

Philippine Demographic Dividend Effort Index (DDEI) Policy Workshop: Documentation Report

Kevin L. de Vera¹, Diana Mendoza²

¹*The Forum for Family Planning and Development*

²*Women Writing Women*

Corresponding Email: kdevera@forumforfp.org

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Abstract: Harnessing the economic potential of a Demographic Dividend (DD) requires a favorable policy environment and a rigorous evaluation of national preparedness. This study documents and analyzes the discourse from the Philippines Demographic Dividend Policy Workshop held on November 19, 2024, which convened 80 multi-sectoral experts to examine findings from the Demographic Dividend Effort Index (DDEI). Utilizing a qualitative Thematic Discourse Analysis of verbatim transcripts, participant narratives, and sectoral outputs, the study identifies seven primary themes characterizing the intersection of population dynamics, policy readiness, and climate change. Results indicate an accelerated demographic transition with a closing "window of opportunity" requiring immediate policy intervention before 2035. While education and economic institutions demonstrated high policy effort, family planning and maternal health lagged significantly due to systemic barriers such as political corruption, socio-cultural impediments, and weak local accountability. Crucially, the proceedings established a historic policy dialogue linking demography and climate change, demonstrating how environmental hazards and heat stress directly compromise human reproduction and exacerbate workforce displacement. To address these multidimensional challenges, the discourse emphasized decentralized grassroots empowerment, advocating for a whole-of-government "just transition" strategy, mandated Comprehensive Sexuality Education, and the structural integration of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to combat localized political vulnerabilities like red-tagging. The study concludes that realizing the DD is not an automatic outcome; rather, it necessitates systemic institutional reform, climate-resilient health infrastructure, and authentic cross-sectoral collaboration to overcome entrenched structural and gender inequalities.

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1 Introduction

Harnessing the economic and social potential of a demographic shift requires deliberate, multi-sectoral policy intervention and a rigorous evaluation of national preparedness. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), a Demographic Dividend (DD) is "the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population". To achieve this dividend, a country must first undergo a Demographic Transition—defined by UNFPA as the critical "shift from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality". Furthermore, Sustainable Development is unattainable unless all individuals—women and men, girls and boys—are able to exercise their human rights and live with dignity, enabling them to build their capabilities, attain reproductive health and rights, access decent employment, and actively participate in economic growth [1].

To systematically measure the level of effort the Philippines is investing to capitalize on its impending demographic transition, the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) partnered with Johns Hopkins University (JHU) to implement the Demographic Dividend Effort Index (DDEI) project. Developed by the William H. Gates Sr. Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at JHU, the DDEI serves as a "robust tool" designed to guide researchers and policymakers "through a process of assessing local efforts in high-impact policies and programs".

Drawing on comprehensive data collected between 2022 and 2023, the DDEI acts as a critical diagnostic framework to assess the country's policy environment. This paper documents and analyzes the discourse from a dedicated policy workshop—held as a pre-conference event to the 3rd National Conference on Family Planning, Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Population and Development (NCFP2024)—convened to examine the DDEI survey findings and translate this data into actionable, evidence-based policy recommendations.

Recognizing that demographic transitions do not occur in a vacuum, the workshop facilitated a critical dialogue among sectoral experts across six foundational domains essential for DD realization: (i) family planning, (ii) maternal and child health, (iii) the labor market, (iv) education, (v) women's empowerment, and (vi) governance and economic institutions. Furthermore, reflecting the complex realities of contemporary sustainable development, the initiative uniquely integrated perspectives from climate change experts. By bringing these diverse fields together, the proceedings established a holistic and highly urgent framework for navigating the intersecting challenges of population dynamics, policy readiness, and climate resilience in the Philippines.

2 Methods

2.1. Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically employing a Thematic Discourse Analysis. This approach was selected to systematically investigate how various stakeholders construct, negotiate, and articulate the intersecting issues of the demographic dividend (DD) and climate change (CC) within a formal policy setting. Rather than measuring numerical variables, this qualitative design allowed the researchers to capture the nuanced rhetoric, underlying systemic barriers, and lived experiences shared by the participants.

