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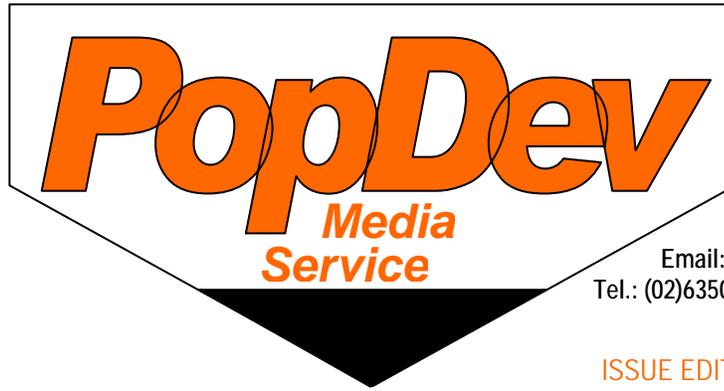
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*Population growth, if left unchecked, can worsen a country's poverty situation.*

## **RP: What happened?**

**By A. San Agustin**

*PopDev Media Service*

Too bad. The economy could have been a bit better, and the lives of many Filipino families could have improved. If only—but we are getting ahead of our story. Read on.

It has to do with population increase and development gains, income levels and poverty reduction. There are other related factors like education, foreign debt, infrastructure, governance, and agrarian reform.

How does the Philippines compare now with other Southeast Asian countries? Take Thailand. It has since overtaken this country economically, and one reason for this is that the Thais have a strong and successful population program.

"The country (Philippines) was initially comparable with Thailand but over the years it has exhibited laggard economic performance," economic scholars Arsenio M. Balicasan and Charisse A. Lanzona observed in their essay, "The Population-Poverty Nexus: The Philippines in Comparative East Asian Context."

Dennis S. Mapa and Leonardo A. Lanzona also contributed to the final report of the lengthy study, published by the Asia-Pacific Policy Center.

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After tracking the trends in East Asia over the past 25 years, they noted that the Philippines "has consistently registered one of the highest population growth rates, and fertility rates, in the region, not to mention that its age structure has remained unchanged in 40 years!"

Recent studies have indicated that an important factor in the success of East Asian economies has been the ability of these countries to reduce their dependent population and, correspondingly, maximize the contributions of the productive members of society.

"With a reduced dependent population," Balicasan and C. Lanzona pointed out, "the economic contributions of the more productive segments may be further felt, most likely resulting in rapid income growth for the country."

As for the Philippines, its population program has had shifts in focus since the 1970s. Presidents Marcos and Estrada advocated a strong program, but both were deposed. President Aquino, a devout Catholic, was apparently less enthusiastic about the program.

The same could be said of President Arroyo during her first term of office, if one may point out, and it was observed that artificial methods of family planning were neglected by the government.

It became an electoral issue, with the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) holding forums in Kawit, Cavite, and Iloilo and Davao cities to demand from candidates what their position on family planning and reproductive health was.

President Arroyo herself has declared that "we stand by responsible parenthood, enlightened birth spacing and free choice."

However, she added that "my priority now is not to deal with overpopulation to overcome the challenges we face in social justice and economic development, but to go directly to the social and macro-economic development issues that strike at the roots of these challenges."

"From the experiences of its neighbors," the authors of the study said, "the Philippines still has a long way to go before it can expect market forces to take care of population concerns. For now, the clamor should be to come up with a clear population policy and to drum up support from the different sectors of society."

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Population growth is not "the sole culprit" behind the country's "rather dismal performance."

Population makes a significant contribution to economic development "but left unchecked it could exacerbate a country's poverty situation," Balicasan and C. Lanza concluded. "Traversing the path taken by this study, it is worthwhile to consider how slower population growth could have meant the improved lives of millions more Filipinos." — *PopDev Media Service*

