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## Achieving Good Health & Well-Being One SDG at a Time In the Philippines

In September 2015, the Philippines joined 192 other nations in the commitment to tackling all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implemented by the United Nations that same year. These 17 goals were designed to ensure health, justice, and prosperity within all nations by addressing significant issues that impact holistic health on a global scale. According to the Sustainable Development Report website, the Philippines has been making improvements in 13 of the 17 total SDGs; however, major challenges remain in most, with only SDG 12 out of all the SDGs being achieved. Within this report, reaching SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being, will be the central target. All 17 goals will need to be improved upon to achieve this goal as they all have an impact on an individual's holistic health. Since there are many improvements to be made, we will focus on four of the most critical SDGs: SDG 6, 8, 10, and 16, how each impacts the health of the Filipino population, and solutions to target each SDG.

As of April 2023, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that the unemployment rate in February was around 4.8%. The labor force participation rate increased from 64.6% in January to 66.6% in February. However, it was also reported that the number of Filipinos without jobs had reached 2.47 million, 102,000 more than the amount reported in January of this year. Though there is an increase in the rate of labor force participation, the increase of Filipinos without jobs

dramatically impacts the health of people within the nation due to the inability to access quality healthcare services.

According to the Sustainable Development Report, SDG 8, “Decent Work and Economic Growth” is a goal that is listed to have major challenges remaining before reaching their set goal by 2030. An indicator of SDG 8 that is of significant concern is the “Fundamental labor rights” indicator which addresses the measures that need to be taken to ensure the effective enforcement of labor rights. Such an indicator is especially vital to a worker’s health as it involves work hours and working conditions. Unsafe working conditions and lack of labor rights can directly affect a person’s health. Poor working conditions can lead to poor health outcomes, such as higher stress levels and less access to basic needs such as quality and affordable housing, food, medical care, etc. To combat this, proper labor rights and work conditions will need to be enforced and monitored by health organizations/departments and authorities. This way, we can ensure that workers receive fair treatment that will improve their working conditions and ultimately result in a greater quality of life.

Diving deeper into SDG 8, inequality between income levels also dramatically impacts the economy of the Philippines. This issue also coincides with SDG 10, “Reduced Inequalities” which is another goal with many remaining challenges. The Gini Coefficient is a tool used to measure inequality between items such as income levels within a population and is used as an indicator for SDG 10. According to the Gini Index of the Philippines, from data provided by The World Bank, there is an apparent decrease from 47.7 in 2000 to 40.7 in 2021, with a score of 0 representing perfect equality and 100 representing perfect inequality. Improvements have been made over the past couple of decades regarding income inequality; however, the goal for the Philippines is to reach a Gini Index of 30 by 2030. By accomplishing this goal, workers have

more access to quality resources like healthcare services, education opportunities, and other basic needs such as food, clean water, reliable transportation, etc. One long-term objective that should be targeted to reach this goal is to improve the income gap between the top 10% and the lowest 40%. This objective could be addressed by reviewing the allocation of taxes and implementing labor policies that target the wage gap issue. Reviewing policies regarding access to resources such as education could also target income inequality since people with fewer years of schooling tend to get lower-paying jobs, increasing the number of workers with lower-paying jobs and widening the wage gap.

Another solution to the impact of income inequality is to ensure access to the Internet for people of lower socioeconomic status. Access to the Internet has been found to lessen the effects of income inequality and health disparities between socioeconomic groups. With access to the Internet, individuals also have access to healthcare information and other information that may directly impact health. It also allows access to education that may not be attainable to someone who doesn't have access to typical academia and other outlets, increasing job opportunities for people of lower socioeconomic status. SDG 9, "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure" focuses on fostering innovation and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization through many indicators, with "Population using the Internet" being an indicator with major challenges remaining. As of 2020, about 49.8% of the population has access to the Internet, according to the Sustainable Development Report. There have been noticeable improvements made with a large spike in the population's Internet use in 2009. However, the country intends to have 100% of the population using the Internet by 2030. To reach this goal, investments should be made in promoting broadband Internet and ICT subscriptions, improving nationwide Internet and

computer literacy, and increasing access to computers and the Internet in poor and remote communities or disenfranchised groups.

The allocation of money through the different income levels and income inequality are undoubtedly affected by the country's political climate. Political corruption impacts important sectors of the economy, such as education inequalities, asset ownership, and tax systems which all affect the health of individuals in different ways. The lack of fair education opportunities has been seen to lead to obesity, substance abuse, work-related injuries due to the competitive job market, poverty, and more compared to individuals with access to quality education. The increased prevalence of corruption and poverty due to the lack of opportunities has also been found to increase the prevalence of organized crime and homicides. Freedom of the press has also been negatively impacted by corruption. According to the Sustainable Development Report, improvements in the Press Freedom Index have decreased since 2013. For many individuals, news outlets and journalists are their primary sources of information. The suppression of journalists can lead to the spread of misinformation and the general lack of access to information that could be crucial to the health of certain individuals or the entire nation.

SDG 16, "Peace, justice and strong institutions" addresses all the above aspects and promotes peace, justice, and strong, inclusive institutions within the Philippines. To meet SDG 16 by 2030, we must also address major issues the SDGs 8 and 10 also cover since both goals directly impact the success of SDG 16. Some general solutions that could aid the Philippines in meeting SDG 16 are implementing decentralization and encouraging bottom-up empowerment as an immediate resolution to political and economic corruption. By effectively targeting and eliminating corruption, compromised health and safety along with mass distrust of the government would no longer be an issue for the citizens of the Philippines.

Although plenty of major challenges remain for the Philippines to reach SDG 3, “Good Health and Well-being,” improvements are being made in most of the 17 SDGs, which will positively impact the health and well-being of the Philippines in the long run. By tackling income inequality and improving conditions within the labor force, safer labor practices and wage gap reduction will lead to increased participation in the workforce and a reduction of the poverty rate. Improving computer literacy and reducing corruption will allow citizens access to a wide array of reliable information, leading to greater quality of life. By implementing the suggested solutions for 4 of the most critical SDGs within the Philippines, we can target the most crucial health concerns within the Philippines and ultimately achieve SDG 3 by 2030.

## RESOURCES

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