2.2. Context and Participants

The data for this study was gathered during the Philippines Demographic Dividend Policy Workshop, held on November 19, 2024, in Quezon City, Philippines. This event served as a pre-conference dialogue to the 3rd National Conference on Family Planning, Sexual and

Reproductive Health, and Population and Development (NCFP2024), held on November 20-21, 2024.

The workshop convened approximately 80 purposively selected participants. The participant matrix was highly multi-sectoral, comprising key government officials and representatives from the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the Department of Health (DOH), and the Climate Change Commission (CCC). In addition to government actors, the assembly included strong representation from civil society, including academic institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and youth sector leaders, ensuring a wide spectrum of perspectives across both high-level policy and grassroots realities.

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

Data gathering was conducted through primary, live documentation of the workshop proceedings. A designated documentation team and an official rapporteur were deployed to capture the event. The data corpus consists of:

Verbatim Transcripts: Direct quotes and speeches delivered by expert resource persons and panel moderators.

Participant Narratives: Documented interventions, questions, and shared lived experiences from the plenary audience.

Sectoral Outputs: The synthesized narratives and formal recommendations generated during the structured, sector-specific group discussions (covering domains such as family planning, education, labor, and women's empowerment).

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected documentation was subjected to a Thematic Discourse Analysis. The analytical process involved three iterative phases:

Familiarization and Immersion: The team reviewed the rapporteur notes and verbatim transcripts to grasp the overarching flow of the dialogue and identify recurring concepts.

Coding the Discourse: The text was systematically coded to identify significant rhetorical patterns, such as the use of urgency (e.g., the "closing window" of the demographic transition) and the explicit linking of ecological vulnerabilities with reproductive health.

Thematic Generation: The codes were aggregated into broader themes that accurately represented the collective narratives of the workshop. This process yielded the primary themes discussed in the results, mapping both the macro-level policy evaluations and the micro-level socio-cultural barriers identified by the participants.

3 Result (Workshop Discussion)

A thematic analysis of the proceedings from the Philippines Demographic Dividend Policy Workshop (November 19, 2024) revealed seven primary discourses characterizing the intersection of population dynamics, policy preparedness, and climate change. The following sections present the themes that emerged from the expert presentations, plenary discussions, and sectoral group outputs.

3.1. The Accelerated Demographic Transition and the Rhetoric of Urgency

The discourse heavily emphasized a shifting temporal landscape regarding the Philippine demographic transition. Presenters articulated a strong sense of urgency, framing the demographic dividend (DD) not as an inevitability, but as a time-bound opportunity requiring immediate policy intervention.

Dr. Juan Antonio Perez highlighted that recent data upended previous projections, noting a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) decline to 1.9 by 2022. He stated that the demographic transition "sneaked in without the country knowing," and warned that the critical "window of opportunity is closing," giving the Philippines only until 2035 to capitalize on the shifting dependency ratio. Dr. Carolina Cardona reinforced this framing by cautioning that a DD is not an automatic "demographic gift," but relies strictly on the presence of a "favorable policy environment" to translate structural population changes into economic gains.

3.2. Sectoral Preparedness and the Evaluation of Institutional Effort

The introduction of the Demographic Dividend Effort Index (DDEI) provided a quantitative framework that drove much of the policy evaluation discourse. Participants engaged with the DDEI scores to identify specific areas of institutional lag.

According to the DDEI survey of 100 experts, the highest perceived levels of effort were found in Education (7.7) and Sustainable Economic Institutions (7.5), which respondents attributed to sustained research and continuous advocacy in these sectors. Conversely, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Family Planning (FP) received the lowest scores at 6.3 and 6.4, respectively, indicating significant perceived gaps in service delivery. The discourse also reflected anxieties regarding the validity and global context of these metrics. Dr. Marilen Danguilan questioned the direct correlation between DDEI index scores and tangible demographic outcomes. Additionally, Dr. Cardona situated domestic efforts within global vulnerabilities, warning of potential funding decreases for FP programs due to shifting political administrations in the United States.

