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### **Philippines: The Overpopulation Crisis**

The Philippines is an under-developed country with a desperate need for a new start. While the people there are very loyal to the church, full of religion, tradition, and culture, those are some of the very factors holding their society back from the flourishing future they could obtain with change. The Philippines hold one of the highest population densities and fastest growing populations in Asia, yet they lack government funded family planning methods (“PHILIPPINES”). Overall, the Filipinos suffer from an incredible influence that becomes hard to escape, and yet for progress to be made it must be overcome. Currently the Roman Catholic Church holds a tremendous influence by leading population regulations throughout the government. With this leadership, birth control methods have not been widely accepted and the Filipino population has continued to get out of hand. The Philippines need political collaboration to make a stand for the good of the people because as of now, politicians choose not to fight the church on any political matter for fear of losing precious votes and overall, their campaigns (“Cabral”). Even though 90% of polled voters said they would vote for a politician in support of modern contraception, this hasn’t made a difference (Rauhala). The tie seems to be too strong, especially since most members of Congress are of strong religious affiliations. While they may feel modern contraceptives would be a step in the right direction for the Philippines, their relation pressures them into voting against any reproductive health bills (Diaz). If anything is going to be solved, if prosperity is going to be delivered to the people, if the Filipinos want to raise their economic status, the population equation must be controlled. Without an extreme change, this country will certainly continue suffering from not only overpopulation, but also starvation, malnutrition, lack of education, and lives of endless poverty. The Roman Catholic Church has incredible influence over the Filipinos, but in order to provide the desperate changes needed, the church must be removed from the equation of developing family planning methods.

When investigating the issues that take place in the Philippines, it makes sense to have city life as a focal point. Not only is that where the congestion of overall population takes place, but it also leads to the core of all the issues. In the uplands, costal regions, and countryside, Filipinos have an extremely difficult time making a living because of agriculturally depleted lands. They are forced to move into the cities to find other work. After migration, they sell items, work in factories, or work construction. The men come in uneducated and unskilled, and they often end up remaining unemployed and scavenging for food (“Is Work, Child’s Play?”). Women, being the second leader of the house, are forced to step in and try to find work (“PHILIPPINES”). The women often find a low paying job in a factory assembly line (“Reports”). The cost of every essential item needed is on the rise while families try to live off \$2 per day (“Birth control”). While the parents will do everything they can to earn a peso, the average size of 7 children in that family can still be difficult to feed, so children themselves are forced to take to the streets to add some money to the family’s income (“Poverty in the Philippines”). The children are often forced into drugs, robbery, and scams. They typically don’t complete school because of location and the inevitable expenses. The families just can’t afford to put 7 children through school, so the children are left with little education and little hope for their futures. All the time kids spend on the streets often results in respiratory issues, pneumonia, and even injury from automobiles. Having no access to affordable health care, these conditions can end up resulting in death (“Is Work, Child’s Play?”). It is common that even the family’s best efforts aren’t enough. At this point many go wait in line for hours hoping to receive financial assistance from the government knowing there is a large probability they will go home empty handed (Epatko).

In 1975, the Philippines and Thailand were nearly equal economically and in population. The Philippines had a population of around 41 million people and Thailand was right ahead of them with 42 million. That was the year when Thailand decided to launch a family planning program to take control. Could it be possible that Thailand had a premonition of the Filipino future? In 2000, Thailand had a total fertility rate of 1.9 while the Philippines was nearly double with a 3.6. Then comparing GDP, Thailand was able to boost its up 8 times higher, whereas the Philippines were only able to get theirs 2.6 times higher (Schelzig). Considering population, now the Philippines has a population of over 90 million and Thailand is comfortable with about 64 million people. In 2007, Thailand had \$7880 gross annual income per capita while the Philippines had less than half of that. In 2008 it was found that Thailand had become the top exporter of rice. On the flipside, Filipinos were the top importers of grains. The important thing to take from all this, is that if the Philippines had launched the same plan as Thailand all those years ago, Filipinos could have a 22% higher income and 5 million of their people might not be living in poverty right now ("Birth control"). While it is impossible to go back and change time, there could be a tipping point beyond which it would be impossible to turn around the problems they currently have.

The Philippines is the 12<sup>th</sup> most populous nation in the world with a population that is expected to rise 1.82% until the year of 2015 ("NSCB"). The current population is close to 100 million people and has a population growth of 2 million people per year (Epatko). With half of these citizens living in areas of poverty and a third living in literal poverty ("Rural Poverty"), it is no surprise the population growth is a very important developmental issue. Causing high unemployment, more emigration for work, low savings rates, crowded classrooms, strained social services, and environmental degradation, the overpopulation is an unnatural disaster ("PHILIPPINES"). There are 4 million more people living in poverty in 2012 than in 1985. This proves the connection that an increase in population causes an increase in poverty. Not only does it lead to higher rates of unemployment because the job market can't keep up, but the population increase also reduces capital, funds, income, and economic growth (Schelzig). In the cities, wealth is unevenly distributed leading to even more evident poverty. Families are forced to constantly move from bridges to landfills, continuously rebuilding their homes out of materials they can find. The slum areas remain overcrowded, unsanitary, without enough food, water, shelter, clothing, and health services. With these harsh conditions, families are forced to keep moving like stone-age nomads ("Is Work, Child's Play?").

