

Situation Analysis of Children in the Philippines



A Summary Report



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Situation Analysis of Children in the Philippines

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Foreword



On behalf of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), I would like to congratulate the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Philippines, and the team behind the *Situation Analysis on the Children of Philippines*. The spirit of partnership established between the government of the Philippines and our development partners, especially the UNICEF, is invaluable in ensuring an enabling environment for the children to achieve their full potential.

The *Situation Analysis of Children* is the culmination of the efforts of various stakeholders, highlighting the gaps and deprivations faced by Filipino children that need to be addressed through the policy recommendations identified in the report. The same is in line with the targets articulated in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022. Having acknowledged the inherent vulnerability of children especially during their early formative years, the PDP has outlined a set of strategies to promote the welfare and rights of the children which are most salient, specifically on *Chapter 10: Accelerating Human Capital Development*, *Chapter 11: Reducing Vulnerability of Individuals and Families*, and *Chapter 13: Reaching the Demographic Dividend* of the PDP. These recommendations can also serve as impetus in achieving the country’s commitment to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

May this document serve as our guide to ensuring that all the identified issues and concerns will be addressed. May it help in gaining the full support of all sectors of society so that no child will be left deprived. May it also strengthen our thrust in achieving lasting change and social justice for the entire nation.

Again, congratulations and *mabuhay tayong lahat!*



Ernesto M. Pernia

Secretary of Socioeconomic Planning

Foreword



I am pleased to share a summary of the *Situation Analysis of Children in the Philippines*, conducted by UNICEF and the Government of the Philippines. This presents evidence from research into the situation of over 40 million Filipino children and highlights progress and gaps in the fulfilment of their rights across the country.

Over the past decades the Philippines has made significant progress on child rights indicators. Infant and under-5 mortality have been reduced by half, polio and maternal and neonatal tetanus have been eliminated and the Government has launched a multi-sectoral plan of action to end violence against children. Yet, tremendous efforts will be required to reach national development goals and rights standards in the Philippines, and to reduce stark disparities among children across different geographical areas and groups of the population.

Children and youth in the Philippines face huge challenges. Despite rapid economic growth in recent years, 31.4 per cent of children (and a staggering 63.1 per cent of girls and boys in Mindanao), live below the poverty line. 33 per cent of children are stunted (short for their age) due to malnutrition, and immunization coverage fell sharply from 89 to 60 per cent between 2013 and 2015. Meanwhile, access to sexual and reproductive health remains low, despite a rise of 230 per cent in newly diagnosed HIV cases among young people at risk. An estimated 2.85 million girls and boys aged 5-15 years are also out of school, and 8 in 10 children experience some form of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual or online abuse.

This compelling evidence reminds us that we still have a long way to go to fully meet the rights of children in the Philippines. At the same time, it also provides us with a unique opportunity to strengthen our collaboration, and to take action together for Filipino girls and boys. I believe the wealth of evidence, analysis and insight in the Situation Analysis will guide us towards meeting these commitments and inform ongoing efforts to meet children's rights across the country.

This Situation Analysis was prepared in collaboration with the national government of the Philippines and the regional government of Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The analysis is based on data available in 2017, and is not affected by the recent Bangsamoro Organic Law and resulting transition of institutions in ARMM.

2018 marks UNICEF's 70th year in the Philippines. Yet we remain as young as ever and a passionate champion for children in our mission, our vision, our commitments and actions. I would like to express our great appreciation to the Government and to all of our other partners for their relentless efforts to achieve results for children.

You can count on us for unwavering support in reaching every Filipino child in need.

LOTTA SYLWANDER

Representative, UNICEF Philippines

Children in Barangay Labnig, a disaster-prone area of Paracale Municipality in Camarines Norte Province.

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“Despite progress, children across the Philippines continue to face barriers to the full realisation of their rights, affecting their long-term wellbeing and development. High levels of inequity, exacerbated by armed conflict and natural disasters in parts of the country, mean that the most vulnerable girls and boys suffer disproportionately.”

Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of findings from the larger Situation Analysis, an extensive research study into the situation of children in the Philippines.¹ It aims to shed light on progress toward children's rights across the country and to inform future policy and programme interventions for girls and boys.

Overview of Situation Analysis

The Situation Analysis highlights gaps in the fulfilment of children's rights across different sectors in the Philippines and explores the impact on their ability to develop and thrive. It examines how these deprivations are experienced by different groups of children around the country and provides a detailed analysis of the complex set of causes and barriers underlying the failure to fully meet children's rights.

Research for the Situation Analysis was conducted within two key phases:

1. Assessment: *To what extent do children in the Philippines meet international development targets and child rights standards?* Researchers examined how children in the Philippines were progressing across a range of indicators within the areas of health; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); education; child protection and social protection. They then compared these outcomes to international development targets and rights standards for children including

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – allowing them to identify **gaps in the realisation of children's rights** across the country.

2. Analysis: *What are the causes of these child rights gaps?* Researchers then worked to analyse the immediate, underlying and structural **causes** of these gaps (or 'deprivations') and to identify the **barriers** preventing children from fully realising their rights. This analysis was structured according to key determinants identified as critical to achieving results for children, grouped into the categories of: enabling environment, supply, demand and quality.

Throughout the research process, issues of **equity** (outcomes and issues relating to different groups of children) and **risk** (impact of disasters and conflicts) were considered.

