

For these families earning below ₱25,000 a month, daily living is a struggle

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Reynaldo Domagtoy works as an aircon technician and earns around ₱13,000 per month. His wife, Marilen, also wants to work for additional income for their family, but Reynaldo has insisted for her to stay at home so she can take care of their children. Photo by JL JAVIER

Manila (CNN Philippines Life) — During a media briefing last week, NEDA Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon presented a breakdown of how a family of five can work around a monthly budget of ₱10,000 given the 4.6 percent inflation rate.

While this amount was only used to illustrate how the five-year-high inflation rate could affect a Filipino household's income and not use as a standard for decent living, it was quickly criticized by workers' groups, saying that the amount was completely out of touch with the realities of the majority of Filipinos who are poor.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Enesto M. Pernia, head of NEDA, later clarified that in no way did NEDA say that ₱10,000 was enough to lead a decent life. He also shared that ₱42,000 is a more decent household income in order for a family to live above the poverty line.

national poverty line is measured at U.S. \$1.90/day (approximately ₱100/day). The latest available data states that 2 million Filipinos (4.1% of the population) still live below the poverty line. The Philippine government has set a goal to improve the living conditions of the Filipinos, including NEDA's AmBisyon 2040 and the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, which outline the long-term vision of bringing down poverty and making the Philippines an upper middle income country.

Leading up to independence day celebrations, President Duterte shared a message that asserts the government's conviction "to create a brighter and better future for all Filipinos." Today, as we celebrate 120 years of independence, we talked to some Filipino households that earn a few hundreds above the measured poverty line to know if their income could support a decent life, if whether or not they are free from institutional oppression that seem to hinder their economic progress, and if indeed there is hope for a brighter and better future.



"Yung kinikita namin napupunta lang sa food, sa education nila, pero 'yung sa college, pinagiisipan pa kung paano. Diskartehan nalang," says Mary Jane Grogornio on whether she thinks she and her husband would be able to send all their children to college. Photo by JL JAVIER

Mary Jane Grogornio, family of five, Metro Manila

Total household income: ₱24,000

Mary Jane Grogornio has three children, one in college, one in 7th grade, and another in 3rd grade. She works at a social enterprise that sells food, where she takes home ₱12,000. Her husband, a security guard who works for 11 hours everyday, also earns ₱12,000 a month.

She says that they spend around ₱370 per day for food as a family. "Pwede siguro ang ₱100 kung tuyo ang ulam pero naman kung magtutuyo ka lagi mapupunta sa doktor din ang pera kasi magkakasakit," she says. "Kapag nakatipid kami sa isang ulam, magkakarne kami. Pero usually, isda saka ano lang 'yun, gulay."

Six years ago, she and her husband pooled in their 13th month salaries to start a sari-sari store. She says that the store has helped in that it gives them a little bit of extra income. The amount that they earn in the store is also mostly used to buy more goods to sell, ensuring its growth.

a na sa ₱1,000 per month for electricity, a fairly large amount because she maintains two refrigerators for their store. An additional expense is the internet connection of ₱1,200 per month.

Transport costs are also a burden for Grogornio as she pays ₱2,800 per month for the service that picks up her two grade schoolers to and from school. They also shell out ₱220 for the allowance of their children (₱100 for the one in college, ₱70 for the 7th grader, and ₱50 for the 3rd grader).

Total expenses so far, not including tuition (albeit minimal as the one in college is a scholar) and other household expenses, already amounts to ₱21,300. This leaves them with very little to prepare for medical emergencies or save for the future of their children. While Grogornio hopes that they be able to see all of their children graduate from college, she says that at the moment they are not prepared to shoulder the prospective costs.

"Hindi naming masasabing prepared kasi kulang nga 'yung income," she says. "Kumbaga 'yung kinikita namin napupunta lang sa food, sa education nila, pero 'yung sa college, pinagiisipan pa kung paano. Diskartehan nalang."



