

SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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*"The twentieth century, however, has witnessed in many regions of the world the control of prenatal and infant mortality, a decline in birth rates, improvements in nutrition, basic health care and the control of many infectious diseases. This combination of factors has resulted in an increasing number and proportion of persons surviving into the advanced stages of life."
(United Nations)*

Universal Principles

The Philippines adheres to the Vienna Plan of Action and the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. As a signatory of these international documents it gives due importance to policy and program investments in individual lifelong development in the context of longevity and of coordinating the effects of population with other social issues and concerns.

The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing is the first international instrument on ageing, guiding the thinking and the formulation of policies and programs on ageing. It was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1982 (resolution 37/51), having been adopted earlier the same year at the World Assembly on Ageing at Vienna, Austria. It is sometimes known as the 'Vienna Plan' in honor of its city of origin. More frequently, however, it is referred to as the 'International Plan', underscoring its relevance for all world regions. It aims to strengthen the capacities of governments and civil society to deal effectively with the ageing of populations and to address the developmental potential and dependency needs of older persons.

In 1991, nine years after its endorsement of the Plan, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (Resolution 46/91). These 18 Principles can be categorized into five clusters relating to the status of older persons, namely: independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. The specific indicators of the five clusters representing the 18 principles are as follows:

- Independence (access to basic needs; access to income generating opportunities; participation in determining when and what pace of withdrawal in the labor force; access to appropriate educational and training programs; access to safe living environments; and to reside at home as long as possible).
- Participation (integration in society and participation in policy making; opportunities for community service; and freedom to form organizations).
- Care (benefit from family and community care; access to health care; access to social and legal services; utilize appropriate levels of institutional care; and enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms).
- Self-fulfillment (pursues opportunities for full development; access to educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources).
- Dignity (lives in dignity and security; and should not be discriminated).

The framework for the International Year of Older Persons, 1999 (document A/50/114) is based on the Vienna Plan and the UN Principles. It comprises four facets: situation of older persons, individual lifelong development, relationship between generations and interrelationship of population ageing and development. The theme and conceptual framework underscore the 'life-long' and 'society-wide' dimensions of ageing.

Global Statistics on the Elderly

The number of elderly persons has significantly increased over the years while the number of young people has decreased. In 1950, according to United Nations estimates, there were approximately 200 million persons 60 years of age and over throughout the world. By 1975, their number had increased to 350 million. United Nations' projections to the year 2000 indicate that the number will increase to 590 million, and by the year 2025 to

over 1,100 million; that is, an increase of 214 per cent since 1975. During this same period, the world's population as a whole is expected to increase from 4.1 billion to 8.2 billion, an increase of 100 per cent. Thus, 45 years from now the ageing will constitute 13.7 per cent of the world's population. It should be noted, furthermore, that in 1975 slightly over half (52 per cent) of all persons aged 60 and over lived in the developing countries.

By the year 2000, owing to the differential rates of increase, over 60% of all older persons are expected to live in those countries, and it is anticipated that the proportion will reach nearly three quarters (72%) by 2025. The increase in the numbers and proportions of the ageing is accompanied by a change in the population's age structure. A declining proportion of children in a population increase the proportion of older persons. Thus, according to the United Nations projections, the population aged less than 15 years in the developing regions is expected to decline from an average of about 41% of the total population in 1975 to 33 % in 2000 and 26% in 2025. The following table provides a more direct appreciation of these statistical data:

Table 1: Comparative Data of Older Persons and Young People

Year	Older Persons	Under 15 Years Old
1950	200 M	41 %
1975	350 M	33 %
2000	590 M	26 %
2025	1,1 B	No data

Philippine Situation

Population aging is a contemporary demographic phenomenon that cuts across the regions of the world. It is for this reason that the development of institutions and programs to address the needs and problems of the elderly in a more sustainable way requires time as well as concerted action by the stakeholders. The pension program is a case in point. Normally, 94% of the population supports the 6% who are 65 years old and below. This is viable but the problem starts to unravel when the proportion changes to the point where the number of those who are getting the support increases over time. In other words, a time will come when there are fewer people working and supporting the growing number of elderly persons.

