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**SOCIAL
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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Social Welfare and Development (SWD) Journal is the official journal of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Published annually, the SWD Journal aims to popularize studies initiated by the DSWD and other stakeholders along social protection and social welfare development. This Journal features quantitative and qualitative researches from various disciplines of social welfare and rigorous policy analysis along social development. Aside from research papers, the SWD Journal also articles with relevant policy implications on social development.

Article contributions are open to DSWD offices, staff and all interested partners – individual researchers, institutions, universities and colleges, and schools including those with research extension offices, non-government organizations, national and local government agencies and other research institutions.

The Journal has also shifted from print media to digital publication starting 2021, following the call for digitalization as a response to the new normal.

Any reader who is interested in submitting a manuscript may refer to the Guidelines for the Publication of the Social Welfare and Development (SWD) Journal (Administrative Order No. 10, Series of 2017). Queries or comments may be sent to pdpb@dswd.gov.ph.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Last 2020, the world was hit by an unforeseen health crisis on a massive scale. The imposition of various levels of community quarantine to curb the spread of COVID-19, especially in the Philippine context, resulted to great challenges in administering public services to the poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged – who needed the assistance the most as they bear the brunt of the crisis.

This prompted the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to re-evaluate our work and priorities. DSWD’s program implementation, service delivery, particularly its systems and processes that respond to the needs of its clientele, were looked into through the conduct of various research studies, which are now compiled in this year’s Social Welfare and Development (SWD) Journal. We ensured that this year’s issue will be relevant to current events and contributory to finding solutions to emerging concerns.

First is a study that was borne out of a partnership among Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), World Bank and DSWD, entitled “Monitoring Digital Financial Payments of Cash Transfers in the Philippines”. This study used the Social Amelioration Program Tranche 2 as its context in mapping key challenges that persisted in the last-mile delivery of the provision of emergency aid – specifically on the beneficiaries’ well-being and financial health; Government-to-Person (G2P) payment experience; program awareness; and, financial service use.

Meanwhile, our Field Office CARAGA’s research on the “Enabling Components for Pandemic Management” was able to provide an evidenced-based knowledge to fill-in the gap on pandemic response and recovery, informing policy-making bodies about the necessary management of the pandemic.

Further, on top of the pandemic response and recovery initiatives exerted by the Department, we are also in the process of transitioning the devolution of some of our social welfare and development services due to the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling. As such, also featured in the Journal are studies that shed light on the readiness of our Local Government Units (LGUs) to implement devolved services as enumerated under Section 17 of the Republic Act No. 7160 (LGU Code of 1991).

The Social Watch Philippines' paper entitled, "Investing in the Social Service Workforce (SSWF) to Address Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Angeles City, Violence Against Children in Valenzuela City and Early Pregnancy in Northern Samar: Three Case Studies", attempted to fill in the gaps in the literature on the institutional challenges faced by specific SSWFs. It delved into the investments and costs of planning, developing, and supporting SSWFs involved in the delivery of social services linked to the prevention and response to violence against children (VAC), and the operationalization of the Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence Against Children.

In addition, the Policy Development and Planning Bureau-Research and Evaluation Division's contributions to the Journal focused on the absorptive capacity of LGUs. The study on the "Rapid Assessment of Devolved Emergency Programs and Services" assessed the current capacity of LGUs to respond to the challenges of the new normal and in anticipation of the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling implementation. It aims to draw lessons and insights on the motivation of the LGUs to implement devolved emergency programs, and determine LGUs' emergency program success in terms of relevance, efficiency and sustainability.

The "Process Evaluation of the Supplementary Feeding Program" then painted a picture on the extent to which the Supplemental Feeding Program (SFP) was implemented in the local levels as planned (e.g., how SFP resources, activities and outputs contributed to the attainment of outcomes, and the program's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and potential impact).

These studies provide a glimpse on the realities our fellow kababayans face on a day-to-day basis, encapsulating the needed collaborative efforts we - from the public and private sectors - have to persistently realize to address issues and concerns of the marginalized which were heightened by today's crisis.

At this point, on behalf of the editorial team, may I offer a word of gratitude to our authors, peer reviewers and the National Research and Evaluation Technical Working Group (NRE-TWG) - all of whom have provided valuable support this year's issue of the Social Welfare and Development (SWD) Journal.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform the public that in light of our Department's move towards digitalization, what was once disseminated through print medium shall now be shifting into an electronic publication. Thus, expect that all succeeding issues of the SWD Journal will be launched digitally using online platforms such as the DSWD and PDPB websites.

Again, thank you for your unwavering support to the SWD Journal. We look forward to producing more Journals containing articles, think papers, and studies that will not only shed light on the issues and concerns of the SWD and social protection sectors and clientele, but also provide workable recommendations to the stakeholders involved.

Mabuhay ang sambayanang Pilipino!

JOSELINE P. NIWANE

Editor-in-Chief of the SWD Journal and
Assistant Secretary
Policy and Plans Group

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ENABLING COMPONENTS FOR PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT

By the MONITORING & EVALUATION UNIT
KALAHY-CIDSS Program
Promotive Services Division, DSWD Field Office – CARAGA

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ABSTRACT

This study is a comprehensive novel inquiry in the aspect of disaster management. This is predicated on the existing gap on pandemic management observed in the literature, and on the dearth or absence of policy calculations in the disaster management plans and programs of the Philippines directed at addressing pandemic. Thus, the end of this paper is to provide evidenced-based knowledge to fill-in the said gap and inform policy-making bodies relative to the management of the pandemic. Various variables were hypothesized to relate with pandemic management and their theorized associations were tested using survey data obtained from the 143 program stakeholders of KALAHY-CIDSS program who served as the respondents of the study. On the basis of acceptable regression weight values, this study found that the enabling components for pandemic management include: the adoption of e-governance, the incorporation of research and the application of evidenced-based information, the availability of social protection mechanisms, the good and healthy network of relationships among people in the community and the people's sustained trust to the government. The variables decentralized disaster governance and participatory planning and decision-making appear to have insignificant impact on pandemic management. As it stands, various issues exist as impediments to the association of the variables. Essentially, these issues are policy-related concerns requiring attention and action from entities in government. In consonance with the findings of the study, this paper argues for necessary calculations, including a recommendation to explore on the fundamental restructuring or re-design of the KALAHY-CIDSS program to better position itself particularly in responding expeditiously and effectively to crisis situations.

Keywords: *Pandemic Management, Disaster E-governance, Decentralized Disaster Governance, Research-based Disaster Plan and Response, Social Protection, Social Capital*

I. INTRODUCTION

The sudden and rapid emergence of the COVID-19 disease has drawn the world's attention to a known or familiar yet invisible enemy which disastrously left indelible imprints in history (Little, 2011; Taubenberger and Morens, 2006). The concern in the Philippines is that the plans and programs of the Philippine government towards disaster management are frequently geared at responding to natural disasters (i.e. typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions). This is due to the fact that the Philippines by virtue of its geographic circumstances is highly prone to these disasters, making it one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world (CFE-DM, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2018; NDRRM Plan 2011-2028). This despite the fact that the country has also a weak health care system (The Borgen Project, 2017; CEDMMA, 2018; Amit et al., 2020) which also makes it vulnerable to disasters that inflict biological hazards such as the pandemic.

At present, the limitations of our health care system are still challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. And this has been coupled with the unbearable consequences to the economic, social, and political life of the country. This entails that the government was unable to prepare enough or sufficient plans and policies to address this kind of disaster. This is shown for instance in the non-passage of the 2013 bill entitled Pandemic and All-Hazards Prevention Act, which could have prepared the Philippines from the lethal virus and calibrated early on the disaster management plans and programs of the country (Tan, 2020).