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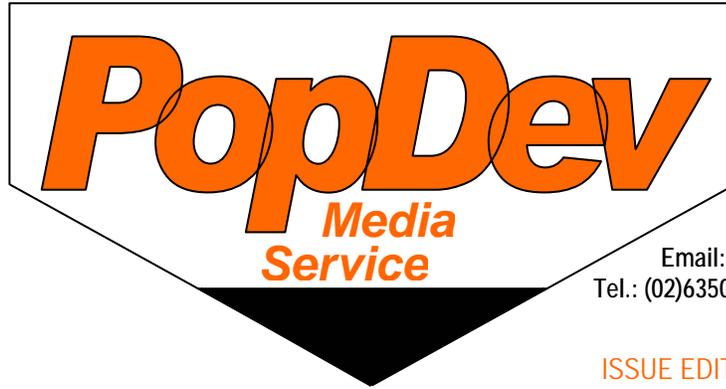
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*Unprotected and unplanned sex is another "stressor" of adolescent life.*

## Adolescents share their fears and concerns

**By Pinky Choudhury**

*PopDev Media Service*

There they were—Connie, 19, and Jan-Jan, 20—seated quietly yet companionably. *Barkada* since high school, they were sharing their problems.

"I might not be able to enroll," he sighed. "Itay has just lost his job at the factory."

"And I think I'm preggy!" she whispered. "What do I do?"

Connie and Jan-Jan are just two of the millions of adolescents in the Philippines who may be as young as 10 (World Health Organization) and as "old" as 24. Their plight is discussed in the recently launched book *Filipino Adolescents in Changing Times*, written by Ma. Cecilia Gastardo-Conaco, Ma. Carmen Jimenez and Cherrie Joy Billones. The book is based on a study of adolescents commissioned by the Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD).

The team consulted 189 adolescents based in Metro Manila, Baguio, Rizal, Pampanga and Nueva Ecija. Participants were organized by: gender (male or female);

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age bracket (13-16 or 17-21); place of residence (urban or rural); socioeconomic status (private or public school or out-of-school youth); and living arrangement (staying with parents or living away from family).

Family relationships, especially with parents, appear to be the most common problem of adolescents. And with five million Filipinos looking for jobs, Jan-Jan is like the many respondents who said that their parents were unemployed ("*walang trabaho ang magulang*").

For those from lower-income levels, this meant having no funds for basics like food ("*kakain, lista muna... ako, hindi kumakain*"), shelter ("*walang sariling bahay*") and school ("*kulang ang pangmatrikula*"). In one of the younger female groups (private, rural, living away from parents) lack of finances was seen as leading to robbery ("*pagnanakaw...pagkuha ng gamit ng iba*").

Adolescents were also aware that they could unduly burden parents because of relationships with peers and the opposite sex. In the context of premarital sex, virginity and pregnancy, an older female respondent (private, rural, living away from parents) lamented the condition of peers who become pregnant: "*Sa halip na mag-aral may anak na...imbes na makatulong sa magulang, magiging pabigat na siya.*"

Indeed, the respondents identified sex and sexuality, including unprotected and unplanned sex, as still another "stressor" of adolescent life.

"Sex and sexuality are major areas of curiosity, high information need and experimentation, especially among male adolescents," the authors said. "Sex is prevalent among their peers, oftentimes without the use of contraceptives."

But respondents have only a few sources of credible information on sex. They rated parents poorly and said that schools provide "mainly cold, clinical and scientific information or moralistic prescriptions."

"Thus, curiosity and information needs fall on the peer group and dubious sources such as pornographic materials," the authors pointed out. "Or the individual can attempt to find out, experientially and sometimes with grave consequences, what sex and sexuality is all about."

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"Today's youth may also be self-destructive: smoke, drink and use drugs, often because of relationships with parents ("*nagrerebelde*") and pressures for conformity.

"Although friends and peers can be a major source of emotional support, they can also be a source of conflict, stress and stress," the project team observed.

"[M]isunderstandings are taken very seriously."

Adolescents also face issues about sexual identity. An older female respondent noted "feeling lesbian" and some of the young male respondents mentioned homosexuality as an issue. Heterosexuals also found it hard to navigate new roles in female-male relationships.

Most of the key informants had no one to talk to about their deepest fears and secrets. They did interact with mothers, groupmates or best friends—but they still felt lonely, uncertain and isolated. As for guidance counselors, most of the key informants asserted they could not get confidentiality about their disclosure. And as for teachers, they gossiped among themselves.

Still others keep to themselves; pray; trust in God and in themselves; laugh about problems; and sing, dance and generally entertain themselves. And all this is taking amidst beepers, cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, the chat room and the Internet.

