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Save the Children Calls for Passage of First 1,000 Days' Bill as Malnutrition Stalks Millions of Children

Save the Children Philippines calls for the passage of 'First 1,000 Days' bill that provides long-term solution to malnutrition problem concerning millions of children of poor and marginalized families.

Albert Muyot, Save the Children Philippines' CEO said the increasing food prices that partly triggered the high inflation rate of 6.4 percent in August have put millions of children at risk of malnutrition as more poor families experience hunger.

"Malnutrition is a silent killer among the children of poor and marginalized families," said Muyot. Multi-sectoral interventions should be strengthened to ease the impact of rising food prices to families who can barely afford decent meals, he added.

Malnutrition has four indicators—stunting (*'bansot'*) or below standard height for age, underweight, wasting or below standard weight for height and low birth weight or newborns with below 2,500 grams weight.

With 3.3 million stunted children, the Philippines ranks ninth among 10 countries with worst cases of stunting along with war-stricken countries Nigeria (third), Democratic Republic of Congo (seventh) and Ethiopia (sixth), as mentioned in the 2016 Save the Children Report titled: "Cost of Hunger: Philippines".

In the Philippines, 95 children die every day due to undernutrition, as stated in the 2015 United Nations Children's Fund report titled: "United for Children."

He said the bill ensures all children and pregnant women, particularly in the poor provinces will have access to proper healthcare and nutrition.

The Senate and the House of Representatives approved the bill on third reading in March and September respectively. The bill awaits transmission to the Office of the President.

He also said that malnutrition among children aged 5 and below has irreversible effect and could lead to deaths from preventable diseases.

Muyot said the first 1,000 days of the child's development is a "window of opportunity" to address malnutrition and child deaths from preventable diseases.

The National Nutrition Survey of the Food and Nutrition Research Institute of the Department of Science and Technology (FNRI-DOST) showed that stunting among children aged 5 and below increased to 33.4 percent in

2015 from 30.3 percent in 2013; the number of underweight children aged 5 and below also increased to 21.5 percent in 2015 from 20 percent in 2013.

At the same time, Muyot lauded the landmark adoption of the First 1,000 days by the local governments of Navotas and Malabon early this year following the pilot testing of Save the Children Philippines nutrition programs there. Caloocan is also targeting to have their First 1,000 days City Ordinance before the end of the year.

Under the Local Government Code, cities and municipalities have autonomy to pass and enact own laws to address needs of the population.

The Cost of Hunger Study by Save the Children also lined up recommendations to address wide malnutrition among children in the Philippines, these include:

- Urgent implementation of cost-effective nutrition-specific interventions to reverse the increase in undernutrition prevalence among children.
- Equity-based approaches that serve the poorest and most marginalized groups.
- Prioritization of universal access to public services, targeting interventions for disadvantaged groups, and implementing policies to improve social protections, distribution of resources, and human rights.

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