

Social Protection Programs Need Improvement

Manila Bulletin – Mon, Feb 25, 2013

<http://ph.news.yahoo.com/social-protection-programs-improvement-105652977.html>

MANILA, Philippines --- Human rights advocates urged policymakers yesterday to improve the country's social protection programs and increase funding for social services for the growing population of Filipino youth.

FoodFirst Information and Action Network Philippines (FIAN Philippines), Peoples Development Institute (PDI), and Action For Economic Reforms (AER) agreed during a forum that policymakers should seriously consider the importance of the country's demographics because the existing social protection programs leave out large segments of the poor vulnerable.

"Our country has a young population with an average of 22.5 years old and has only 8 percent of the population who will be 65 years old or older by 2030," Chavez said.

Joy Chavez, and AER fellow, noted that the Philippines has low dependency rate.

Dependency ratio is an age-population ratio of those typically not in the labor force or dependents (zero to 14 years old and 65 years old and above) and those in the labor or productive force (15-64 years old), she said. It is used to measure the pressure on productive population.

"The challenge now is how to sustain an active population," Chavez said.

She added that an active population exerts pressure on the provision of basic services, especially health care and education.

Moreover, it requires that the quantity and quality of employment be given special attention. Recent data show that 85 percent of the unemployed are educated (at least high school graduates), and half of the unemployed are 15-24 years old.

"So while there's not a significant older generation to worry about, unemployment has a negative impact on a predominantly insurance-based social protection system," she said.

Chavez also cited that social protection in the Philippines is largely insurance-based, through the Social Security System (SSS), Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) and PhilHealth.

Most insurance-based schemes depend on employment, or voluntary membership, she said.

"However, these social protection schemes cannot cover most of those in the informal sector. PhilHealth is an exception but it covers only health services," she said.

She added that the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program does not cover or it has unclear coverage of the elderly and families without reproductive age mothers or school-age children. She said CCT also does not cover certain vulnerable types, such as those extreme homeless and

street children.

Social protection constitutes policies, programs, and interventions that seek to reduce the susceptibility of the poor and vulnerable to risks. This can be done through the promotion and protection of livelihood and employment, improvement in their capacity to manage risks and their protection from disruption or loss of income, loss of welfare and diminished wellbeing.

"This brings to fore the need to assess the efficacy of insurance-based systems vis-à-vis direct provision via general social services; or how the two are connected," she said.

Candidates asked: What will you do to end hunger of 16.5 million Filipinos?

By: InterAksyon.com

February 28, 2013 10:21 PM

<http://www.interaksyon.com/article/56087/candidates-asked-what-will-you-do-to-end-hunger-of-16-5-million-filipinos>

http://www.interaksyon.com/assets/images/articles/interphoto_1325692129.png

MANILA, Philippines - A coalition of non-government and people's organizations and individuals advocating right to adequate food on Thursday challenged national and local candidates in the May 13 elections to aim for hunger-free Philippines.

Aurea Miclat-Teves, convenor of the National Food Coalition said her group would like to know what the candidates have to say about food security and how they, as leaders and legislators, once elected, can make this a reality in the Philippines "in this lifetime."

"Is there hope that the 16th Congress will improve the situation?" asked Teves, also president of FIAN Philippines, adding that hunger had been haunting the country under the various administrations since the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos.

"As the current administration winds up its reform program, there is a need to make the administration aware and see the urgency of crafting a national food policy before it bows out of office," Teves said.

"The crucial element in any platform to improve the lives of Filipinos is assuring food security for the nation – or providing adequate food that is accessible to all, especially to the poor in the rural and urban areas," she added.

The challenge of ensuring food security is especially for those who will win as senators and representatives as they will be the ones who will legislate a national food policy, according to Teves.

"We must, therefore, determine which candidates have made themselves informed of the issues involved in regard to food security and are going to take the correct steps to address this problem and approach it from the right perspective," she said.

Three times Singapore's population

Citing the latest survey by the Social Weather Stations on hunger, Teves said that there are 3.3 million Filipinos or 16.5 million individuals who have experienced involuntary hunger or having had nothing to eat at least once in the past three months.

"That is roughly the size of Holland and about three times the population of Singapore," she said.

Moreover, Teves said hunger incidence had steadily risen nationwide from 1998 to 2012.

She said that in 2012 the incidence of hunger in the National Capital Region more than doubled to 22.9 percent from only 8.1 percent in 1998.

"In the rest of Luzon, the incidence increased from 9.9 percent to 17.8 percent; in the Visayas, it rose from 11.3 percent to 14.6 percent; in Mindanao it was 14.5 percent, increasing to 26.3 percent. Over this period, moderate to severe hunger almost doubled to 19.9 percent in 2012 from 11 percent in 1998," Teves said.