The way and manner a society treats the elderly is a function of the cultural and economic configurations of the prevailing system of governance. In the Philippines the elderly is treated with respect, care and benevolence. The senior citizens are not detached from their families. It is their families that continue to take care of them right in their ancestral homes or in the homes of their children. The families play a very significant role in attending to the needs and caring for their elderly members. They perform this function regardless of their economic status. In both rural areas, which is 60% of the population, and urban areas we find a significant number of families where the children, grandchildren and their grandparents live together.

Aging is both a graceful and horrifying process. For those who have the means, it can be designed in a more coherent and leisurely manner but for those who lack the means, the aging process can be that lonely. In the Philippines, the increase in the number of the elderly is relatively contained and minimized by the poverty situation that makes it difficult for a big number of families and their elderly members to provide and sustain their medical and nutritional requirements.

The Philippine population is 85 million. The Gross Domestic Product per capita is \$3,971. In the Human Development Report of 2002 the Philippines has a medium development and ranks number 77 in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) and number 23 in terms of the Human Poverty Index (HPI) of all the countries in the world. The life expectancy at birth is 69.3 years old. The average rate for male is 67 years old and 71 years old for the female. The adult literacy rate is 95.3%. Today, the Philippines has a relatively young population. About 1/3 is below 15 years old and by 2015 the number of elderly 65 years old and above will be about 5 million in 2015. As of today, our older persons represent 6.9 % of our total population.

This problem on the increasing number of older persons may not be true to the Philippines at present and even in the next few decades. But in the year 2050 this problem is something to worry about according to ADB because ¼ of the Philippine population and in the world will be 65 years old and above (See Table 2).

Table 2: Population 65 and above as a Percentage of Population (ADB Key Indicators 2002)

Year	Philippines	World
2000	7.3	12.8
2025	11.5	18.1
2050	23.6	27.7

Comparatively, the number of the elderly in the Philippines is not as big as its neighbors as shown by the following table:

Table 3: Comparative Elderly Population for Years 2000, 2025 and 2050 (ADB Key Indicators 2002)

Country/Year	2000	2025	2050
Singapore	11.2	35.8	54.7
Malaysia	8.0	15.2	26.6
Indonesia	8.9	13.7	28.7
Philippines	7.3	11.5	23.6

As of 2004, the population of persons aged 60 years old and above totaled to 5,705,591. It comprises 6.9% of the whole population of the country based on the medium assumption of the National Statistics Office (NSO). The breakdown of older persons statistic based on categorization is as follows:

Table 4: Breakdown of Older Persons Statistics in the Philippines

Category	Years Old	Population
Young Old	60-70	3,448,304
Old Old	71-79	1,694,170
Oldest Old	80 and above	563,117

In terms of the support for the older persons, according to the Asian Development Bank Report, the Philippines relies in whole or part on social

insurance schemes, i.e. transfer programs that provide benefits to the elderly, mainly by taxing the earnings of those who are currently working. These programs are politically attractive in the short run because generous benefits can be offered at a relatively low per capita cost where there are relatively few retirees. However, as population aging sets in, the program can be sustained only if the government cuts benefits to retirees or raise taxes on workers. After a point either option is politically difficult. Of additional concern is the large-scale transfer program having serious disincentive effects that undermine economic growth. Incentives to work are lessened through workers' knowledge that they will receive large transfers after they retire. This is demonstrated by the statistics that the labor participatory rate of male 65 years old and older from 1950 to 2010 has been decreasing. In 1950 the rate was 70% down to 55% in 2000 and 50% by 2010. In terms of providing social insurance, the Philippines covers only half of the benefits due the older persons in Malaysia and Singapore. However, it performs better than Indonesia.

