

Likas-Philippines - Poor women pay for contraception

Written by IRIN News

Friday, 08 October 2010 15:41 - Last Updated Friday, 08 October 2010 15:56

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MANILA, 11 June 2010 (IRIN) - Insufficient public funding for family planning services means poor women have to buy contraceptives from pharmacies rather than getting them free from clinics.



"Social disparities and lack of access to services make the poorest of our women suffer," said Alberto Romualdez, vice-president of Forum for Family Planning, a local the NGO. Nearly half the population lives on US\$2 a day or less, and spending \$1 on a pack of condoms is not an option.

Despite the cost, a recent study by the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive health think-tank, and the Likhaan Center for Women's Health, found that more women - 40 percent in 2008, up from 17 percent in 2003 - were buying contraceptives.

Women want smaller families

According to the 2008 National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS), women desired a family size of 2.4 children on average, but actually had an average of 3.3 children; only 41 percent of poor women used contraceptives, and had an average of one or two more children than they wanted.

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The lack of contraception was hampering the already dismal progress in reducing maternal mortality; the government's 2006 Family Planning Survey indicated no significant decline in maternal mortality ratio (MMR) between 1998 and 2006.

In 2006 there were 162 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to 172 per 100,000 in 1998. The UN Development Programme Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for the Philippines is to reduce maternal deaths to 52.2 per 100,000 live births by 2015.



"There is no way that the Philippines will meet their MDG on MMR unless this unmet need for contraception is addressed," said Sharon Camp, president of the Guttmacher Institute.

Extending modern contraceptive use to all women at risk of unintended pregnancy would prevent 2,100 maternal deaths each year, the Guttmacher Institute study noted.

Contraception branded as immoral

The Philippines had depended on US Agency for International Development (USAID) for free contraceptives since the 1970s, but as part of the Philippines government's self-reliance initiative from 2002 to 2008, USAID phased out donated contraceptives, including condoms, pills and intrauterine devices.