The high population is also causing a severe strain on the fish market. With additional people starving and unable to afford food, the Filipinos turn to illegal fishing methods like nets and dynamite, often taking more fish than they need because they don't know where their next meal will be coming from. This desperate need for food is dramatically hurting underwater ecosystems. Marine preserves are working hard to revive fish stocks along with the fishing market, but such serious destruction can be hard to repair (Epatko). It seems that despite the clear low production level here, even high production levels will never be able to keep up with extreme overpopulation. An excess of people will always strain resources, education availability, and common services ("PHILIPPINES"). With income falling in agriculture and fisheries, the poorest in the nation remain natives, small-scale farmers, landless workers, fishermen, women, and most Filipinos populating the uplands of the Cordillera highlands and Mindanao islands. The small-scale farmers suffer from deforestation, lack of production, and lack of profit. The fishermen suffer from depleted waters and an overall lack of other skills. The indigenous are illiterate, making it hard for them to find work. Finally, women are left only market and family responsibilities that can leave little room for a decent income ("Rural Poverty").

Painting this picture with a fictional scenario, Hendrick and Celia Cruz are a typical married couple that have travelled to the city of Manila to find work when their agricultural work couldn't bring in any profit. They have seven children, five boys and two girls. The boys, Bryan, 14, Crisanto, 13, Heath, 12, Hendrix, eight, and Saku, are all uneducated. After migrating to Manila, Hendrick was unable to find a job from lack of skills, and remained unemployed. This forced Celia to go out into the job market travelling from

factory to factory making only two pesos per day. Even though Celia and Hendrick wanted to put Jennifer, age 16, through school, she was forced to drop out to take care of her infant sister Carmelita. While Saku, only five, was able to stay home with Jennifer and Carmelita, it is his job to make sure the pieces of their house stay intact. Since they don't have any money, the family was forced to build a shanty for shelter. The four older boys were sent off into the streets to look for any work they could find. Bryan, the oldest, was quickly influenced into a gang and has been selling drugs for money. Heath and Crisanto work to stick together and try to get money from tourists. Unfortunately, Hendrix is suffering from pneumonia from all his unsanitary work, and it doesn't look like he will live much longer since they have no health care access. The family often can't afford food and can go hungry for days at a time. Carmelita is malnourished, so most of the family's provisions go to keep her healthy and alive. This is the average life of an urban Filipino family.

No relief comes with family planning methods since eighty percent of Filipinos are Roman Catholic and many of the hospitals are affiliated with the Catholic religion. Not only is abortion illegal in the Philippines, but it is also required that the country protect both the mother and child from the first point of conception. Even while many Filipinos don't support this, it has yet to be changed (Murphy). Excommunication is the price to pay for any woman who completes an abortion (Diaz). While effective and affordable birth control methods such as the birth control pill and condoms could easily be distributed to limit family size, the church remains completely against all usage (Epatko). It certainly doesn't help that most other churches and religions outside of the Catholics hold the same beliefs and standards on family planning methods (Murphy). Surveys found that 90% of married women aged 15-49 years old reported having access to use of contraceptives but less than 40% actually use family planning methods (Schelzig). This may be because the city's affluent minority can get contraceptives from private clinics, but the impoverished can't afford them and have to go without (Rauhala). The church strongly supports its followers, but surprisingly, followers of the church's natural family planning ethics are minorities in society (Murphy). The majority of women don't see birth control as anti-Catholic (Rauhala).

Women have started becoming spiteful of their religion's intolerance to modern contraceptives, saying that they have a hard time planning their families naturally when they have husbands coming home drunk. This has led them to undergo illegal and unsanitary abortions ("PHILIPPINES"). Although smaller communities outside of the city have less religious ties and easier access to the contraceptives, that leaves no relief for those in the city. Some families even choose to use them simply to have smaller family sizes because mouths are just too hard to feed. The bittersweet truth is that small communities and small families have been known to promote better-educated kids (Epatko). The fewer children in a family, the more resources and supplies there are to go around. That is why larger families are more likely to become impoverished. The children of large families have been known to do worse in school, have frail bodies, have bad hygiene, and ultimately have lower survival rates (Schelzig).

Ultimately, population is the most significant reason for a poor economy, creating a direct link between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (Schelzig). One of the worst parts of this is that most of the previous Filipino presidents have known that there is a population issue that needs a dramatic fix, yet some face heavy denial. For example, the former mayor of Manila, Lito Atienza, refuses to believe there is any link between poverty and population. Atienza says that supporters of birth control are "propagandists of a culture of death." With a new mayor, the government may have taken a step in the right direction, but there is still a major fallback that none of the new doctors have been trained to perform operations like vasectomies or tubal ligations because all similar techniques were illegal in the past (Santos).