Table 5: Comparative Coverage of Schemes Providing Cash Benefits to the Old-Aged & Disabled Persons

Country	Rate %
Philippines	52.6
Singapore	100.0
Malaysia	95.6
Indonesia	6.9

The Philippines recognizes the enormous challenges and implications of the increasing population of older persons as well as the impact of globalization and urbanization to its society's structure. Recognizing these challenges, the Philippines becomes an active participant and a signatory to several significant international/regional conferences/treaties promoting the rights, welfare and integration of the older persons in the mainstream of society. The Philippines participated in the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid from April 8-12, 2002 where the outcome documents (Political Declaration and the International Plan on Ageing) serve as blueprints for its response to the opportunities and challenges within the region.

The Philippine Plan of Action for Older Persons was formulated coinciding with the United Nation's International Year of Older Persons and drawn from several international, regional and national mandates on ageing, among which are the Vienna International Plan of Action and the Macao Plan of Action on Aging for Asia and the Pacific (Regional Meeting in Macau, 1998). Following the lead of ESCAP's Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific (1998), the Philippine Plan of Action for Older Persons likewise addresses eight (8) areas of concern related to population on ageing in the Philippines. These major areas include the following: a) older persons and the family; b) social position of older persons; c) health and nutrition; d) housing, transportation and environment; e) income, security, maintenance and employment of social services and the community; f) social services and the community; g) continuing education/learning among the older persons; and h) older persons and the market.

Key Legislations

There are five (5) major policies and legislations that promote and protect the interest and welfare of the older persons:

1. REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7432 (ENACTED ON 22 JULY 1991). AN ACT TO MAXIMIZE CONTRIBUTION OF SENIOR CITIZENS TO NATION BUILDING, GRANT BENEFITS AND SPECIAL PRIVILEGES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES. This is the basic legislation since it clearly recognizes the value of older persons to the development of their communities.
2. REPUBLIC ACT 7876 (ENACTED ON 25 JULY 1994). AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER IN ALL CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES OF THE PHILIPPINES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFORE. This is a supplementary law since it calls for the establishment of Centers for the Elderly at the local government units particularly in cities and municipalities.
3. EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 105 APPROVING AND DIRECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM PROVISION OF GROUP HOME/FOSTER HOME FOR NEGLECTED, ABANDONED, ABUSED, DETACHED AND POOR OLDER PERSONS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. This is another reinforcing legislation since it specifically requires the establishment of Group and Foster Homes for the poor and marginalized older persons.

4. EXECUTIVE ORDER 266 (ENACTED ON JULY 17, 2000) APPROVING AND ADOPTING THE PHILIPPINE PLAN OF ACTION FOR OLDER PERSONS. This law mandates the creation of the Inter-Agency Committee chaired by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and co-chaired by the Department of Finance to oversee, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Philippine Plan of Action for Older Persons. It also calls for the review and regular updating of the Plan with the various government and non-governmental organizations and older people's organizations. This executive order gives particular emphasis to the establishment of the coordinating mechanism in government to oversee the implementation of programs by government, non-government organizations and by people's organizations.

5. REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9257 (ENACTED ON FEBRUARY 26, 2004). AN ACT GRANTING ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES TO SENIOR CITIZENS AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT 7432 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS AN ACT TO MAXIMIZE THE CONTRIBUTION OF SENIOR CITIZENS TO NATION BUILDING, GRANT BENEFITS AND SPECIAL PRIVILEGES AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES. This is an enhancement of the earlier legislation so that more benefits will accrue to the older persons in terms of higher discounts at 20% for medicines, doctor's fees, funeral expenses, transport, etc. It also requires that the Head of the Office of Senior Citizens Affairs (OSCA) at the local government units should be an Older Person and not a local government official.

Strategic Programs for the Elderly

What is the progress on the implementation of these policies?

There are a number of programs and services that are being implemented for the welfare and development of the elderly population. These are as follows:

1. Mainstreaming ageing into development policy and promoting full integration and participation of older persons. This includes the development of Federation of Senior Citizens (FSCAP) organization in

the national and local levels throughout the Philippines. Seventy-five percent (75%) of Filipino older persons or 4, 279, 190 are currently members of the National Federation of Senior Citizens.