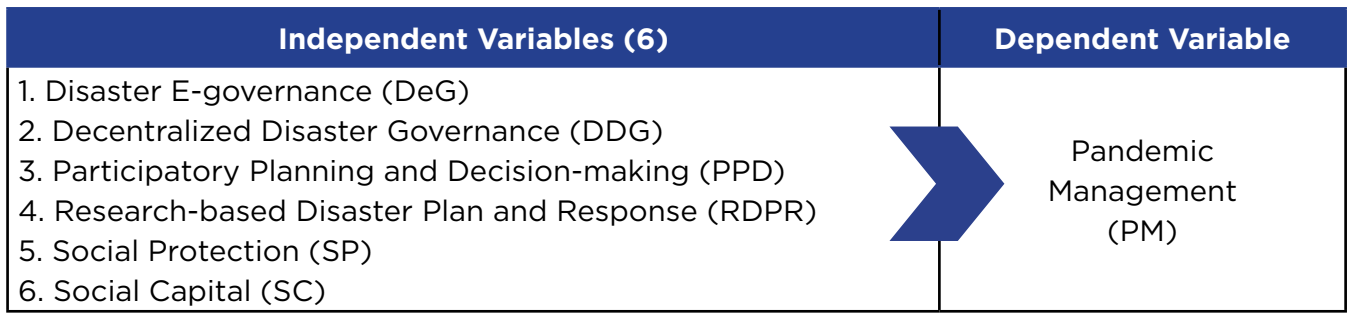
The challenge, however, is the anticipation that as soon as this crisis starts to fade so too may the will to anticipate and prepare for the next one. There could be an overwhelming temptation to forget Covid-19 and move on. However, with no anticipation of future pandemic occurrences, it is reasonable for the government to develop comprehensive framework of pandemic response that goes beyond immediate health response measures.

Thus, this study derives its relevance in its attempt to contribute evidenced-based information to thrust and/or improve the parlance of disaster management in the Philippines towards the management of the pandemic. In doing so, the study revisits and probes into various disaster management related designs and attune them for pandemic management.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

This study seeks to examine the variables theorized to be associated with the management of the pandemic by analyzing the collected quantitative and qualitative data gathered. Using the proposed research model, this inquiry specifically answers the following questions:

1. To what extent are disaster e-governance, decentralized disaster governance, participatory planning and decision-making, research-based disaster plan and response, social protection, and social capital associated with pandemic management?
2. What are the issues and challenges that affect these associations?



The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

- H¹.** DeG is positively associated with PM.
- H².** DDG is positively associated with PM.
- H³.** PPD is positively associated with PM.
- H⁴.** RDPR is positively associated with PM.
- H⁵.** SP is positively associated with PM.
- H⁶.** SC is positively associated with PM.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Emerging out of various literatures that attempts to explain disaster management, this study adopted the following independent variables or constructs which were conjectured as components that would contribute in enabling pandemic management. Indicators for each variable shall aid in the identification of the association, or the lack thereof, of the independent and dependent variables.

Summarized from the relevant knowledge and information drawn from the literatures reviewed, the table below provides the mapping and classification of the constructs and their corresponding concepts and/or indicators, as well as the sources for each:

Constructs	Indicators of Concept	Sources/Authors
Disaster E-Governance (DeG)	Availability of online services; use of ICT in information management; use of social media in communication and information sharing and learning; use of technology in knowledge creation, storage, and distribution; collection of data and information in databases to manage logistics during emergencies; use of technology for crisis mapping; use of geographically referenced analysis tools to highlight or emphasize risk areas, vulnerabilities, liabilities and potentially affected populations.	UNESDA (2003;2006); Peristeras et al. (2009); Schultz et al. (2011); Mehta, 2019; ADPC (2011); Asimakopoulou and Bessis (2010); Cao and Zhou (2008)

Constructs	Indicators of Concept	Sources/Authors
Decentralized Disaster Governance (DDG)	Empowerment of local governments or authorities; decentralized responsibilities on DRM; devolved technical and financial resources; bringing in local knowledge and perspectives; the assumption that LGUs have better understanding of local contexts and vulnerability, unique local needs, and assets; LGU activities are believed to facilitate context-specific risk management solutions that are custom-tailored to the local communities' needs.	UNISDR (2005, 2012); Bae et al. (2015); Paton & Johnson (2001); Tobin (1999); Hayek (1984); Marks and Lebel, 2016; Butt et al. (2014); Scott and Tarazona (2011)
Participatory Planning and Decision-making (PPD)	Inter and intra-sector coordination and collaboration; multi-stakeholder participation; CBDM; Community-based monitoring; popular policy development and implementation; citizens demand for action to reduce disaster risk; citizens evaluate situation, form part of creating plans and decisions, and are the major player in its implementation; establishment of local level planning committees; participatory budgeting, or finance schemes to fund community-managed development; participatory action research	Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014); Mercer et al. (2007); UNISDR (2005, 2011); Boyer-Villemare et al., (2014); Pelling, (2011); Warner (2008) Shaw and Okazaki (2004)
Research-based Disaster plan and response (RDPR)	Needs assessment and targeting studies; monitoring and evaluation researches; multi-risk assessments and socioeconomic cost-benefit analysis of risk reduction actions; development and application of methodologies, studies and models to assess vulnerabilities to and the impact of hazards; incorporation of methods into decision-making processes at all government levels; action research that target risk reduction and recovery efforts	Rietbergen-McCracken (2014); ACEDDR (n.d); Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015); Sendai Framework for Disaster Reduction (2015-2030)
Social Protection (SP)	Public works to support risk reduction; interventions to promote diversification of livelihoods; skills training in 'green' economy sectors; cash and in-kind transfers to poor and affected households; cash-for-work for poor and affected households; flexible use of social insurance; social care for affected vulnerable groups; supporting small projects (e.g. infrastructure and social services, training and micro-enterprise development); microfinance schemes	Vakis (2006); UNISDR (2006); Twigg (2007); ILO (2016); Pelham et al. (2011); GFDRR, 2017
Social Capital (SC)	Importance of shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. Engagement and trust of citizens to people with different social backgrounds; Engagement and trust of citizens to people with common social backgrounds; Building connections with organizations and system	Putnam (2000); Szreter & Woolcock (2004); Woolcock, (2001); Hawkins and Maurer (2009)

IV. OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

The variables used in the study are limited to disaster e-governance, decentralized disaster governance, participatory planning and decision-making, research-based disaster plan and response, social protection, and social capital. How these variables were used in the study (i.e. the operationalization of variables) is determined and limited by the indicators subsumed from the relevant literatures gathered or reviewed. This is shown in the table below. Each variable has coded indicators which are also reflected in research instrument used in the study.

