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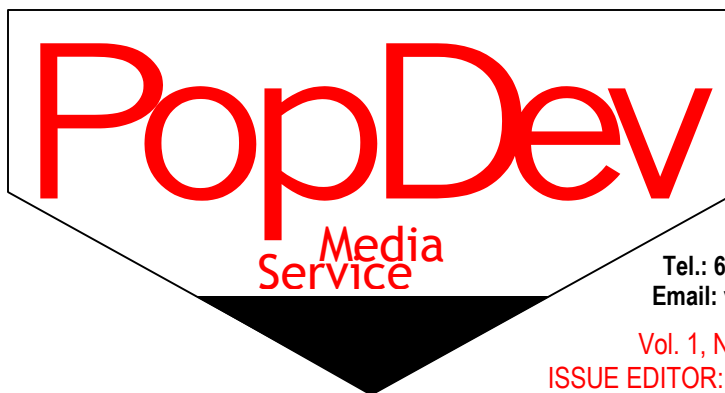
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ISSUE EDITOR: Cynthia Diaz Alberto

To remedy the problem of street children, we must get at its roots.

More responsible parents, fewer street children

By Raymond Lim Toledo
PopDev Media Service

“Responsible parenthood” has many meanings. Perhaps the simplest definition is that a couple should not have more children than they can afford to fully support financially, physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

In the case of Filipino street children, parent support is exactly what they do not have.

The term "street children" is officially defined by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as “boys and girls (usually 5 -17 years old) found in urban areas who have adopted the streets as their habitual abode and/or source of livelihood.”

According to a DSWD Fact Sheet, there are more than 220,000 of them roaming the nation’s cities. Seventy-five percent of them have parents and go home regularly (e.g., every few days); 20 percent go home on a very irregular basis; and 5 percent are completely abandoned.

To survive, they beg, peddle, scavenge, steal, gamble, push drugs, sell their bodies (both sexually and literally, as in selling their blood and kidneys), join gangs, fight, and sometimes kill.

By working 6 to 14 hours per day, they earn 100 to 300 pesos daily. To temporarily ward off

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hunger and pain, they sniff rugby fumes, overdose on cough syrup, inhale *shabu*. They often become teenage parents of another generation of street children, widening and deepening the cycle of poverty and dehumanization.

Worse, “there are more street children now than before. And for as long as the problems of poverty and overly rapid population growth remain unresolved, their number will continue to increase,” says DSWD Secretary Corazon “Dinky” Juliano-Soliman.

Despite its extremely limited resources, the government is doing its best to address the street children problem. But it simply does not have the money to house, feed, educate, and rehabilitate more than 220,000 street children – with thousands more added each year. In many cases, street children rescued by DSWD and brought back to their parents return to the streets after a few days or weeks – often on orders of the parents themselves.

“So far, it is only Makati City which has passed an ordinance that parents who are repeatedly caught allowing their children to work in the streets will be sued in court and punished. Apparently, officials of other places have not done the same because they are afraid of losing votes during elections,” Secretary Soliman notes.

The DSWD head believes that the street children problem is but the symptom of much deeper social diseases. You cannot cure the symptom without curing the disease; in this case, the main disease is poverty and its root causes.

Asked about the possible link between the Philippine government’s weak population program and the problem of street children, Soliman says: “The poorer a family is, the higher the possibility of a large family. Usually, it’s due to three causes. First, many poor couples have very low awareness of responsible parenthood, and think they can just have as many children as they want.

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“Second, because of poverty, they think that having many children is an investment in the future. They think, 'the more children I have, the more people I will have working for me in the future, and I am assured that at least one of them will take care of me when I grow old.'

“Third is the very common Filipino attitude of *bahala na* (come what may) -- let's just enjoy the moment and if we happen to have kids, then let's have the kids – without thinking that it will leave the children very vulnerable to malnutrition, disease, and eventually a life of crime and destitution.”

Soliman further observes that “majority of poor Filipinos are simply not aware of responsible parenthood.” She's not quoting a research finding. She's talking from a solid grasp of how the poor live, think, and feel. Before heading the DSWD, she was into grassroots-level community organizing and development work, with both rural and urban poor, for nearly three decades. As DSWD secretary, she heads the government agency tasked with being at the forefront of service to the poorest of the poor in Philippine society.

