from 36% to 54%. The employment share of agriculture has been decreasing. NSCB data in April 2003 show that the share of agricultural employment accounts for about 37%. There has been a major shift to the services sector, which now accounts for more than half of employment, or 53%. Industrial employment is at 10%.

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The sectoral shift merely transfers people from low-productivity jobs in agriculture to similar marginal jobs, especially in services, the bulk of which are in the informal sector in both rural and urban centers, and consisting mostly of jobs that are easy to enter but are low in both productivity and pay, e.g. retail trade, itinerant vendors, mall sales workers, home-based workers, small transport operations and personal, community and social services. It is in these occupations where women find more employment.

- ***The quality of education, of our graduates, and of our workforce***

In the past, we took pride of the Filipino employee – highly literate/educated, English speaking, trained or skilled in his profession or field of expertise, and very cheap in terms of salaries/wages. We have lost all those differential advantages over other nationalities.

The quality of education in the Philippines continues to deteriorate. Roberto Aboitiz, trustee of the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), gave still more dismal figures on the state of Philippine education, saying the teacher to student ratio was 1:65, there were four students for every desk, and five students for every book.

Aboitiz said there was also no glory in the statistics showing that the elementary participation rate had risen to 97% from 85% over a 10-year period, as majority of these elementary school students dropped out before reaching high school.

Moreover, he said, “We take pride in sending OFWs” abroad, who together remit close to \$8 billion yearly to the Philippines, but recent graduates lack the knowledge, skills and values to be globally competitive.” (SunStar Cebu, Cherry Lim, 02/26/2004)

- ***The growth of business and the economic health of the country***

Notwithstanding the self-serving announcements of the GMA administration of incredible job creation, unemployment stands at 12.7%. This means that 4.35 million Filipinos are unemployed, the worst since 1984. The principal reason for this is that 2,859 firms closed in 2001; 3,296 more in 2002; and, perhaps the same number again in 2003.

For sure, rapid population growth did not cause all these negative economic developments, but it exacerbated the results.

3. ***Do you think it is the business of government to act on the population problem, or should the government just let this problem take care of itself?***

It is the business of the government to take action on the population problem.

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The population and development framework explains how population-related processes of fertility, mortality and migration affect population size, structure and distribution. These impact on both human and natural resources, which in turn have an impact on development. This framework considers the impact of population growth on the ability of government to provide services to the people (e.g., education, health and employment opportunities) as well as the impact of population growth on resources and the environment. It also includes the relationship between population, human resources and productivity.

The framework can also be viewed from the perspective of poverty alleviation. Rapid population growth has an impact on development because rapid population growth means more and more resources will be needed to provide health, education and employment opportunities to the people.

Without increased investments in human capital, the future productivity of today's children will be low when they become adults. Rapid population growth also leads to environmental degradation as a result of increased pressure on various ecosystems. This is also related to poverty as the poor typically have access only to marginal land characterized by low productivity and high susceptibility to environmental degradation.

Aside from population being a development issue, it is also a health issue, as shown by the following data:

- a. The leading cause of death among women of reproductive age is related to pregnancy and child bearing.
  - Maternal mortality rate is 172 deaths per 100,000 live births
  - Infant mortality rate is 36 deaths per 1,000 live births
- b. Approximately 7 million women of reproductive age are considered at high risk in pregnancy because they:
  - are too young (less than 18 years old)
  - are too old (over 34 years old)
  - have four or more pregnancies
  - have closely spaced pregnancies
  - are concurrently ill (they have existing diseases/ disorders like iron deficiency anemia)

Even faced with these risks, at least 2.6 million Filipino women are expected to become pregnant each year.

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- c. One in six pregnancies end up in abortion.
- d. There is an estimated 400,000 cases of illegal abortions per year.
- e. At least 2 million women of reproductive age want to practice family planning but fail to do so because of insufficient access to family planning services, among others.

These are statistics that cannot be ignored or set aside by a responsible government that is after the welfare of its citizenry.

