

9. Presentation of Initiatives in the Philippines

MYRNA TANG-YAO, PHILIPPINES

Commissioner for Business and Industry sector under the Philippine Commission on Women and President of Business and Professional Women (BWP) Philippines.

In the Philippines, the welfare of senior citizens remains of critical concern in contemporary society, despite efforts to improve their conditions through legislative measures, such as the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010, which provides privileges and benefits. Economic hardships often render many elderly individuals financially vulnerable, lacking adequate coverage of their daily needs. Social isolation exacerbates these challenges, as a significant number of seniors experience loneliness and neglect due to evolving family dynamics and urban migration trends. Furthermore, health care accessibility presents an important issue, with numerous elderly citizens struggling to access affordable and comprehensive medical services. Addressing these multifaceted challenges necessitates a concerted effort from governmental and non-governmental actors to enhance social protections, foster inclusive community engagement, and ensure equitable healthcare access nationwide.

Studies indicate that older Filipinos face considerable health risks, primarily from chronic diseases like hypertension, arthritis, diabetes, and cataracts, often

undiagnosed due to limited health-care access. Additionally, poor oral health and nutritional deficiencies are prevalent, characterized by a high incidence of tooth loss and underweight conditions. Functional disabilities, such as difficulties with daily activities and limitations to independent living, are widespread among seniors, significantly impacting their overall quality of life. Many seniors also struggle with inadequate healthcare access due to financial constraints, hindering their chances to obtain essential medical attention and medications.

Despite health insurance coverage provided by PhilHealth, senior citizens frequently face substantial out-of-pocket expenses, particularly for outpatient care and hospitalization. Gender disparities exist, with females more likely to report functional difficulties while often perceiving their health more positively than males. Information on and utilization of government health programs remain limited, despite the offer of free vaccinations and medical services.

As the Philippines evolves towards an ageing society, many senior citizens suffering from debilitating illnesses or

physical conditions heavily rely on family care due to limited institutional care facilities. Approximately 8% of seniors require daily care because of chronic health conditions, predominantly provided within the family setting by female relatives — often spouses or daughters — assuming primary caregiving roles. In addition, there is a notable lack of formal training among caregivers; only 5% report having received any form of formal caregiving education. This problem exists also in dementia care, where a significant majority of caregivers lack proper training. The burden of providing long-term care (LTC) at home frequently leads to economic repercussions, as evidenced by 42% of caregivers who reported quitting work to fulfill caregiving responsibilities, significantly impacting household situations.

These challenges require concerted efforts to improve healthcare access, raise awareness of available support programs, and enhance healthcare services tailored to the diverse needs of senior citizens across different regions of the Philippines. Initiatives should also focus on enhancing support for family caregivers through training programs and expanding access to institutional care options as the population continues to age. The changing patterns of Filipino families also pose significant challenges for senior citizens, contributing to their plight in contemporary society. In today's modern era, there is a growing gap between the older and younger generations, which hinders effective

communication and mutual understanding within families. Often, families fail to communicate effectively with the elderly, leading to misunderstandings and strained relationships. Bridging this intergenerational gap is crucial as it not only fosters stronger familial bonds but also can improve the living conditions of senior citizens. Understanding and accommodating the different schedules and mindsets of older adults and the younger generation is essential for improving their quality of life. This lack of synchronization in lifestyles often results in neglect or isolation of the elderly, exacerbating their chances to obtain support and care. Addressing these issues requires promoting better communication practices within families and fostering mutual understanding across generations, thereby alleviating the plight of senior citizens who are integral members of the Filipino society.

Support groups and non-government organizations play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by senior citizens in the Philippines, such as loneliness, boredom, and generational gaps. These organizations provide vital social connections and activities that help alleviate the isolation many elderly individuals experience. By engaging seniors in meaningful interactions and listening to their stories and desires, these groups bridge the gap between generations and foster a sense of belonging and purpose. For instance, local Zumba groups organized at barangay lev-

els not only encourage physical activity but also create opportunities for elderly individuals to socialize and enjoy companionship with their peers. Such initiatives not only combat boredom but also promote a healthier lifestyle among senior citizens. These efforts are essential in improving the overall well-being of seniors by keeping them mentally stimulated, physically active, and socially engaged, thereby enhancing their quality of life amidst the challenges they face in their later years. In fact, one of our club affiliates in Business and Professional Women (BPW), the “Dipolog” initiative has projects that really help senior citizens, for example by the following actions:

1. Cakes presented at older persons' birthdays.
2. Free hospitalization which means they don't have to pay anymore.
3. Free check-ups.
4. Free medicine.
5. They also have a project for blind.
6. In a project for blind senior citizens aged 60 to 65 are trained how to achieve an income despite their handicapped situation. The local government unit also gives their elderly 1,500 PHP to help them with their needs like medicine and other essentials.

Also, a project was launched which provided free cataract operation for senior citizens from August 8 to August 13. These projects have made seniors feel loved and well-cared-for. Our affiliate club in “Tawi-Tawi” supports senior citizens through social pensions and cash incentives, aiding them in purchasing necessities and managing living expenses. Additionally, they offer training programs and activities designed to combat boredom and provide a sense of fulfillment. One such initiative includes classic gatherings, which allow seniors to enjoy simple, enjoyable get-togethers with their peers.

In conclusion, while our club affiliates have made admirable successes in supporting senior citizens through various projects, much work remains to be done, particularly in remote areas of the Philippines. These regions face unique hardships that our initiatives must address. As members of the NGO community, we have a crucial role to play in improving living conditions and ensuring that our senior citizens have simple, enjoyable, and effective solutions to their needs. Thus, we can make a meaningful difference in their lives.