2. The creation of the National Inter-Agency Committee on Philippine Plan of Action for Older Persons (PPAOP) and the establishment of the 16 Regional Inter-Agency Committees throughout the Philippines to oversee, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the Plan of Action for Older Persons in-line with the Shanghai Implementation strategy and Macao Declaration.
3. The Senior Citizens Volunteer Resource Project (SCVRP) strengthened its information campaign to increase public awareness on the vastness of volunteerism areas for older persons. Through the SCVRP, it was able to outreach, train and mobilize older persons as volunteers/ partners to assist in the implementation of various social welfare and development programs especially at the community level.
4. Setting Aside 1% of Government Agency Budget for Programs/ Projects for Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities. This shall ensure funding support to programs intended for older persons and persons with disabilities. To date, a total of 18 government agencies submitted their plans on how to implement the mandate.
5. Literacy and Adult Education Program for 60 years old and above and this has been implemented throughout the various provinces and far-flung areas.
6. Implementation of 10% across the board increase on the Social Security System (SSS) retirement benefits.
7. The national celebration of the Elderly Filipino Week (Proclamation No. 470- Declaring the 1st week of October every year as Elderly Filipino Week) has been a tool to create social awareness on older person issues among the general population.
8. Issuance of Older Persons Identification Cards has reached to 4,273,678, which is 85% of the whole population of elderly. Likewise, it has been noted that 98 percent of the total municipalities and cities were able to establish the Office of Senior Citizens Affairs

nationwide. The OSCA is responsible for planning, coordinating, implementing and monitoring the programs for older persons in the locality. Similarly, a total number of 331 senior citizens centers are operational nationwide. These centers serve as locus of all recreational, educational, health and social programs and facilities for the full enjoyment and benefit of the older persons in cities and municipalities.

9. The development of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Intergenerational Program that brings together the different generations like children and older adults in new and ongoing mutually beneficial structure and activities to meet the needs of individuals and families throughout the life cycle.
10. A total of 11, 638 Older Persons benefited from of Self-Employment Assistance Kaunlaran (SEA-K) Integrated and Livelihood Program.
11. Capability building towards developing and institutionalizing family, community and multi-generational-centered system of care for older persons as well as promoting healthy lifestyles for them.
12. Training of implementers/service providers, caregivers and community volunteers to help frail/ sickly, bed ridden older persons in a community based setting. This is a basic orientation/ training for care-giving and case management of older persons. This includes the training of community gerontologists on alternative medicines as well as conduct of seminars/ lectures/ symposia on gerontology, family health, promoting positive family values and encouraging community support.
13. Continuing legislative advocacy and coordination with the OSCA, local government units non-government organizations and the FSCAP for the bill on Magna Carta for Older Persons. The bill intends to integrate the socio-economic and political rights of older persons as well as provide tax incentives for activities related to the promotion of the well-being of older persons.
14. Foster Care program for older persons which intends to improve the physical and mental well-being of homeless, abandoned, neglected and unattached older person by providing them with alternative family care.

15. Implementation of Neighborhood Support Services for Older Persons (NSSOP) in three (3) regions (NCR, VI, XI) covering 17 cities and municipalities. The project seeks to test out strategies in helping ill/ sickly older person by involving the older persons' families, community volunteers/ caregivers and the local government units. Its components include community volunteer development, physical fitness program for older persons. and home care.
16. Integrated Day Center Services for Senior Citizens and Children is being pilot tested in NCR where demonstration and testing out of strategies for programs/ projects for young and old take place. The co-existence of day care children and older persons in an integrated day care services program provides an opportunity for an intergenerational approach that bridges the conflicts between generations.
17. Operation and maintenance of government-owned centers and institutions that provide residential care/ alternative family care to older persons. A total of 627 older persons were provided with residential care during the period CY 2003.
18. Implementation of peer counseling project of Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), an NGO licensed and accredited by DSWD. The project, being piloted in Greater Manila, is a non-directive approach for both personal problems and problems within the group.
19. Implementation of Home Care for bedridden older persons by COSE, a project aligned with community gerontologist program. The project aims to provide care to bedridden older persons in the homes with the help of the family and the caregivers.
20. Implementation of Group Home program. This is a collaborative program between COSE, the DSWD and the local community. The program intends to provide an alternative group living environment/ arrangement for ambulatory older persons right in their own communities.
21. Construction/renovation of transport facilities in compliance with Accessibility Law (benefiting older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women and minors) such as in airports, MRT stations, port facilities and bus stations.