**4. *What will be the population policy, if any, of a Lacson/LDP administration? Specifically, will your policy be supporting (or not), any or all of the following:***

- ***A national population program run by the government advocating and implementing measures to reduce population growth?***

Vision: Attain ZPG for the Philippines in the shortest possible time.

Mission: To enable all Filipinos to exercise responsible parenthood through fertility regulation using all available effective family planning methods acceptable and compatible with their culture and beliefs.

Goal: To attain a contraceptive method mix and corresponding contraceptive prevalence rate that will result in a total fertility rate of 2.1 or less by the end of the year 2008.

Programs:

1. Advocacy

- The national government will lead a campaign for meaningful responsible parenthood that will promote two children per couple as the ideal family size, stressing that the healthiest interval between births for mothers is three years or more. (Note: None of these advocacies shall be imposed or forced on the citizenry. There shall be no punitive action against violators. However, studies shall be undertaken to provide incentives or benefits to those who are compliant to these advocacies).
- The national government will undertake an information drive that will enable couples to understand contraceptive method options available to them.

2. Service provision

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- Information and services for contraceptive methods, will be made available in family planning programs of all DOH hospitals.
  - The DOH will provide technical assistance and, where appropriate, resource support to enable local governments to make available family planning programs.
  - The private sector will be encouraged to participate in the provision of family planning services through the technical support of DOH and financing through expansion of the national health insurance benefits to cover reimbursements for all methods of contraception.
- ***The government promoting and providing information and services on all legally accepted family planning methods, natural and artificial?***

The government must undertake education/information program on the options available to couples in order for them to make informed choices.

However, we are firm on our stand against abortion.

- ***The government allocating and/or managing funds for the procurement and provision of contraceptives to individuals who wish to practice family planning?***

As it is obvious, most Filipinos who wish to practice family planning cannot avail of contraceptives since most are living below the poverty line. We will see to it that within 90 days of a Lacson administration, the government shall allocate PhP 6 B coming from the Health Insurance Reserve Fund to serve as revolving funds for three pro-poor health programs namely:

- Anti-TB medicine procurement;
- Procurement of population management supplies; and
- The expanded immunization program.

**5. *If presidential candidate Sen. Panfilo Lacson wins, what is the first action he will take on the matter of population?***

As previously mentioned, he will allocate funds to serve as revolving fund for the procurement of population management supplies. Along with this, efforts shall be undertaken in order to seek the restoration of international grants that were withdrawn, that have in the past been focused on population management.

The various government health centers throughout the country shall be the centers for any population management programs. It behooves that these centers be inventoried and improved in order to enhance their capacity to undertake the program.

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**6. *What are the first ten areas of priority in the Lacson/LDP's agenda for development? How would you rank population management in your order of priority?***

In our program of governance, we have listed eight (8) priority programs and these are:

- a. Restore of Justice, Law and Order.
- b. Creatively match revenues and expenditures.
- c. Stop corruption.
- d. Increase national wealth through improved productivity and generation of jobs.
- e. Upgrade education.
- f. Institute investor-friendly and predictable economic policies.
- g. Strengthen the judicial system.
- h. A national health policy to make affordable quality health care a right, not a privilege.

Population management is a necessary component of the national economic development program, which is listed as fourth priority only because the first three are very important ingredients for national economic recovery that need to be undertaken first.

**7. *How will a Lacson/LDP administration handle objections from the Catholic Church regarding the use of modern family planning methods other than natural family planning?***

The Church has all the freedom, resources, and opportunities to convince its followers to plan the size of their families in accordance with its teachings. Concomitantly, the Church must also respect the State's prerogative to assist its citizens and provide access to services and provisions needed to plan the size of their families according to their own means and according to their obtaining conditions. This is all about the welfare of the people and the good of the country.

While a Lacson administration does not have any intention of defying the Church or going against the teachings of the Catholic Church on this issue, merely to

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demonstrate political will, population management is a vital component of any national development program as it impacts on the quality of life of the entire citizenry.

