



MAP URGES GOVERNMENT TO DECLARE MALNUTRITION AND CHILD STUNTING AS TOP NATIONAL AGENDA

June 19, 2023

We in the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) firmly believe that because of their huge human and economic costs, malnutrition and child stunting deserve to be among the country's top national priorities, together with other urgent issues like poverty, climate change, and national security.

MALNUTRITION AND CHILD STUNTING MUST BE ADDRESSED AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

The government's declaration of malnutrition and child stunting as a priority agenda will ensure that concrete measures will be taken, sufficient funds will be earmarked, and actions will be cascaded from the national all the way to the community level.

Severe malnutrition remains a serious problem for nearly 30 years, with one in every three Filipino children below 5 years old suffering from stunting, according to a World Bank (WB) study. The country ranks fifth among countries in the East Asia and the Pacific region with the highest prevalence of child stunting. Rural areas have more stunted children (30%) than in urban areas (26%) in direct proportion to the poverty levels in the provinces like Western and Southern Mindanao, Mindoro, Negros, Palawan, Samar, and the far north of Luzon. Stunting rates are the highest in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (45%) and lowest in Manila and Central Luzon (23%).

An unstinting national support can enable future budgets to be allocated to initiatives and resources that can be made available to nutrition-sensitive programs that will holistically address key underlying determinants of proper nutrition. These include food security, access to nutritious food at cheaper prices, access to health and social services, as well as nutrition-specific interventions that deal with the immediate causes of maternal and child malnutrition, such as micronutrient deficiency and stunting.

ADVERSE EFFECTS CAN SPAN MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that malnutrition contributed to child mortality with 95 Filipino children dying everyday and that 27 out of 1,000 do not get past their fifth birthday. A malnourished individual has deficient or excessive nutrient intakes, and depending on the condition, can lead to wasting (low weight-for-height), being underweight, stunting and obesity. It is malnutrition that directly causes child stunting, not only physically, but more so mentally, which needs to be addressed urgently because of its long-term and irreversible effect on children.

Most importantly, malnutrition adversely affects multiple generations. Today's undernourished children will mature as poorly performing adults who will not have the necessary skills to better their lives and contribute to the country's human development. This will make it harder for them to get out of the vicious

cycle of poverty and poor health. It will be in this environment that they will raise their families and passing it on to the next generations, unless this issue is acted upon with urgency today.

EFFECTS ON HEALTH, QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE BURDEN ON THE HEALTH SYSTEM

The first 1,000 days of a child from conception up to two years of age are crucial. The World Health Organization (WHO) raised the concern that chronic malnutrition at this stage results in stunted growth development and impairment of children, rendering them vulnerable to infections and impaired cognitive development. Repeated bouts of illnesses can affect the health and quality of life of these children who will grow as sickly adults. Compounded with poverty, sickly adults will lead to diseases that will burden an already resource-constrained health system. More financing will need to be allocated for curative services rather than prevention and health promotion. Needless to say, this will require bigger budget allocation just to plug the health requirements.

EFFECTS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PHILIPPINE PROGRESS

Child stunting can impair a malnourished child's cognitive ability that in turn will impact his/her development, ability to learn and capacity to earn income. Failure to arrest malnutrition and child stunting will eventually lead to lowered capabilities, resulting in poor comprehension and lower educational attainment.

The extent of this problem is already evident in the deficient performance of Filipino students in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) where they ranked the lowest among 79 countries in mathematics, science, and reading. The COVID-19 pandemic has even worsened the learning gap and if not immediately addressed, it will affect the country's skilled labor force, make it unattractive to investors, and hamper economic growth. This will be detrimental to our future competitiveness and our progress as a nation.

MAP CAMPAIGN AGAINST MALNUTRITION AND CHILD STUNTING


To help solve this persistent societal problem and contribute to the effort to eradicate child stunting resulting from malnutrition, the MAP launched a campaign against malnutrition and child stunting in the country. Initiatives were laid out aimed at complementing the Government's Philippine Multi-sectoral Nutrition Project (PMNP).

- We fully support the four-year PMNP which aims to lower the incidence of malnutrition by helping over two hundred towns through primary health care services and nutritional support that will be provided to children and pregnant mothers.
- We urge the effective and judicious use of the PMNP's P10 Billion loan from WB by the government to address the health and nutrition needs of poor mothers and their children.
- We recommend an active pursuit of tripartite partnerships - business sector, government, and community - for a whole-of-society approach in fighting malnutrition and child stunting.

We in the MAP hope to expand our role beyond fund generation and philanthropy to a shared responsibility in addressing malnutrition in the country, participating in the governance of nutrition strategies and interventions.

The MAP will welcome the opportunity to serve as one of the three private sector representatives in the National Nutrition Council (NNC) and contribute to its mandate to formulate national food policies and strategies for nutritional improvement.

We are worried, yet we are hopeful too, that we can solve this national problem by working together. Failure to address this problem in an urgent and decisive manner will place our country's future in the hands of stunted children becoming adults whose capacity to be productive, competitive, and creative are limited. That will imperil national development and progress.


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