

DISTURBING: **NSO's 2001 survey** **on children**

In many parts of the world, adults are not the only ones making a living. Children also do. Their work take many forms. They may be carpet weavers in Nepal, garbage pickers and market vendors in Mexico, brick workers and stone quarry workers in India, or fishing platform workers in Indonesia.

Child labor is a pervasive problem especially in developing countries. Africa and Asia together account for over 90 percent of total child employment. Studies show that child labor is especially prevalent in rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work is lacking. Children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to escape from this plight.

Working children are the objects of extreme exploitation in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay. Their work conditions are especially severe, often not providing the stimulation for proper physical and mental development. Many of these children endure lives of pure deprivation.

In the Philippines, many children work in farms and factories. They do also toil for long hours under severe work conditions and get minimal pay if at all. Moreover, these child laborers are increasing in number, as borne by the results of the 2001 Survey on Children 5-17 Years Old, conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO).

The survey indicates that there is a much more pronounced predominance of the so-called economically active children now than six years ago. From the first survey in 1995, the number went up by about 400,000 to reach four million in 2001.



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The findings of the survey are disturbing (see Quick Info, p.6). But its conclusions and the suggested policy recommendations have more far-reaching implications.

It seems the world of the working children deviates from that of the ordinary children. As the survey suggests, more and more Filipino children are starting to work early in life because they need to survive. In time, their young hands will be adept at the use of a circular saw, a knife, a plate printing machine, a blow, a crow bar, or welding tools. In the meantime, their non-working children counterparts are secured in the confines of the classroom and are busy mastering their hands on the proper hold of a pencil.

Since globalization continues to dislocate our adult workers and forces children to fill up the income gap, the government should direct its employment services to the unemployed parents. As the survey also suggests, more formal economic opportunities should be generated in the countryside in the light of children filling in the shortage of adult workers in agriculture as adults migrate to urban and industrial areas due to regional disparity.

Not all types of child work are considered child labor. In the Philippines, child labor is defined as the illegal employment of children below the age of 15 who are not directly under the sole responsibility of their parent or guardian, or whose works do not impair their normal development. Child labor also includes those children below the age of 18 who are employed in hazardous situations.

Thus, as long as the working child is above 15 and below 18 working in safe undertakings, or the child is below 15 but employed in exclusive family undertakings under a parent or guardian where normal development is not impaired,

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THE EARLY YEARS: Making it right, right from the start



Investing in young children will bring long term social change

Beyond the first birthday

Estimates show that 19 out of 20 children born (95%) in the Philippines are expected to live until their first birthday. This projection suggests that important strides have been made to fulfill child survival rights over the years.

But when other data on children's health, nutrition, and development come into the picture, the scenario turns a bit bleak.

- Malnutrition among younger children has increased.
- 3 of 5 infants are considered deficient in iron and vitamin A.
- Full immunization coverage has decreased.
- The number of working children is growing.
- Participation in early care programs remains limited.
- Poverty incidence has swelled.

The probability that a newly born child will not live till age 1 may be minimal. But what if children are not thriving despite the decline in mortality rates.

At the same time that children

struggle not to die, they struggle to develop mentally, socially and emotionally. Therefore, families, communities and governments should possess a greater understanding of the importance of a child's early years, especially the first six years.

The earlier, the better

Early Childhood Care and Development refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to six years of age, their parents and caregivers. ECCD comprises all the essential support a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, as well as the support families and communities need to promote children's healthy development.

A good start to life is the foundation for ensuring children's rights. Research shows that choices made and actions taken by parents and society in the earliest years of childhood have a powerful and lasting influence on the progress of children, and consequently, the progress of nations. Quality care and protection in these years are keys to avoiding death, disease, stunted growth, trauma, malnutrition and developmental delays, while ensuring healthy growth, self-esteem and the ability to learn. These in turn are central to

school readiness, further learning, effectiveness of school-based programmes, and future ability of children to contribute as parents, economic actors and citizens. Investing in young children will bring long-term social change and sustained realization of children's rights.



The early years is a time where children need all the help to combat all threats to life.

In the Philippines, the Fifth Country Programme for Children (CPC V) considers the Child-Friendly Integrated Childhood Care and Development as one of its priority areas. CPC V is a joint initiative of the Philippine government and the United Nations Children's Fund. Covering 20 provinces and five cities, it aims to promote a Child-Friendly Movement by creating appropriate living conditions for Filipino children.

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT?

The acronym ECCD refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to six years of age, their parents and caregivers.

Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential. Community-based services that meet the needs of infants and young children are vital to ECCD and they should include attention to health, nutrition, education and water and environmental sanitation in homes and communities.

The approach promotes and protects the rights of the young child to survival, growth and development.

The early years of a child's life are most often neglected in countries' policies, programmes and budgets.

From: The State of the World's Children 2001

P500 can provide multi-level workbooks for 10 pupils in a multi-grade class, which they will use from Grades 1 to 6.

Limited funds stall full blast of ECCD Act

By Jesse C. Ong

There was little celebration when the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Act finally became binding in December 2000. Its enactment should have been grandly feted. But with or without fanfare, advocates of children nationwide continue to strongly push for its proper implementation.

Republic Act No. 8980 calls for the creation of a comprehensive policy and a national system for Early Childhood Care and Development, and the provision of funds for this undertaking. But limited funds prevent a full-blast implementation of the law.

The law officially tasked the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) as the National ECCD Coordinating Council. According to Ma. Elena Caraballo, CWC deputy executive director, the law provides uniformity in all ECCD programs that existed even before the law was conceptualized.

“Programs on health, nutrition, psychosocial development and early education were already in place in many parts of the country even before the law was passed, but they were not uniform in quality and readily available especially in the far-flung areas,” Caraballo said.



WHAT MAKES UP THE ECCD ACT?

The ECCD Act is being implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd) in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The salient features are as follows:



- Making the ECCD program mandatory for all five year old children as part of the formal elementary education ladder;
- Implementing adequate ECCD program that promotes physical, social, intellectual and skills stimulation and value-formation; and
- In the implementation of the ECCD education program, any of the following alternative approaches may be used:
 - a) Organization of community-based ECCD classes with local government support;
 - b) Organization of ECCD classes through service contracting with NGOs, private schools, and other learning institutions; and
 - c) In case where the Department of Social Welfare and Development provides for day care services for five year-old children, such day care centers must be recognized by DECS.

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The ultimate aim of the ECCD Act is to improve access to ECCD services nationwide.

Caraballo further noted that comprehensive and integrated ECCD programs are being channeled through the local government units to have a wider reach. Barangay leaders, barangay health workers, barangay nutrition scholars, daycare workers and parents play a vital role in the delivery of these services.

At present, ECCD programs are mostly visible in Regions 6, 7 and 12, in compliance to a provision within the ECCD law that it should be operation in at least three regions per year within a period of five years.

But has the ECCD Act been successful in changing the lives of children in these selected regions since it had been passed two years back?

“Not quite. We cannot claim yet that the ECCD law implementation is very well in place and is already widely within the system of those who are benefiting from its programs,” Caraballo opined.

However, she added, there have been initiatives on their part on improving and updating the curricula of ECD in grade 1, based on the findings of researches that were conducted in the said regions. The "bridging" programme from early childhood to primary school through an 8-week early childhood programme in grade one has been cited as an effective practice in the Philippines.

The CWC is already preparing the standards, curriculum and various important aspects of the ECCD system. Caraballo envisioned that within the next 10 years, the ECCD Act would be widely recognized nationwide as a foundation for ensuring children’s rights and welfare.

P1,000 can provide measles vaccines to immunize 143 children.

A smile on a rainy afternoon

By Jesse C. Ong

BORONGAN, EASTERN SAMAR - It was raining hard that afternoon.

Like everyone else in the community, her mood is in an upswing as the sudden heavy downpour temporarily clears the atmosphere of the draining heat brought by the summer season.

It has been nearly two months since rain last fell on Barangay Bugas in Borongan, Eastern Samar, a province in the Visayan region of the Philippines. Dolores Lagramada, 52, is very thankful that the sky finally opened for them after a long hot spell.

"Sa wakas, umulan din! (At long last, it rained!)" she remarks smilingly as she watches with contentment how the trees outside the Bugas community health center are swayed by the wind.

Dolores had long prayed for the rain to fall. She finds it punishing to go around the community to fulfill her task as barangay health worker under the blistering summer heat. That afternoon, her prayer was answered.

Before the day ends, she has to visit at least seven women who have just given birth to assist in the registration of their newly born babies.

But no problem, Dolores says, she can easily finish her assignment under the cool climate that has suddenly overtaken the oven-hot atmosphere.

Like Dolores, Nelida Cartago, 46, is assigned an area within the community that she regularly has to visit to ensure that every child is registered at birth.