**8. *What sectors, groups and organizations will a Lacson/LDP administration be relying on in addressing the population issue?***

As the issue of population encompasses all sectors, theoretically, all sectors should help and cooperate in solving this problem.

The Church has manifested its concern on the matter, and so it must be extensively consulted. Its full cooperation on this matter would be most welcome. If it can provide practical resolutions to the issues at hand, including counseling in tandem with government health workers.

The private sector will be encouraged to participate in providing family planning services with the technical assistance of the DOH and financing through the expansion of the national health insurance benefits to cover reimbursements for all methods of family planning.

Both local and international organizations will be tapped for assistance, but emphasis will be given on mobilizing local people's networks and civic organizations for information dissemination.

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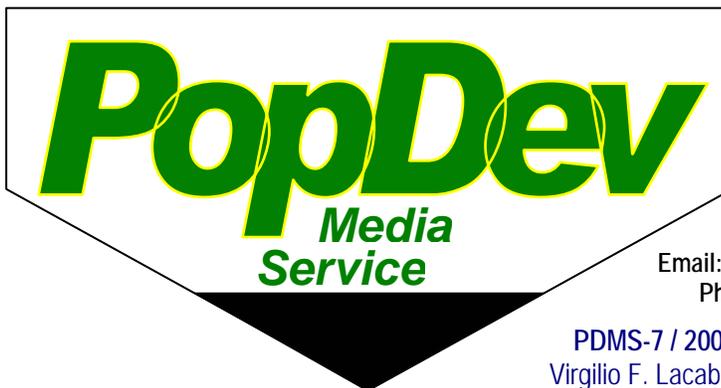
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*Rep. Satur Ocampo of Bayan Muna, the party-list organization that topped the 2001 election for part- list representation in the House of Representatives, analyzes the population riddle.*

### **A PARTY-LIST VIEW**

## **“Population, income distribution, and debt policy are related issues”**

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

Ascetic. The word comes unbidden as you interview Congressman Satur Ocampo, more known as Ka Satur. He uses a small clerical table in his room at Bayan Muna, the party-list organization of which he is president. He also looks like a priest; slim, mustachioed, bespectacled, salt-and-pepper hair. The mien somber. You are almost afraid to look at his chair, which turns out to be just a grade above monobloc.

After all, he is a congressman now, and you expect some congressional opulence. But apparently, for the former chief negotiator of the revolutionary Left’s National Democratic Front (NDF) during peace talks with the Aquino administration in 1986, the hardships of decades spent trying to change Philippine society through both armed and unarmed struggle have created certain habits, frugality and simplicity among them.

He smiles when you tell him the interview will be about population issues, including family planning.

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The nail on the head. “If the nation’s income were equitably distributed, its present resources would be enough to support the present population level of about 80 million Filipinos,” he begins.

Income distribution. An issue pregnant with nuances. In a recent TV interview, former Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Cielito Habito (under the Ramos administration), pointed out another disturbing aspect: “The gap between rich and poor has been increasing instead of decreasing. Latest statistics (year 2000) indicate that the top one fifth of Philippine society earn 16 times more than the bottom one fifth. About eight to ten years earlier, they (those among the top one fifth) earned 13 times more. In other words, the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. That is why we have a social volcano. It should be noted that in more progressive countries like Japan and Taiwan, the income ratio between rich and poor is lower, between 5:1 and 10:1.”

In fact, truth may be worse than the statistic cited. You just need to look at the mansions in Forbes Park and Dasmariñas Village, garages bursting with Benzes, BMWs, and Jaguars, and then look at the rest of the nation, many of whom are surviving on one pack of noodles worth P5.00 to be shared among five children and the parents, to ask yourself if the income difference is only 16 times. Maybe one million times is the more honest estimate.

But how do you get the Philippine rich to share more of their wealth with their starving fellow Filipinos? Must we wait for the grapes of wrath to fall, the social volcano to explode? The question hangs in the air but you decide not to ask. The answer is Ocampo's life. For several decades, he and thousands of idealistic Filipinos like him tried the path of armed struggle. Now, he is trying the non-violent parliamentary course. Which path is correct, only history’s accurate hindsight can tell.

