

Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
NATIONAL NUTRITION COUNCIL

KEYNOTE MESSAGE¹
of

Assistant Secretary of Health Maria-Bernardita T. Flores, CESO II
Executive Director IV

To Ms. Raquel Buere, the President of the DCNPCAP Incorporated and its other officers and board members; Dr. Jose Llacuna, Regional Director of the DOH-CARAGA and OIC-NNC-CARAGA; Ms. Jocelyn Lumaad, President of the LuzViMin BNS Federation; Regional Nutrition Program Coordinators; my dear D/CNPCs from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

After one year, I am happy to see all of you once more as we gather these two days for the 5th National Conference of District/City Nutrition Program Coordinators. Before anything else, thank you for coming. Your presence here in this conference is indicative of your convincing power over your local chief executive and your provincial or city nutrition action officer that it is important for you to attend this conference. So, please do extend NNC's appreciation to your respective local chief executives and NAOs for their support in making your attendance here a reality.

This is your Association's fifth national conference already. We started in 2009 with the joint conference with the nutrition action officers where NNC helped organize you into the D/CNPC Association of the Philippines. To sustain the interest, we decided to convene you in 2010 and in 2011 for the second and 3rd national conference; and in 2014, we had the 4th conference outside Manila in Davao City.

Now we gather you once more for your 5th national conference. In previous conferences, we highlighted the importance of coming together and working together to push the nutrition agenda and in developing the knowledge, skills and values of D/CNPCs to improve the human resources for local nutrition program implementation. For this year, we intend to further develop you to become enablers of priority nutrition actions in your respective areas.

Therefore we have chosen the theme, "Conquer Malnutrition! Start with the First 1000 Days". This conference hopes to drive home the message among D/CNPCs that we must prioritize the First 1000 Days of life as the window of opportunity to improve the nutrition of the next generation of Filipino children.

For some of you who are not yet aware, the First 1000 Days represent the nine months while in the womb and the next two years just before the child reaches his or her second birthday. Ensuring optimal nutrition in the First 1000 Days represents an intervention package composed of services to the pregnant woman including prenatal care and nutrition, exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months and appropriate

complementary feeding starting at 6 months while continuing breastfeeding.

But why focus on the First 1000 Days?

Poor nutrition in the First 1000 Days results to stunting, underweight, disease and possibly death. If the child survived, poor nutrition leaves a mark that is permanent and irreversible. Poor nutrition in the first two years of life affects the physical, cognitive and behavioral development of the child which in turns hampers the child's capacity for education and productivity later in life. The affected adult person can have poor work productivity with 20% less earnings on the average that could translate into a 2-3 percent annual loss in a country's gross domestic product. Furthermore, maternal malnutrition is a key contributor to poor fetal growth, low birth weight babies and short- and long-term infant morbidity and mortality.

And lastly, focusing on the First 1000 Days protects the right of the child for survival and development. Preventing undernutrition in the early years will also reduce risk for obesity in later years.

Focusing on the First 1000 Days will help in increasing the rate of reduction in malnutrition.

Looking at the prevalence rates of underweight-for-age and stunting among children below 5 years old since 1990 (which is the baseline year for the Millennium Development Goals), we note that the rate of reduction has been slow compared to neighboring countries such as

China, Vietnam and Thailand. The Philippine prevalence of underweight preschool children has slightly decreased from the past survey period at 19.9% in 2013 compared to 20.7% in 2008. The same trend is also observed for the prevalence of stunting at 30.3% in 2013 compared to 32.3% in 2008. The prevalence of wasting has remained about the same over the past years, hovering about the 7-8 percent level. The same trend is observed for underweight and stunting among 5-10 years old and adolescents aged 10-19 years old. At the local level, while current available data are only for underweight and hopefully more on stunting prevalence in the near future, your situation should be more or less similar to the national data.

For us to really make a dent in our nutrition situation, we must continue to do the things that work, stop doing things that do not work and start doing the things that we should be doing. And to do this, we need well-prepared local nutrition action plans that complement the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition.