3.3. The Articulation of the Climate Change and Demography Nexus

A central and novel finding of the workshop was the explicit integration of climate change (CC) into the demographic dividend framework. The proceedings documented what was described by Mr. Jose "Oying" Rimon as a historic policy dialogue linking DD and CC.

The discourse mapped both macro-level and micro-biological impacts of climate change on population dynamics. Dr. Nimfa Ogena established that rapid onset environmental events create "environmental refugees" due to forced displacement, while slow onset events threaten human capital. Furthermore, she cited studies demonstrating that CC-fueled heat stress and air pollution directly compromise human reproduction, altering male sperm concentration and increasing the risks of miscarriage and low birth weights. Consequently, the discourse reframed traditional FP interventions. Drawing on the Project Drawdown model, Mr. Rimon argued that while educating girls and meeting unmet contraceptive needs are not conventionally viewed as environmental solutions, their combination emerges as a highly effective strategy for climate mitigation.

3.4. Systemic Barriers: Governance, Culture, and Inequity

While high-level demographic and environmental data framed the initial discussions, the discourse consistently returned to the systemic, localized barriers impeding policy implementation. Sectoral working groups and health experts identified entrenched socio-political challenges. Governance and institutional integrity emerged as critical concerns. Dr. Lalay Jimenez argued that political corruption directly translates to critical supply shortages, such as absent vaccines in local health centers. Socio-cultural impediments were also

highlighted; working groups identified religious influences, unsupportive Local Government Executives (LCEs), and persistent misconceptions about FP as primary barriers at the community level. Dr. Jaime Galvez-Tan humanized these systemic issues by urging advocates to observe the lived realities of vulnerable populations, specifically noting that the highest rates of teen pregnancy occur among the "poorest of the poor" living in dysfunctional family structures. Furthermore, the education sector working group cited the lack of in-depth teacher training on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and high dropout rates exacerbated by climate-related school disruptions as fundamental roadblocks.

3.5. Frameworks for Action: Strategic Advocacy and Grassroots Empowerment

In response to the identified barriers, the discourse shifted toward mechanisms for decentralized action and localized empowerment. A prevailing theme was the need to bypass traditional bureaucratic bottlenecks by empowering grassroots actors.

Ms. Maricar Laigo-Vallido emphasized the necessity of narrative strategies, advocating for the "SMART Advocacy" tool to translate complex data into compelling storytelling that highlights the disproportionate impact of disasters on women. Structurally, the discourse revealed a push toward decentralizing financial resource. Dr. Yolly Oliveros of USAID outlined a strategic pivot aimed at allocating 50% of USAID funding directly to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to foster local solutions. Additionally, Mr. Jose Miguel dela Rosa and Mr. Rimon stressed the importance of harnessing the increased budgets of Local Government Units (LGUs) and utilizing digital tools to enhance local health systems, indicating a discursive shift away from reliance on centralized national planning toward localized accountability.

3.6. Sector-Specific Policy Recommendations and Strategic Actions

During the sectoral group discussions, participants synthesized the identified barriers into concrete, sector-specific policy recommendations, emphasizing multi-sectoral collaboration and climate resilience.

Table 1 summarizes the critical gaps and strategic recommendations identified across the four primary sectors evaluated during the workshop.

Table 1
Summary of Sector-Specific Vulnerabilities and Strategic Recommendations

Domain/Sector	Identified Critical Gap	Strategic Recommendation
Women's Empowerment	Disproportionate climate vulnerability among maternal populations and acute shortages in essential reproductive health supplies.	Prioritize targeted disaster-proofing for at-risk demographics and urgently expand health human resources.
Family Planning & Maternal and Child Health	Systemic lag in local accountability mechanisms and a failure to integrate climate risks into population health planning.	Institutionalize participatory, climate-resilient health planning and enhance CSO-led monitoring (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Learning, and Adapting [MERLA]).
Education	High climate-related student attrition and fundamental instructional deficits regarding Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).	Mandate specialized CSE training for educators and secure multi-sectoral financing (including CSR) for resilient infrastructure.
Labor Market	Impending workforce displacement due to	Enact a whole-of-government "just transition" strategy to stabilize the

	environmental hazards and severe underinvestment in rural/informal economies.	workforce and foster sustainable industries.
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3.7. Political Vulnerabilities and the Integration of Civil Society

The final stages of the workshop discourse revealed deep-seated concerns regarding the political safety and structural integration of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) within the broader development framework. The conversation highlighted a stark contrast between the acknowledged reliance on grassroots organizations and the institutional risks they face.

