PHILIPPINES

| Population | 79,503,680 |
| Infant mortality rate | 31 per 1000 live births |
| Life expectancy at birth | 69.5 years |
| Fertility rate | 3.2 |
| Annual population growth rate | 2.32% |

The Department of Health provides vitamin A capsules during Garantisadong Pambata (Pre-schooler's Health Week), a biannual week-long delivery of a package of health services to children of 0-59 months with the purpose of reducing morbidity and mortality among the under-fives through the promotion of positive Filipino values for proper child growth and development. In addition to vitamin A supplementation, the children are offered free immunization, deworming, weighing and iron supplementation.

The Food Fortification Program was strengthened with the passage of the Food Fortification Law in 2000, which mandates the fortification of rice, flour, oil and sugar. Current efforts are underway for its full implementation in 2004. A favorable image for the fortified staples was created with the Diamond Sangkap Pinoy Seal.

Use of iodized salt has increased from 25% to 50% since the launch of the Patak sa Asin law in October 2002, aiming to monitor and promote the use of iodized salt.

NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS

Birth weight

In 2000, 16.65% of infants were born with a low birth weight (<2500 g).¹

Infant feeding

The 2002 Maternal and Child Health Survey showed that 89.7% of women with children below five years of age reported having breast-fed or were breast-feeding their youngest child during the time of the survey. The median duration of breast-feeding for all women who ever breast-fed or who were currently breast-feeding was 10.3 months.

The same survey also reported that the most frequently reason cited by urban and rural women for never initiating breast-feeding was insufficient milk. UNICEF estimates that 37% of infants are exclusively breast-fed for <6 months (State of the World's Children, 2003).

Child growth

Based on the 1998 National Nutrition Survey conducted by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute-Department of Science and Technology (NNS-FNRI-DOST), 32% of children five years of age and below were underweight, 67.6% were normal and 0.4% were overweight. The same survey also showed that 34% were stunted and 6% were wasted.

In 2001, FNRI updated the nutritional status of Filipino children at the regional level and showed that, among those five years of age and below, 30.6% were underweight, 31.4% were stunted, 6.3% were wasted and 1% were overweight.

Nutritional anaemia

The prevalence of anaemia for all age groups is 30.6%. Infants aged six months to one year have the highest IDA prevalence rate at 56.6%, with pregnant women of 50.7% and lactating women of 45.7%. Children of six months to five years have a prevalence of 31.8% (1998 NNS-FNRI-DOST).

Iodine deficiency

The prevalence of iodine deficiency in the country is mild based on urinary excretion levels. However, some cases of severe and moderate IDD also exist among children. The 1998 NNS-FNRI-DOST survey reported a median UIE level of 71.0 ug/L. Only 34.7% of children have UIE values equal to or greater than 100 ug/L; 35.8% of children have UIE values below 50 ug/L. In 1998, utilization of iodized salt at the household level was at a national average of 24.7%.

Vitamin A deficiency

The prevalence of children with low to deficient vitamin A levels is 38.0%, indicating that vitamin A deficiency remains a public health problem. Based on the deficient level alone, vitamin A deficiency prevalence is 8.2%.

The vitamin A deficiency prevalence among pregnant women is 22.2% and is a public health problem (1998 NNS-FNRI-DOST). The same survey showed a prevalence rate of 16.5% among lactating women.

Obesity

The 1998 NNS-FNRI-DOST showed that the prevalence of obesity (BMI>30) is 3.3% among 20-60 year-old adults. Female adults have a higher obesity prevalence rate than male adults. Those most at risk of being obese are 40-59 year-old adults.