Variables	Indicators
Disaster E-Governance (DeG)	<i>DeG1</i> availability of basic government services online during pandemic
	<i>DeG2</i> use of technology in the information and communication sharing about pandemic/public health emergencies (i.e. SMS, social media)
	<i>DeG3</i> collection of data and information in databases to manage logistics
	<i>DeG4</i> use of geographically referenced analysis tools to highlight or emphasize risk areas, vulnerabilities, and affected populations
Decentralized Disaster Governance (DDG)	<i>DDG1</i> devolve responsibilities to LGUs with their proximity and better understanding of local contexts.
	<i>DDG2</i> devolve financial and technical resources to LGUs for pandemic management.
	<i>DDG3</i> increase local authorities' capacities to respond to pandemic
	<i>DDG4</i> empower local government functionaries to facilitate context-specific risk management solutions that are custom-tailored to the local communities' needs and wants during pandemic
Participatory Planning and Decision-making (PPD)	<i>PPD1</i> Inter and intra-sector coordination and collaboration.
	<i>PPD2</i> citizens evaluate situation, form part of creating plans and decisions.
	<i>PPD3</i> Citizens are major player in implementation of pandemic response projects or interventions.
	<i>PPD4</i> Multi-stakeholder involvement
Research-based Disaster Plan and Response (RDPR)	<i>RDPR1</i> Needs assessment and targeting studies
	<i>RDPR2</i> Monitoring and evaluation (i.e. multi-risk assessments, socioeconomic cost-benefit analysis) of risk reduction actions
	<i>RDPR3</i> incorporation of methods into decision-making processes at regional, national and local levels
	<i>RDPR4</i> development and application of methodologies, studies and models to assess vulnerabilities to and the impact of hazards
Social Protection (SP)	<i>SP1</i> cash and in-kind transfers and/or cash-for-work for the poor and affected households
	<i>SP2</i> augmenting public health insurance
	<i>SP3</i> building local health care units that are attuned to the standards of DOH and WHO
	<i>SP4</i> diversification of livelihood and skills training in 'green' economy sectors

Variables	Indicators
Disaster E-Governance (DeG)	<i>DeG1</i> availability of basic government services online during pandemic
	<i>DeG2</i> use of technology in the information and communication sharing about pandemic/public health emergencies (i.e. SMS, social media)
	<i>DeG3</i> collection of data and information in databases to manage logistics
	<i>DeG4</i> use of geographically referenced analysis tools to highlight or emphasize risk areas, vulnerabilities, and affected populations

V. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches. Survey research method was used in the gathering of data from the 143 respondents who were selected using the stratified sampling technique. To ensure bias reduction, program facilitators of KC-NCDDP, select LGU officials, and community members/volunteers were requested to take part of the study. The data were gathered from the three KC-NCDDP municipalities in the three provinces of Caraga Region. The research instrument (i.e. Survey Questionnaire) was subjected to pre-testing before the actual gathering of the data to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs determined by the coefficient of Cronbach's alpha (1951). According to Nunally (1978), the minimum Cronbach's alpha values should be greater than 0.70 to indicate reliability of the research instrument.

Quantitative data were analyzed through structural equation modeling, path analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis statistical tools using the IBM SPSS Statistics (ver. 20) and IBM SPSS Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS ver. 25). Qualitative data were content-analyzed to supply and augment the analysis of the findings. Qualitative data gathered were limited to the answers of the respondents to the open-ended questions in the survey questionnaires. This is due to the many restrictions and challenges that prevent the researcher from conducting face-to-face and/or phone interviews or FGDs amidst the pandemic. This includes mobility limitations, prohibition of gatherings, and the lack of access to good signal in the many areas of the municipalities identified in the project.

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On the demographic lens, there is a proportional distribution of the samples according to designation, where program facilitators, LGU officials, and community members/volunteers comprise 13.9%, 23.9% and 62.2% of the total sample, respectively.

In terms of the reliability and validity test results, the Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs range from 0.775 to 0.928 (high reliability level) which means that research instrument used was reliable and valid. The variables of the study also passed the test for discriminant validity, and the research model also passed the model fit test where the actual values for fit indices exceed the recommended values.

On the main, the association of the independent and dependent variables was determined using regression weight value and p value. Accordingly, a regression weight value of at least 0.100 and a p value of less than or equal to 0.05 are the minimum values that would tell that the independent variable has significant positive association with the dependent variable (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). Otherwise, there is no association between the variables. In other words, if the regression weight and p values for, say Disaster E-governance (DeG) and Pandemic Management (PM), are .104 and <.001 respectively, this means that DeG is positively and significantly associated with PM. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values of approximately 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are considered as substantial, moderate and weak, respectively, in terms of the level of explanatory power (Chin, 1998). Below provides the summary of the findings:

Relationship	Standard Regression Weight	Hypothesis Supported?	Significance (p)
DeG → PM	.104	Yes	<0.001
DDG → PM	.048	No	Ns
PPD → PM	-.124	No	Ns
RDPR → PM	.211	Yes	<0.001
SP → PM	.136	Yes	<0.001
SC → PM	.636	Yes	<0.001
R^2 (PM)	.71		

The issues and challenges that affect the association of the variables (e.g. DeG and PM) are also identified in the study.

6.1 On the association of DeG and PM

Disaster E-governance (DeG) is positively associated with Pandemic Management (PM) on the basis of the regression weight value of .104 and this association is significant given the p value of less than .001. This means that there is the need for the availability and use of e-government activities in the service delivery of government and in the resolve to proactively and reactively address the challenges of the pandemic. However, certain issues attendant to this association include: the lack of internet connectivity (or good internet connectivity) that would enable the effective functioning of e-governance; the lack of technical and financial resources on the part of the LGU to enable e-government transformation in their localities; and the lack of intention on the part of certain local government officials to actually adopt e-governance.

6.2 On the association of DDG and PM

On the aggregate, there is popular agreement among respondents that local governments be at the forefront of responding to pandemic disaster given their proximate understanding of their localities, and therefore the need to capacitate the LGUs on this aspect. However, the regression weight value of .048 suggest that Decentralized Disaster Governance (DDG) is not positively associated with Pandemic Management (PM).

Issues attendant to the association of these variables are worth noting: the lack of technical, financial, and human resources to be able to effectively actualize the responsibilities of managing the pandemic; lack of medical facilities in the localities that will be used in addressing the medical need of the people during the pandemic; and the lack of technical know-how and expertise of some LGU officials in the crafting and implementation of policy responses that would effectively address the needs of the community. These issues may have significantly hindered the association between DDG and PM.

6.3 On the association of PPD and PM

Considering the regression weight value of $-.124$, there is no significant positive association between Participatory Planning and Decision-making (PPD) and Pandemic Management (PM), thus based on the findings, participatory approach does not significantly impact on pandemic management. It is worth noting that the responses gathered by the study are from the point-of-view of the program stakeholders of the KALAHICIDSS program which applies the participatory approach in service delivery. In relevance, the issues interpreted to affect the association of these variables particularly relate on the program. These issues include: the mobility limitations of restricts the people to get involve in participatory activity designs; many of the respondents were found to have less appreciation on the process which according to them is lengthy and tedious; and the involvement of all sectors of the community in the decision-making table (i.e. identification and implementation of subprojects) which would challenge the urgency that the pandemic situation demands.

6.4 On the association of RDPR and PM

The variable Research-based Disaster Plan and Response (RDPR) is positively associated with Pandemic Management given the regression weight value of $.211$ which is significant at less than $.001$. This means that there is the need to anchor the policy framework of government on evidenced-based knowledge and/or empirical data especially in the formulation of proactive policy measures on the pandemic disaster. The hindering factors however include the following: The lack of technical skills and financial resources in the conduct of research or studies especially among local government units; and lack of intention on the part of the LGUs to incorporate the use of research in their planning and decision-making activities.

6.5 On the association of SP and PM

The findings of the study also show the central role of social protection measures in the management of pandemic especially in addressing the needs of those who are vulnerable to economic shocks. This include the service provision of the KALAHICIDSS program where the poor and vulnerable population were provided with temporary relief and assistance amidst economic standstill. The regression weight value is at $.136$ and significant at less than $.001$, which means that social protection is positively and significantly associated with pandemic management. However, there are certain issues and challenges that intervene this association which are particularly relevant to the KALAHICIDSS program since the respondents are program stakeholders whose perceptions are drawn from their experiences in the program in the 2020 implementation.