“If the government succeeds at least in its information campaign regarding responsible parenthood and proper birth spacing, this will greatly diminish the problem of street children,” says Soliman. The hope is that, as more couples learn and accept the values and principles of responsible parenthood, including the most fundamental principle of not having more children than they can afford to support, fewer children will be forced to live and work in the streets.

The Catholic church pressure on the government not to promote artificial methods of family planning could also be one of the reasons for the low level of family planning practice in the country. Until now, the Catholic church supports only natural family planning, maintaining that artificial family planning methods promote promiscuity, immorality, premarital and extramarital sex and are, therefore, unacceptable.

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It was only a few months ago that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made a public statement regarding the need to address population issues as part of the country's overall development effort. Before that, there was deafening official silence on family planning and related issues.

Secretary Soliman adds: “At least now that the President has raised the population issue, the matter of responsible parenthood is open for discussion. Unlike before when you would automatically be accused of being pro-abortion if you mentioned family planning. However, the President has also stated that since the great majority of Filipinos are Catholics, we might as well focus on responsible parenthood through natural family planning, since that is the position acceptable to the church.”

Proponents of free choice argue, however, that considering the urgency of addressing the imbalance between population and economic growth, the government should promote both artificial and natural family planning methods, and leave it to the couple to choose based on their personal and religious beliefs.

Is there something that ordinary persons can do as individuals to help remedy the street children problem?

“Yes. You can help by not giving alms to children begging in the streets. If you want to help, you should give to responsible nongovernment organizations that are working to solve the problem in a sustained and long-term manner. Children go to the streets because they know they can earn from begging. Once we take away this incentive, once they realize that they cannot earn anything from begging, they will stop. But for as long as we give alms out of misguided pity, we are making the problem worse, we are creating a generation of beggars.” — *PopDev Media*

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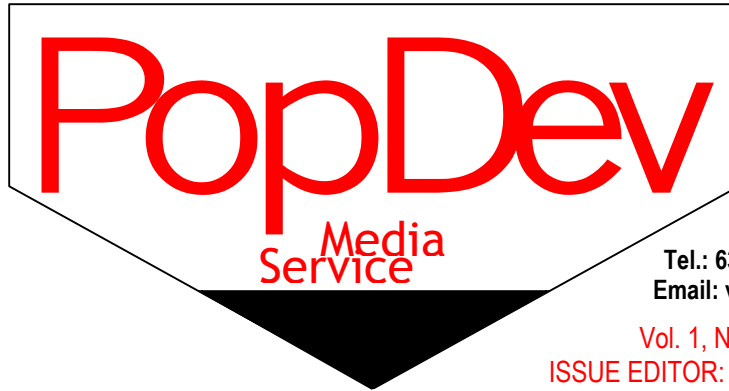
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Trafficking is a global problem linked to poverty and population growth.

Trafficking in women – an outcome of poverty

By Perla Aragon-Choudhury

PopDev Media Service

Trafficking is a clandestine activity that involves syndicates. Worth about \$8-12 billion worldwide, the majority of its victims are women and children.

The statement comes from Chairperson Aurora Javate-de Dios of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW). “The Department of Foreign Affairs has recorded 1,000 victims in the Philippines over the last three years or so,” she says. “But our feeling is that this is just indicative. The definition of trafficking is unclear and victims do not come forward.”

Trafficking is generally understood as the exploitative recruitment and export of persons for employment abroad, where the trafficker gets big cuts of the fees paid and salaries earned by the persons recruited. The jobs are usually sex-related and domestic, and in many cases, the victims had been deceived as to the true nature of the jobs.

Filipino women get trafficked mostly to Japan and other Asian countries, including, more recently, South Korea.

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In "A Review of Data on Trafficking in the Republic of Korea," Dr. June Lee, a former International Organization for Migration (IOM) Seoul Chief of Mission, estimates that as many as 1,000 Filipino women were working near the US military bases there in 1999. They were among the 5,000 or more women who had been trafficked from different countries into South Korea for the sex industry since the mid-1990s.

Dr. Lee reports that these Filipinas are recruited by traffickers for their proficiency in the English language and are admitted into South Korea on "E-6 Entertainment" visas. Dr. Lee's document details interviews with trafficked women who describe their recruitment by agents, the false contracts that lured them and the exploitative working conditions that they endure in an industry characterized by entrapment and intimidation.