Research methods

Research methods for the Situation Analysis included:

- Synthesis and analysis of existing data from laws, policies, studies, reports and surveys
- Key informant interviews with government stakeholders and experts
- Workshops with government, UN, civil society and academic stakeholders to conduct causality analysis and mapping exercises, and to validate the research findings

Overview of the Philippines

Population

The Philippines is the twelfth most populated country in the world. An archipelago of 7,107 islands, it has 100.98 million people² and is characterized by:

- **High numbers of children:** in 2010, almost 40% of the population was under 18³
- **Rapid urbanization:** the proportion of the population living in urban areas is predicted to increase from around 27% in 1950 to 56% in 2050⁴
- **Ethnic diversity:** there are an estimated 14-17 million Indigenous Peoples (IPs) from 110 ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines.⁵ Around 92% of people are Christian, with most of the country's 5% Muslim population based on the island of Mindanao.⁶

Economic context

The Philippines is a lower middle-income country with the tenth fastest growing economy in the world.⁷ Recent economic advances however, have been marked by:

- **Slow human development:** in 2016, the Philippines ranked 116 out of 188⁸ countries on the Human Development Index, lagging behind regional neighbours
- **Persistent poverty:** poverty levels remain fairly high and are actually *increasing* in areas such as ARMM⁹
- **Slow and uneven growth:** Poverty rates vary significantly across the country, from 3.9% in the National Capital Region (NCR), to 53.7% in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)¹⁰

This report provides a snapshot of children's situation in the Philippines based on data available in 2017. The ARMM part of the analysis was developed in collaboration with the regional government of ARMM, and is not affected by the recent Bangsamoro Organic Law and resulting transition of institutions in ARMM.

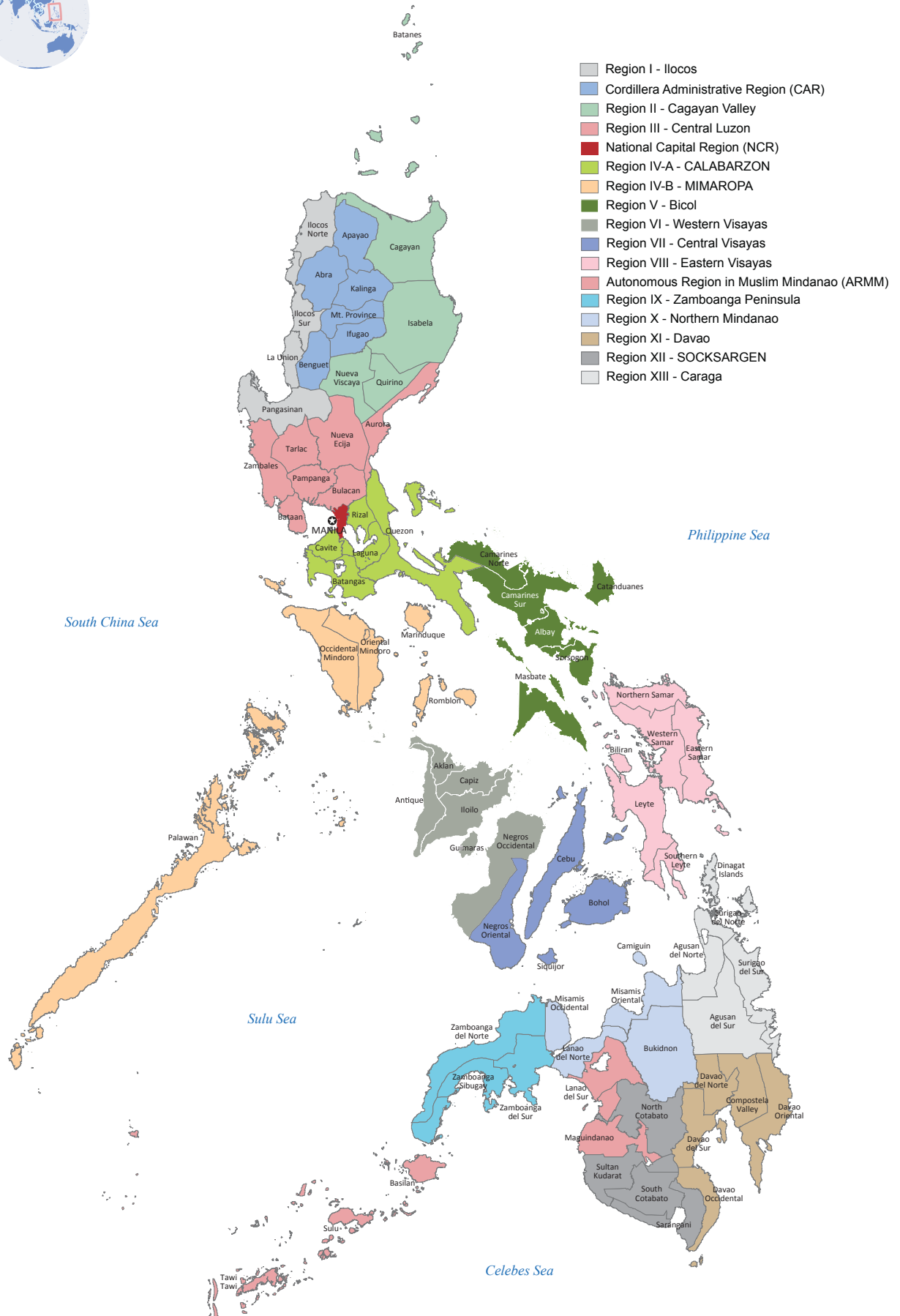
The Copina family lives in a makeshift house in Tanauan, Leyte. Six of the nine children are still living with their parents. Their mother, Mernita, receives cash grants from the government's 4Ps programme, which they use for the family's daily needs.

©UNICEF Philippines/2014/Joey Reyna





17 REGIONS	81 PROVINCES	145 CITIES	1,489 MUNICIPALITIES	42,036 BARANGAYS
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The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Political context

The Philippines is a democratic republic headed by a president. Heavily decentralized, it is governed through 17 administrative regions made up of provinces, cities, municipalities and barangays. These local government units (LGUs) raise taxes, enact legislation and deliver services. In recent years, there have been efforts to move the country towards a federalist government.

- **Inequality:** around 50-70% of politicians in the Philippines are associated with a dynasty,¹¹ concentrating power among a few families and perpetuating inequality¹²
- **Corruption:** In 2017, the Philippines scored 34 on Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index*, indicating a serious level of corruption¹³
- **Capacity gaps in local government:** many LGUs struggle to raise revenue, manage their financial resources, and to plan, budget and implement programmes effectively

Risk (disasters and conflicts)

The Philippines has been heavily affected by natural disasters and conflicts, which have devastated communities and fuelled poverty.

