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Save the Children Philippines calls on mothers to breastfeed newborns as national nutrition survey reveals rising cases of malnutrition among babies and pre-schoolers

Save the Children Philippines urged mothers to exclusively breastfeed their newborns as malnutrition remains on steady rise among babies and pre-schoolers in the country.

Lawyer Albert Muyot, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Save the Children Philippines said community health and nutrition workers should intensify campaigns on breastfeeding, complementary feeding and proper nutrition particularly among children of deprived families and marginalized communities.

He raised concern over the results of the 2018 Expanded National Nutrition Survey by the Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) presented last June 24 which showed increasing prevalence of malnutrition and anemia among babies and toddlers.

Atty. Muyot said the nutrition survey serves as “a wake-up call” in time for Nutrition Month being observed every July.

Anemia cases among babies six to 11 months increased to 48.2 per cent in 2018 from 40.5 per cent in 2013, while anemia among toddlers aged one to two years old have increased to 35.4 per cent last year from 24.7 per cent in 2013.

Stunting, a life threatening condition due to chronic undernutrition remains high at 36.6 per cent for children two years old in 2018, from 36.2 per cent in 2013.

Malnutrition among pre-schoolers is also high particularly among three years old at 33.8 per cent in 2018 from 38.6 in 2013; and four years old at 30.2 per cent last year from 36.8 in 2013.

“Exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months and continued breastfeeding up to two years old will provide critical nutrients and protection to infants against life threatening diseases and improve their immune system,” said Muyot.

Globally, exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months prevents deaths of 1.3 million children below five years old every year.

Save the Children Philippines had been campaigning to eradicate malnutrition among children through maternal and child health and nutrition programs for children and pregnant and lactating mothers in deprived areas in the cities of Malabon, Navotas and Caloocan of Metro Manila as well as conflict affected areas of Mindanao.

Muyot urged local leaders to implement Republic Act 11148 or the First 1,000 Days Law that ensures optimum health and nutrition for children from conception up to two years old.

He said the first 1,000 days of a child’s life is considered a “critical window of opportunity” when physical growth and brain development are very crucial, and damage could be permanent or irreversible.

“We call on local government leaders to invest in safe motherhood and children’s health and well-being by providing more funds for maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition programs,” said Mr. Muyot.

He lauded the cities of Malabon, Navotas and Caloocan that have adopted the First 1,000 Days law into local city ordinances and allocated funds to improve the health and nutrition status of pregnant and lactating mothers and children below two years old.

Dr. Amado Parawan, Health and Nutrition Advisor of Save the Children Philippines said government programs on maternal and child health and nutrition should focus on priority areas with high malnutrition rates, mostly in conflict affected areas in Mindanao.

“We need to focus our nutrition programs in priority areas with high malnutrition rates to achieve the targets in the 2017 – 2022 Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition,” said Dr. Parawan who serves as private sector representative to the National Nutrition Council Governing Board.

Save the Children Philippines advocated for the passage of Republic Act 11148, known as Kalusugan ng Mag-Nanay Act to implement maternal and child health and nutrition in the first 1,000 days of the child’s life using the Nurturing Care Framework developed by the World Health Organization, World Bank and UNICEF.

“Malnutrition is a very complex problem with long-term effects physically, mentally and socially. With the passage of RA 11148, now is the perfect time to mobilize collaborative actions from all sectors. We should always remember that takes a village to raise and nurture a child,” said Dr. Parawan.

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NOTE TO EDITOR:

Save the Children Philippines is implementing Nutrition among **Urban Poor Through Unified Response (NURTURE) project** in 8 pilot barangays of Navotas, which aims to contribute to the reduction of deaths under-5 girls and boys through improved health and nutrition among children and their mothers/caregivers. The project implements nutrition-specific and nutrition sensitive interventions focusing on the first 1,000 days of life preventing stunting and wasting and improving maternal nutrition. It also emphasizes the involvement of men and family members in all the interventions as part of the support system within the household.

Among the strategies of NURTURE project are the establishment of Supplemental Feeding Program or Dietary Supplementation, establishment of a functional Out-patient Care (OTC), establishment of two-way functioning referral In-patient Care, community mobilization and partnership for multi-sectoral convergence, and social protection support through Conditional Cash Transfer.

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