"During these years, the official Philippine population figure rose from 60.7 million in 1990 to 76.51 million in 2000 and 92.34 million in 2010. So as our population steadily expanded, so did the number of hungry Filipinos rise while undernourishment declined only slowly," she added.

Group to Aquino: Declare right to adequate food a national policy

By: InterAksyon.com

March 3, 2013 12:23 PM

<http://www.interaksyon.com/article/56247/group-to-aquino-declare-right-to-adequate-food-a-national-policy>



MANILA, Philippines - With more than three years left to the current administration, President Benigno S. Aquino III should declare right to adequate food a national policy in order to leave a legacy that is beneficial to the present and future generations, the National Food Coalition (NFC) said in a news release.

In an event dubbed “National Conference on the Right to Adequate Food: A Collective Action for Policy Reform,” Aurea Miclat-Teves, NFC convenor, said there is a need for the government to come up with an enabling law that will rectify existing incoherent, non-complementary and conflicting legal mechanisms.

The conference was attended and participated in by more than 100 human rights defenders, rural development advocates, pro-environment groups, indigenous peoples, people's and non-governmental organizations from various parts of the country and representatives of different national government agencies last February 27 to 28.

Not in Constitution

In a presentation, lawyer Maria Socorro I. Diokno, secretary-general of Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), pointed out that the right to adequate food (RTAF) is not recognized in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. She proposed the enactment of a "Philippine Food Framework Law."

"As part of the Declaration of Policy in the proposed enabling law, the state should explicitly recognize right to adequate food as fundamental human right," said Diokno, adding that RTAF should be defined as a freedom and an entitlement that is beyond minimum set of calories,

proteins and other nutrients.

"The purpose of the proposed law must be to realize right to adequate food of every Filipino," the FLAG Officer stressed.

Diokno further explained that said enabling law should set targets or goals with time frames. Among the goals to be set are: eradication of hunger; improvement in nutrition; elimination of gender disparity in access to food/resources for food; and, sustainable use and management of natural and other resources for food.

She also said that the contents of the proposed law should include institutional responsibility mechanisms such as the identification of a lead agency, inter-agency collaboration, and collaboration with all food actors.

It should also include avenues for recourse to deal with discrimination in access, non-security of land tenure, unfair trade competition and harm caused by unsafe food. The state should also allocate appropriate funds with sources of funds and specific rules or guidelines on fund use, management and liquidation.

To ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the proposed law, Diokno also stressed that there should be a national mechanism for monitoring. "It can be a 'National Coordinating Committee for Food' or similar body," she said.

Not in HR action plan

In another presentation, Max De Mesa, chairman of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), disclosed that the right to adequate food is not substantially addressed and is not even a thematic objective in the final draft of the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) initiated by the government.

"Of crucial importance is the program to the right to adequate food," de Mesa emphasized, adding "that without it, actions to reduce poverty would be weak and the whole National Human Rights Action Plan anemic."

Declare 'right to food' as national policy, food advocates urge Aquino

BusinessMirror

Category: Agri-Commodities

Published on Sunday, 03 March 2013 19:44

Written by Jonathan L. Mayuga / Reporter

<http://businessmirror.com.ph/index.php/business/agri-commodities/10050-declare-right-to-food-as-national-policy-food-advocates-urge-aquino>

PRESIDENT Aquino was urged on Sunday to declare the right to adequate food (RTAF) a national policy and leave a legacy beneficial to present and future generations.

The appeal was made by a network of food-security advocates under the National Food Coalition (NFC) after the "National Conference on the Right to Adequate Food: A Collective Action for Policy Reform" was held on February 27 and 28.

More than 100 human-rights defenders, rural-development advocates, environmental advocates, indigenous peoples, people's and non-governmental organizations from various parts of the country, and representatives of different government agencies took part in the event.

Aurea Micalat-Teves, NFC convenor, said there is a need for the government to come up with an enabling law that will rectify the existing "incoherent, non-complementary and conflicting legal mechanisms" on food.

For her part, lawyer Maria Socorro I. Diokno, secretary-general of the Free Legal Assistance Group, proposed the enactment of a "Philippine Food Framework Law."

In a presentation during the conference, Diokno said the RTAF is not recognized in the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

"As part of the Declaration of Policy in the proposed enabling law, the state should explicitly recognize [the] right to adequate food as [a] fundamental human right," Diokno said.

She added that RTAF should be defined as a freedom and an entitlement that is "beyond [the] minimum set of calories, proteins and other nutrients."