Since she started as a BHW 19 years back, Nelida has been used to going house-to-house to get the names of the newborn babies and submitting their birth documents to the municipal hall for registration. This, she does for free.

Nelida admits that going around the community is one tedious task that she has to endure until she retires. But she does not complain. The consis-

tent high turnout that Bugas has been getting when it comes to birth registration, she says, is worth all the effort.

Until the latter part of April this year, Bugas, one of three pilot barangays in Borongan under the Fifth Country Programme for Children (CPC V), has posted an enviable 95 percent birth registration rate. CPC V is a joint programme of cooperation between the

"I've learned to love this job. I may not earn much but I don't regret it. I really want to help the children of Bugas to grow healthy,"

Philippine government and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It aims to promote a child-friendly movement that will eventually create living conditions appropriate for Filipino children.

Under the civil code of the Philippines, every Filipino child has to be registered at birth as the government uses it as a basis in the provision of legal or civil rights to the citizens. In 1999, the National Statistics Office reported that out of 13 million children (0-6 years old), 84 percent were registered.

Based on a recent UNICEF report, however, it is estimated that 50 million babies worldwide were still not registered in the year 2000. The report calls for free birth registration for all children.

"These children have no birth certificate, the 'membership card' for society that should open the door to a whole range of other rights including education and health care, participation and protection", says the report.

Without a birth certificate, the unregistered child may be unable to enrol in school, apply for a passport or formal job, open a bank account, get a marriage license, stand for elective office or vote.

To further intensify its campaign on birth registration, the local government of

Borongan conducts occasional mobile registration in several communities. Dolores proudly notes that in her five years as a BHW, she has taken part in this endeavor, which she considers an enriching experience.

"We go to different communities whenever the local government conducts mobile registration. It feels good to know that you are able to help while meeting new friends," she says.

During mobile registration sessions, community health workers like Dolores and Nelida move 'door-to-door' in different barangays with several people from the local government. There, they not only conduct free birth registration, but also explain to the families they visit the importance of having their children registered.

"Going around several communities whenever there's a mobile registration is no easy job, but we have to do it to ensure that more children are registered," Dolores says.

Dolores, whose husband Fidel, 56, has been paralyzed for several years now after being struck by a strange illness, recalls with fondness how her "suki (loyal patrons)" would convince her to apply as a community health worker every time she sells snack foods at the Eastern Samar Provincial Hospital.



Daycare worker Dolores Lagramada struggles but enjoys her work tremendously.

Finally, in 1997, she started as a volunteer BHW through the help of mid-wife friend Epifania Montances, 47. Whenever her time permits, Dolores still sells snacks to make both ends meet. The 300-peso honorarium she receives monthly is not enough to buy Fidel's medicines.

"I've learned to love this job. I may not earn much but I don't regret this because I really want to help ensure that the children of Bugas would grow healthy," Dolores states.

Nelida has a similar wish for the children of Bugas. She vows to continue counseling on health and proper nutrition as she hopes to contribute to the solution of second-degree malnutrition in their community and other problems facing children and their families.

"As long as I'm willing and able, I'll

"Going around several communities whenever there's a mobile registration is no easy job, but we have to do it to ensure that more children are registered."

continue serving the people of Bugas," she concludes.

Outside the Bugas community health center, rain continues to shower like hell, drowning the soil that has longed for water for months.

Like the rain that afternoon, tears roll freely from Dolores' eyes as one painful realization strikes. "Nakakatulung ako sa pagpapalaki at pagpapalusog ng mga bata, pero ang masakit, sarili kong asawa hindi ko matulungang gumaling (It pains that while I help in raising healthy children, I couldn't help my husband recover from his illness)," she says.

Rain or shine though, Dolores knows too well that her job requires that she be available for the children of Bugas until the last day of her service as a community health worker.

With the hope of serving the children in their community longer, Dolores steps out of the Bugas health center to complete another busy day.

That is enough reason to make her smile on a rainy afternoon like that.

Hand-made toys, hands-on parents

By Dinna Louise C. Dayao



Parents' full support and active participation in daycare center activities have contributed so much to the improvement of their children's growth and progress.

The more parents participate in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs, the greater the likelihood that these programs will succeed. As parents share in the responsibility of bettering the welfare of their children, and other children in their barangay, they feel more empowered and committed to the success of ECCD programs in their community.

It is common for many parents to enroll their children in daycare centers, attend Parent Effectiveness Service, help in classroom activities, donate building materials and labor, and even take turns in cleaning the school premises. But the parents of Barangay Paddad in the municipality of Alicia, Isabela province, have taken a step further in the development of the community's children.