Dr. Juan Antonio Perez brought attention to the political vulnerabilities of advocacy work, noting a historical lack of support for CSOs and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from both the national government and development partners. He explicitly identified "red-tagging" as a severe threat to organizations working on human rights, describing a landscape where these groups are often abandoned to find their own funding. In response, Dr. Perez advocated for a systemic shift where CSOs and NGOs are fundamentally integrated as fully funded community developers and equal partners.

This call for structural integration was accompanied by a discourse on political accountability and electoral opportunity. Acknowledging that systemic issues have persisted for decades, Mr. Jose Miguel dela Rosa framed the upcoming elections as a strategic opening for advocates to identify and elect "key champions" capable of leveraging local budgets for health and climate initiatives. Mr. Jose "Oying" Rimon echoed this need for principled leadership, emphasizing that absolute integrity and "being incorruptible" are mandatory values. Ultimately, the discourse concluded with a unifying directive from Dr. Yolly Oliveros, who urged stakeholders to transcend national political divides and focus on cross-sector collaborations to build resilient local health systems capable of securing the demographic dividend.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Demographic Dividend as a Critical Window of Opportunity

The demographic dividend represents a critical economic opportunity for developing countries when structural population changes create a favorable ratio of working-age to dependent populations. However, workshop discussions align with Cardona et. al. study that this window is neither automatic nor indefinite [2]. The Philippines faces particular urgency: with a Total Fertility Rate declining to 1.9 by 2022, the critical policy window closes by 2035, necessitating coordinated sectoral action across family planning, maternal and child health, education, women's empowerment, and labor markets.

Research on sub-Saharan African countries reveals that demographic dividend realization depends strictly on favorable policy environments. Most sub-Saharan African nations have prioritized job creation and employment for youth, yet their efforts require preliminary investments in governance, family planning, maternal and child health, education, and women's empowerment [3]—a framework directly applicable to the Philippines' context.

4.2. Family Planning and Reproductive Health as Foundational Sectors

Family planning remains foundational to demographic transition, yet persistent implementation gaps characterize most developing countries. In pre-dividend nations, policies addressing family planning still lag significantly in specificity and measurability [3]. The Philippines workshop findings corroborate this gap: Family Planning and Maternal and Child Health received the lowest Demographic Dividend Effort Index scores (6.4 and 6.3, respectively), indicating significant perceived service delivery gaps.

The challenge extends beyond policy formulation to actual service delivery integration. Out-of-school girls in sub-Saharan Africa identified access to family planning information as a critical barrier to educational continuation [3]. When girls face marriage, pregnancy, and childcare responsibilities driven by financial necessity, demographic transition stalls—a pattern that threatens the Philippines' dividend window.

Women's contraceptive utilization patterns are closely associated with labor force participation, educational attainment, and decision-making autonomy. In ASEAN countries specifically, labor force participation emerged as the most significant determinant of contraceptive use across all nations studied, demonstrating that economic empowerment and reproductive health form an interconnected system rather than isolated policy domains [4].

4.3. Education as the Primary Lever for Demographic Dividend Realization

Education functions as the most powerful mechanism for demographic transition, influencing childbearing delays, labor market participation, health outcomes, and household decision-making. In ASEAN countries, education demonstrates a positive influence on women's labor force participation and reduced fertility rates [4]. The Philippines workshop identified education as the sector with the highest policy effort (7.7 score), yet quality and completion—particularly for girls—remain underdeveloped.