Why do many Filipino women become victims of trafficking? Javate-de Dios made reference to what she called the galloping rate of population growth in relation to the economy and their effects. Too many people and not enough jobs lead to economic difficulties that drive women to seek other sources of living.

Trafficking is linked to poverty, stresses the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which has a global data base established under the Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings (GPAT) of its Centre for International Crime Prevention. "Persons are typically recruited from moderately poor countries, transported through countries which provide safe routes, and end up in more affluent parts of the world. Asia, the former Soviet Republics and Africa are the major regions of origin."

Recently, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 (Republic Act No. 9208) was signed into law. It criminalizes the "recruitment, transportation, transfer and harboring of persons with or without the victim's consent' for the purpose of exploitation such as prostitution, forced labor slavery and the removal for sale of body organs.

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During the signing, which took place in Malacañang on May 26, 2003, Bayan Muna Representative Liza Maza said that "at least half a million women and children are trafficked in the Asia-Pacific region every year and the Philippines has been cited as among the countries in Asia where trafficking is at its worst."

Deputy Director Jean Enriquez of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia pointed out, however, that trafficked persons "should not carry the burden of proving that force was used on them, especially given the context of poverty and gender discrimination which spawns the situation of lack of real consent or choices for the women."

The new law will penalize the offender with life imprisonment and a fine of up to P5 million for any offense under the following circumstances: if the trafficked victim is a child, if the victim died or incurred HIV/AIDS, if the offender is related to the victim, or if the offender is a member of a law enforcement unit of the government.

Also, a "user" or "buyer" of trafficked prostituted women will receive six months imprisonment and pay a fine of P50,000 for a first-time offense. Second-time offenders pay double that and stay in jail for a year.

The victim will be protected from unnecessary public disclosure of his or her identity, and will be given counseling, temporary shelter, health care, legal aid, and protection as a witness.

Javate-de Dios called the new law a landmark achieved by government and NGOs working together for eight long years.

For her part, Maza said, "It will now be up to each one of us to ensure...proper implementation... We must continue to be active in educating women and children in impoverished communities who run a high risk of being trafficked... Let us continue to work and struggle for comprehensive reforms that will alleviate the worsening poverty of our people. These

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are all critical to putting an end to the trafficking in women and children.” — *PopDev Media*

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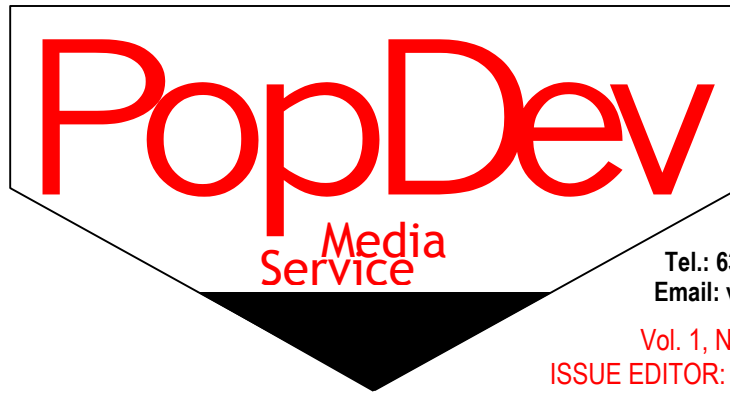
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Gaining wider acceptance among Filipino men...

No-scalpel vasectomy: Sure, quick and easy

By Roberto C. Navarro
PopDev Media Service

The atmosphere is fiesta-like. Men, women and children move about a seating area with white monobloc chairs just across the health center. A huge *tolda* secured by bamboo poles protects them from the heat of the midday sun while a streamer on an improvised stage declares “Launching of No-Scalpel Vasectomy, Brgy. Alegria, Alabel, Sarangani.”

While 16 men wait for their turn to undergo no-scalpel vasectomy at the health center, a number of women line up in the adjacent house to take their tetanus toxoid shots or avail of other services for their babies and children.

“In all the barangays we go to, the launching of no-scalpel vasectomy is held in conjunction with the provision of an expanded service delivery that includes family planning counseling, Vitamin A supplementation and immunization for children, and tetanus toxoid shots for pregnant women,” said Dr. Jose Rodriguez, chief of party of Management Sciences for Health (MSH).