These include: the limited timeline or timeframe of completion which in effect undermines the quality of certain program deliverables; the volume of documents needed by the program and their compliance is taxing and onerous; late delivery and downloading of fund or grants which affect the seamless and prompt provision of the interventions or projects; and the issue of sustainability of the projects provided by the program (e.g. Cash for Work).

6.6 On the association of SC and PM

Social capital is positively associated with pandemic management. This is indicated in the regression weight value of .636 which is significant at less than .001 p value. This indicator yields the highest regression weight value among the six independent variables measured in the study. This means that the healthy relations among people in the community, as well as their trust with the government, were found to be highly essential in the management of the pandemic, especially in coping with the negative repercussions of the crisis.

The result on the R2 value of PM (refer to the table), which is .71, suggests that the independent variables account for about 71% of the variance in PM. In other words, the independent variables in the model can substantially explain 71% of the PM, and the remaining 29% can be explained by other variables.

VII. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The variable Research-based Disaster Plan and Response (RDPR) is positively associated with Pandemic Management given the regression weight value of .211 which is significant at less than .001. This means that there is the need to anchor the policy framework of government on evidenced-based knowledge and/or empirical data especially in the formulation of proactive policy measures on the pandemic disaster. The hindering factors however include the following: The lack of technical skills and financial resources in the conduct of research or studies especially among local government units; and lack of intention on the part of the LGUs to incorporate the use of research in their planning and decision-making activities.

7.1 Conclusion

On the whole, the study found that the enabling components for pandemic management include: the adoption of e-governance; the incorporation of research and the application of evidenced-based information; the availability of social protection mechanisms; the good and healthy network of relationships among people in the community and the people's sustained trust to the government. The variables decentralized disaster governance and participatory planning and decision-making appear to have insignificant impact on pandemic management. This conclusion is illustrated below:



Proposed Model and Theory for Pandemic Management

7.2 Implications

Implications to Theory

There is a dearth of information in the literature on pandemic management vis-à-vis policy calculations and approach of government to the pandemic. Essentially, the study's proposed theory and model for pandemic management is its evident novel contribution in filling-in this research gap in the broad body of literature particularly on the progression of disaster management literature. Consequently, the findings and relevant analysis of this study could be used as evidenced-based policy reference for the concerned entities in government in the management of the pandemic.

Implications to Practice

a. On the use and application of ICT in disaster governance

The findings of the study suggest that the pandemic situation magnifies the need for e-government transformation in all levels of government, especially at the lower echelons. The convenience and efficiency that this provides is seen to contribute significantly in the swift and operative service delivery of government especially in crisis situations. While several government offices were found to adopt this pursuant to the relevant laws, this remains a challenge especially at the local government units pending the lack of necessary resources and the lack of intention of some local officials towards its adoption. The inability to effectively respond to the imperatives of e-governance is seen in how certain government offices at present struggle and grapple in the utilization of technological platforms, in lieu of the traditional or conventional approaches. Thus, it behooves the national government to extensively implement the optimization of e-governance.

b. On the decentralization of disaster management responsibilities to the LGUs

By virtue of relevant laws (e.g. RA 10121), the delegation of responsibilities from the national government to the LGUs vis-à-vis the role in disaster management can already be seen in practice. However, consistent with the study's findings, the transfer or devolution of responsibilities usually does not come with it the corresponding financial and/or technical resources for effective actualization of those responsibilities. As seen in the current situation, there is still an obvious dependence on the national government to provide the necessary resources for disaster management. Coupled with the lack of technical know-how of some local officials, this thwarted the LGUs to effectively respond to the enormous negative repercussions of big crisis such as the pandemic.

c. On the participatory approach to disaster governance

While the findings of the study show the insignificant impact of this approach to pandemic management, this does not undervalue the due advantage of participatory governance. As noted, the data gathered by the study on this variable emanated from the viewpoints of the program stakeholders of the KALAHI-CIDSS program which apply the participatory approach in the pandemic response. That the issues and challenges which significantly affected the association of this variable with pandemic management must be considered and acknowledged for necessary improvements on the part of the program particularly on the feasibility of its design and modes/activities of implementation under restrictive situations. This, when realized, may potentially improve the association of these variables.

feasibility of its design and modes/activities of implementation under restrictive situations. This, when realized, may potentially improve the association of these variables.

d. On the use of evidenced-based knowledge in disaster management

The use of research and incorporation of knowledge and information generated therefrom is contributory in aiding and directing the government towards feasible and appropriate approaches or response to the crisis situations. This study sits well in this aspect as the outputs of this research have the potential to underpin the government's calibration of the disaster management plans and actions (i.e. the study can provide baseline information for certain approaches to be attuned for pandemic management). Needless to say, researches produced should be undertaken with quality such that there is adherence to scientific method and principles (e.g. relevance and timeliness) as well as to ethical standards. Quality research is a precursor to quality evidence which can be used to inform policy-making. Essentially, these importance needs to be appreciated and recognized at all levels in government.

e. On the relevance of social protection and social capital in disaster management

This study augments the analysis that crucial to crisis situations is ensuring that mechanisms are in place to reduce the vulnerability of the population to the repercussions of the crisis. That people and families have security in the face of vulnerabilities and contingencies. The shocks and negative impacts of this pandemic disaster should impel the government to further strengthen and improve the social protection measures (e.g. access to health care; adequacy of benefits provided) and address issues and concerns that affect their effectiveness. This is especially relevant in the present and post-disaster phase of the pandemic where there is the pressing need to recover the poor and vulnerable populations from the economic shocks.

On the other hand, bonding, building, and linking social capital have seen to contribute in the management of the pandemic especially when social cohesion that engenders cooperation and compliance to authorities is ensured. Parenthetically, the provision of social protection measures could have its bearing to the social capital especially fostering social cohesion among people in the community, and on sustaining the trust of the people to the institutions of government (i.e. when it is ensured that the services are directed to the poor and the most vulnerable).

7.3 Recommendations

For the Government (i.e. Policy-makers and implementers)

As it stands, the Philippines has no existing law to ready the country in the occurrence of pandemic. Thus, to concretize and institutionalize the vision of preparing and protecting the country from the ramifications of enormous crisis situation such as the pandemic, it is important for lawmakers to formulate laws directed at addressing this. This shall stimulate the calibration of the disaster management plans and actions of the country which shall effectively address situations attendant to the pandemic. In consonance with the findings of the study, especially in consideration of the issues and challenges identified, formulated policy/policies should include or predicated by the following:

1. Integration of ICT for the whole of government. E-governance is especially significant in the local government units, where its adoption is less recognized and remains a challenge, to better their capacity to respond to crisis situations given that they have the primary responsibility for immediate disaster response and relief. The transfer of technologies from various national government agencies down to the local governments would be a significant endeavor to eventually realize this. In addition, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in disaster management should be furthered and improved. Its improved usage could be seen, for example, in highlighting or emphasizing risk areas, vulnerabilities, liabilities and potentially affected populations, and in the automatic classification of crisis-related microblog communications during crisis situations e.g. pandemic to prevent the people from engaging on non-informative disaster-related communications. There should also be a continuous and improved usage of technological platforms in the basic service delivery of government. This include the digitization of social protection delivery service to bring help and assistance faster to the people. However, the effectual realization of the aforementioned rests on the absolute improvement of internet service in the country by bridging the gap between the internet infrastructure market and government policies.
2. Empower local government units. As identified, LGUs lack the capacity to be effective in performing the responsibilities on disaster management. Increasing their capacity entails devolution of financial resources to the local governments which they can potentially use for e-government transformation, improving the local health services and local social protection programs, and augmenting the human resource that will help improve disaster governance at the local level. Significantly, the impending implementation of the Mandanas Ruling, which expanded the local governments' share to the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), is pivotal towards the realization of the latter. While the upshot of this ruling is the transfer of more devolved responsibilities to the LGU (i.e. LGUs absorbing some functions of the national government), the increased financial resources would fuel local governments' towards improving their performance including their role in disaster management. The optimal concern however, is when the devolved resources and responsibilities made available at the local level will be poorly handled and executed by local bureaucrats bereft of sufficient knowledge, experience, and technical know-how in effective governance. Thus, safeguards should be present in the law to guarantee due diligence and dutiful deployment of resources and responsibilities by the LGUs.
3. The provision of social protection measures should not be limited to usual cash transfer programs, public works, or microfinance schemes. It should be extended towards the strengthening the country's health care system, especially the health care units at the local levels where poor people resorts immediate access. This would prepare the country to future public health emergencies and prevent the health care system from being overburdened as what the present pandemic situation has engendered.
4. Strengthen the linkage of the academe and the government in the conduct of research activities. Academics who are immersed and well-versed in the research should be encouraged to aid the government in the formulation of evidenced-based proactive policies for disaster management, and in identifying not only the strengths but also pitfalls of existing government policies for necessary alterations or improvements. The government, especially among LGUs, should seek for technical assistance from the academics to capacitate or increase their capacity in conducting research which will be deemed essential in their local policy formulation. Overall, this realization would be well

within the internationally-abided framework for disaster management such as the Sendai framework for Disaster Reduction (2015-2030).

For the KALAHI-CIDSS program

1. The restrictive nature of the pandemic apparently highlights the limitation of the program specifically on ensuring the general participation of the community, in as far as the current program design is concerned. It can be interpreted from the issues towards the program that these do not only concern the DROM implementation but to the program implementation on its whole. The issues identified imply or hint on the need for the program to effect necessary adjustments or re-design to better position itself in its mandate to reduce the vulnerabilities of the poor populations. This without compromising and surrendering the community-driven development approach which is inherent to the program. Consistent with the issues identified, program managers may: (a) explore the reduction of documentary deliverables (i.e. identification and removal of duplicate documents); (b) revisit the adequacy of the timeline (i.e. is it sufficient in actualizing or realizing the comprehensive scope and objectives of the program which includes the political and economic empowerment of the people of local governments on the main?); and (c) redefining or reconfiguring the extent or mode of participation of the people in the program especially during crisis situations. These, among others, may allow the program to be more effective, less tedious, and more expeditious in the delivery of services, most especially during the disaster.
2. Given program's nature to work closely with the poor and vulnerable communities in reducing their vulnerability to various shocks, it has the ability and operational advantage to actually aid or help in strengthening the Local health care units of local communities. It may work on providing and equipping the health centers with quality facilities that are at par with the standards set by the Department of Health or the World Health Organization, and that these provisions are enough and sufficient to be responsive to the health needs of the population, not only during public health crisis, but also on the usual medical demands of the people. This initiative could be credited to alleviate the conditions of the poor communities as it increases their protection especially against the unbearable hazards caused by public health emergencies.
3. The program may also work on ensuring the sustainability of the projects especially those which are designed for pandemic response. For example, the Cash-for-Work project of the program may come in the form of tree growing or mangrove tree growing activities. This will not only temporarily address the economic need of the beneficiaries but would at the same time address the risk of natural hazards such as floods or typhoons, especially when the planted species are assured of their sustainability.
4. Transfer of technologies to the partner LGUs. Part of the mandate of empowering the local communities is to be able to transfer program innovations that will actually help improve local governance. This would also be a contribution of the program to e-government transformation and in the willing attempt to increase the capacity of the LGUs in performing the devolved responsibilities particularly on disaster management.

VIII. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES

Appropriate provisions were carried out by the researcher in the facilitation of the study, but certain limitations need to be considered with regard to the interpretation of the findings of the study:

1. The samples used in the study are limited to certain KALAHI-CIDSS stakeholders. Future researches may consider other segments of the population and must take note of the population size so that if it is just small and manageable, a complete enumeration would be ideal. The results could then be safely generalized to the whole population.
2. The constructs used in the research model were chosen due to their prominence in the body of literature. Future researches may consider investigating variables other than the independent variables that were used in the study.
3. Future researches may also apply a different research method especially in the collection of qualitative data which, in this study, is limited at the answers of the respondents to the open-ended questions in the research instrument. Triangulation method could be applied to further strengthen the findings of the study.
4. This study utilized a simple linear regression model in theorizing the relationship of the constructs; thus, future researches may develop research models that would explore some nuances in the relationships of the constructs.
5. Explore and conduct other disaster management-related (or pandemic management for that matter) researches that would further contribute to the existing literature and would inform policy-making bodies concerning disaster management. This would include researches that would help practitioners or project implementers prepare the communities for major hazards, and reduce vulnerability, microstudies that can be implemented in one week, immediately following disaster, that could help inform the response, and action research that could help target recovery efforts and allow those affected by the disaster to have more ownership of their well-being.
6. Research should also be conducted to aid the KALAHI-CIDSS Program in improving its participatory program design/approach. This would, at the very least, include a thorough evaluation of the Disaster Response Operations Modality (DROM) implementation in 2020 that will draw up practical implications for future disaster response service of the program, or a thorough evaluation of the program design and outcome based on the program's theory of change which shall unearth ideas that would help improve the program implementation at the time of disasters such as a pandemic.

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Investing in the Social Service Workforce (SSWF) to Address Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Angeles City, Violence Against Children in Valenzuela City, and Early Pregnancy in Northern Samar: Three Case Studies

By Social Watch Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the trends in public investments of the social service workforce and budgetary support of select Local Government Units (LGUs) in combating violence against children (VAC). A specific child protection (CP) issue is highlighted for each LGU, namely, online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) in Angeles City; child sexual abuse (CSA) in Valenzuela City; and early pregnancy (EP) in Northern Samar. The study identifies challenges and recommends policies and programs to strengthen the LGUs' social service workforce (SSWF), including increasing budgetary support, to strengthen its capacity for child protection. The case study method was employed and used the mixed-method approach for data-gathering from both primary and secondary sources. The case studies reveal that the LGUs covered have basically established functional child protection system (CPS), key components of which are the SSWF and budgetary support, although at varying levels of scale and quality of responsiveness. The challenges that beset the SSWF across LGUs were related to the need to improve skills, capacity, caseloads, coordination, training and support. Furthermore, while child-focused budgets by child rights categories were increasing, child protection allocations were much smaller across the three LGUs, a trend that needs to be reversed.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally understood that the incidence of VAC in the Philippines is widespread and takes place at an alarming rate. The 2016 study conducted by UNICEF and the Philippine Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) covering 3,886 children and youth across the country found that a staggering 80% of the respondents had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. Data indicates that a significant percentage (17.1%) of children aged 13-<18 years old experienced sexual violence while growing up; and about 11% experienced sexual violence in cyber space. Teen pregnancy, on the other hand, was estimated at 43% [out of 1,371 respondents]. While many of the respondents claimed that the experience of violence made them resilient, children also reported negative impacts such as “having to stop their schooling, developing low self-esteem, feeling sad, fearful and anxious, and being stigmatized and ostracized for life” (CWC and UNICEF, 2017).

It is critical to address the prevalence of VAC in the country because it is considered as a “human right and public health problem that impede development” (UNICEF, n.d para.1). According to UNICEF, violence committed against children affects the victims throughout their lifetime, and with adverse consequences on their health and well-being, education and future economic prospects (UNICEF, n.d).