Diokno also said, "The purpose of the proposed law must be to realize right to adequate food of every Filipino."

She added that the enabling law should set targets or goals with timeframes.

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natural and other resources for food.

Diokno said the contents of the proposed law should include institutional responsibility mechanisms such as the identification of a lead agency, inter-agency collaboration and collaboration with all food actors.

The proposed law should also include avenues for recourse to deal with discrimination in access, non-security of land tenure, unfair trade competition and harm caused by unsafe food. The government should also allocate appropriate funds with sources of funds and specific rules or guidelines on fund use, management and liquidation.

To ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the proposed law, Diokno said there should be a national mechanism for monitoring.

“It can be a ‘National Coordinating Committee for Food’ or [any] similar body,” she said.

Max de Mesa, chairman of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates, said RTAF is not substantially addressed and is not even part of the final draft of the government’s National Human Rights Action Plan.

“Of crucial importance is the program to the right to adequate food,” de Mesa said. “Without it, actions to reduce poverty would be weak and the whole National Human Rights Action Plan [would be] anemic.”

Bets challenged to take on hunger problem

Business Mirror, page A4

Category: Nation

Published on Thursday, 25 April 2013 20:43

Written by Jonathan L. Mayuga / Reporter

<http://businessmirror.com.ph/index.php/news/nation/12613-bets-challenged-to-take-on-hunger-problem>

FOOD security advocates on Thursday challenged candidates in the May 2013 midterm elections to focus and debate on the country's worsening hunger problem rather than feeding Filipino voters with propaganda trash.

Aurea Micalat-Teves, convener of the National Food Coalition (NFC), said one of the major reasons the country has a high incidence of hunger is the lack of a comprehensive national food policy, which candidates should seriously look into.

Teves said there is an urgent need to craft such policy which needs the full and active participation of all sectors concerned, including those most vulnerable to hunger.

“Should they get elected, incoming members of the 16th Congress must prioritize the crafting of a national food policy that will rectify incoherent, non-complementary and conflicting legal mechanisms,” Teves said.

Teves said that to show their sincerity in addressing the country's hunger problem, candidates should project themselves during the campaign and must enact a framework law on the right to adequate food of every Filipino.

She said the hunger problem is experienced worldwide, but it is worst in the Philippines.

There are some 870 million people in the world who do not have enough to eat. Citing an infographic of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Teves stressed that one in every eight individuals goes to sleep hungry every day. In the Philippines one in every six Filipinos suffer from involuntary hunger.

She added that FAO's estimate is still conservative, considering the third-quarter findings of the Social Weather Station last year which showed that 21 percent or an estimated 4.3 million households, or one in every five persons experienced “having nothing to eat in the last three months.”

“At the rate this election campaign is going, we have yet to hear concrete proposals from the candidates in addressing the hunger problem,” Teves said.

Citing data from FAO, the NFC said that among the countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and Cambodia are tied at second with 17-percent prevalence of undernourishment.

In terms of actual number, the Philippines has 16 million undernourished persons, while Cambodia has 2 million.

Lao People's Democratic Republic has the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the region with 28 percent or 2 million individuals. Indonesia, while having only 9-percent prevalence of undernourishment, has the highest number of undernourished citizens in the region, with 21.0 million.

FAO defines undernourishment or chronic hunger as the status of persons, whose food intake regularly provides less than their minimum energy requirements.

The average minimum energy requirement per person is about 1800 kilo calories per day. The exact requirement is determined by a person's age, body size, activity level and physiological conditions such as illness, infection, pregnancy and lactation.

Poverty data doubted, but...

The Philippine Star, page 1 (ear)

Updated April 26, 2013 - 12:00am

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2013/04/26/935043/poverty-data-doubted-...>

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN — President Aquino doubts the accuracy of poverty data provided by a government agency but says he is willing to adjust anti-poverty measures to benefit more Filipinos.

He questioned data from the National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) showing poverty levels were unchanged despite economic growth.

“I have a bit of a doubt since they used the wrong population data, which is the basis for computing per capita income,” Aquino said the other night, midway through the regional summit here of ASEAN leaders.

“How then can you properly compare 2009 and 2012? The (NSCB) might feel bad, but these are off-the-cuff remarks that were on top of my mind.”

Poverty incidence - or the percentage of the population living below poverty line - stood at 27.9 percent in the first semester of 2012, virtually unchanged from the 28.6 percent in 2009 and 28.8 percent in 2006.

Aquino chairs the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board.

The NSCB and the National Statistics Office (NSO) are attached agencies of NEDA.