Ocampo explores the population riddle further. “Yes, we need to rationalize our population, we need to ensure that there’s a reasonable balance between existing resources and population size. Yes, we need a stronger population program that will make natural and artificial planning methods more accessible to the people. But we must view the population issue in relation to other issues, such as the government debt issue and the income distribution issue.”

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He points out that while many cite the massive shortage of educational and health facilities as major indicators of how our population is growing much faster than our available resources, the reality is that if only we gave higher priority and a larger budget to education and health than to debt servicing, then the shortage would be greatly reduced.

“We are now paying more than 400 billion pesos a year, more than 40 per cent of our national budget, for debt servicing. If we could allocate bulk of that amount to education and health, imagine how many classrooms, books, hospitals, medicines we could buy—that is why some of us in Congress are now looking at ways to amend or repeal the law on automatic appropriation for debt servicing,” he adds.

Debt. Death. The onomatopoeic coincidence is apt. The Philippine government (meaning the Filipino people) now has a total local and foreign debt burden of more than P5.16 trillion pesos. The amount is almost beyond comprehension or imagination.

The disturbing question: Where did the money go? To development projects that benefited the people – or to the pockets of certain public officials and favored corporations? The fact that in less than a decade, the Philippines has deteriorated from number 12 to 4 in the global corruption ranking, increases the discomfiture. For the past 15 years, groups like the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) have lobbied for a comprehensive inventory and audit of the nation’s loans, to determine exactly where the money went; the terms and conditions for them; which loans really benefited the people and which just went to private pockets. So far, government has turned a deaf ear on the extremely valid demand for audit.

One example being raised by critics of government’s debt policy is the fact that for nearly 20 years now, we have been paying one-hundred-thousand-dollars per day (P5.5 million pesos per day!) for the \$2.3 billion loan drawn by then President Marcos for the infamous Bataan Nuclear Power Plant that allegedly benefited only the so-called "Marcos cronies" through kickbacks. The plant never generated a single watt of electricity since experts deemed it unsafe in 1986, considering its design defects, plus being built on several earthquake faults, right under a volcano.

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Unknown to many Filipinos, Philippine poverty is directly related to two policies/laws. First, Presidential Decree No. 1177 or the Automatic Appropriations Act issued by Mr. Marcos, reaffirmed in 1986 by President Aquino through Executive Order No. 292 or the Administrative Code of 1986; second, President Aquino's Proclamation 50, which among other objectives was to honor all of Philippines' debt and thus, legitimized the assumption of debts by the national government including private loans. These are the two laws/policies that Ocampo and a few like-minded legislators want to amend or repeal.

The Philippine government not only gives the highest priority and largest allocation in the national budget to debt servicing; worse, it has been increasing the allocation for debt servicing, while decreasing the budget for basic services. Records from the Department of Budget and Management drive home the point: In 1986, P21.6 billion or 20 percent of the national budget was given to debt servicing; in 1991, P74.9 billion or 30 percent; in 2002, P358 billion or 31 percent; and in 2003, P425 billion or 42 percent. If the 2003 budget had not been reenacted for 2004, the figures would have risen further to P542 billion or 47 percent.

The fantasy: For us to someday have a government that will tell creditors, "Look, studies show that 225 Filipino children are dying every day because of poverty. Maybe we can work out something for us to address this problem first; once our economy improves, then we will be in a better position to settle our debts." (The prerequisite, though, is a credible administration, which creditors will trust not to pocket public funds.)

Ocampo subscribes to the view that the dismal economic situation is not helped any by government's decision to follow the church policy of promoting only natural family planning. "Government should be more rational and practical," he notes. "It should not allow itself to be pressured into following the Catholic Church position."

He shares the observation that lack of economic opportunities (joblessness) increases idle time and "increases the time for intimacy between couples—and if there are no contraceptives available, then you will have many unplanned and unwanted pregnancies."