The project team called for policies beneficial to adolescents and their physical and mental needs: a more comprehensive and less exclusionary sex education; training on effective parenting; centers for adolescents—especially for gay youths—with information materials, regular lectures or workshops, youth-related services and trained peer counselors; stronger in-school counseling by competent and gender-sensitive personnel (including counselors carefully trained in skills, attitudes and values) whose availability will be disseminated to all and services for special groups like victims of sexual abuse; homosexuals; pregnant adolescents (including those who have had abortions) and adolescents who suspect they have sexually-transmitted diseases.

The PCPD is pilot-testing a number of these suggestions, especially effective parenting. So, hopefully adolescents like Connie and Jay-Jay just might have a happy ending to their problems. — *PopDev Media Service*

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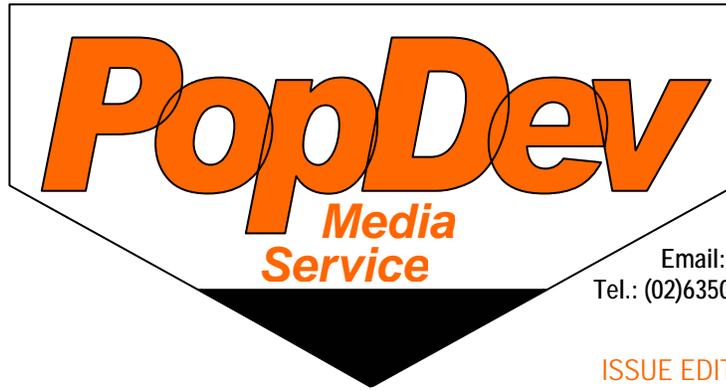
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*"Will we be forever exporting people rather than goods?"*

## **Yuchengco calls for responsible parenthood**

**By Bernard Supetran**  
*PopDev Media Service*

He has eight children and never practiced family planning during his younger days. But top businessman-diplomat Alfonso T. Yuchengco believes that now the government has no choice but to institute important measures to manage the country's worsening population problem.

He warned in an interview: "Unless we are able to contain or control rapid increase in our population, we will never be able to feed and support the so-called '*masa*.' We will be forever exporting people rather than goods, and 'prostituting' ourselves to feed our families," he concluded.

"At that time, my wife was a devout Catholic so she did not like to practice birth spacing. That's why we have so many children. I wanted birth spacing but she did not agree to any form of family planning," he recalled.

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Five daughters and three sons later, Yuchengco still believes that like him, every Filipino should find a way to manage the size of his family and thus help in reducing the population to more manageable levels.

"For me, one of the biggest problems of the Philippines today is the rapid population growth rate. Our population is growing very fast at around 2.4 percent annually, which is among the highest in the world. Given this situation, I can't see how we can sustain our economic growth," said the chair of the Yuchengco Group of Companies (YGC), one of the country's largest conglomerates.

"This is very unsustainable economically and geographically. Where will you put the growing population with our limited territory? The country must implement a population program," he added.

His strong and unwavering position is also reflected in a public statement made by the YGC during the 2004 national elections, wherein the Group expressed its preference for population management and urged the government to encourage wide use of family planning methods.

Yuchengco also underscored the vital role of the government in providing the public with information on the various contraceptive methods.

"The government should provide information on the different methods of family planning, both natural and artificial, and make these within reach of the ordinary people so they will have a choice," he said.

With the complex, interlocked issue of poverty and population growth, he saw no short-term solution to the problem, and recommended, for the long term, a massive education campaign on family management to curb the growth rate.

This education drive should use all forms of mass media and cover the entire archipelago, from the urban centers to the remote villages. It should also use the existing public school system to instill among the young the principles of family management and responsible parenthood.

Moreover, the former permanent ambassador to the United Nations, said, the government should generate more jobs and income opportunities by creating a political and economic climate conducive to business. It must also provide sufficient basic

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services particularly in the countryside, to address poverty and perennial social problems attendant to population growth.

In this endeavor, a public-private sector partnership is important. Several business groups, such as the Makati Business Club and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, have come out with similar positions.