"Ngayon dadaan pa kami ng dalawang taon para magka-college. Sa panahon ngayon, 'di namin alam kung kaya pa [i-enroll sa college]," Merly Bacomo shares when asked if they would be able to provide for their children's college education. Photo courtesy of MERLY BACOMO

Merly Bacomo, family of five, Puerto Princesa City

Total household income: ₱20,000

Merly Bacomo works at a store in Puerto Princesa, Palawan while her husband works as a plumber. Merly says that her income combined with her husband would amount to ₱20,000 a month. Most of their money are spent on food, which comes to ₱200 per day or ₱6,000 a month, for their whole family (they have three children).

"Talagang budget na budget 'yun," says Merly of their expenses on food. "Noon, 'yung isda merong mga ₱50 per kilo. Ngayon 'yung galunggong nasa ₱70 o ₱100 'yung kilo. Ang karne din ang laki ng pagtataas."

Another price that has spiked in the recent years is the cost of electricity. She says that around two years ago, they would pay around ₱400 or ₱500 per month, but now, it costs them around ₱700 or ₱800.

Best child is in college studying nursing, tuition fees are also taken into consideration when it comes to their education. Bacomo is a single mother who says that the additional two years because of the K-12 program has also taken a toll on her finances. This is particularly crucial as she still has two children in grade school.

(4) "Ngayon dadaan pa kami ng dalawang taon para magka-college. Sa panahon ngayon, 'di namin alam kung kaya pa [i-enroll sa college]," she shares.

She says that there are a lot of school projects and activities that need paying for, and while often difficult to manage, she and her husband try their best to enable their children to experience and enjoy being in school. "Marami pa talagang binabayaran sa eskwelahan na extra expenses ... Siyempre gusto din nila makasali sa mga aktibidad sa school," she says.

Bacomo adds, "Pangarap ko naman po na magkaron sila ng magandang pamumuhay, magandang edukasyon para naman hindi lang matulad sa amin na undergraduate."



Bebelyn Miranday earns around ₱5,500 through cleaning houses and washing clothes, among others. She provides for three of her six children who are in Manila; the other three are taken care of by her husband in Siargao. Photo by JL JAVIER

Bebelyn Miranday, family of four, Metro Manila

Total household income: Approximately ₱5,500

Bebelyn Miranday doesn't have a regular income. Most days, she works as a labandera or a cleaner for different houses in a subdivision that is near the slum area that she and her family resides in. If she does get work in a week, she gets paid ₱500 for doing the laundry, another ₱500 for cleaning the house, and another ₱500 for ironing clothes. She also sometimes gets ₱1,500 a month for fetching her employers' children from school.

She has six children but since May, her husband and three of her children went back to Siargao, their province, to live there. Her husband works as a construction worker in Siargao and is the one who provides for the children who are with him, while she is in charge of the three who live with her here in Manila.

...lam kung magkano nakukuha niya sa probinsya,” she shares. “Hindi ko naman siya inaano na maghingi ako ng papunta sa kanya.”

She says that ₱5,000 for her and her children are enough, only because she has no other choice but to make it enough. She spends around ₱400 a month for rice, but other than that, she can't give an estimate of other monthly expenses because whatever she earns in a day, she already budgets for the next two days.

“Kung nandiyan sa kamay ko magkano lang, ‘yun lang din ang binubudget ko,” she explains. As Miranday hopes to have a more regular income, she has been trying to look through newspapers for possible jobs. “Nagtetext-text ako dun [sa ad] tapos pupuntahan ko ‘yung agency. Kaso lang ayoko kasi ‘yung mga bata walang kasama dito,” she says.

However bleak the future may seem, Miranday says she is still thankful that at least her 20-year-old son is one of the scholars of the government's 4Ps program, which enabled him to study electrical engineering at the Technical University of the Philippines. She says that she is hoping that her son can help her provide for their family once he graduates.

“Sabi ko, halimbawa, ‘pag nakatapos ka, may trabaho ka, siyempre ‘yung mga kapatid mo siyempre elementary pa, sana naman mapaaral mo din,” she shares. “Sabi niya, ‘Nay wag ka mag-alala papaaral ko silang lahat.”