- **Natural disasters:** The Philippines is prone to typhoons, flooding, drought, rain-induced landslides, volcanic eruptions, storm surges and earthquakes. Between 2000-2017 there were 273 disasters caused by natural hazards.¹⁴
- **Climate change:** The Philippines is ranked among the top five countries in the world in terms of vulnerability to climate change,¹⁵ with rising sea levels, mean temperatures and storm surges recorded in recent years¹⁶
- **Conflict:** The Southern Philippines, particularly ARMM, has had a complex history of ethnic and armed conflict over the past decades. This has severe consequences for children including death, injury, displacement, sexual violence and recruitment into armed forces/groups.¹⁷

A woman holds her child amid the rubble in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013.

©UNICEF Philippines/2014/Joey Reyna



Children stand in a river that has dried up due to severe drought in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, April 2016.

©UNICEF Philippines/2014/Joey Reyna



A young boy sits on the doorstep of his cardboard box like house in an informal settlement in Barangay 775, San Andres, in Metro Manila. Although San Andres only has a small land area, it is the second most densely populated district in Manila.

©UNICEF Philippines/2016/Shehzad Noorani



“

Girls and boys from rural communities and low-educated households are more likely to live in poverty. Indigenous children, street children and children with disabilities may be deprived of basic services.

”

Findings

The Situation Analysis identifies a range of gaps in the fulfilment of children’s rights across all sectors in the Philippines. It also finds distinct disparities in children’s progress toward meeting international development and rights standards according to

geographical location, economic situation and gender - with girls and boys from marginalised groups performing significantly worse.

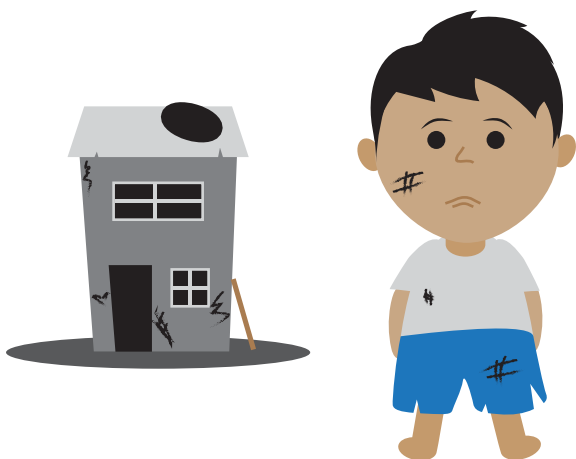
Key child rights deprivations identified across sectors include:

Social protection

Despite rapid economic growth and overall declining rates of **poverty** in recent years, the situation remains extremely challenging for children in the Philippines. In 2015, a staggering 31.4 per cent of children were living below the basic needs poverty line (down from 2012),¹⁸ with poverty rates actually *increasing* for children in ARMM: from 52.6 per cent in 2006, to 63.1 per cent in 2015.¹⁹

Stark **disparities** were found not only between areas of the country, but across different groups of the population: in 2009, girls and boys from rural communities, low-educated households and larger families were more likely to be living in poverty.²⁰ Similarly, while there is limited data available, children from marginalised groups including street children, children from indigenous communities and children with disabilities, appear more likely to be deprived of services (including access to school), to experience social discrimination and to live in poverty.

Significant rates of child poverty



31.4%
of children
are living below the
basic needs poverty line
nationally

63.1%
in ARMM

Child poverty rates vary significantly
and are very high in some regions

Philippines Statistics Authority, 2015

Health

The Philippines has made progress in reducing **child mortality** over past decades. Between 1990 and 2015, deaths of infants under one year decreased from 41 to 21 per 1,000 live births, while the number of children who died before the age of five dropped from 59 to 27 per 1,000 live births.²¹ Child mortality rates however, are significantly higher in rural areas and in ARMM,²² and huge efforts will be required to meet national targets of 15 (for infants) and 22 (for children under 5 years). Unfortunately, the Philippines has been less successful at lowering the **maternal mortality** rate. At 114 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015²³ (down only about 25 per cent from 152 deaths in 1990),²⁴ it is significantly higher than the regional average of 62 for East Asia and the Pacific, and short of the SDG goal of 70.

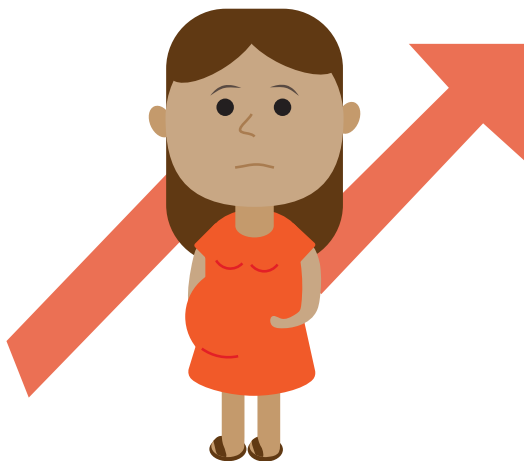
Worryingly, childhood **immunization rates** are low, and in some cases declining, in the Philippines. Between 2013 and 2015 the routine immunization coverage rate²⁵ dropped from 89 per cent to around 62 per cent,²⁶ and low immunization rates contributed to increased incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases such as rubella (2011) and

measles (2014).²⁷ There is also significant disparity in immunization coverage across the country, with only 18 per cent of children in ARMM receiving all their basic vaccinations (2017), compared to up to 87 per cent in other areas.²⁸

Children and adolescents in the Philippines have limited access to **sexual and reproductive health services**, including contraception. While contraceptive prevalence has fluctuated in recent years, it stood at only 42.8 per cent among married women aged 15-49 years in 2015 (significantly lower than the regional average of 63 per cent), with only 35 per cent using modern methods.²⁹ Between 1997 and 2015 there was also a steep increase and reverse in declining **teen fertility rates**, from 49 births to 59.2 births per 1,000 women (aged 15-19 years) – levels comparable to those in the 1960s.³⁰

The Philippines also has one of the fastest growing **HIV** epidemics in the world: diagnosed cases increased from one a day in 2008 to 26 a day in 2016 (29 per cent among children and youth aged 15-24 years),³¹ and HIV infections rose by 230 per cent among at risk groups of young people³² between 2011 and 2015.³³

Low access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH)



Rising rates of teen fertility:
an increase from 49 (in 1997)
to 59.2 births per 1,000 women
aged 15-19 years in 2015

Contraceptive prevalence is at 42.8%
among married women aged 15-49 years, with only 35.7% using modern methods

National Demographic and Health Survey, 2013.

