



# The land of many islands and nutrition achievements



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PHILIPPINES

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In spite of the Philippines' emerging economy, high child stunting levels persist (33.4 percent), child wasting levels (7 percent) leave no room for complacency and child overweight doubled between 2003 and 2015 (GNR, 2018). Adult overweight and obesity levels have also risen steeply and less than half of infants are exclusively breastfed during the first six months of life, an essential nutrition action that safeguards their nutrition during infancy and from becoming overweight or obese later in life (GNR, 2018). The country's vulnerability to typhoons and earthquakes further complicates the situation, as do the number of isolated and disadvantaged areas in view of its geography.

While the Philippines is facing multiple burdens of malnutrition, it has in no way shied away from the challenge. It remains deeply committed to the SUN Movement and has taken exemplary action to combat malnutrition at all levels from the President of the Republic to Local Government Units (LGUs). The UN agencies engaged in UNN have increasingly aligned their efforts on nutrition to help tackle these multifaceted issues effectively and holistically. The country's UNN, comprised of FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, has provided technical assistance to government and advocated for nutrition-smart legislation and fiscal policy. One recent advancement took place on 2 May 2019, with the signing of the implementing rules and regulations Republic Act (IRR) 11148 also known as the "Kalusugan at Nutrition ng Mag-Nanay Act." The law calls for the sustained provision of nutrition interventions through pre- and post-natal health services during the critical 1000 days period that starts with pregnancy and extends through the first two years of life. It also targets adolescent girls and women of child-bearing age and includes provisions for breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. The new legislation attracted [CNN media coverage](#),<sup>1</sup> created a buzz in social media and was an excellent advocacy moment to remind the public and policymakers about the hefty consequences of malnutrition, yet high return on investment.

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1 Visit: [https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/5/2/IRR-1000-days-law-nutrition-health.html?fbclid=IwAR3b\\_ZohVzFkerRXlddNhT3gJM\\_ccTowYCKWU3lOrSeHUWDa6rppQ7Bqwls](https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/5/2/IRR-1000-days-law-nutrition-health.html?fbclid=IwAR3b_ZohVzFkerRXlddNhT3gJM_ccTowYCKWU3lOrSeHUWDa6rppQ7Bqwls).



Signing of Kalusugan at Nutrition ng Mag-Nanay Act  
May 2019  
UNICEF/Joris Van Hees

The signing of the act also coincided with a national forum on *Nutrition in the First 1000 Days: Integrate and Scale Up*, organized by the National Nutrition Council (NNC) in Manila. During the event, the Director/Global Coordinator of the UN Network, Dr. Purnima Kashyap, delivered a speech that stressed the importance of engaging multiple sectors in the nutrition agenda and implementing person-centered programmes, recognizing that “a human body is not compartmentalized into sectors.” Dr. Kashyap painted the picture of how nutrition has the potential to drive the achievement of the SDGs, explicitly acknowledging “the interconnectedness of prosperous business, a thriving society and a healthy environment.” The speech also underscored the need for a systems approach, to branch out and forge new partnerships as well as being open to new ways of addressing multiple forms of malnutrition.

Other measures that the Philippines have taken include the sweetened beverage tax<sup>2</sup> that was enacted on 19 December 2017. The tax presents a win-win situation whereby public health goals are promoted and government revenue is generated which can, in turn, be utilized for other nutrition-related social programmes such as universal health care. While it is still early, the tax has already contributed to declining sales of sweetened beverages. This will hopefully translate into health gains for Filipinos such as reduced levels of overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (e.g. diabetes) among children and adults. Congressional deliberations on the possibility to extend maternity leave hold further promise and exemplify nutrition's ties to the labour sector.



*Nutrition in the First 1000 Days event  
May 2019  
UNICEF/Joris Van Hees*

The presence of the UNN Director/ Global Coordinator at this event helped connect individual efforts, reminding participants how they add up to a greater whole. These sweeping changes are the fruits of strong government commitment, bottom up accountability mechanisms, a vibrant UNN, flourishing multi-stakeholder engagement and willingness to converge efforts. Undoubtedly important steps forward for the Philippines' fight against malnutrition, they can also be a source of inspiration for other countries.

<sup>2</sup> Visit: <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/97/2/18-220459.pdf>.