MSH is a nonprofit organization contracted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist the Department of Health (DOH) in its Matching Grant Program

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(MGP). The MGP provides technical and financial assistance to local government units (LGUs) willing to implement health and family planning programs.

According to Dr. Rodriguez, no-scalpel vasectomy has been gaining wider acceptance in barangays across the 16 regions of the country since the procedure was brought down to the barangay level a year ago. He and his team of trained doctors have performed 2,101 vasectomy procedures from Ilocos Norte to Sarangani.

No-scalpel vasectomy or NSV is the method of choice in many barangays for several reasons. First, training local doctors to do the male sterilization procedure is easier and faster than teaching them to do tubal ligation. Second, the procedure can easily be performed in a health center or even in the patient's home, using local anesthetics and only two simple tools. Finally, there is very minimal chance of complication or infection.

The 10-minute procedure, said Dr. Rodriguez, leaves only a small hole on the skin of the scrotum, which is simply covered with a band-aid afterwards until it heals.

Recruited by especially trained barangay health workers (BHWs), the men go through several levels of counseling before, during and after they undergo vasectomy. At the pre-NSV counseling, the benefits and features of the procedure are explained to them and their reservations about it are clarified.

According to Dr. Rodriguez, the three most common misconceptions of patients and their partners are: vasectomy makes a man *bayot* (gay); he becomes weak and unable to do hard work; and he becomes a *babaero* (womanizer). These misconceptions are corrected before the men decide to be vasectomized.

At the health center, just before they undergo the procedure, the doctor makes sure that the men have fully decided to undergo the permanent family planning method. The simple steps

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are explained to them. They are told that the only pain they would feel would be the prick of the syringe that deliver the local anesthesia.

Once the operation is done, the vasectomized men are made to rest and are observed for a few minutes. Again, they are gathered for post-NSV counseling.

In Alegria, Alabel, Dr. Rodriguez did the counseling himself. After debunking those false stories of men becoming gay or weak after undergoing vasectomy, he told the men that getting their wife or partner pregnant was now next to impossible if they followed a few must-do steps immediately after the simple operation. First, the wife must use a temporary method of family planning within the next three months after the husband undergoes vasectomy. The next 20 ejaculations of the patient might still contain sperm that might impregnate his partner. The patient must take the antibiotics provided by the health center just to ensure that the tiny wound does not get infected.

To Ruben Lawa, 40, one of the 16 men of Alegria who were vasectomized, these instructions are easy to follow. He said that he and his wife decided on having him vasectomized because they had seven children already. “We are children of farmers and we rely on our hands to get a good harvest. I want to send my children to high school but I’m not harvesting enough corn. Now I can concentrate on increasing my harvest. I don’t have to worry about having another child to feed.”

“To promote NSV in the barangay, BHWs provide counseling on male sterilization with the help of patients like Ruben who have undergone the procedure and are satisfied with it,” Dr. Rodriguez said. “Occasionally, Ruben will be tapped to give testimonials to other men in the barangay who are interested in NSV.” — *PopDev Media Service*

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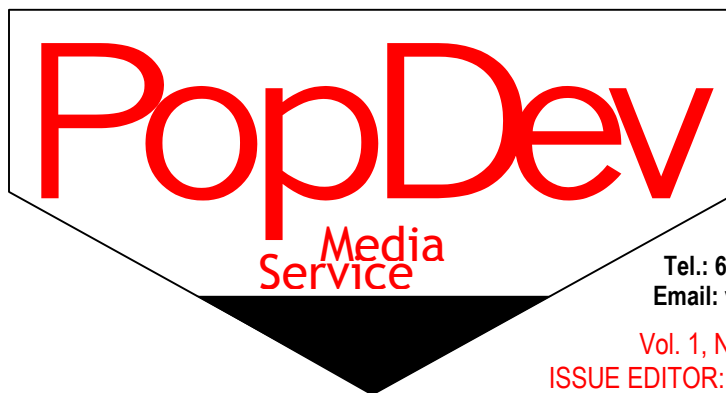
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Family programs in the workplace have boosted workers' performance.