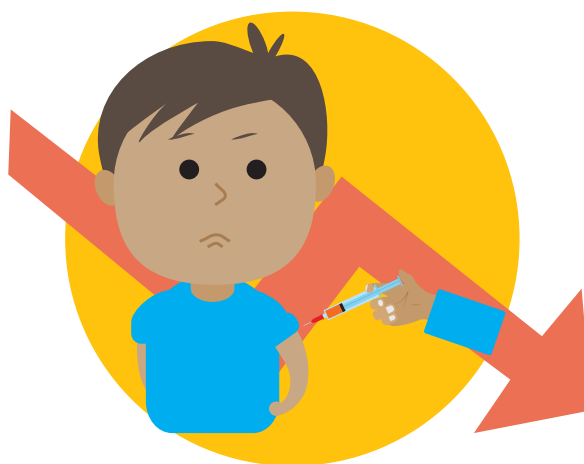
Parents have their child vaccinated at a health centre in Leyte.

©UNICEF Philippines/2015/Jeremy Bayaya



Low and declining immunization coverage

89%
2013



62%
2015

Only 62% childhood immunization coverage

Decline in childhood vaccination coverage:
from 89% in 2013 to 62% in 2015

WHO and UNICEF, 2015

Nutrition³⁴

The Philippines has very high levels of **stunting*** (33 per cent) and **underweight** (21.5 per cent) among children under 5 years (2015), which have actually *increased* in recent years – marking a worrying reversal of overall downward trends in past decades. Childhood stunting is much higher in ARMM (45 per cent) and falls considerably short of the regional average for East Asia and the Pacific (11 per cent).³⁵ Unsurprisingly, household wealth is one of the most significant predictors of childhood stunting across the country: nearly 1 in 2 children from the poorest households are affected, compared to only 15 per cent of the wealthiest households.

Childhood **wasting*** is estimated to affect around 7 per cent of children under 5 years in the Philippines (and 8.2 per cent of children in ARMM), falling short of national and international targets of 5 per cent.³⁶ As the risk of wasting increases during humanitarian emergencies, it is of particular concern in the Philippines, which is vulnerable to natural disasters. At the same time, the proportion of **overweight** children under the age of five has been slowly increasing over the past decades, rising from 1.1 per cent in 1989 to 3.9 per cent in 2015.

Although still relatively high, the Philippines has successfully halved the rate of **maternal anaemia** (among pregnant women) from over 50 per cent in 1998,³⁷ to 25 per cent in 2013.³⁸ Similarly, while **childhood anaemia** prevalence remains very high, it has decreased significantly among children between the age of six months and one year: from 66 per cent in 2003, to 39.4 per cent in 2013.³⁹ While almost all children in the Philippines are breastfed at some stage (94 per cent),⁴⁰ only 34 per cent are exclusively breastfed for the first six months after birth.⁴¹



One in three children under the age of 5 in the Philippines is stunted. Almost half of stunted children come from the poorest households, compared to only 15% from the wealthiest households.



High and increasing rates of childhood stunting and underweight



33% of children under 5 years are stunted:
an increase from 30% in 2013



21.5% of children under 5 years are underweight:
an increase from 20% in 2013

National Nutrition Survey, 2015

*Stunting in children indicates that they are too short for their age due to long term undernutrition

*Wasting in children indicates that they are too thin for their height due to acute undernutrition

“
More efforts are needed
to implement laws and
policies that can protect
children’s rights.
”

A health worker takes measurements of a severely malnourished child in a Rural Health Unit in Barangay Manungkaling, Mamasapano Municipality, in the province of Maguindanao.

Water, sanitation and hygiene⁴²

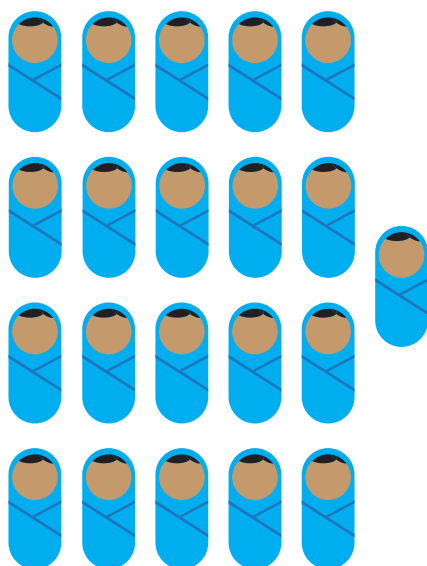
Although a high proportion of the population (90.5 per cent in 2015) has access to basic drinking water, the Philippines does not yet have universal access to **safe drinking water**.⁴³ There are also significant disparities by household income and region: as of 2017, only 80 per cent of the poorest households and 62 per cent of people in ARMM had access to at least basic drinking water, compared to 99 per cent of the wealthiest households in other parts of the country.

The Philippines has made good progress towards improving **sanitation** over the past decades, however still has a long way to go to meet the SDG goal of adequate and equitable access to sanitation for all. As of 2015, only 75 per cent of the population (and 45 per cent of the poorest households) were using basic sanitation services.

Similarly, while rates of **open defecation** declined between 2000 and 2015, the national rate of 5.74 per cent remains higher than the regional average of 3.28 per cent and was practiced much more frequently in poorer parts of the country such as ARMM (39.4 per cent). A large number of schools in the Philippines, 3,819, also still lack water supply and sanitation facilities,⁴⁴ with some evidence of inadequate facilities affecting **menstrual hygiene management** for girls.⁴⁵

“ In 2017, only 80 per cent of the country’s poorest households had access to basic drinking water, compared to 99 per cent of the wealthiest households. ”

High rates of child mortality



Infant mortality rate
of 21 deaths in 1,000 live births
and under-five mortality of 27
deaths in 1,000 live births

Significant disparities:

Child mortality is higher in rural areas and in ARMM where the under-five mortality rate is 55 deaths per 1,000 live births

National Demographic and Health Survey, 2013

After a series of disasters in Leyte, UNICEF helped to set up solar-powered water systems in schools without access to safe drinking water.