In view of the ongoing phase-down of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) support for the physical supply of contraceptives, Yuchengco said that business groups and private organizations should fill in the void by distributing contraceptives more aggressively and openly, even if the Catholic Church is against it.

"They should make these available and within reach of the poor so we can control our population, for the sake of our country," the civic leader said.

Media should do their share by producing publications, features, TV and radio programs, and information materials that will make the public aware of the relationship between economic and population growth. — *PopDev Media Service*

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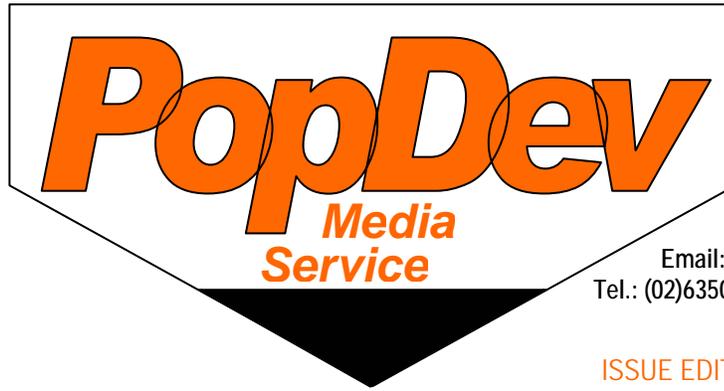
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*Muslims: It's go for family planning and reproductive health.*

## **Family planning part of peace—Muslim educator**

**By Perla Aragon**  
*PopDev Media Service*

Now, class. Question: Does Islam prohibit family planning? If you answered yes, you're wrong!

Muslim religious leaders in Mindanao, under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and after years of deliberations, have issued this *fatwah* (religious edict): "All methods of contraception are allowed as long as they are safe, legal, in accord with Islamic Shariah, and approved by a credible physician, preferably a Muslim, for the benefit of both the mother and the child."

Not only that, family planning is an important part of the peace process, says a Muslim educator.

The edict comes after 22 scholars from Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga scrutinized the stand of Islam on reproductive health and family planning, and took analogies from modern sciences to update the situation.

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For these twin tasks, the scholars formed the *Daruh-Ifta* (House of Islamic Opinion) and consulted among themselves, the *ulamas* (religious leaders) in Mindanao and even with their peers in Indonesia, the Nahdatul Ulama.

After this extensive process, the *Daruh-Iftah* issued an edict which declares that family planning does not refer to abortion or to birth control but to birth or child spacing—and that it should be a couple's decision.

The newly issued *fatwah* cites verses from the Holy Qur'an that promote family planning and forbid infanticide. Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheik Ali Jadel Haq noted: "A thorough reading of the Qur'an reveals no text prohibiting the prevention of pregnancy or diminution of the number of children. However, we can find many verses in the Qur'an prohibiting infanticide by any means."

Delayed marriage is advocated for those not ready for it: "Let those who find not the financial means for marriage keep themselves chaste, until Allah enriches them with His bounty." Thus, the *fatwah* urges: "Marriage should be planned for, with a view specially to ensure the ability of a man to care for a wife and a household. Otherwise, in the meantime, a Muslim should remain chaste."

The document spells out the rationale for family planning: "The permissibility of family planning is for the welfare of the mother and the child and for the couple to raise *saleh* [goodly] children who are pious, healthy, educated and well-behaved children."

It concluded: "The Assembly, therefore, finds that reproductive health and family planning as practiced under valid reasons and recognized necessities, are in accordance with the teachings of Islam."

The Grand Mufti of Egypt approved the results, and praised the religious leaders for their efforts.

The edict was enriched by contributions of 200 *ulamas* in Davao City and, later, by Metro Manila-based Muslim religious leaders.

More than 100 men and women attended the latter meeting, which was supported by the Academy for Educational Development/United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through its The Social Acceptance of Family Planning program.

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The meeting, held at the UP-Diliman campus, was at the initiative of the Center for the Promotion for Peace and Development in Mindanao (CPPDM).

"In family planning, we look at the roots of the problems and their solutions because family planning is an integral part of peace," said CPPDM Director-General Saeed Daof. "There is a need for expeditious dissemination to the general population of information on the proper practice of family planning."