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However, he stresses that if only government adopted a more progressive policy regarding income distribution and debt servicing, then people would be better educated, more funds would be available to energize the economy (e.g., more capital credit for farmers and entrepreneurs; more irrigation facilities for farms; better infrastructure, etc.), more people would be employed, and realization by better-educated and better-employed couples of the advantages of well-planned families would be a logical result.

“We need to rationalize our population, just as we need to rationalize all aspects of our nation. That is why we advocate a stronger role for government in development planning and implementation. If you just allow the private sector to do whatever it wants, then you will lose rationality, you will have chaos. You need to have a clear plan.”

He says that so far, Bayan Muna has focused more on macro issues like income distribution, debt servicing, agrarian reform, and globalization. “In the next Congress, assuming we win another term, we will include greater attention to the population issue in our agenda.”

You thank him for the interview. He grins, stands up to shake your hand, and promptly goes back to work on his small desk. *Ascetic. – PopDev Media Service*

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*“The business sector is looking at the population issue now as a long-term commitment.”*

## **PCCI takes a closer look at the population issue**

**By Roberto C. Navarro**  
*PopDev Media Service*

The business community is beginning to realize the significant impact of managing the country’s population growth vis-à-vis economic growth. Unless government aggressively addresses the population issue, business will have difficulty in achieving notable improvements in the country’s economy in the coming years.

From 1975 to 2003, modest yearly increases in the country’s gross domestic product had been devoted almost completely to the added requirements of the fast growing population that had doubled within that time period.

According to Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) executive vice president Donald Dee, unless the country can achieve a GDP increase of 7 to 8 times—which some of its Asian neighbors have achieved—it really has to have a very effective population management program. Otherwise, it will find it difficult to address concerns such as urban congestion, worker productivity, and competitiveness in the world market, provision of basic services, environment and poverty.

“I believe that the business sector is looking at the population issue very seriously now as a long-term commitment while ensuring that businesses will be able to compete

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globally,” said Joji Ilagan-Bian, chair of the PCCI Committee on Population, Corporate Social Responsibility and Governance.

Over the past few years, the PCCI has focused on raising the level of awareness of its chambers and business support partners on the relationship between limiting the country’s population growth and achieving a higher level of development.

“This year, the involvement of PCCI is going to be greater and deeper since we are really pushing grassroots involvement of the business sector and its partners in population work,” Bian said.

Bian, who has served as chair of the Mindanao Business Council, added: “I’m asking all our chambers of commerce to create a local population committee which would focus on information dissemination at the workplace and the in the community where the chambers operate. We are networking and forging partnerships with local government units, various population groups and NGOs with track record in promoting population and family planning services.”

From June to December 2004, the various chambers of PCCI will be implementing specific advocacy and services that cater to family planning and health needs of workers and the community.

PCCI is now in the process of identifying service providers in the community who can tie up with local chambers in the conduct of population and family planning activities. Local chambers will also be tapped to set up logistical requirements for undertaking family planning programs that cater to small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Pilot testing of population management and family planning clinics or centers in at least one local chamber per PCCI regional area will be undertaken. PCCI has five regional areas (NCR, Northern Luzon, Southern Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao) each of which has an area vice-president, a vice chair and a Population and CSR Committee.

“I would like to really pose the challenge to our members to go out and talk to their workers and the communities where they do business and really find out the quality of life of people and find out how the issues of education, health, environment and poverty are tied down to effectively managing population,” Bian stressed.

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For the political candidates seeking an elective post in the May 2004 elections, Bian had this to say: “I think that the very important public service politicians can give voters is for them to be able to clearly tell us what their agenda on population is and tie this up with their agenda on poverty, education and health. If they will just give us their agenda on poverty and other issues without touching on population, I don’t think they will get our votes.”

The February 2004 Pulse Asia Survey on Population and Family Planning revealed that “anywhere from 82 percent to 86 percent of Filipinos say that candidates in favor of couples’ free choice of family planning, a law or measure on population issues, a government budget for family planning, and a program on women’s health ought to be supported by the general public.”