The WHO Global Database on BMI reports rates of overweight and obesity (%) in 1998 as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year survey began/ended</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age range (years)</th>
<th>Rates of overweight and obesity (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overweight (BMI≥25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>≥20</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both sexes</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES DIRECTED AT NUTRITION

The Philippines Plan of Action for Nutrition or PPAN is the country's blueprint for achieving a meaningful nutritional improvement for all Filipinos and the Government's response to global commitment to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. The PPAN 1999-2004 is aimed at reducing the prevalence of protein-energy malnutrition among children and micronutrient deficiencies, particularly vitamin A and iodine deficiency disorders and iron deficiency anaemia. The PPAN 1999-2004 serves as a guide in designing and managing specific nutrition interventions by national government agencies; local governments units, through their local nutrition committees; nongovernmental organizations; the private/business sector, especially the food processing industry; academia; and communities themselves.

Administrative Order No 3-A s., 2000 Guidelines on Micronutrient Supplementation was issued by the Department of Health to serve as a reference for health workers in the implementation of the Micronutrient Supplementation Program.
In 1995, the ASIN Law or Republic Act No 8172, which is an Act promoting salt iodination nationwide, was passed in support to the Salt Iodination Program. In 2002, the Department of Health launched its major campaign in the implementation of the ASIN Law nationwide.

In 2000, the Food Fortification Law or Republic Act No 8976, which mandates fortification of flour, rice and sugar, was passed.

Administrative Order No 25 s., 2003 is adopting International Standards (IRS) in the Philippines for growth table and chart materials.

**Breast-feeding policies**

There is a National Breast-feeding Policy, a Committee and a Coordinator. There is a successful Mother Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative; there are 1336 health facilities both government and private implementing MBFHI.

In 1999, the Department Order No 259-1 s., 1999 created a task force on breast-feeding.

In 2003, DO 69-C s., made Dr Fabella Memorial Hospital in charge of the breast-feeding programme.

In 1998, the Department of Health issued Dept. Circular No 19-A s., 1998, providing guidelines for the implementation of EO No 51 (The Philippine Milk Code) and adopting a National Code of Marketing Breast Milk Substitutes, supplements and other related products.

There is an ongoing training programme for health workers and World Breast-feeding Week is celebrated, with media campaigns. Mother support groups, such as ARUGAAN, are active.

In 2003, 52% of women were participating in the paid labour force. Paid maternity leave in the public sector is eight weeks (11 weeks in case of Caesarian section).

Efforts to develop a national plan on infant and young child feeding, in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF, have been initiated.

**Monitoring and surveillance of nutritional status**

The country is now adopting the International Reference Standard (IRS) for growth monitoring, which will be used in regular growth monitoring activities and in the conduct of the annual national Operation Timbang.

National nutrition surveys are conducted by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) every five years to monitor nutritional status. The sixth national survey was conducted in 2003.

**Intervention programmes**

Intervention programmes are undertaken to improve birth weight, nutrition during pregnancy and child growth, and to prevent micronutrient deficiencies among others.

The micronutrient supplementation programme is aimed at the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies particularly vitamin A deficiency disorders and iron deficiency anaemia. Vitamin A is given twice a year to children 12-59 months old during April and October as part of the Pre-schoolers Health Week or Garantisadong Pambata and also routinely to high-risk groups in all health centres and barangay health stations nationwide. Vitamin A is also given postpartum and to pregnant women.
The *Patak sa Asin* strategy was launched in 2002 to monitor and promote the use of iodized salt. It is now conducted quarterly and what was initially done in the markets has been expanded to households and salt warehouses. There are also plans also to conduct the activity in schools.

The *Sangkap Pinoy* Seal Program (SPSP) is a strategy to encourage food manufactures to fortify their food/food products with vitamin A, iron and iodine. Twenty-five companies have applied for the seal and at present there are 49 processed foods/foods products with the *Sangkap Pinoy* Seal. The Seal of Acceptance is given to food companies upon completion of the requirements and upon achieving the standards set by the Department of Health.

Fortification of sugar, flour and rice is mandated by the Fortification Law (RA 8976) and will be implemented in 2004. Its Implementing Rules and Regulations were launched in January 2002.

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