Education⁴⁶

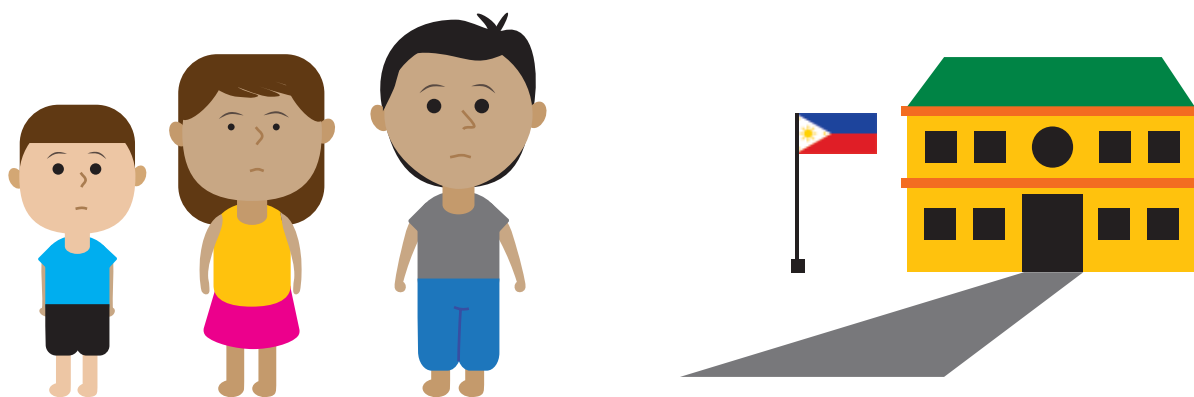
Despite some encouraging progress in recent years, there are still limitations to children's **access to education** in the Philippines. As of 2013, only about 42 per cent of children aged 3-4 years were enrolled in day care centres⁴⁷ and less than 30 per cent in some areas of ARMM.⁴⁸ **Enrolment** in Kindergarten however, almost doubled from 2005 to 2013⁴⁹ (standing at 74.65 per cent in 2015),⁵⁰ with the largest increases within the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. The Philippines also has some way to go to meet the 2030 SDG target of universal access to quality primary and secondary education. In 2015, the net enrolment rate in primary education was 91.05 per cent and 68.15 per cent in secondary school,⁵¹ with both rates substantially lower in ARMM: 75.6 per cent and 29.6 per cent respectively.⁵²

As of 2015, 83.4 per cent (primary)⁵³ and around 73.9 per cent (secondary)⁵⁴ of enrolled children actually completed their schooling, reflecting a somewhat fluctuating rise in **completion** rates from 2010. Around 2.85 million children aged 5-15 years were also estimated to be out of school,⁵⁵ with

ARMM recording the highest rates of drop-outs for both primary and secondary level.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the evidence points to a marked gender difference in this area, with more boys dropping out of school, and higher attendance rates by girls: in 2013, 71.2 per cent of girls compared to 58.9 per cent of boys attended secondary school.⁵⁷

In the 2014/2015 school year, average student scores on National Achievement Tests were 69 per cent (primary) and 49 per cent (secondary), with lower scores in ARMM: 59 per cent and 41 per cent respectively.⁵⁸ Literacy rates continue to improve however, with 90.3 per cent of people aged 10-64 years functionally literate (2013).⁵⁹ The **quality** of education is also a concern: in 2014, 59 per cent (primary) and 63 per cent (secondary) of teacher education institutions did not meet national pass rates for trainees,⁶⁰ attributed in part to poor quality teacher training. Limited numbers of teachers (and low knowledge of subject matter), and inadequate classrooms and school supplies also pose challenges.

An estimated **2.85 million** children aged 5-15 are out of school



Department of Education, Philippines Development Plan 2015



“ In 2015, the net enrolment rate was only 75.6% at primary school level and 29.6% at secondary school level in ARMM. ”

Students attend a class at Pamalian Elementary School in Shariff Saydona, Maguindanao.

Child protection

In 2018, the Philippines published findings from the *2015 National Baseline Study on Violence against Children (NBS-VAC)*,⁶¹ the first ever study to measure prevalence of all forms of **violence against children** across the country. This indicates that children and youth aged 13-24 years, experience high levels of physical (64.2 per cent), psychological (61.5 per cent), sexual (22.4 per cent) and peer (65 per cent) violence.

Prevalent forms of violence include **corporal punishment** of children at home and to a lesser extent at school (which is driven by social norms around discipline), and **bullying**.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) children are particularly vulnerable to physical, psychological and sexual violence. Contrary to research from other countries, the NBS-VAC also indicates that more males (26.4 per cent) than females (18.2 per cent) experience sexual violence both at home and at school. This pattern of violence is equally manifested in all economic groups.

The Philippines continues to be a source, transit and destination country for commercial **sexual exploitation and trafficking** and one of the top ten countries globally producing sexual content using children. While a relatively low and declining

rate of commercial sex was reported among children and youth aged 15-24,⁶² domestic and cross-border trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation continues, with 1,465 victims of trafficking assisted in 2015, and sex tourism reportedly on the rise (2016).⁶³ **Cyber violence** has emerged as serious threat: new technologies put children at risk of online sexual solicitation and grooming, and the number of young children coerced (often by relatives)⁶⁴ to perform sex acts for live streaming on the internet has increased, making online child abuse the leading cybercrime in the Philippines.⁶⁵

Almost 11.8 per cent of children aged 13-17 years in the Philippines are affected by **collective violence**.⁶⁶ 6.8 per cent have experienced deliberate destruction of their homes, and 9 per cent have seen people being shot, bombs exploding and fighting or rioting. In ARMM, grave violations against children have also been documented, including killing, use of child soldiers, rape, abduction and attacks on schools and hospitals.⁶⁷ Exploitative child labour, the absence of universal birth registration (93.5 per cent of children overall and only 37.9 per cent of children in ARMM have had their births registered)⁶⁸ and child marriage, are among other child protection risks.