Parents like 36-year-old Salome Manongdo, with the help of daycare worker Hanita Nabua, make their children's toys themselves at no cost, using recycled materials, clay, cloth, and wood. These educational and gender-neutral toys -- bottles filled with colored water of varying amounts which serve as musical instruments, multi-shaped plastic pillows filled with shredded doypacks, and miniature farm and cooking implements--are played with equally by both boys and girls.

In this manner, the toys can effectively promote gender equality. They also greatly aid Hanita in teaching her students the basics of numbers, colors, and shapes, and peer socialization.

Making these toys, says Salome, fulfills certain goals. "We want to contribute to our children's education, assist the daycare worker, and help the daycare center make the most of its limited resources." Hanita much welcomes this support.

The daycare worker is also grateful to the parents for another reason. "They share their knowledge of effective parenting or a child-friendly practice with other parents and their friends". This, plus the fact that she has trained three mothers to be substitute teachers in case she's unavailable, makes the job easier for 40-year-old Hanita --who teaches sixty children daily in two sessions for the past 13 years.

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P3,000 can fund the training of a barangay official on child protection and how to handle child abuse complaints in his/her barangay.

The active participation of parents in Barangay Paddad's daycare center, their resulting sense of empowerment and ownership for its success, and their close cooperation with their community's daycare worker have all benefited their children. The children eagerly attend school and as proof that they have been taught well, Manongdo proudly reports that most have gone on to become honor students in their elementary and high school years. While she cites the parents' full support for Nabua and their unity in furthering their children's education as contributing factors, she also gives much credit to the daycare worker. "Ms. Nabua's long years of service, working closely with us, have led us to have complete faith in her teaching ability," she says.

Aside from parent participation, supportive local government agencies also play a part in the success of ECCD programs in Barangay Paddad. Starting academic year 2002 to 2003, students from the barangay's indigent families can avail of the "Piso Mo, Aral Ko" program ("Your Peso, My Education"), a scholarship fund launched by municipal mayor Napoleon Dy. The scholarship will be funded by daily donations from barangay officials and family heads as well as from the mayor's office and will be offered to a high school student and two college students from the community.

Interestingly, the beneficiaries, instead of being obliged to pay back the scholarship, are encouraged to sponsor someone in turn.

2001 survey...continued from page 1

the work is not considered child labor.

Yet, the survey showed that many children suffered work-related injuries when they were supposedly under the care of their parents or guardians. This may signal the need to take the working children out even in family-related work. The survey, however, cautioned against this intervention as most family undertakings are in agriculture where poverty is pervasive.

Finally, the survey showed that some 348,000 children work for nine or more hours a day and that one in every four children work during eve-

nings. This happens despite the government (through the Department of Labor and Employment) declaring work under long hours or during night a prohibited hazardous work condition for children below 18.

As the final report of the survey puts it: "This brings to a fore a situation where a blanket of legal protection ... is substantive but hardly permeating at the grassroots level."

In other words, the bottomline in the issue of child labor is still political will.

Quick Info

top 10 highlights of the 2001 survey on children

- 1) Children comprise about 31 percent of the total population. One in every six children 5-17 years old worked during the past 12 months (October 2000 to September 2001). Filipino working children were likely to be males, living in the rural areas and whose median age was 14 years old.
- 2) Almost 60 percent of these working children are exposed to hazardous environment. Four in every 10 working children are exposed to more than one type of environmental hazards. Physical hazards affect 85 percent of the children.
- 3) Almost 25 percent of these working children suffer from work-related injuries. Parents usually pay for the treatment of their injured or ill children. Only a small percentage (7.2%) is

treated at the expense of their employers.

- 4) About 30 percent of these working children want some improvement in their working condition, specifically in connection with low salary, extreme heat in workplace, and long working hours.
- 5) Almost two-thirds of the working children were laborers and unskilled workers. Majority of them were also unpaid, seasonal workers, found in the farms.
- 6) Six in every ten paid child workers earned less than P500 a week. Five out of six working children who were paid gave earnings to their family.
- 7) To help in own household enterprise and to supplement family income were the top reasons why children worked.
- 8) About 68 percent of these working children reported that they prefer to attend school than to work during the reference period.
- 9) Two in every three working children attended school. On the average, a working child was more likely to report that he had difficulty working and attending school at the same time rather than admit that his work has negatively affected his schooling.
- 10) One in every three working children had stopped/dropped out of school due to loss of interest (in schooling) and insufficient family income.

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