This is an issue of paramount importance given the prevalence of VAC in the country. Sexual violence mostly takes place in the home, which could result in a large number of cases not being reported to the proper authorities (CWC and UNICEF, 2017). Furthermore, according to the data of the Commission on Population and Development, there were over 62,000 cases of early pregnancy in the country in 2018, and this continued to rise in 2019 (CNN, 2021). At present, about 40 to 50 children aged 10 to 14 years old give birth every week (Cudis, 2020).

The 2020 mid-term report on the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review submitted by the Civil Society Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CSC-CRC) highlighted the increase in the number of cases of OSAEC, VAC, and EP, among other human rights violations. Unfortunately, this phenomenon remains largely invisible and underreported. This is partly due to challenges in monitoring, the absence of an integrated reporting and referral system, the stigma associated with sexual abuse, and the culture of silence.

It is noted however that overall, there may be a need to further refine the baseline database on VAC at the national level given the disparity in the facts and figures provided by different agencies and institutions.

A key strategy to addressing VAC is strengthening the country’s CPS which consists of human resources, financial resources, laws, policies, governance, data collection and monitoring, protection and response services, and care management services. Given that no system can effectively operate without the human resource that make up the system (UNICEF, 2019), there is a need to look into investments being made to upgrade and strengthen the social service workforce (SSWF)³ tasked to undertake promotive, preventive, and response services for CP. Understanding what these investments are, where these investments are directed, and their social and economic impacts are important to determine whether these resources have been optimized.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been a plethora of studies that discuss the need to strengthen the various aspects of the SSWF so that it can more effectively combat VAC. A ten-year study conducted by Madden, Scannapieco, & Painter (2014) revealed that organizational factors such as manageable workload, supervisory and peer support, relevant training, and professional and career development are some of the factors that influence employment retention of child welfare workers, many of whom were involved in combating VAC. The study also found that organizational support such as educational and career advancement opportunities were the strongest predictors of retention.

In a study on social workers involved with the youth, Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew (2006) identified some of the benefits of professional development - improved quality of social service programs, reduced worker burn-out, increased staff retention, and increased ability to handle multiple roles and responsibilities. Aside from improving the professional status of youth workers, training also serves as an avenue for networking and collaboration, which in turn, helps youth workers deal with difficult situations.

According to UNICEF (2016), capacity-building interventions conducted for the SSWF during the Haiyan Typhoon in 2013 not only helped upgrade their skills but also provided them with a network of support. The same study observed that coaching and mentoring of social workers also helped the local social welfare offices to think more strategically and consider their work outcomes as a “measure of [work] success.”

The study conducted by UP-Sikhay Kilos Development Association, Inc. (UP-SKDAI) in 2018 entitled “Mapping the Social Service Workforce in the Philippines” found that many of the issues and challenges of the SSWF are related to human resource management. Concerns regarding recruitment and retention, lack of clarity in roles and functions, heavy workload, skills gaps, and problems of salary standardization were identified. Also, the lack of budgetary support to strengthen the SSWF at the local government level was deemed as a major impediment to the realization of child protection plans and measures.

However there is a dearth in the literature about concrete cases that comprehensively elaborate on the institutional challenges faced by the SSWF, such as inadequate capacities owing to weak human resource complement and low levels of funding for certain programs and activities. Such a study is critical because this provides a micro-perspective of the concrete institutional needs of specific SSWF as they combat VAC on the ground. It will also provide the evidence that will further substantiate the widely shared observation for the need to strengthen the SSWF if it is to effectively combat VAC and sharpen the analysis on this.

It is this gap in the literature which this research attempts to fill in and make a contribution to, that is, to provide a granulated view of some of the concrete institutional challenges faced by specific SSWF and sharpen the analysis in order to subsequently generate more finely-tuned policy recommendations to enhance certain capacities of the SSWF.

OBJECTIVES

This article draws from the case studies undertaken in three local areas with the following objectives:

1. Analyze the trend of public investment in children, specifically on the spending levels of selected LGUs and agencies on planning, developing, and supporting the SSWF involved in child protection;
2. Quantify the direct and indirect investment/costs incurred by selected LGUs and relevant agencies to equip the SSWF in the delivery of social services that is linked to the prevention of and response to VAC and the operationalization of the Philippine Plan of Action to Eliminate Violence against Children (PPAEVAC);
3. Analyze factors that facilitate and hinder investing in SSWF and map out existing human resources against clientele targets and beneficiaries and in the implementation of child protection programs and services; and
4. Provide policy and program recommendations to address gaps and challenges in investments towards strengthening SSWF linked to prevention and response to VAC.

FRAMEWORK

The study referred to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment No. 19 on Public Budgeting for the Realization of Children's Rights (2016) and the recent UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Public Investment for Child Rights as normative frameworks. The study was guided primarily by the global framework for Strengthening the SSWF, which was the main reference for designing the key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The outcome of the KIIs and FGDs then served as the primary inputs for the revised investment proposals to address the gaps and challenges. It also served as the basis for the recommendations on developing a more strategic SSWF strengthening program.

A systems approach was used in undertaking this study. This meant viewing the SSWF as a system in itself as well as part of the broader CPS. It also meant analyzing the SSWF strengthening program in a strategic and holistic manner – that is, assessing the dynamics of planning, developing and supporting the SSWF as they are operationalized at the local level to address the specific CP issue, while taking into account all the relevant actors at both local and national levels.

The SSWF plays a critical role in supporting children and families in the communities, and is an important component of the CPS. UNICEF (2019) maintains that, although the establishment of an effective child protection system is important in preventing and responding to a range of childhood vulnerabilities and concerns, “No system can function effectively without the individuals who make that system come to life”. Thus, it is important that SSWF are given the necessary human resource assistance to be able to perform quality work.

Funding for the strengthening of the SSWF has been identified as one of the “most pressing concerns” of social workers, both professionals and para-professionals. Understanding the investment and costs needed to strengthen the SSWF will help policy makers and program implementers to strategically address the investment gaps, which in turn, can contribute to the overall strengthening of the SSWF, the CPS, and eventually, the achievement of the SDG targets on ending all forms of VAC.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods were used in gathering primary and secondary data from three case study area, namely, the local government units (LGUs) of Angeles City in Central Luzon, Valenzuela City in the National Capital Region, and Northern Samar Province in Eastern Visayas. For each LGU, a specific CP issue was identified as the focal point of the analysis: online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) in Angeles City; child sexual abuse (CSA) in Valenzuela City; and early pregnancy (EP) in Northern Samar. The LGUs covered in this study were selected purposively from UNICEF program areas based on the identified issues. Both qualitative and quantitative were collected to ensure comprehensiveness of data.

Quantitative data consists of fiscal data (e.g. fund sources, budget appropriation and utilization, expenditures, etc.) and human resource (HR) metrics (e.g. ratio of SSWF to child beneficiaries, number of SSWF with plantilla and non-plantilla positions, number of training hours, percent attendance in trainings, etc.). Qualitative data includes state of the children report, description of HR systems and processes, status of implementation of laws, policies, and service standards, assessment of training and development interventions, and other related documents.

For the collection of primary data, the following methods were used:

1. Consultation meetings with National Agencies⁴

While the focus of the study is on the SSWF operating in the local areas, the relevant national agencies mandated to address specific child protection issues were included in the study. These agencies are members of inter-agency councils and working groups created to address child protection issues. They also implement flagship programs to respond to VAC.

The primary agencies consulted at the national level were the following:
Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

- Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC)
- Philippine National Police (PNP)
- Department of Justice (DOJ)
- Department of Information, Communication, and Technology (DICT)
- Department of Health (DOH)

2. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) at the Local and Regional levels

For each case study area, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders were conducted. Purposive sampling method was used in the selection of participants, based on the child protection structure and mechanisms at the LGU level.

