

DOCUMENTS

THE PHILIPPINE POPULATION PROGRAM UNDER THE AQUINO ADMINISTRATION

In this section of PPJ we present three views of the Philippine Population Program, as it evolved in the post-EDSA era. The first of these is a "Population Policy Statement" issued by the Commission on Population (POPCOM) in early 1987. The statement reaffirms the government's recognition of the importance of population factors in affecting national development and outlines the basic principles and "policy thrusts" of the population program, as envisioned by the Aquino administration.

The next two documents present critiques of the policy statement and of President Aquino's population program. The first selection is taken from a paper by Alejandro N. Herrin entitled "Population, Health and Education: Policy Initiatives Under the Aquino Administration." Herrin summarizes the policy statement and criticizes it for being "ambiguous as to its position regarding fertility and population growth moderation." In the second selection, Virginia A. Miralao charges that the current program ignores the needs of women and suggests that women should organize themselves politically so as to correct the resulting imbalance. Miralao's paper was originally prepared for a consultation-workshop for women's groups to be held by the Center for Women's Studies, University of the Philippines.

1. POLICY STATEMENT ON THE PHILIPPINE POPULATION PROGRAM COMMISSION ON POPULATION

The ultimate goal of the Population Program is the improvement of the quality of human life in a just and humane society. The 1987 Philippine Constitution reaffirms the Government's commitment to this goal. It provides: "The State shall promote a just and dynamic social order that will ensure the prosperity and independence of the nation and free the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment, a rising standard of living, and an improved quality of life for all." (Sec. 9, Art. II).

The achievement of this goal requires a recognition of the close interrelationship among population, resources and environmental factors. Population factors affect and are, in turn, affected by the availability of resources and environmental conditions. Recognition of these interrelationships involves a broadening of population concerns about family formation, the status of women, maternal and child health, child survival, morbidity and mortality, population distribution and urbanization, internal and international migration, and population structure.

Constitutional Guarantees

Accordingly, an integral part of the Government's population policy is the provision of support to the efforts directed towards achieving consistency between the country's population growth rate and the state of her resources, as well as a more balanced population distribution within the context of human and

family welfare as provided for in the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan, 1987-1992.

Such efforts shall be guided by the following provisions of the 1987 Philippine Constitution:

Article XV, Sec. 3.1: The State shall defend the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood.

Article XV, Sec. 1: The State recognizes the family as a foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development.

Article XV, Sec. 3.4: The State shall defend the right of family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them.

Article II, Sec. 12: The State recognizes the sanctity of family life and shall protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution. It shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception. The natural and primary right and duty of parents in the rearing of the youth for civic efficiency and the development of moral character shall receive the support of the government.

Policy Principles

1. Orientation towards the over-all improvement of family not just fertility reduction.
2. Respect for the rights of couples to determine the size of their family and choose voluntarily the means which conform with their moral convictions and religious beliefs.
3. Promotion of family solidarity and responsible parenthood.
4. Rejection of abortion as a means for controlling fertility.
5. Recognition of socio-cultural variations among regions and among localities within regions.
6. Promotion of self-reliance through community-based approaches.
7. Coordination and integration of development efforts at various levels of government.
8. Enhancement of public-private sector partnership through the complementary participation of non-government organizations (NGOs).
9. Maximum utilization of participative and consultative approaches.

Policy Thrusts

1. Integrated approach to the delivery of health, nutrition, and family planning services, a subset of which is the integration of value formation, responsible parenthood and family planning as a vital component of comprehensive maternal and child health.
2. Conduct of information, education and motivation in the promotion of responsible parenthood and family planning services in tandem with other development programs, taking personal beliefs and

cultural values into consideration.

3. Provision of full and sustained information on medically approved and legally acceptable family planning services as the couple's basis for free choice.
4. Assurance of accessibility and availability of family planning services.
5. Support to programs enhancing the status and role of women.
6. Advocacy of policies and measures which can reduce the imbalances in population distribution as this relates to inequities in the social structure.

2. POPULATION, HEALTH AND EDUCATION: POLICY INITIATIVES UNDER THE AQUINO ADMINISTRATION

Alejandro N. Herrin

This paper reviews the major policy initiatives of the Aquino administration in the area of population, health and education....

2.2 The Population Policy Statement of 1987

After a year of official silence, the Commission on Population issued in April 1987 a "Population Policy Statement". The policy states as its ultimate goal the improvement of the quality of human life in a just and humane society. It calls for a broadening of population concerns beyond fertility reduction to include concerns about family formation, the status of women, maternal and child health, child survival, morbidity and mortality, population distribution and urbanization, internal and international migration, and population structure. It recognizes that if current economic and demographic trends continue, the pursuit of alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life will become doubly difficult in the future as rapid population growth exerts more and more pressure on scarce resources as well as on an environment that is already showing signs of strain. Accordingly, it aims to provide support to efforts directed towards achieving consistency between the country's population growth rate and the state of her resources. Such efforts will be guided by various provisions of the 1987 Constitution which include (a) the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood; (b) the recognition of the family as the foundation of the nation; (c) the right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them; and (d) the recognition of the sanctity of family life and the protection and strengthening of the family as a basic autonomous social institution.