“Because we are living in a slum area, merong psychological [effect] sa akin ... Very harsh environment, nakaka-affect talaga siya sa condition ko. It restricts me to give me a peace of mind,” Ronniel Javier says of their living situation. Photo courtesy of RONNIEL JAVIER

Ronniel Javier, family of three, Roxas City

Total household income: Approximately ₱25,000

Ronniel Javier got into a motorcycle accident eight years ago, resulting to him breaking his spinal cord. Being a person with disability prohibited him from working to provide for his parents, so he looked to online jobs for income. Now 28, he works as a graphic designer for multiple employers who hire him via the internet.

“We have a lot of income streams. ‘Yung isa ‘yung salary ko from working online, yung sari-sari store ng mama ko, and sa dad ko na nagbubuy and sell,” Javier shares. Within their household, he says their incomes add up to around ₱25,000 per month, an amount enough to cover his medical needs, food, and electricity.

at when their living costs are summed up, it would come to around ₱17,000, leaving them ₱8,000 to save. Of
 bses. he sa (life) the hospital costs that take away most from their income. “Because of my condition ...
 in emergency so we need to save money,” he explains.

(4) When asked about the rising price of goods, he says he’s seen this in the goods his mom sells in their sari-sari store. However, he doesn’t necessarily feel the burden of the price increase as his decent income has allowed him to cope with this sudden change. At the moment, besides preparing for exigencies, he is saving for a home they can transfer to.

“Because we are living in a slum area, merong psychological [effect] sa akin ... Very harsh environment, nakaka-affect talaga siya sa condition ko. It restricts me to give me a peace of mind,” he says.



Reynaldo Domagtoy first started working with a minimum wage of ₱285; now, it is at ₱512. While there is an increase in the minimum wage, he says the prices of goods also increased, so there was not much change at all. Photo by J.L. JAVIER

Marilen and Reynaldo Domagtoy, family of four, Metro Manila

Total household income: ₱13,000

Reynaldo Domagtoy works as an aircon technician and earns around ₱13,000 per month. His wife, Marilen, also wants to work for additional income for their family, but Reynaldo has insisted for her to stay at home so she can take care of their children, ages 8 and 12. After some thought, Marilen says that if she did work, they’d have to pay for someone to take care of their children, which is just an extra expense.

“Parang magkukuha din kami ng magbabayad, mag-aalaga sa [bata]. Hatid sundero kasi siya,” explains Marilen, pertaining to her eight-year-old daughter. “Mahirap kasi ‘pag hindi hatid sundero eh. Ang daming nawawala kasi diyan na bata.”

When it comes to food, they allot around ₱130 per day, which allows them to eat twice a day — one meal in the morning and one meal at night. Water bills would also be around ₱900 per month, while electricity, one of their biggest expenses, amounts to ₱1,495 monthly. “Kasi hindi kami direct ng Meralco eh, per kilowats lang kami dito eh, hindi namin sarili. Nakiki-tap lang kami diyan, sa kapitbahay,” says Marilen.



to sum their spending, Reynaldo says that sometimes their expenses are more than what he's earning, when cases arise (often) since there are various projects here and there that they need to provide for. "Walang nagbago ang sahod nakakapangutang kami," says Reynaldo.

(/)
He first started working with a minimum wage of ₱285; now, it is at ₱512. While there is an increase in the minimum wage, he says the prices of goods also increased, so there was not much change at all. "Wala, walang nagbago. Parehas lang sa 285 kasi dati mura lang din ang bilingin," he says. Marilen adds, "Dati kasi ginagatas ko pa ang panganay ko eh. Nakakabili pa kami ng gatas, tag-iisang lata. Ngayon parang hirap na hirap, ang hirap bilhin."

When asked about what kind of assistance she thinks the government can provide, Marilen says that they hope to be beneficiaries of government programs like the 4Ps. "Kahit papano malaking tulong 'yun kasi every three months nagpipindot sila ng ₱4,200," she says. Like most parents in this list, she also hopes that her children get a good education that could help them rise out of poverty.

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