Family planning increases productivity

By Haydee Parras Toledo
PopDev Media Service

Having a family planning program in the workplace has proven to be beneficial for both companies and workers. The experiences by the member-companies of the Responsible Parenthood-Maternal and Child Health Association of the Philippines, Inc (RPMCHAPI) attest to this.

RPMCHAPI is a private, non-stock, non-profit association of 46 manufacturing companies in the Philippines. With more than 140,000 combined workforce, its members include big companies like Intel, Fujitsu, Shindengen, Ankor-Anam, Masushita, Motorola, Tupperware, Coca-Cola, Jollibee, Universal Robina, Cebu Mitshumi, Dole Philippines, and Central Azucarera Don Pedro.

The association aims to lead the private sector in using its resources to enhance family life, responsible parenthood, maternal and child health values and practices among Filipino workers, thus improving their work productivity and quality. These, in turn, can redound to benefits for the agro-industrial sector.

Almost two decades of work have produced numerous positive results that have helped pull the productivity barometer in the manufacturing sector.

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For the Central Azucarera Don Pedro. Inc. (CADPI), for instance, productivity not only increased; the company also realized savings of as much as 54.79% in medical and hospitalization-related expenses, according to Roy Luntayao, community development officer of Central Azucarera Don Pedro and RPMCHAPI treasurer.

In a paper delivered at a seminar held recently by the Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD), Luntayao said the program also helped enhance CADPI's image as a socially responsible organization. It has received recognitions from various award-giving bodies like the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), and the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), among others.

“CADPI believes that the workers and their families are its basic building blocks, and the strength of the company is based on the kind of family that its workers have,” said Luntayao.

“CADPI's Family Welfare Program aims to strengthen the unity and enhance the capabilities of parents and other members of the family through enrichment activities – the ability to provide greater value and importance to the goodness already inherent in relationships, thereby increasing productivity.”

Luntayao noted that his company's Family Welfare Program became more responsive to the needs of their employees when they forged a partnership with PCPD in the implementation of the Responsible Parenthood-Maternal and Child Health Program (RP-MCH). The partnership has also caused the institutionalized implementation of the Family Welfare Program in the company using the following strategies:

- Referral system utilized for artificial family planning services.
- Specialized officers assigned to take charge of information, education,

communication (IEC) and service delivery; nurses or clinic staff and motivators trained.

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- IEC activities conducted through big group lectures, small group discussions, and film showings during off-milling season; motivation of family planning method acceptors done on a one-on-one basis.
- Dissemination and promotion of the program done through posters and brochures placed on company bulletin boards, logo-making contest, company newsletters, messages in payslips, and program orientation of company managers.
- Program symposiums and related activities undertaken on company time; participants recruited through posters, announcement during flag ceremonies and newsbreaks, and official memos.
- Service delivery done through the expanded referral system wherein acceptors are referred to the district hospital, local health unit, regional or provincial hospital, or other referral centers like the UP-PGH.
- Incentives and rewards given to the program team, like company-sponsored outings and Christmas gifts.

The implementation of the RP-MCH program in workplaces began in 1984 with the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) providing the funding to the PCPD.

When program funding ended in 1999, the member-companies, having seen the benefits of the program, decided to continue the work on a voluntary basis. Thus, RPMCHAPI was established.

To date RPMCHAPI continues to advocate and support family planning in the workplace. As Roy Luntayao puts it, “Our experiences bear good fruits that are replicable.” —

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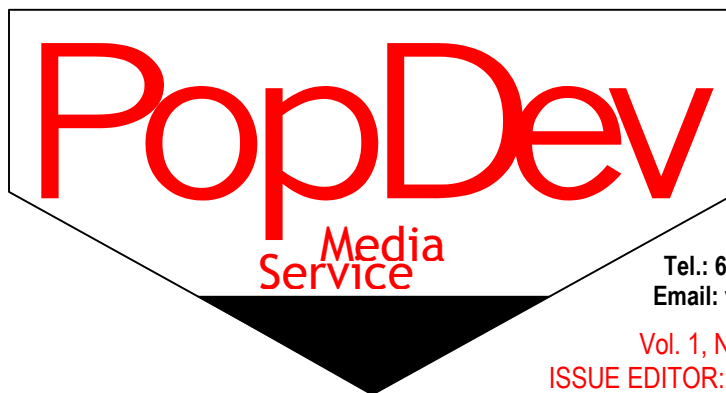
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Three out of ten school children drop out before Grade 6.