The basic principles governing population policy includes, among others: (a) orientation towards overall improvement of family welfare, not just fertility reduction; (b) respect for the rights of couples to determine the size of their family and to choose voluntarily the means which conform to their moral convictions and religious beliefs; (c) promotion of family solidarity and responsible parenthood; (d) rejection of abortion as a means of controlling fertility.

The major program thrusts in the area of population growth consists of the following: (a) integrated approach to the delivery of health, nutrition and family planning, a subset of which is the integration of value formation, responsible parenthood and family planning as a vital component of comprehensive

maternal and child health; (b) conduct of information, education and motivation in the promotion of responsible parenthood and family planning in line with other development programs, taking personal beliefs and cultural values into consideration; (c) provision of full and sustained information on medically approved and legally acceptable family planning services as the couple's basis for free choice; and (d) assurance of accessibility and availability of family planning services.

2.2.1 Ambiguities in the Policy Statement

The policy encompasses a whole gamut of population-related concerns. But in doing so, it becomes ambiguous as to its position regarding fertility and population growth moderation as a component of the overall development strategy. While it acknowledges the problem posed by rapid population growth, and speaks of support to efforts towards achieving "consistency between the country's population growth rate and the state of her resources," it avoids explicitly advocating a policy to moderate fertility and population growth that includes modifying the fertility preferences of couples to complement a policy of increasing resources to support a larger population. The provision of family planning services is viewed essentially as a health service activity rather than also a direct means to achieve fertility and population growth targets.

In view of the debate that was then raging, the population policy statement was expected to clarify the government's position on two basic issues. The first issue is whether or not an acceptable economic and social development can be achieved within a reasonable time without a moderation of the currently high fertility and population growth rates. This issue needs to be clarified because of opposing views regarding the role of population growth in development. One view expressed by some influential segments of society says that economic and social development can be achieved even without government action in moderating fertility and population growth. This view is opposed by others who claim that moderating fertility and population growth, given the country's current socioeconomic situation, will facilitate development. While the Population Policy Statement does state that "if current economic and demographic trends continue, the pursuit of alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life will become doubly difficult in the future, as rapid population growth exerts more and more pressure on scarce resources..." such statement is not inconsistent with either of two opposing policy conclusions: (a) that there is a need to moderate fertility and population growth as an integral component of the overall strategy for development; and (b) that there are enough ways to speed up economic and social development without directly modifying fertility and population growth trends through government action. The Population Policy Statement is not clear on which of these conclusions it accepts.

The second issue is whether or not the government is justified in sponsoring a national program of fertility and population growth moderation. This issue should also be clarified by public policy because of opposing views on the matter. While some segments of society are calling for a stronger government program of family planning and advocacy of a small family norm, other segments of society argue that the determination of the number of children should be left entirely to individual couples. The constitutional provision on the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and demands of responsible parenthood is often cited to support the latter view. But does this constitutional provision, which is also adopted by the policy statement, preclude any form of government action in the fertility decision-making of couples? The program thrusts of the Population Policy Statement already include some forms of government actions in the form of information, education and motivation in the promotion of responsible parenthood and in the provision of family planning services which clearly have fertility impacts. But these actions can easily be justified purely on health grounds. What is not clear in the Population Policy Statement is precisely the government's position on the objective of fertility and population growth moderation and the role that the government will play in attaining such objective beyond promoting family planning essentially as a health service.

Thus as it now stands, the Population Policy Statement of 1987 issued by the Commission on Population does not offer much guidance to the hotly contested issues described above. In not being explicit about its position on these issues, the government's position is not inconsistent with one that favors no direct action on fertility and population growth moderation that includes modifying the fertility preferences of couples by endorsing a small family size norm. This ambiguity with respect to the objective of fertility and population growth moderation as an integral component of the overall development strategy is also reflected in various plan documents....

3. POPULATION POLICIES, FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS AND WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Virginia A. Miralao

Except for the unified rally staged by women's groups to protest the inclusion of anti-divorce, abortion and birth control provisions in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, most women's groups in the Philippines have not been inclined to speak up on matters of population policies and family planning. Their hesitance is not completely surprising, considering that the debate on population control and family planning now span two centuries--during which time various groups, including the women's movement, the Church, and the Left and the Right, alternately promoted or attacked the merits of controlling births and population growth. Coming themselves from differing feminist, political and religious orientations, women's groups have not forged a consensus on how to deal with State-sponsored population policies and family planning programs even as these directly affect the lives of women. Consequently, population policies and programs continue to be left in the hands of (largely male) government planners and legislators, and to be influenced by the more organized lobby of religious and political interests and the subtle pressures of foreign agencies interested in funding population activities.

