

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND ROMUALDEZ MARCOS JR.'s
PHILIPPINE MULTISECTORAL NUTRITION PROJECT NATIONAL LAUNCH**

Manila Hotel, City of Manila

March 29, 2023

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Thank you very much to our DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian for his introduction. Oh, please take your seats.

Our Secretary from NEDA, Secretary Arse Balisacan; the officer-in-charge of the Department of Health, Undersecretary Maria Rosario Singh-Vergeire; the Civil Service Commissioner [Chairperson] Karlo Nograles; now our partners in peace in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, our Chief Minister Ahod Ebrahim Al Haj; and our now, partners in nutrition from the World Bank, the World Bank Country Director Dr. Ndiamé Diop; officials from the UN and the World Health Organization who have joined us here today; all my fellow workers in government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great gladness that I extend my warmest greetings to my fellow public servants from the national and the local governments, our key private sector partner, the key stakeholders and fellow citizens as we launch the Philippine Multisectoral Nutrition Project.

We cannot overstate the importance of why we are gathered here today. Indeed, if our collective ambition as a nation is to push for a fast-paced yet long-term economic development, especially in this post-pandemic era, we must be able to lay that development on a firm foundation.

We will want to invest in our 110-million strong population, who, without question, are the main drivers of our economy. We must capacitate and hone them to become industrious, potent and productive Filipinos, who are strong and resilient, withstanding the rigors of citizen life, to live long and to enjoy their lives in the process.

This is the reason why this Administration has put a high priority and considered it of strategic importance that lies in the areas of food security, health care, and education, amongst others.

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Sometimes we do not think about it and therefore do not often realize it, but lodged at the very core of all this is the aspect of good nutrition for our people.

On the one hand, we have acknowledged the harrowing state of affairs that hunger and food inadequacy continues to be of paramount national, and for that matter, international concerns.

We are taking the bull by the horns, as in fact I have made it my own personal mission to address these fundamental problems as I take on the role of Secretary of Agriculture, just to make sure that a proper focus is given to that particular challenge. However, there are kindred issues that we must also address if our strategy will be complete and effective.

The recent Expanded National Nutrition Survey has noted among our children a high incidence of stunting, amongst other health issues. It is not to say that it's only the young that are vulnerable. Other age groups are not spared from these nutritional problems. What is worse is the insidiousness of the malnutrition problem.

Malnutrition is, in turn, linked to long-term adverse developmental impacts, taking its toll on our people's learning ability, academic performance, all the way to productivity and employment opportunities --- and it also carries with it hereditary implications. Indeed, like the problem of food security, these related nutritional issues are also critical and fundamental to our socio-economic development.

Therefore, as we aim for food security, we must also pursue with the same vigor and consistency the remedies to this grave problem of nutrition. In fact, whatever solutions we adopt in these two areas, they must be strategically related and mutually reinforcing.

This major nutrition project that we are launching here today is a strategic intervention by government, which adopts a "multi-sectoral community and participatory approach". It is important because such an approach is seen to be the effective method to deal with this multifaceted problem, the benefits from which we will feel all the way from the very top of our society down to the grassroots level.

The project joins together the DOH, the DSWD, the DA, the National Nutrition Council, the DOST-Food and Nutrition Research Institute and very importantly, it involves our Local Government Units from Luzon all the way to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.

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Of course, this would not have been possible without the crucial funding assistance from the World Bank. And for that, we will be eternally grateful.

On the ground, this project will deliver services straight to our LGUs most in need of intervention, in the form of primary health support and nutrition

services, including Early Childhood Care and Development, not to mention access to clean water and sanitation, technical information, training and financing, amongst other facets.

And that just I think demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of the problem and the multi-faceted nature of whatever solutions we will apply to that problem.

And as if this was not enough, the program will also incentivize the participating LGUs.

And we were just having a very quick discussion about how that should be – how we can achieve that. And from, well, the Secretary of DSWD is a former mayor, I am a former governor. And so we have been... We see very clearly the problems that arise at the ground level.

In very simple terms, usually health does not – health care does not become a priority simply because there's little capacity and ability and skills and manpower at the local level to be able to achieve all the threshold levels, let us say, of health care, of nutrition and all of these things that we are now recognizing to be an important part to the solution of malnutrition.

So, we have found a way to bring the LGUs in. Because it is without their partnership, we do not get to what is often referred to as the last mile. And that is always the problem when you try to translate a program from the national level, a program of national government, all the way down to the local government, down to the barangay level. And this was – the effort that we have done now I think addresses that problem which will contribute to the success of what we are trying to do and improve the nutrition map of the Philippines.

So once again, let me emphasize that good nutrition of our people is key to the attainment of our socio-economic goals. Precisely, according to the World Bank, investing in nutrition promises the highest returns, making it one of the best value-for-money development actions.

Hence, we must be serious in its pursuit, in the same way that we do our other administration priorities. This program will involve and improve the lot of our people across the board, especially those who we put in the poor and marginalized category.

It is also our hope that, through this project, not only LGUs but all Filipino families, will emerge more informed and capacitated in the area of good nutritional practices.

Ultimately, in the long-term, we shall see our economy being driven by Filipinos with “Better Bodies, Better Minds”, fully equipped and ever-ready for the challenges of the present and the future. Moreover, as the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. Our good nutrition program will

level our thrust towards a Universal Health Care Program for all Filipinos. We are counting on our LGUs' full support and our people's cooperation to guarantee the success of the PMNP.

So, to further address malnutrition in our country, I once again call on the Department of Health to work in unison with other concerned government agencies in harmonizing and effecting sound diet and nutritional policies and practices for our people. We must continue to exert our best efforts to ensure a well-orchestrated and coordinated strategy to implement not only the PMNP but all related nutritional programs throughout the country, so as to be able to get a maximum effect for all our efforts.

Let me also take this opportunity to enjoin our lawmakers for their assistance in this endeavor by helping us develop and enshrine into law policies that will help eradicate malnutrition and uplift the standards of primary health care and nutrition in the Philippines.

As the country continues to face the persistent threats of hunger and malnutrition, rest assured that this administration is working conscientiously to find effective and cross-cutting solutions to address these and other paramount social problems and concerns.

Ang lahat ng ito po ay para sa isang malusog at maunlad na sambayanang Pilipinas, ngayon, bukas at hanggang sa mga susunod na henerasyon.

Maraming pong salamat sa inyong lahat. Mabuhay po kayong lahat. Maraming salamat at magandang tanghali. [applause]

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