High rates of violence against children



Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF, National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children, 2015

“

The Philippines is a source, transit and destination country for commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, and one of the top ten producers globally of sexual content using children.

”

A social worker speaks with a four-year-old girl at the Philippine General Hospital in Manila. She was brought into the centre by her grandmother who filed a report of sexual abuse against the child's father.

©UNICEF Philippines/2016/Josh Estey

Justin plays with plastic balls at a special classroom for children with disabilities at Ponciano Bernardo Elementary School in Metro Manila.



Analysis

The Situation Analysis identifies a complex set of inter-related causes underlying the deprivations experienced by children in the Philippines and highlights numerous barriers that continue to impede the full realisation of their rights.

1. Enabling environment

A strong enabling environment is critical to promoting children's rights and improving their situation. In the Philippines however, there are considerable challenges:

Legal and policy frameworks. Despite a comprehensive set of laws and policies supporting children's rights in the Philippines, there remain gaps that put girls and boys at risk. Inadequate criminal laws mean that children are not fully protected against violence: corporal punishment is not prohibited at home; the age of sexual consent is extremely low (12 years); and criminal responsibility for rape may be expunged if a perpetrator subsequently marries the victim. At the same time, some laws restrict children and adolescents' right to basic services. For example, independent access to sexual reproductive health services is restricted to adults over 18 years.

A fragmented legal/ policy framework and an issue-based approach also impedes the government's ability to address children's needs in a comprehensive and coordinated way, with little attention given to the particular challenges faced by girls and boys from marginalised groups (such as indigenous children). This includes child protection and social protection systems, which are fractured and ineffective. Too often moreover, policies and laws have remained largely 'on paper' due to insufficient efforts to put the necessary systems, financing and capacity in place for implementation.

Governance and coordination. A range of governance issues including corruption, financial mismanagement and inadequate oversight and

accountability, have limited the government's ability to provide services to children in the Philippines. In particular, poor coordination between government sectors and agencies has made it difficult to address children's needs holistically. Despite some good attempts to foster more 'joined up' working between sectors, oversight or coordination bodies often lack capacity and funding, and struggle to step out of a culture of 'working in silos.' Similarly, the multitude of government bodies with overlapping child mandates has contributed to confusion, overlaps and gaps in support to children.

Poor coordination and integration between national and local levels of government has also resulted in fragmented and ineffective services. This has been exacerbated by the decentralised governance structure in the Philippines, with areas devolved to LGUs, particularly weak. For example:

- National policies and laws affecting children are often poorly disseminated to local levels of government, where they are interpreted and applied inconsistently
- Policies and programmes affecting children (even within the same sector) aren't coordinated across different levels of government, causing overlaps, inconsistencies and gaps
- Inadequate supervision and monitoring, weak accountability mechanisms and limited technical capacity have left local level LGUs struggling to implement laws, policies and programmes for children

Budgeting and finance. Public sector finance management in the Philippines is complex and fragmented, with a number of barriers obstructing the fulfilment of children’s rights and delivery of services and interventions.

One of the biggest challenges is inadequate financing for essential sectors. Budget allocations to health, social welfare/protection, WASH and ECCD (early childhood care and development) sectors are particularly limited and well below regional averages. Moreover, the resources that are available are unevenly allocated. LGUs rely heavily on Internal Revenue Allocations, which are determined according to land mass and population size rather than on a needs basis, which has limited funding for smaller and less populated areas and compounded inequalities across the country. There is also limited transparency and accountability: as the government does not publish a children’s budget, it is difficult to know how much is spent on children’s services and programmes.

A slow, centralised procurement system with strict rules has also hampered the delivery of essential services across social sectors and limited the government’s ability to respond effectively to emergencies. Infrastructure and supplies for schools, health institutions, WASH facilities and for social welfare and child protection services have all been affected. Limited capacity and inadequate finance skills at all levels of government moreover, mean that policies and programmes for children aren’t always properly costed, affecting their implementation. Concerns over financing in some sectors (e.g. health) have also impeded emergency preparedness and response services.

Data collection and use. Limitations in the availability, quality and use of data around children in the Philippines, has made it challenging to target policies and interventions to meet girls’ and boys’ needs. In the absence of a clear government framework for oversight and accountability, data collection around children is highly fragmented and poorly integrated between sectors and levels of government – resulting in data gaps and duplications. This has made it difficult to track children across sectors and programmes, and to develop a more rounded understanding of the multiple dimensions of issues that affect them: e.g. the social aspects of nutrition and non-income dimensions of poverty.

Across all sectors, there is also insufficient data on the situation of vulnerable children, including children with disabilities, indigenous children and children living in informal urban settlements. The inability to ‘see’ these children and the challenges they face, has created a policy gap which continues to render them vulnerable.

Harmful sociocultural norms, practices and beliefs. While sociocultural norms, practices and beliefs in the Philippines do, at times, support children’s rights, they can also create barriers. Social acceptance of corporal punishment for example, condones the use of physical violence against children in the home. Similarly, norms and beliefs related to gender place women and girls in a subordinate position to men - fuelling violence and confining them to child rearing/domestic roles that limit their access to formal employment and their ability to escape poverty.

“ Harmful sociocultural norms in the Philippines can create barriers to realizing children’s rights. While some practices and beliefs protect children, others threaten them. ”

2. Supply

In the Philippines, inadequate investment in the social sector has resulted in a limited supply of basic services to children and families – making it extremely difficult to fulfil their rights. Around the country, the quality of social services also varies considerably, with more acute difficulties experienced by children and families in remote areas, and services often failing to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable groups. This has been exacerbated by challenges with:

Human resources. There is a shortage of well trained and qualified professionals across all sectors in the Philippines. In many parts of the country, the ratios of professionals to population (health workers, teachers, social workers and sanitation engineers), are below government targets and regional averages. In particular, there aren't enough professionals with specialist expertise in providing services to children and adolescents (e.g. doctors, teachers, psychologists, social workers, child care workers) and marginalized groups such as children with disabilities and indigenous children. Unfortunately, the government hasn't been able to capitalize on the strong civil society sector in parts of the country to help deliver social services to children and to address these gaps in provision.