22. Passage/ issuance of policies/ directives to ensure provision of utmost protection and safety to older persons, accessibility to affordable decent housing with low-cost financing programs and at the same time considering the proximity to medical facilities, recreation facilities, churches, drug-stores, etc.
23. Technical Assistance and Resource Augmentation. A total of 54 LGUs (municipalities) has been provided technical assistance on the implementation of RA 7876 (Senior Citizens Act). A total of 20 intermediaries (NGOs/POs/LGUs) were also provided resource augmentation.
24. Protection of the rights of older persons. There are 2,278 operational Consumer Welfare Desks nationwide in Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) offices and other business establishments. Along with this is the establishment of Consumer Net intended to speed up resolution of consumer complaints as well as provide spot information to consumers. Volunteers manning the consumer desks have been trained to handle/ assist older persons.
25. Creation of a National Monitoring and Coordinating Board on the implementation, monitoring of national policies on ageing and development of plan of action for older persons in the succeeding years. This is the PPAOP Inter-Agency Committee, a technical working group composing of member agencies from the government, non-governmental organizations and people's organization which formulates policies, develops plans and promotes and implements strategies for an effective national program on the older persons. The Committee monitors and evaluates the adoption of the policies and implementation of the plans at all levels.
26. Creation of sub-national coordinating body for the older persons. These 16 sub-national bodies provide the direction and ensure the adoption of national policies and implement programs/projects/ activities for the welfare of the older persons at the sub-national down to the local level.

Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

Is the number of older persons increasing and is there really a support for them?

Yes, indeed but the problem is the financial resources to backstop these programs and activities.

It is true that there is an increasing number of older persons in the Philippines but the alarm has not been sounded yet because it is still decades away before it becomes a serious problem and a major threat to the productivity and economy of the nation. In the meantime, the government has taken cognizance of this issue so much so that it has put in place the mitigating and preventive measures to address the present requirements of the older persons that are estimated to be about 7% of the population.

The Philippines may not be that rich like its next-door neighbors in the region but it religiously observes the international protocols that promote and protect the welfare and development of older persons. These are evident in the programs and activities that are being pursued and implemented by government, non-government and people's organizations. These programs are comprehensive, integrative and holistic. Comprehensive, in the sense that it covers a broad array of interventions from financial discounts in medical expenses to accessibility and mobility in infrastructure. Integrative, since it does not isolate the older persons but in fact bring them together with other sectors in the population such as children. Holistic, because these programs look at the older person as a person with physical, cognitive, affective, social and spiritual dimensions of development.

The availability of financial resources is a major constraint in addressing the needs and problems of the elderly, especially those who are poor. Given the present financial crisis of the country, it can be indicated here that for 2005 there is less money that will be allocated for social services and one of the sectors that will be hit hard will be the older persons. A big chunk of the 2005 budget or about 40% will go to debt service, 30 % for government operation and only about 30% for basic social services and defense. With this meager share and with the increasing population and higher expectations from the public, the fund for development will certainly be stretched too far and too thinly.

The hope is the family. Building families is one good alternative to provide, maintain and sustain the support for older persons. This option is cost-effective because the whole family is capacitated to assume greater roles and responsibilities in rearing and caring for its very own members. In other words, let our efforts focus on the basic unit in society. Everything begins and ends in the family. The Philippine experience is a case in point. Were it not for the strength of the family in the midst of financial crisis and turbulence in governance, the number of abandoned elderly could have littered the streets.

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