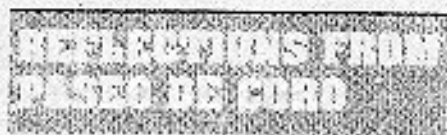


## On population and poverty

**T**HE Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) and the Population Commission (Popcom) are undertaking a research project aimed at comprehensively evaluating the Philippine population policy and its program components. Now on its completion stage the result of the study will be highlighted in a workshop to be held today at Cebu Midtown Hotel. The workshop participants are selected from the region's government and non-government organizations, the local government sector, academe, media and private sector.

Presenting the results of the study are Dr. Alejandro Herrin and Dr. Aniceto Orbita, two guys I met before while I was still involved with NEDA's Integrated Population and Development Planning Project in the late eighties and early nineties. Dr. Herrin is connected with the UP School of Economics while Dr. Orbita is with the PIDS, a government think tank under NEDA.

I do not know anything yet about the results of the study, which I hope to learn from the presentation of Dr. Herrin and Dr. Orbita, but I think it is time that such a study is conducted in the country to know exactly what is happening to our population policy as it is actually being implemented. Are our population program objectives clear? Had they



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been understood and enthusiastically received by those tasked to implement the program? What had been the actual results of the program? It is a known fact that we are lagging behind many of our more economically progressive neighbors in Asia in the population front, why?

The questions I asked above may not be the actual questions asked in the study but surely the data gathered from the two-phase study will make it clear how these questions will be answered and it is for this reason that I am interested in the workshop.

It was in the seventies when the Philippines started to do something about our rapid population growth through family planning, which in the fifties and sixties reached up to three percent per year, similar to what was assumed by Thomas Maltus for population to grow when left unchecked, a growth that he observed to happen in the US while he was writing his *Essay on the Principle of Population*.

Now our population

growth rate is down to 2.3 percent per year. This reduction is quite remarkable in itself except for the fact many other countries that also had higher growth rates as our country after the last war had achieved a far more drastic cut in their population growth rates. Why? Is it because of the opposition of the Catholic Church as what many keen observers in the country would like us to believe or is it simply because of government failure to formulate and implement a strong population policy program irrespective of what the Church says? The study should help us also to answer this question, directly or indirectly.

Many of our neighbors who have successfully reduced their population growth rate in the last three decades are now way ahead of us in terms of per capita income. I would not say that our rapid population growth is what is causing us to remain poor as a nation, yet it is easy to see that a lower population growth rate will make it easier for a nation to achieve a higher per capita

income compared with those nations with higher population growth rates.

After all, while a rapid population growth rate will give us an ample supply of labor to till our land or man our industries, labor alone will not suffice for a nation to produce more wealth. Workers whether in the farm or in factories and offices also need many other things to work with before they can produce anything. Lacking in capital and technology many of our workers will remain unemployed or become less productive when employed, thus remaining poor.

Perhaps there is nothing inherently wrong with rapid population growth. In fact many countries with zero or close to zero in population growth want a much faster growth rate now.

But in a country like ours which is poor, it may be wrong because having more children who will have to be taken care of before they enter the working age will take up much of our resources that could have been used to augment our productive capital and other needs for development and because once they join the labor force when they are of the right age they will find that there is not enough capital and other resources anymore for them to work because they have used them up already while they were still young. ■