It seems as though the Philippines have taken baby steps to solving their major issue. Governmental commissions are frequently put in place to make it seem like changes are being made, but at the last minute, the commissions are abandoned ("Cabral"). Recently, there has been some headway. The Manila

city health office finally signed the ordinance, "Further Strengthening Family Services," saying that birth control choices were to be left up to the couple (Santos). The USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) used to be the main contributor of condoms in the Philippines, but they are now decreasing their supplies because they want Filipinos to step up and start paying for their contraceptives (Rauhala). While Manila is now open to accepting donations for contraceptives, they are refusing to pay for them, and they are still banned from city clinics. While the women's rights activists are happy that they have gained this type of ground, they still say they won't be satisfied until their own government will provide funding for the supplies (Santos). The national government is still completely against using funds to buy any types of pills or condoms, but Manila, since it can set its own rules, has the opportunity to provide such funding. It refuses to, leaving all of the poor empty handed (Rauhala). Since the majority live in poverty, this doesn't make much of a dent in correcting the situation. Many of the women don't understand how the government can say they are finally willing to support families using this type of family planning, yet they still aren't willing to provide funding. This is motivating human rights and women's rights activists to fight for the funding (Santos). They say that it's a matter of the rights and not the religion. In fact, some of Manila's poorest residents got a legal advisor from the Center for Reproductive Rights to file a lawsuit against the contraceptive ban. The women provided evidence of increased unsanitary abortions, maternal deaths, and impoverished families due to high numbers of offspring. They didn't win the lawsuit, but they are hoping this will lead a precedent for citizens to keep fighting to retain their rights (Rauhala).

The Philippines tried to turn things around with the RH (reproductive health) bill of 2011. This is a combination of previous bills that either failed or didn't quite make the cut, but were still very important to the progress that needs to be made. This bill was set in place with the purpose of reducing fertility. While it has not been proven to be effective at this, many positive outcomes have already been seen. More ministry offices and officials are currently working to take responsibility for getting families contraceptive services from the government. POPCOM (Population Commission) and DOH (Department of Health), for instance, have made family planning more common in everyday Filipino society. The current government goal is to slow the population growth rate to 1.98%. For this to become a reality, dramatic changes will have to come. The natural family planning that the church promotes simply isn't going to be effective enough. A better education for not only contraceptive use for families but also adolescents needs to be set in place. (Schelzig). Another major thing that should be set into place is getting family planning supplies and products on the National Drug Formulary. The National Drug Formulary is a list of drugs that the Filipino health insurance companies may reimburse people for (Murphy).

Another project that could ultimately help city families and allow the Philippines to bounce back is receiving help from the IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development). Combining the implementation of family planning services would allow stable incomes and economic growth. The IFAD works to finance irrigation, promote rice production, increase income, food, education, and health care. It also increases the number of loans, focuses on upland and coastal areas, and provides resources, all of which the Philippines desperately need. By emphasizing the 2010-2014 Philippines Country Strategic Opportunities Plan (COSOP), the uplands could get better homes, resources, profit, and family stability. Businesses would receive an overall stability and profit. This would also help the coastal lands by restoring fisheries and providing food ("Rural Poverty"). This is especially important because it has a focus on not only the poorest regions of the country, but also because it can implement finances to boost the economy and get more food throughout to Filipinos. The IFAD is financed through the United Nations for countries just like this. It would essentially be the best investment toward a successful solution.

Filipinos have been suffering from overpopulation for years. In cities, in the uplands, and throughout the countryside people have been starving from lack of relief from their own government. The Filipinos need

people in power making decisions for their well-being. Every single Filipino is connected in this. When one suffers, loses money, or goes hungry, so does another, and so do their families. One action can cause a ripple effect and that is why the action must start now rather than later. It is time to make changes and get the people of the Philippines on course. By limiting population growth rates and implementing a government funded family planning system with modern contraceptives, families can gain control of their lives and overall pressures by reducing the amount of income needed. Women can obtain the rights they always should have had. Fishermen can raise their fish stocks with less illegal fishing putting them back on the market and in work. More Filipinos can return to their rural homes with better chances of making a living in the farming areas. This would decrease the amount of people congested in the city, reducing pollution and living expenses. Ultimately with less people in the cities, there would be less unemployment and a higher production of crops leading to an economic bounce back. While the Roman Catholic Church has done an amazing job bringing forth a strong religion to the people of the Philippines, its influence needs to be moderated. With the population having been out of hand for so long, the Filipino government has no choice but to start stepping in and making decisions for the good of the people. Religions are strong and hard to break. They can't be expected to change what they believe, even if they're ultimately going to drive the Philippines down, so we must change the way we look at this. It is up to the politicians to come together and all move towards the same path with the same goals. While there may be a major reduction in support from the Catholic religion, maybe even all the religions, it will happen to all politicians equally. That is what is needed to happen to get the country back in control of the government. The sooner these large steps are taken in the right direction, the sooner Celia and Hendrick will be able to give their family the peace, prosperity, and control in their lives they have been working so long and hard to achieve.

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