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda and Cabinet Secretary Jose Rene Almendras, accompanying Aquino in Brunei, belied reports that Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan was excluded from the delegation to the 22nd Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit, fueling speculation that it might be related to the poverty report.

“NEDA is normally not very active in ASEAN because it’s about negotiations with equivalent line ministers such as trade, finance, etc.”, Almendras said. “Also, (Secretary) Balisacan just arrived from a foreign trip.”

Lacierda also said the main topics for discussion are primarily ASEAN matters and trade.

“It is not related whatsoever with the poverty survey,” he said.

In a press conference on Wednesday night, Aquino said he and his administration were open to ideas and “everything that will accelerate inclusive growth.”

However, he does not believe that immediately pouring billions of pesos into a certain program could actually effect change in poverty ratings overnight.

“Will we tweak it (anti-poverty programs)? Of course, we’re open to all... everything that will accelerate inclusive growth. But... it’s not as if we invest so many billions now and in one month’s time you will see a reversal,” he said.

Aquino said the Department of Social Welfare and Development’s 4Ps (Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program) has been receiving yearly budget increases due to its effectiveness in lifting people from misery and spurring economic growth.

“Now, I think what we should pay attention to is this: All our interventions for instance, example the Pantawid Pamilya Program... the DSWD’s budget increased over 200 percent,” he said.

“If we look at the economic activity in the areas where many households are beneficiaries of this, when you talk to the local businessmen, they will tell you there is a dramatic increase in economic activity in their areas.”

Lacierda said the government remained focused on generating jobs for Filipinos in urban and rural areas to mitigate poverty.

The Human Development and Poverty Reduction Cabinet cluster had come up with an action plan to generate jobs, he added.

Various programs to support the farmers are now in place to improve the agricultural sector, Lacierda said.

Aquino said he never had the chance to study poverty incidence thoroughly, but that 2009 population numbers were “questionable” and thus could not be compared to the 2012 figures.

“Somebody said there was really no change, whatsoever, and I don’t think that’s what the statistics said,” he said.

“Except for two regions, everybody else had... Obviously, they want dramatic changes. But there is reduction in the poverty levels in the rest of the regions. Now, what’s difficult here is to predict (changes), it takes time to gather statistics. But there are times when you ask for a particular quarter and the results that will come to you are two quarters after that.

“But, sorry, I just have to emphasize: The whole country is not composed of two regions. There are only two regions that had dramatic increases in poverty levels. May I point out that one of them is ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) and the ARMM, if you include 2009, how reliable are (the figures)? Are you comparing apples to apples?” the President asked.

Aquino said projects for the ARMM had been considered “ghosts” or nonexistent and even the population figure had to be corrected.

The ARMM is the region with the highest poverty incidence nationwide at 46.9 percent of families living below the poverty line in the first semester of 2012.

Another region that saw an increase in poverty incidence was SOCCSKSARGEN with 37.5 percent of families living below the poverty line.

Hunger incidence worse in Phl

Aurea Micalat-Teves, National Food Coalition (NFC) convener, said hunger incidence in the Philippines is 1:5.88 or almost 1:6, worse than the global average of 1:8.

“One in every six Filipinos is experiencing daily the world’s number one health risk - hunger,” she said.

Teves said 870 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat based on an infographic of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“It is worse in the Philippines,” she said.

Teves said FAO’s estimate is still conservative, considering the third quarter findings of the Social Weather Stations last year showed 21 percent or an estimated 4.3 million households or one in every five persons experienced having nothing to eat in the last three months.

“At the rate this election campaign is going, we have yet to hear concrete proposals from the candidates in addressing the hunger problem,” she said.

Teves, citing data from FAO, said among the countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and Cambodia are tied at 2nd with 17 percent prevalence of undernourishment.

In terms of actual number, the Philippines has 16 million undernourished persons, while Cambodia has 2 million, she added.

Teves said one major reason why the Philippines has high incidence of hunger is the lack of a comprehensive national food policy.

“Should they get elected, incoming members of the 16th Congress must prioritize the crafting of a national food policy that will rectify incoherent, non-complementary and conflicting legal mechanisms,” she said.

“If they are really sincere, as how they project themselves during the campaign, then they must enact a framework law on the right to adequate food of every Filipino.”

Senatorial bets react

San Juan Rep. JV Ejercito said the NCSB report should prod the government to buckle down to work.

“The Aquino administration can start by investing heavily in quality education and make it

accessible to all,” he said.

“The government should also work with various economic sectors to address job mismatches and focus on the development of the manufacturing sector to increase jobs.”

Ejercito said the country’s supposed economic gains have failed to lift the millions of Filipinos out of poverty.