Focused Group Discussion

- SSWF Professionals:
- Members of Multidisciplinary Team
 - Case Worker, Social Welfare and Development Office (LGU)
 - PNP - WCPD Officers
 - Medical doctor, social worker, nurse, psychometrician assigned in community-based CPU
- Social workers assigned in temporary residential facilities for children
- SSWF Paraprofessionals: with certificates and/or secondary education
 - BCPC workers, VAWC Desk Officers
 - Barangay Health Workers (BHW), Barangay Nutrition Scholar (BNS)
- Allied Workers
 - PNP - WCPD Officers
 - DepEd Division Office personnel/teachers
 - Social Workers from NGOs
- Allied Workers
- Parents (with children age 13 - 17 years old)

Key Informant Interviews (6 individuals)

- Coordinator, Regional Sub-Committee for the Welfare of Children
- Representatives, Local Council for the Protection of Children
- Head, Social Welfare and Development Office (city or province)
- Head, Human Resource Office
- Local Finance Committee (for data validation purposes)
- Focal Persons, Field Offices of DSWD, DepEd, DOH, and POPCOM

During the conduct of FGDs and KIIs, particularly for the parents and children, the research team made sure that the respondents gave their full consent to be part of the study. Participants were assured that information gathered will be treated with confidentiality. The Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) served as a guide for the consultation with children. Informed consent forms for guardians and Informed Assent forms for child participants were collected as part of the child protection policy applied by the researchers.

For the collection of secondary data, the following methods were used:

1. Consultation meetings with national agencies and LGUs
2. Use of data collection checklists
3. Online research

Data validation meetings:

Data validation meetings were conducted with the three LGUs. Research participants and local offices/units of Valenzuela City, Angeles City, and Northern Samar Province attended the meetings. Recommendations were also solicited from the participants.

A. Pre-testing of Instruments

The following pre-test methods were conducted for the qualitative data gathering tools:

1. Experts Review

Draft FGD and KII guides were submitted to DSWD and CWC for Experts Review. Two lead staff of the PDPB of DSWD reviewed the instruments and gave their feedback to the research team. An online meeting to discuss and review the instruments was also conducted with the CWC. Lead staff of the Policy and Planning Division, Localization and Institutionalization Division, and Coordinators of the Regional Sub-Committee of the CWC for Angeles City and Northern Samar participated in the review. The list of data gathering participants was also reviewed by the CWC Team.

2. Field Test

The FGD and KII guides were pre-tested in Angeles City. The following respondents were considered as field test participants:

FGD: Women and Child Protection Desk (WCPD) - 2 Officers; Student Officers, Supreme Student Government (2 students)

KII: Youth Formation Coordinator and Grievance Committee Member, DepEd Division Office; LCPC member, HRMO

The field test participants were debriefed after the interview to gather feedback both in terms of questionnaire content and data gathering procedure. Results of both the experts review and field test were incorporated in the revised FGD and KII Guides.

The data collected were analyzed using a dual-lens approach - fiscal and human resource perspectives were applied to correspond to the two components of the study. For the human resource component, the study used the Global Framework for SSWF Strengthening and the Program to Institutionalize Meritocracy and Excellence in Human Resource Management (PRIME-HRM) as reference guides. Trend analysis and budget analysis were conducted to analyze financial data. Content analysis was conducted to make sense of the qualitative data gathered. For the fiscal component, the researchers drew on the extensive experience of Social Watch Philippines in undertaking research related to public investments in children guided by relevant international laws and existing public finance management systems.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the findings arising from the case studies may not be generalized given its focus on only three cases identified through purposive sampling, the data and findings that were generated have yielded a rich and highly granulated picture of the institutional capacities of the SSWF in specific localities. These can provide a useful starting point and reference for future studies on this topic in order to further add to and enrich understanding of SSWF capacities of LGUs, validate and further identify factors that determine these capacities and to establish certain trends related to strengthening the SSWF.

Nevertheless, the three case studies have yielded a number of policy and program recommendations to address current gaps and challenges in investments and costing of SSWF for CP of the three LGUs. While these recommendations may only be applied to the three cases, it provides an analytical reference which future studies can take into account and build from. Furthermore, the study was limited by the lack of data at the local level, although in varying degrees, either because the LGU had difficulty generating the data, or the researchers had difficulty getting hold of certain administrative documents or conducting on-line interviews of resource persons in the field, a problem exacerbated by the restrictions imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

FINDINGS ACROSS THE THREE STUDY CASES

The general findings are presented below. The data is organized as follows: (a) description of the CP situation (OSAEC/VAC/EP) and factors that influence CP outcomes; (b) assessment of the SSWF strengthening components (planning, supporting, and developing), and (c) analysis of public investments in children and in the strengthening of the SSWF for child protection.

A. Description of CP Situation Across the Three Case Studies

OSAEC in Angeles City: In Angeles City, it is doubly difficult to pin down the number of OSAEC cases. First of all, the monitoring and entrapment operations of OSAEC cases are mostly handled by the national agencies and their regional counterparts. As such, cases are filed at the office of the National Bureau of Investigation and may not necessarily be reflected at the local Philippine National Police (PNP) stations. Secondly, the local PNP lacks the essential technology (i.e., equipment and facilities) and the corresponding technical skills and capacities to effectively act on OSAEC reports and referrals, undertake surveillance, perform cyber-patrolling, and conduct entrapment operations.

The study indicates that the existence of, and perceived rise in, OSAEC cases in Angeles City appears to be linked to the lack of capabilities or competencies of child protection actors. Competency, in this case, refers to the extent of awareness, knowledge, and capacity of people to prevent, and respond to cases of OSAEC. It also refers to perceptions and attitudes that people have which do not support or help to address OSAEC. The lack of knowledge on children's rights, anti-trafficking laws, and the legal implications of committing OSAEC can cause family and community members to unknowingly commit the crime. Lack of information on how to report OSAEC cases, where to report them, and who to contact when confronted with OSAEC and VAC related situations serve as barriers.

Furthermore, barangay officials who have not been trained and provided with technical know-how would be unable to detect the presence of OSAEC even if it is happening within their neighborhood. Awareness-raising campaign on the Third National Plan of Action for Children (3rd NPAC) and PPAEVAC appears to be limited as well.

In terms of response programs for OSAEC, challenges identified by the key informants and observed by the researchers include: (1) the absence of a clear and strategic prevention and response plan for OSAEC and VAC in general; (2) inconsistent coordination and communication among agencies within the LGU or between the LGU and national agencies (particularly when undertaking rescue operations); (3) inadequate SSWF and allied workers working on VAC and OSAEC cases, and (4) insufficient and/or weak infrastructure – such as residential care facilities and a child protection unit – for responding to the needs of child victims.

VAC in Valenzuela City: The incidence of VAC, particularly child sexual abuse, is found to be high in Valenzuela City as it is in many parts of the country. Although data are available both at the local PNP and CSWDO, the absence of a unified system for tracking VAC cases prevents the LGU from providing consistent and reliable baseline data. Also, similar to the national trends on OSAEC which show that sexual violence mostly takes place in the home, a large number of OSAEC cases in the City may go unreported to the proper authorities. Monitoring of VAC cases is another priority area that the CSWDO has identified.

Valenzuela City is the first to be designated as a Pathfinding City by the Global Partnership to End VAC. Thus, Valenzuela City has developed a relatively advanced structure, system, programs, and process for responding to VAC. A broad range of CP services, an expanded SSWF, and multi-disciplinary teams were formed and developed by the LGU. Local policies such as the Children's Code and GAD Code were also formulated. Localization of the PPAEVAC and 3rd NPAC was underway before the pandemic started.