Back to school? Not so for many young Pinoys

By Mydia V. Lacaba
PopDev Media Service

Sonny, 16 years old, would have graduated from high school this year. Unfortunately, he and his two stepbrothers were forced to stop studying because his stepfather's salary could no longer pay for their tuition fees, school supplies and allowances. Of the six children in their family, only the youngest three, all in elementary school, have been able to continue with their schooling. Meanwhile, the three out-of-school youths are looking for jobs to help pay the bills.

Sonny's stepfather, Mang Cesar, deeply regrets that his children have had to drop out of school. Being a teacher at a nearby college, he himself values education highly and believes that everyone should at least get a high school diploma. "But there was really nothing I could do," he laments. "It was a choice between that and eating and paying the electric bill. I do enjoy some subsidy for my eldest son's tuition fee because he studies at the school where I teach, but that doesn't really help a lot when you have six children to send to school."

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Sonny's dilemma is similar to that of many Filipino children today. Although basic education is compulsory in the Philippines, three out of ten children drop out of elementary school before Grade 6. And out of the seven who go on to high school, only five will graduate.

As in Sonny's case, the reasons are mostly economic. With some 40 percent of the population or around 30 million Filipinos considered poor, it is inevitable that many children will be forced to drop out because they simply cannot afford to stay in school. Even if elementary education in public schools is supposed to be free, the additional costs of miscellaneous fees, uniforms, textbooks, school supplies, transportation and food allowance are beyond the means of so many poor families. Some children have to work and earn extra money or stay home to take care of younger siblings while their parents go off to work.

The government is supposed to be the main provider of basic education. But faced with the rapid growth of the school-age population that it is expected to educate each year, the government is forced to stretch its limited resources as well as it can, which is no easy task. The Department of Education projects a net increase of 2 percent in the number of enrollees into the system each year. In 1999, this was translated as 400,000 additional students, 8,000 more classrooms (at 50 per classroom), 1.6 million more textbooks, 400,000 more desks, and 8,000 more teachers. This included only the net increase, not the catch-up numbers needed to be able to take up the shortages accumulated in previous years.

With so many new enrollees in the educational system every year, the teacher-pupil ratio keeps deteriorating and the government is perennially burdened with the task of expanding facilities. Government resources are being diverted into building new classrooms and hiring more teachers to accommodate population growth instead of improving the quality of education for current students. As a result, educational outcomes have been steadily declining. Schools cannot

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meet basic educational challenges, like reducing dropout rates and raising academic achievement levels.

What can be done? Some of the answers to the problems of the Philippine education system may be found in an improved economy and advances in the education sector. Whatever potential improvements that can be made, however, get watered down, and in some cases, nullified in the race against numbers. A more sensible solution would be to slow down population growth so that resources can be concentrated on keeping kids in school long enough for them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to function well as workers, parents and citizens.

Neighboring countries in East Asia have demonstrated the potentially large benefits of slowing down the rapid increase in population. A World Bank study showed that during the 1980s, the growth of the school-age population in East Asia was very slow, leading to a decline in the number of school children in Singapore, South Korea and Thailand. Taken with the swift growth of these countries' economies, this presented an opportunity to increase the amount of resources spent on each child and to improve educational results.

Such a scenario may seem to be too much to expect from the Philippines, a country where the rate of annual population growth is at 2.3 percent and has been that way without much change over the past ten years. But faced with the continuously increasing numbers of school children and the corresponding increase in dropouts, the Philippines must address the fundamental problem of population growth soon.

When it does, there will be fewer children to teach and more resources to spend on each child. Maybe then Sonny and his brothers can go back to school to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills they need for a better life. — *PopDev Media Service*

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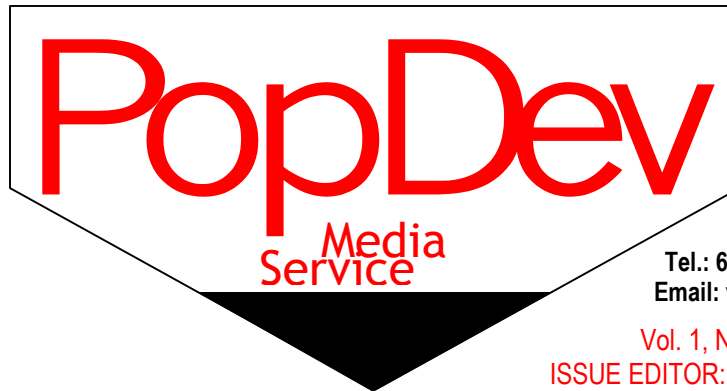
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Surviving the struggle through poverty, congestion and the ills of city life.