The mention of peace was significant, for many of the participants maintain ties with relatives in Mindanao, and they are aware of the situation in some war-torn areas of the region.

The *fatwah* also noted: "National data indicate that in the Philippines, 10 women die everyday from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Maternal mortality is found highest in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Northern Mindanao at 2,200-2,300 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births."

It added: "Infant mortality in ARMM is also very high at 55 deaths per 1,000 live births (1998 National Demographic and Health Survey).

Forum speaker Aleem Esmael Ebrahim of Central Mindanao also cited the development imbalance and said, "Muslims in Mindanao are always number one in illiteracy rates, unemployment, health problems and poverty incidence despite vast resources such as lakes and minerals. The question is why. We have to account for ourselves."

Daof added: "It will take years to propagate peace and development but we have to start with family planning in relation to peace-keeping. — *PopDev Media Service*

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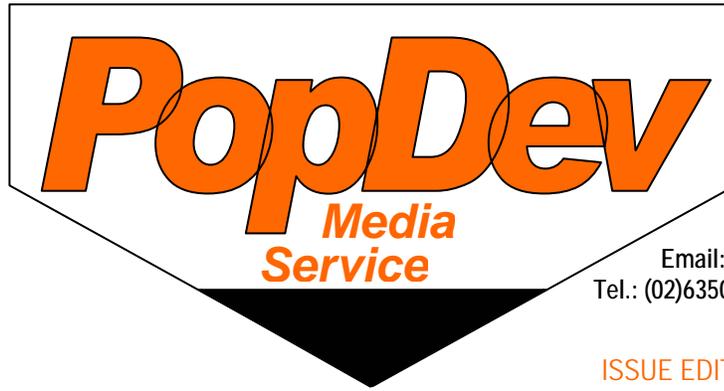
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*Years of neglect have taken their toll on this "beauty."*

## **Watch out for those vital statistics**

**By Haydee Parras-Toledo**  
*PopDev Media Service*

If it were a beauty pageant, she could have run away with the title. After World War II and through the 1970s, her vital statistics made her stand out in the Asian region: a gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$1502, with a population of only 43 million.

Years of neglect, however, have taken their toll on this "beauty." Some 25 years later, the Philippine population is a bloated 84 million while the GDP registered only US\$939—one of the poorest figures in Asia.

In addition, World Bank data has shown that 14.6 percent of the population are living below the international poverty line of US\$1 (now P55+) per day.

Unchecked population growth has been identified as one of the critical elements for the deterioration of the figures.

In a report by Dennis S. Mapa for the Asia Pacific Policy Center, with assistance from the Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD), the effects of population growth on economic growth were mapped out, using simulation techniques.

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Using cross-country data from 1975-2000, to illustrate the impact of population growth on economic growth, Mapa was able to show that population growth rates have an opposite or negative effect on economic growth rate. In fact, according to the study, a one percent reduction in total population growth could have meant an increase of 1.23 percent in the average income growth rate.

On the other hand, an increase in the workers' population has a positive effect on economic growth; this supports the concept of economic dividend or economic bonus.

Although the Philippines had an early start, the progress of its "human capital" or human resources has been rather slow.

The country's rapid population growth and high fertility rates have kept the Philippines from experiencing the same progress attained by our East Asian neighbors. Likewise growing is the population that is dependent.

The Mapa study confirms an earlier study of University of the Philippines School of Economics Professors Ernesto Pernia and Arsenio Balisacan. This showed that a one percent increase in the overall mean income would increase the mean income of the poorest 20 percent of the population by 0.5 percent.

Moreover, the heavy population burden prevented the country from improving or maximizing existing factors that could have boosted economic growth: increased average life expectancy at birth, an economy more open to trade, savings rate, literacy rate, and quality of public institutions, among others.

Clearly, our vital statistics—to use the real meaning of the term—have reached critical levels, and we can no longer avoid addressing the factors affecting them.

For the population program to really have an impact in managing the country's population, Mapa recommended a well-designed and well-funded family planning program; improving the status of women through education, more job opportunities, and better health care.