The study noted that 97 percent of Filipinos believe that “it is important to have the ability to control one’s fertility or to plan one’s family.” It showed that about seven in 10 Filipinos believe that a fast increasing population hinders the development of the country and impacts negatively on the ability of government to provide employment, health services, food security, education and other key services. – *PopDev Media Service*

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*Editor's Note: National Artist Nick Joaquin, using his equally famous journalistic pseudonym Quijano de Manila, wrote this still relevant and timely piece in 1988 and gave the editor of PopDev Media Service special permission to re-issue it through this news and features service. The "greatest Filipino writer" died last April 29, five days before his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

## **The Pinoy Murder Mystery**

What Explains The Age-Old Puzzle That's  
The Alleged "Indolence" Of The Pinoy?

**By QUIJANO DE MANILA**  
*PopDev Media Service*

For centuries has the question been debated. The "indolence of the Filipino." Is that tag merely the chauvinism of the imperialist colonizer? Or has our infernal climate grilled us torpid? Or did four centuries of the foreign boot crush all spirit out of us?

Are we really, once out from under the boot, as giddy with go as the next Westerner, not to say Oriental?

But the foreign observer of today (often without knowing it) continues to repeat the charges of yesterday. An American miss will say impatiently of the Pinoy: "I wish he'd get a move on." Asked to elaborate, she'll sigh: "You people are so slow!" And you know that by "slow" she means "lazy."

Now a charge that has been going around for some 400 years should really be getting by this time some attentive scrutiny instead of the usual nationalist indignation.

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That “slow” of the American miss provides us with a clue. Some sluggishness in the way the Pinoy moves, especially if he’s from boondocks or urban slum, gives the impression of egregious inborn indolence. That is apparently the foreigner’s experience, even when his eye is completely disinterested.

This American miss, for instance, is merely being objective when she adds: “You move like zombies!”

As movie fans know, zombies are killed people still moving around like sleepwalkers. Is the Pinoy a zombie? Is his famed sluggishness the sleepwalking of somebody who was murdered but continues to circulate? If so, who killed him? What’s the solution to the Pinoy Murder Mystery?

Another clue is offered by a Lady Bountiful doing volunteer work at a charity school for poor children. She says she has need of the most exquisite patience instructing ragamuffins who are such laggard, laggard learners: “Things my own children pick up on the instant, it takes these poor kids days or weeks or even months to comprehend. But I know I can’t blame them. What’s grammar or arithmetic to children who are too busy being hungry?”

And what vistas that insight opens up!

Suddenly, certain scenes of the national life are illuminated.

The mass dropouts from the public schools after the third grade. The enigma of young folk who have been through six or ten years of English instruction unable to speak a correct sentence in English. The scandal of thousands of college graduates annually failing the state board exams. The perpetual “debacle” of our athletes whenever they compete in international stadia. The mystery of mass unemployment in a country where so many good jobs are going begging. The poor quality in general of the national product, from cigarettes to cinema, and the continuing absence of heavy industry.

The various explanations advanced for such infirmities of our culture have by now become immemorial and, being very tired clichés, no longer click.

The schoolmen, for example, will again trot out their argument that our children learn nothing in school because they have to do their learning in a foreign language, although the private schools are evidence of how ably Filipino children can master

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knowledge through English. On the other hand, the flopping at government exams will be blamed on commercialism in academe, while our sports “debacles” will be attributed as usual to too much politics and too little funding. As for our industrial paradoxes, the standard answer on them more or less follows the classic apologia of the Philippine cinema: Pinoy movies are so lousy because of a *bakya* audience that doesn’t know any better.

It’s becoming clearer and clearer that such answers evade the issue and obscure the heart of the matter. The culprit is not a foreign language, nor a venal academe, nor politics, nor graft, nor *bakya* culture.