It would seem however, that women's groups cannot keep on disengaging themselves from the shaping of population policies and family planning programs. First, whether women like it or not, population-related policies and programs impinge on women's reproductive rights and freedom. Women's failure therefore to influence the formulation of policies and programs can further erode women's control over their own fertility, already weakened by cultural pressures that they marry and have children, the objections of husbands to limiting the number of children, and the proscriptions of the Church against contraception. Also threatening women's control over their fertility but in the opposite direction, are hard line population control programs and their tendency to pressure women to limit their births beyond what women are prepared to do.

Second, having now moved towards a more feminist orientation, current-day women's groups cannot evade addressing population and family planning matters while they continue to advocate for women's rights in other fronts. Evading the issues places women's groups in the contradictory position of promoting women's equal rights in employment, education, politics and other fields, but not speaking as much on policy matters affecting women's reproductive rights and access to birth control. While the provision of family planning services will not solve all of women's problems, access to the means of fertility regulation is central to the overall liberation of women.

Third, evidence from social and demographic surveys and even more vividly, from the personal accounts of women of their fear of repeated pregnancies or of their abortion traumas, indicate a large "unmet" need for birth control which women's groups have to confront. Being in the forefront of women's struggle for equality and freedom, women's groups should take the lead in articulating the nature

of population policies and family planning programs that is both consistent with the women's rights movement and responsive to the family planning needs of women....

3.1 Population Issues and the Aquino Government

With the change in governments in 1986, population matters initially took a backseat to the task of economic recovery and the need for restoring order following the upheaval that ousted President Marcos from power. It did not take long however, for population issues to be revived in the newly installed government of President Corazon Aquino.

Discussions on population matters were prompted by the call for the drafting of a new Constitution and the formulation of the Aquino government's first 5-Year Development Plan which entailed deliberations on whether to delete or include in these, the population policy and program provisions of the 1973 Constitution and the Plan documents of the previous Martial Law government. The "democratic space" engendered by the new order further encouraged the airing of contrary views on population, a process that never quite accompanied the formulation and adoption of policies (population or otherwise) under the Marcos regime. But except for the extreme opposition of the Church to population control, discussions centered on the same well worn arguments of those on either side of the economics-population debate in the late 1960s, even as unfolding economic and demographic trends in more recent decades would have afforded a more balanced view on population issues.

Having assisted in the overthrow of the previous regime and the installation of the present one, there was no mistaking that the Church would dominate the population thinking of the Aquino government. Starting with the drafting of the 1987 Constitution, Church representatives to the Constitutional Commission succeeded in including anti-population control and anti-women provisions in the Constitution, including ones that would block possibilities of legalizing divorce and abortion in the future. Church representatives also succeeded in deleting the earlier provision of the 1973 Constitution which accorded the State a role in population planning and in promoting small family size norms. In turn, the victory of the Church in these areas paralyzed the operations of the national family planning program which, in the past, had served as women's major source of family planning services.

Similar anti-population control thinking extended to the Aquino Cabinet, many members of which were widely believed to be spokespersons of the Church. Only the national economic planning body (NEDA which houses the country's trained technocrats) came out openly in support of population control by incorporating fertility reduction goals and the provision of family planning into the country's 1987-1992 Medium Term Development Plan. To date however, these components of the Plan remain in paper, since the Population Commission (the implementing arm of the family planning program) falls under the control of another department (Department of Social Services and Development), whose Secretary has openly declared her opposition to population control.

The opposing positions of the Church and those of technocrats are also seen in the various bills that have been proposed in the newly restored Philippine Legislature. To scrap the earlier population program and discourage the adoption of a new population policy, anti-population control legislators capitalized on prevailing anti-Marcos sentiments and built on some of the arguments propounded by the Church or the mass movement against population control. In the Senate for example, resolutions have been proposed directing inquiry into the use of "foreign debts" to fund the "failed population program" of the Marcos regime, and into the "social costs of artificial contraceptives". But more directly supporting the Church's position are several other pending Senate/House bills seeking to increase the penalties for abortion (one proposes no less than capital punishment), and to adopt the Billings Ovulation Method or natural family planning (NFP) as the birth control measures to be promoted by the State instead of "harmful

artificial contraceptives". All the above bills display a complete disregard for women's rights. If passed, the abortion-related bills would disproportionately and most unfairly punish women; whereas the NFP bills would again bias and even more severely restrict women's family planning options to only those methods sanctioned by the Church.

On the other hand, the pro-population control and family planning bills that have been proposed reflect highly technocratic approaches to the population problem. Expectedly, they also show no concern for women, nor for correcting the flaws of the earlier population program of the Marcos government....

Summarizing briefly the developments in the last two decades therefore, the major players in the shaping of population policies have been politicians, technocrats, the Church and foreign donor agencies. Proponents of population control policies have argued their case almost exclusively on the grounds of fertility reduction and national development goals, while those rejecting these have served no more than the interests and moral self-righteousness of the Church. Women simply fall victims to whatever policies are adopted, which, whether pro or anti population control, tend to be insensitive to their needs and restrictive of their reproductive and other rights.