Making a difference in the life of the poor

By Odette M. De Guzman
PopDev Media Service

“When you get to the street, everyone knows where the sisters live. You can ask anyone you meet to give you directions.” This from Naomi Ardon who oversees income-generating projects of Alay Kapwa, an organization of residents of urban poor communities.

Ardon acknowledges the influence of a group of sisters of the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM) on their organization, the community they call home, and yes, their personal lives.

Alay Kapwa started out as Bible study groups conducted by the sisters in 1979. Studying the Bible opened their eyes to so many realities of living in an urban poor community. The sisters who gave so unselfishly of their time, talents, and material blessings inspired them to formally organize Alay Kapwa in 1986.

While the incidence of poverty in urban areas has declined (now only 20 percent), life in a poor urban community can be quite distressing compared to poor rural living. With population density getting as high as 96,000 persons per square kilometer in the most crowded areas, the risks and pressures brought on by congestion, poor sanitation, pollution, lack of basic services, and exposure to the social ills can exceed human limits.

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In the communities it works with, Alay Kapwa has addressed these pressing needs of poor urban dwellers. Facilitators of Alay Kapwa conduct classes for mothers, children, youth, and fathers. Malnourished children are assisted through a feeding program in day care centers. Scholarships are awarded to children of members who actively serve the community. Trained volunteers attend to health needs. There is also a medical assistance fund for those who really cannot afford the cost of medicines.

Alay Kapwa was instrumental in obtaining security of tenure for residents who have conscientiously paid their dues to the National Housing Authority (NHA). The organization continues to pursue the Bible education classes that started it all and also conducts catechism classes for children.

Today, Alay Kapwa operates in nine areas: Leveriza, Orosa, Dakota, Paco, and Pandacan in Manila; Paliparan and Gen. Trias, Cavite; Sariaya, Quezon; and Cebu City.

Of its various programs, it is the income-generating projects that have made Alay Kapwa known to those outside the communities where they operate.

The communities make and sell gifts and houseware like soap, candles, crocheted items, metalcraft, and baskets. They also have food items like cocojam, peanut butter, polvoron, bagoong, crinkles, and peanuts. They employ 592 workers and benefit 25,000 people.

Their products are available in their main office at #2258 Interior 4, Kapitana corner Bagong Lipunan, Barangay 9, Leveriza, Manila or in stalls provided by benefactors at the RCBC Plaza and Rockwell Center in Makati City and Harrison Plaza in Manila.

Almost two decades since its establishment, Alay Kapwa remains at the forefront of the struggle to improve the lot of the urban poor. Much remains to be done, particularly in providing basic services like water and sanitation, electricity, health, and housing. Residents store precious water in huge containers, crowding the narrow alleys that also serve as washroom, kitchen, and

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laundry area. The prohibitive cost of electricity makes them resort to illegal connections. They are plagued by common complaints like cough, colds, and fever; malnutrition; and tuberculosis. Indeed, it is a constant struggle to keep body and soul together, made more difficult by modern-day problems like drugs.

The overriding concern foremost in residents' minds is the search for gainful employment and adequate income; that is why the income-generating projects are central to the organization's efforts to improve life in the community. "If we have work and income, we will be able to provide for the other needs of our families," says Ardon.

Alay Kapwa began as a group of faithful believers who chose to put their faith into action, instituting programs and projects that address the problems that plague urban poor communities – poverty, congestion, overpopulation, lack of basic services and employment opportunities, among others. They believe in leading by example, so, like the Master they seek to obey, they are servants as well as leaders. In the cleanliness drive, for example, each household is supposed to be in-charge of the area in front of their home. If the family is remiss in meeting their community obligation, members of Alay Kapwa take broom and dustpan and clean up the area.

We may always have the poor with us, but as long as they are, Alay Kapwa will continue to pursue its mandate to work for their welfare. — *PopDev Media Service*

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