The relationship operates through multiple pathways: higher educational attainment correlates with delayed marriage and childbearing, increased economic participation, improved maternal and child health outcomes, and enhanced household autonomy [5, 6]. For the Philippines, integrating comprehensive sexuality education, skills development, and vocational pathways from secondary education through tertiary training is essential for enabling youth labor market participation.

4.4. Women's Empowerment as a Critical Multiplier Across Sectors

Women's empowerment demonstrates consistent associations with improved reproductive, maternal, and health outcomes across low- and middle-income countries [4]. Economic empowerment proves particularly consequential: research on ASEAN nations shows that wage increases, healthcare access, and reduced fertility significantly influence women's labor participation [7]. In contrast, factors such as high fertility rates, limited parliamentary representation, and low life expectancy serve as barriers [8, 9, 10].

The mechanisms operate through multiple dimensions: education and skills development, economic participation and entrepreneurship, agency and decision-making, political representation, and shifts in sociocultural norms. In rural contexts, women's empowerment through enterprise development and social capital (cooperative groups, savings collectives) accelerates demographic transition outcomes [11]. For the Philippines, grassroots women's empowerment mechanisms—community-based women's groups and financial inclusion initiatives—address localized barriers that centralized policies often overlook.

4.5. Labor Market Integration and Governance as the Completion Mechanism

The labor market represents both the destination for demographic dividend gains and the critical challenge of translating educational and demographic improvements into employment [2]. Research reveals that individuals possessing a blend of cognitive and non-cognitive skills have higher employment prospects, with notable improvements for young women possessing specific competencies [12].

Governance failures represent fundamental barriers to demographic dividend realization. Governance constraints fundamentally impede demographic dividend realization, with political corruption driving service supply shortages, sociocultural and religious influences perpetuating family planning misconceptions, and weak inter-agency coordination fragmenting service delivery [13]. The Philippines workshop participants emphasized that policy integration remains underdeveloped, with institutional reform—not merely policy formulation—necessary for sectoral coordination.

Cross-sectoral collaboration frameworks demonstrate that success requires formal collaborative structures, clearly defined roles, sustained funding, and dedicated collaborative mechanisms [14]. Effective models combine legislative mandates with formal response plans and coordinating structures that specify the coordinative function across health, education, social protection, and labor sectors.

4.6. Climate Change as an Emerging Intersectoral Determinant

A novel finding in recent policy discourse is the explicit integration of climate change into demographic dividend frameworks. Climate-driven heat stress, air pollution, and water scarcity directly compromise human reproduction through altered sperm concentration and increased miscarriage and low birth weight risks [15]. For the Philippines, climate-resilient health infrastructure and adaptive approaches within family planning and education services are essential for sustaining demographic transition gains, particularly in geographically vulnerable regions.

4.7. Toward Integrated Policy Readiness: Decentralized Governance and Civil Society Integration

The Philippines' capacity to realize its demographic dividend depends on translation of intersectoral insights into coordinated action. Current barriers include governance fragmentation, political vulnerabilities of civil society organizations, weak inter-agency coordination, and localized implementation gaps. Strategic pathways forward emphasize decentralized governance: allocating resources directly to Civil Society Organizations, harnessing Local Government Unit budgets, and utilizing digital tools to enhance local health systems.

5. Conclusion

The Philippines' demographic dividend window presents opportunities. Realizing this opportunity requires not incremental sectoral improvements but systemic institutional reform—integrated monitoring systems, decentralized accountability mechanisms, climate-resilient health infrastructure, and genuine partnership with grassroots organizations. Successful models combine formal institutional structures with flexible, community-responsive mechanisms that address context-specific barriers to achieving equality across population subgroups and regions. Future national development agendas must formally adopt the intersection of climate change and population dynamics as a central planning pillar. Furthermore, national and local governments must establish formal collaborative structures and systemic safeguards to fully integrate and protect civil society organizations in local policy execution. Finally, academic institutions should update public health and education curricula to integrate climate resilience and demographic transition strategies for future frontline workers.

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