Human resources are unevenly spread throughout the country, with remote, geographically isolated, disaster-prone and conflict-affected areas

more likely to experience chronic shortages of key professionals across all sectors. There are also issues around quality: in some sectors (particularly WASH and ECCD), professionals are paid low salaries and aren't required to gain university qualifications, limiting the supply of qualified professionals. Nepotism among local government executives also means that better qualified staff may sometimes be overlooked for positions.

Logistics and procurement. Delivery of quality social services to children has also been hampered by difficulties acquiring and distributing essential supplies efficiently. Weak logistic systems and slow, cumbersome procurement procedures mean that service providers often face delays or even failure in acquiring essential supplies such as vaccines, medicines, WASH equipment, textbooks and other materials - particularly in rural areas. This has been aggravated by poor planning and limited technical capacity to forecast demand, stocktake and distribute supplies, leading in some cases to considerable underspend on social service budgets (e.g. within the education sector).

These bottlenecks have also limited demand: where children and families routinely experience shortages of needed medication, school materials and other essential supplies, they are less likely to see the value in accessing services.



A child receives hygiene supplies and water storage and purification kits for her family in the aftermath of Typhoon Bopha in 2012.

3. Demand

While a supply of quality social services is essential to fulfilling children's rights, there also needs to be *demand* for those services. In the Philippines however, there are many barriers that limit demand:

Insufficient awareness and knowledge. Parents, families and communities do not always understand why or how children should access available support. For example, there is limited understanding regarding the importance of health issues such as routine vaccinations and sexual health check-ups; good nutrition and infant feeding practices; and how to report violence against children including exploitation, abuse and neglect.

Financial barriers have suppressed demand for health, education and WASH services for children. In particular, children's access to health care has been affected by demands for informal and out of pocket payments from subsidised health facilities, which have made them too expensive for families. Similarly, the food insecurity experienced by many families poses a barrier to children's adequate nutrition, with household wealth a main predictor of child malnutrition.

Sociocultural norms, practices and beliefs can determine the extent to which children access services and fulfil their rights across all sectors. In the Philippines:

- Socioreligious norms that render sexual activity among young (unmarried) people unacceptable, have suppressed demand for family planning services among adolescents and led service providers to deny access
- Stigma associated with violence, in particular sexual violence, has resulted in under-reporting and limited demand for justice and social services
- Gender norms have limited boys' access to education and their educational attainment
- Social beliefs and practices around WASH have contributed to families' reluctance to prioritise and engage in improved sanitation practices

Physical access: The geographical make-up of the Philippines as an archipelago with many small and remote islands means that access to social services can be challenging for children and families. Inadequate transport infrastructure in some areas makes it difficult for children to access health facilities, schools, police and social welfare support, while families in geographically isolated communities often struggle to participate in social protection programmes.

4. Quality

To fully realise children's rights, it is important that they are supported with high quality services. Unfortunately, inadequate monitoring and quality control of services to children across all sectors in the Philippines, makes it difficult to assess how well they function. For example, health care, WASH and alternative care facilities are not always monitored or even accredited. From evidence available in the education sector however, it appears that poor quality of services is a significant problem: indicators on teacher to pupil ratios, classroom size and teacher/student educational attainment indicate low levels of quality education.



Parents and caregivers have their children vaccinated at a barangay health center in Tondo, Manila.

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Women displaced by the Marawi conflict breastfeed inside a mother-baby tent at the Buruun School of Fisheries evacuation centre. The tent provides a safe space for women to breastfeed their children and to receive counselling on infant and young child feeding practices from trained volunteers and health workers.

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5. Risk (disasters and conflicts)

Exposure to natural disasters and long running conflicts present huge challenges to the fulfilment of children's rights in the Philippines:

Impact of natural disasters. The Philippines is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, particularly in the form of extreme weather events such as typhoons, which will likely get worse as climate change continues. This has had a detrimental impact on children's rights across all sectors due to damage and disruption to infrastructure; reallocation of resources from social services to emergency relief; and the toll of displacement, insecurity and stress on children and families.

Unfortunately, while the Philippines has a strong legal and policy framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRMM) and Climate Change Adaptation, there is often limited technical expertise and funds to implement these policies at the local level and to mainstream them across sectors.

Impact of armed conflicts. The peace and security situation in the Philippines, particularly in ARMM*, has also heavily affected children's rights in the Philippines and led to numerous challenges in the implementation of laws and policies. The ongoing conflicts have resulted in:

- Grave violations against children, including their recruitment and abduction for use in armed conflict, killings, maiming and sexual violence
- Stress and trauma for children and their families as they face the disruption of extensive displacement and the continued threat of violence and unrest
- High levels of poverty and deprivation in parts of the country (particularly ARMM), slow growth and development, and difficulties delivering social services

Conclusion

The government has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving children's situation in the Philippines. Despite progress however, **many girls and boys continue to face barriers to the full realisation of their rights**, affecting their ability to survive, develop and thrive. To date, strong economic growth and a comprehensive legal and policy framework, have sadly failed to translate into improved outcomes for children across the country.

A number of barriers and bottlenecks are at the core of this slow progress towards meeting children's rights. These appear to have a cross-cutting effect, negatively affecting the sectors that support children, and impeding the ability of laws, policies and programmes to have a real and measurable impact on girls and boys.

What is perhaps most striking is the **uneven performance of the Philippines** in meeting children's rights and development targets. Results vary starkly by geographic area and in terms of particular groups: children with disabilities and from poor families, indigenous communities and rural areas, face many more challenges accessing services and achieving progress.

Carlito Maladian, 9 years old, from Maasim, Sarangani Province, wants to be a teacher. "I want to teach Tboli kids to develop ways to protect our cultural treasures."

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Suggested recommendations

The challenge moving forward will be using the findings from this Situation Analysis in a way that makes a difference for children. This means targeting the identified barriers and causes that prevent girls and boys in the Philippines from fully realising their rights and drawing on this evidence to inform future policy and programme interventions for children.