“The lack of productive jobs caused by the government’s failure to implement the necessary economic reforms is one of the major reasons why many have remained mired in poverty,” he said.

Ejercito said implementing a stop-gap measure like the conditional cash transfer program will not resolve the social and economic ills.

“Workers are also deprived of the opportunity to earn enough due to widespread underemployment especially in the agriculture sector,” he said.

“The poor can no longer afford basic goods because of the continuous increase in prices.”

He and the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) will pursue programs and a legislative agenda focused on giving the poor the means to ensure their children will not inherit poverty, Ejercito said.

Former senator Migz Zubiri said only 40 families are getting richer in the country.

“Only 40 taipans are making money,” he said.

“The six percent economic progress translates to nothing to the millions of poor Filipinos. There has been no trickle down effects to our people. What should be done, with the increase of profits of businessmen, the blessings should be shared by the employers to their employees by giving them higher pay rates rather than fattening their own accounts.”

Aurora Rep. Juan Edgardo Angara said the government needs to focus on providing quality education accessible to all and generate jobs to alleviate poverty.

“The latest data on poverty make us realize the need for more comprehensive and far-reaching solutions,” he said.

“Poverty deprives Filipinos the opportunity to achieve their full potential to play a vital role in nation-building. We should immediately advance reforms and implement measures that would make the poor feel the gains of the growth of our economy.

“In order to get Filipino families out of poverty, we must push for drastic reforms on education and employment generation,” said Angara whose platform is anchored on education and jobs.

Former senator Jamby Madrigal said the public must not blame President Aquino if the poverty incidence remains the same since it has only been three years of his administration.

It is not that easy to cure the nine years of corruption under of the Arroyo administration, she added.

Madrigal said efforts to alleviate poverty are not expected to be felt this early in the Aquino administration.

If re-elected, she will file bills of national significance to hopefully address problems of the poorest of the poor now benefiting from government's conditional cash transfer, she added.

Former lawmaker Risa Hontiveros said that the administration should be credited for making a dent on poverty.

"It's like a rally cry that we have to be even more relentless in implementing these programs because we are on the right track," she said.

It should serve as a wake-up call to everyone in government, Hontiveros said.

Sen. Franklin Drilon said poverty incidence has dipped a bit since the Aquino administration took over.

"That only means that we have been successful in alleviating poverty," he said.

Drilon said the growth in population must be taken into consideration when discussing poverty alleviation.

The number of Filipinos has increased significantly from six to seven years ago, he added.

Drilon said the administration has implemented several reform measures like the increase in the coverage of the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. or PhilHealth, as well as the beneficiaries of the conditional cash transfer program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

"Reduction of poverty takes time," he said.

"But because of the reforms done by this administration, it has paved the way for substantive poverty reduction through socio-economic reforms like for example the 4Ps program, the increase in enrolment of the poor in the PhilHealth program."

Drilon said the allocation of P25 billion for PhilHealth this year and another P40 billion for 3.8 million Filipinos under the National Housing Poverty Reduction Program were unprecedented.

"That is precisely the point in this campaign," he said.

"This is a referendum of the performance of this administration. The past two and a half years,

the Aquino administration has shown its capacity to govern properly.

“We will continue to address poverty in this country and we’re confident that under the leadership of the President, we will succeed. But you don’t lick poverty at the levels that this administration inherited in two and a half years time.”

-Aurea Calica, Rhodina Villanueva, Jose Rodel Clapano, Delon Porcalla, Marvin Sy

Group to bets: Prioritize nutrition

By Ellalyn B. De Vera

Manila Bulletin | Published: April 28, 2013

<http://www.mb.com.ph/article.php?aid=9543&sid=1&subid=3#.UXwQQsrQSM0>

Manila, Philippines --- Candidates in the 2013 midterm elections should focus and debate on how they can improve the incidence of undernourishment or chronic hunger in the country, food advocates urged on Saturday.

National Food Coalition (NFC) convener Aurea Miclat-Teves cited that in the country, one in every six Filipinos are experiencing hunger every day.

There are 870 million people in the world who do not have enough to eat. Citing an infographic of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN), she stressed that one in every eight individuals goes to sleep hungry every day.

She added that FAO's estimate is still conservative, considering the third quarter findings of the Social Weather Stations last year, showing that 21 percent or an estimated 4.3 million households or one in every five persons experienced "having nothing to eat in the last three months."

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In terms of actual number, the Philippines has 16 million undernourished persons, while Cambodia has two million.

Lao People's Democratic Republic has the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the region with 28 percent or two million individuals. Indonesia, while having only nine percent prevalence of undernourishment, has the highest number of undernourished citizens in the region, with 21 million.