One thing that we need to work on is our local nutrition planning. In the course of going around the country for monitoring and evaluation as well as other activities, I continue to see local nutrition action plans that are mere repetitions of previous years. I still see plans that use the terms “Impact Programs”, “Enabling Mechanisms”, terms that were used in the first PPAN plan period of 1993-1998.

Although you may know this already, local nutrition actions should be integrated into the three-year local development plan. This is most critical as we expect a new administration in the next few months. As

D/CNPCs, we expect you to provide the technical expertise when your LGU begins crafting its local nutrition action plan and when you assist municipalities and barangays in formulating their respective nutrition action plans.

You should be able to help your local government units prepare nutrition action plans that include much more than the celebration of Nutrition Month. This is not to say that Nutrition Month is unimportant but every month should be like Nutrition Month when we prepare and implement nutrition interventions.

We must stop doing interventions that have been proven to be ineffective in reducing malnutrition. For one, it is still very common to see supplementary feeding for older children when evidence is rich that shows the onset and increase in malnutrition starts when the child is less than a year old; and when the latest PPAN directions already enjoins that we need to target pregnant women and children 6 months to 2 years old.

We should continue to undertake micronutrient supplementation, especially iron/folic acid supplementation not only for pregnant women but adolescent girls too; and vitamin A supplementation because it not only prevents vitamin A deficiency but more importantly, reduces child morbidity and increases child survival. We should continue food fortification as this has helped reduce vitamin A, iron and iodine deficiencies in the country.

We started strengthening our infant and young child feeding interventions less than a decade ago. Since 2007, the NNC provided trainings on IYCF counselling and we shall complete training of all barangays in the next two years. Yet, we still have to see functional IYCF support groups that provide counselling to pregnant women and to mothers with children less than two years of age.

We have to work on having a more defined complementary feeding intervention, as this has been the weak link in the First 1000 Days strategy. We still need to fully promote, protect and support breastfeeding through the enforcement of the Milk Code and the Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act. I still see local workers that possess various paraphernalia from milk companies, and sadly sometimes, displaying these paraphernalia with pride. How many of our LGUs have established lactation stations in the workplace? How many of you are prepared to protect infant and young child feeding practices during disasters and emergencies?

We also have to address overweight and obesity. This year's Nutrition Month focused on this problem but this is just a start. We need to put in place policies, develop intervention packages, even infrastructure, as well as nutrition assessment for overweight and obesity not only for children but for adults as well. Focusing on the First 1000 Days will prevent the child's risk of being obese later in life as well.

Overall, it is apparent that there are still a lot for us to do to be able to drastically bring down levels of underweight, wasting, stunting and

overweight and obesity in our country. And you, dear District and City Nutrition Program Coordinators have a big role in this.

And so in this 5th national conference, we prepared a number of technical sessions to update you on priority actions that need to be done. We have also drawn up opportunities for enhancing your skills. And lastly, we included sessions on personal development to help you overcome negative thoughts and frustrations that may be your stumbling block to harnessing your full potential. You need to move on and look forward to something better. Remember, *may tamang panahon*. If you are not shining yet, then after this conference, I hope you will let your light shine and be the beacon in your area.

This conference should also enable you to become conquerors of malnutrition both as an individual and as an association. Rest assured that the NNC will continue to support you as long as we are able. Let us continue to work together in conquering malnutrition. Let's focus on the First 1000 Days of life. Let's build a better generation after us for after all this will be our legacy to our children. Let us give each child a better future. Let us not fail our children who place their trust in us.

And lastly, in these two day conference, take stock of what you have been doing and see which you should continue, stop and build on. As our experience in emergency and disaster management taught us, we

should build back better. So when you get back to your stations, I hope that you will build back better to finally conquer malnutrition.

Again, congratulations to D/CNPCAP on your 5th national conference.
Mabuhay tayong lahat!