Suggested recommendations for improving the situation of children in the Philippines include:

Legal and policy frameworks

- Remove barriers to children and adolescents' independent access to services and ensure that new laws and policies are child and gender-sensitive. Reform criminal laws to ensure comprehensive protection against all forms of violence against children.
- Consolidate the multiple laws relating to children into one piece of legislation, e.g. a *Magna Carta for Children*, and develop a comprehensive legal and policy framework for the child protection system.
- Improve enforcement of child-related laws and policies by building capacity in financial management and resource allocation and establishing monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Governance and coordination

- Improve coordination between government agencies and bodies on child-related issues.
- Entrust national and regional government agencies with the mandate, power and resources to support LGUs to implement laws, policies and programmes for children. Incentivise LGUs to deliver quality services for children by providing them with specific targets, e.g. linked to the SDGs.
- Improve transparency and accountability mechanisms in order to tackle corruption and financial mismanagement, and to monitor the use of resources for children.
- Consider changing the Inland Revenue Allocation formula to focus on need, in order to reduce disparities in the allocation of resources across LGUs and inequalities in outcomes for children.

“**Bottlenecks in policy and programme implementation result in poor and uneven progress towards meeting children's rights in the Philippines.**”

Adolescents participate in a group activity at an event held to commemorate the one year anniversary of Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban City.



Budgeting and finance

- Increase government spending in the social sectors (particularly health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, social protection) to ensure there are sufficient services to meet demand.
- Focus on developing capacity and skills at all levels of government for improved public finance management and planning.
- Encourage government at all levels to articulate 'child budgets' to improve transparency and accountability for public spending on child-related services and programmes, or alternatively, facilitate social auditing of budgets by independent bodies. Improve oversight and accountability of public spending by LGUs.
- Review and reform the Procurement Law and recommend ways to improve the efficiency of public finance systems, while retaining transparency and anti-corruption safeguards. Adopt special procurement rules to ensure that agencies can respond swiftly to emergencies.

Data collection and use

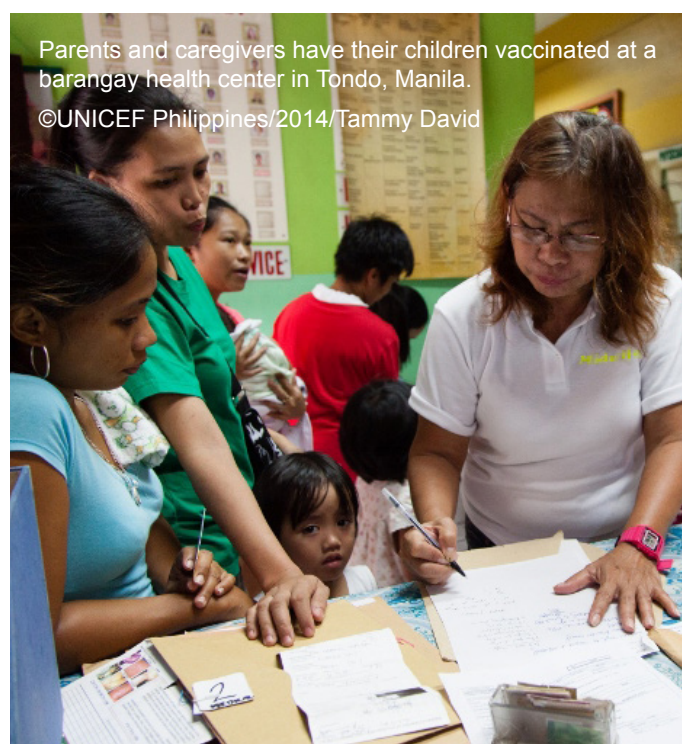
- Mandate a lead agency with responsibility for management and oversight of child-related data and improve freedom of information and open access to data.
- Harmonize data collection systems to identify gaps relating to children and ensure that information on vulnerable groups of children is captured in survey/administrative data.
- Develop a plan with an attached budget for addressing challenges in data collection and management.
- Improve accountability and oversight mechanisms for data collection and reporting (particularly at local levels), through incentives or sanctions.

Sociocultural norms and practices

- Conduct research to better understand the implications of social norms and practices on children's rights, and to guide policies and programmes to address them.

Supply barriers

- Conduct a national review to identify human resource gaps in service delivery for children and create an incentive system to attract skilled workers to difficult and remote areas.
- Develop a plan for full coverage of social workers across the country and create specialist social worker positions to deliver child protection, child justice and social welfare services. Train and improve the skills of service providers who work with children.
- Remove barriers that prevent private and civil society actors from providing services to children and develop a more joined-up approach between government and non-government providers to ensure better coordinated and higher quality services.
- Develop integrated packages of services for vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, adolescents and indigenous children.
- Review government procurement and distribution systems that provide essential services and supplies to children.



Demand-side barriers

- Ensure that government policies and programmes focus adequate attention on demand-side barriers to the realisation of children's rights.
- Roll out communication and social mobilization interventions in communities to raise awareness of violence against children and to encourage reporting of violations. Engage religious leaders in behaviour change strategies and strengthen community platforms for engagement with adolescents.
- Encourage the private sector to endorse corporate social responsibility, and to promote beliefs and practices that support children's rights.
- Develop, strengthen and integrate child rights and sexuality education into schools and the national curriculum.
- Promote inclusive and gender sensitive policies and programmes for children.

Quality of services

- Ensure that monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms are embedded within policy development and service delivery.
- Improve oversight of LGU service delivery and provide incentives for enhancing quality.
- Strengthen the accreditation process and improve guidance and compliance on quality standards for service delivery.
- Promote and facilitate child and youth participation in the development of laws, policies and programmes to ensure that they are responsive to children's needs.

The Situation Analysis of Children provides the Philippines with a unique opportunity. By bringing together compelling evidence regarding progress toward children's rights across the country, it highlights areas where the government must now take urgent action. A strong response is required. Every child in the Philippines has the right to grow up healthy, educated and protected in an enabling environment that helps them to meet their potential and lead a fulfilling life. Collective efforts must build on these findings to make changes that have a lasting impact for children and address the inequity that leaves vulnerable girls and boys lagging behind.



Teacher Muntiya Amor's pupils learn about shapes and colours at Madrasah Nor-Faidah Al-Islamiah, a Tahderiyyah in Mable, Malabang, Lanao del Sur.

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