What has for ages been earning us the tag *indolent* is a collective childhood “too busy being hungry” to develop a quick mind for learning, or a shrewd hand for industry, or the right brawn for championships. Alas, what’s retarded at the start of life often never succeeds in catching up. The potential sage, or entrepreneur, or champion, has been nipped in the bud.

Yes, the Pinoy is the zombie of a killed victim.

Who killed the Pinoy?

The womb.

Who murdered the Pinoy?

The home.

Where was he killed?

In the womb.

Where was he murdered?

At home.

Womb and home together compose the entity that destroys by producing. The womb that’s too young or too old, too sickly or too over-used, can only bring forth zombies. And the home with too many babies and not enough food destroys what can never be replaced: the matter of the mind.

Tis said that the growth of brain tissue is most crucial during the first years of life, since there’s no further growth after a certain time in youth is reached. So it’s imperative not only that brain matter should grow but that it should grow as fast as

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possible during those crucial years of infancy. But that growth is possible only if certain conditions are right.

The conditions that have to be right include proper nourishment, proper care, proper health, proper hygiene and sanitation—in short, a proper lifestyle geared towards the infant's full development.

If those conditions are *not* right during the infant's first years in this world, then that poor babe is marked for life. He must face the world with a stunted brain.

Cruellest stunter of brain growth is hunger. In effect, the starved child's mind is blighted, is destroyed. He may technically not be a retarded person but he is so in actuality.

Nobody dares to say so, but one reason the Philippines fails to progress may be that the bulk of its population is composed of the mentally retarded. Rizal hit the nail on the head when he observed that progress in the Philippines was always of the individual, never of the mass. Those who today claim to be the champions of the masses were better occupied if, instead of defacing public walls with futile graffiti, they got peasant and proletarian to learn the use of contraceptives and the wisdom of limiting families to one child each. The individual.

A single child will be better fed and better nursed and can thus be expected to grow up with a full brain volume inside his brain case. But even the most ideal of socialist setups will find itself thwarted by wombs and homes engaged in the prodigious production of the mindless mass. Yes, it's not responsible for what it is (hunger is; poverty is) but nevertheless its continuing proliferation cannot but doom the future of the nation.

If there is to be a great leap forward, we'll just have to cut down on the production of blighted minds. And the cutting down will just have to mean a really serious and effective Philippine population program.

The problem is compounded by the nature of the native diet, which is rice and fish, fish and rice—a diet not very vigorous, since the fish is usually not even fresh but dried. So even among the poor who eat three meals a day, there's already a risk of brain damage for the children. Imagine the risk for the children of homes where the meals,

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only once a day, are of rice and salt. Yet it's precisely in such homes (if squatter ersatz roof and wall can be deemed homes) that there are six or ten or even fifteen children fighting for a share of the rice and salt!

Both extreme Left and extreme Right say it's a problem not of supply but of distribution—but both ignore the history of the policy: “To each according to his need, from each according to his ability.” A “just” distribution system automatically entails an authoritarian government riding roughshod over the freedoms. And a number of people don't think a guaranteed three meals a day can compensate for the loss of freedom of expression and the ballot box.

On the other hand, there's the undoubted results of unlimited freedom of genesis.

In the Philippines, one chief result is the zombie—that young Pinoy whose “charms” are languor and leisure. But sterner eyes read the languor as laziness, the leisure as laxity. So here comes the campaign to make the Pinoy more macho.

The campaign we favor is not necessarily anti-macho. Why shouldn't it be as macho to generate one son who's all go-go as far as fight is concerned as ten sons who are all come-come as far as dividends are concerned?

But the picture we want to project to the nation is of the babies who are being birthed right now by parents who think they have a perfect right to bring as many babies as they wish to this world even if those babies are doomed to brain damage because of their parents' irresponsibility.

But it's those babies who, retarded themselves, retard the nation's progress.

What we want to send out to the entire country, from Aparri to Jolo, is a message to the Pinoy family to realize that the future of the nation is in its hands. We can make progress only by replacing the baby machine with a condom machine. Or whatever machine produces your preferred device.

But: let's stop producing zombies?