Crucial to the success of our goals, the report added, is the firm commitment of our leaders and other influential sectors of society. – *PopDev Media Service*

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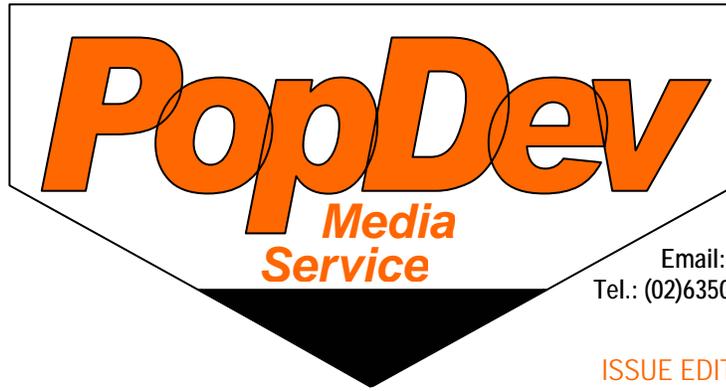
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*There is a deadline for meeting the Millennium Development Goals.*

## **Securing the future of our children**

**By Ma. Carmela Tagorda**  
*PopDev Media Service*

There are projections that by 2010, the Philippines will have a population of nearly 100 million. That is only a few years away, and so it is just fair to ask: What are the economic, social and political implications of a population of nearly 100 million? In such a state, what is the future of our children?

But let's put a human face to these questions—a child walking to school all by herself, braving the rains, saving her jeepney fare to pay for project materials. Tired, she puts down her bedraggled bag and adjusts her water jug. She sighs deeply—then picks up her load and walks on.

Let's meet Anna, now in Grade 4 in a public school. An honor student, she is the pride of her mother who has been looking for a job ever since the restaurant where she cooked folded up two years ago.

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*"Nalugi, e* (It lost money). But I can keep house till late for the *mayaman* (rich) of our subdivision and rush home to cook for my kids," says Virgie, Anna's mother and a single parent.

Will Anna and her four siblings ever finish school in such a situation? The League of Corporate Foundation (LCF) must have had them in mind when it held a recent forum on corporate social responsibility at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC). The theme was *"May Bukas Ka, Bata!"* (You Have a Future, Child!).

One of the keynote speakers was Professor Solita Monsod of the University of the Philippines School of Economics, one of the authors of the national version of the *Human Development Report* of the United Nations, and a popular TV host and columnist.

"The good news is that we have a high probability of attaining the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) because of an environment of strong support," Monsod told the plenary session. "The national scenario for achieving the goals is strong in terms of policy, program and budget." For education the goal is universal access to primary education by 2015.

But the bad news is the low cohort survival rate for every 100 children who enter primary school but drop out, she added:

"Between 1991 and 2001 the figure was 6.6 percent; by this year (2004) it should increase to 11.7 percent and if we want to make it by 2015, we have to work (on the youths completing high school)," Monsod said.

Monsod presented a chart on population growth rate, which was affected by a strong fertility rate of 3.7 percent in 1998 and 3.5 percent in 2003. Having no available and effective means to lower the figures beyond a minimum rate has effects on the demands on education, she explained.

The former Cabinet member then shared the results of scenario-setting: In one scenario, the country can achieve the MDG but in the other, "it's business as usual. In the first we get a population growth rate of 1.8 percent but in Scenario 2, we get a population growth rate of 2.3 percent. With every point making a difference, we can say about the theme *'May Bukas Ka, Bata'*—there's none for elementary school and high school in the future."

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What's to be done to improve Scenario 2? The relevant MDG pledges here are to reduce child mortality and to improve women's health.

"*Dapat* we should encourage and influence the government to change its policy on the population growth rate," urged Monsod, economic planning secretary under the Aquino administration. "Responsible business, committed business, must check to ensure that the government will redouble its efforts for the MDG. Influence the policy."

In the case of Anna the fourth grader, it is her eldest brother, now 19, who supports the family with occasional jobs. But can they survive when, according to Ibon Foundation, a family of six based in Metro Manila needs at least P560 a day for food, fare and attending school?

The Millennium Development Goals of the UN were agreed upon in 2000. At that time Anna, who is probably 10, was only about six years old. Will she have a better life in 2015, the self-imposed deadline of world leaders for achieving the Millennium Development Goals? — *PopDev Media Service*