On one hand, the increasing number of reported VAC cases can be attributed to the effectiveness of the reporting system and structure set-up by the City. On the other hand, it can also be a manifestation of a weak or underdeveloped CP prevention program at the community level. Although it is laudable that the local government is able to respond to VAC concerns, it is important that the incidence of VAC is minimized and eventually controlled. The CSWDO of Valenzuela validated this observation and admitted the need to strengthen their community-based VAC prevention programs.

Early Pregnancy in Northern Samar: The Provincial Health Office (PHO) of Northern Samar recorded a total of 2,758 cases of early pregnancy from 2017 to 2020. In 2020, out of the 189 cases of early pregnancy, four (two percent) were adolescent girls ages 10-14, and 185 (98 percent) were within the age range of 15-19 years. Programs to address early pregnancy are lodged under the adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) program of the PHO, and the population program of the Provincial Population Office.

Sexual abuse was identified by the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) as the predominant concern of the province with regards to VAC. Current initiatives of the PSWDO of Northern Samar include the formulation of a Local Plan of Action for Children (LPAC) and a Local Plan of Action to End VAC. The advent of the pandemic, however, delayed the implementation of these initiatives.

Implementation of VAC prevention and response programs are lodged in the municipal social welfare and development offices of Northern Samar. At present, there are three challenges encountered by the PSWDO in implementing their role in addressing VAC. First is the limited support from regional and national agencies. Second is the absence of a reliable and valid data on CP due to an inefficient data collection system. Third is the absence of an effective monitoring and evaluation system at the provincial and municipal levels.

B. General Findings on Challenges to Combating VAC Across the Three Cases

In summary, what is common among the three LGUs with regards to curbing VAC are the following:

1. Challenges in producing consistent, valid, and reliable CP-VAC baseline data;
2. Difficulty in tracking down cases of VAC as these happen mostly within the home and in many cases, take place with the knowledge or consent of parents or family members, who are even sometimes perpetrators of the crime;
3. Difficulty in monitoring and assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of programs implemented due to the absence of appropriate systems and technical infrastructure;
4. Lack of a clear, established, and strategic local plan of action to address/prevent VAC;
5. Lack of awareness, appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitude of SSWF to undertake both preventive and responsive CP-VAC work; and
6. Insufficient awareness campaigns and inadequate VAC prevention programs at the grassroots level.

C. SSWF Human Resource Strengthening Program

The Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) of all three LGUs are currently at Maturity Level 2 or process-defined human resource management (HRM), which means that aside from following existing rules, guidelines, and policies of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Civil Service Commission (CSC), these LGUs have established their own set of standard operating procedures. Examples of HRM systems that the LGUs have in place are (1) a staffing plan aligned with the DBM Personal Services Itemization and Plantilla of Personnel (PSIPOP), (2) a recruitment plan based on CSC approved Qualification Standards (QS), and (3) a Learning and Development (L&D) policy following CSC guidelines (CSC and Australian AID-PARAHDF, 2014). Beyond these fundamentals, the three LGUs have also established their own operating procedures customized to their own needs and requirements. These include their own recruitment, selection and placement (RSP) processes, L&D budget and plans, and regular feedback and performance evaluation for all employees.

With regards to the LGUs' human resources, particularly the SSWF handling CP prevention and response work, the key findings are presented below across three domains: planning, developing and supporting.

Planning: There are three key observations under the planning component. First, the standard staff to client ratio is not always observed or practiced. This creates the problem of the SSWF performing multiple tasks or handling multiple sectors (Persons with Disabilities [PWD], senior citizens, women, children, etc.). This situation makes it difficult to ascertain how much of the SSWF time is allotted to child protection work. Also, the problem of inadequate SSWF staffing can mean having fewer social workers stationed at the community or barangay level. Benchmarks on caseloads of Registered Social Workers (RSWs) as well as on area and household coverage, have been established in various Administrative Orders of DSWD.5 Among the most relevant ones for this study are the following: for specialist approach, one RSW shall manage at most 20 individual cases that require intensive casework; one RSW for every 10 - 15 Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) cases; at least one Social Welfare Officer (SWO) II for every 3,000 households in a city/municipality to perform specialist function in case and family work and group work; and one SWO I for every three (3) municipalities in a province or 3,000 households in a city/municipality.

Second, the percentage of plantilla personnel to the total number of personnel working on child protection is low. Casual and contractual employees, although they are part of the Personnel Services (PS) budget, are hired by an LGU for less than six months. However, unless casual or contractual employees are hired permanently, they will need to be replaced before they reach their sixth month of employment. This is a concern if a social worker is hired under this term of employment because it affects continuity of work. Employees have to go through a learning curve every time they start a new job. The reality is that the quality and amount of work accomplished by new employees (without previous experience) will be significantly less than the quality and amount of work of a high performing regular employee.

With regards to the hiring of employees under Job Order (JO), possible limitations would be the work qualifications of the employee, as they are not covered by the qualification standards set by the CSC (as compared to regular and casual employees). Also, because of the lack of an employee-employer relationship, the authority and accountability of these workers are limited. As such, it also limits the extent of responsibilities that these workers can take on. One particular limitation is that non-regular employees are not allowed to make decisions nor can they represent the LGU. In the case of child protection work, the non-regular employees cannot participate in rescue operations nor can they represent rescued victims in court.

On the part of the SSWF, the lack of social protection, job security, and inequality in benefits under a contract of service or JO agreement are clear challenges that need to be addressed.

Third, a strategic workforce planning system does not seem to be in place yet in the LGUs studied. Workforce planning is “the process in which the organization attempts to estimate the demand for labour and evaluate the size, nature and sources of the supply which will be required to meet the demand” (Reily, 1996). A strategic workforce plan ensures that both the short- and long-term staffing needs of the organization are addressed. This is accomplished by embedding the workforce plan in the organization’s strategic planning process. This also implies that the competencies – i.e. knowledge, skills, and attitudes - needed to perform the work required are identified in the employee job descriptions.

At present, all three LGUs implement a staffing plan aligned with the DBM’s Personnel Services Itemization and Plantilla of Personnel (PSIPOP), and a recruitment plan based on the CSC approved Qualification Standards (QS).

QS refers to the education, experience, training, and eligibility required of employees. For example, the QS for a Social Welfare Officer IV would be a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, 3 years of relevant experience, 16 hours of relevant training, and eligibility for social worker as specified under R.A. 1080 (An Act Declaring the Bar and Board Examinations as Civil Service Examinations).

Developing: With regards to developing the SSWF, the training and development programs of the three LGUs were reviewed. By definition, a training program aims to develop employee knowledge and skills based on their current job assignment, whereas a development program focuses on the medium to long-term professional growth of the employee. Training generally refers to online or classroom type learning sessions. Development, on the other hand, is more varied in approach. Formal education, professional conferences, coaching and mentoring sessions, job rotation and job enlargement fall under this category.

In terms of a training program, basic standards are in place such as minimum training hours consistent with the QS (e.g. 16 hours per employee per year), and an approved training budget based on the LGU's requirements. A needs assessment is conducted by asking each individual to identify their learning needs. Opportunities for training are variable across the LGUs, but are generally lacking for the non-plantilla personnel. Training sponsorship from non-government organizations and funding institutions are found to be indispensable. Likewise, the support provided by the local government executive is considered vital in ensuring that the people are given the training they need.

In terms of an employee development program, it appears that there are very limited or nil opportunities for such. Budget wise, both the HRMO and Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO) did not mention any allocations for the development (e.g. further education, advanced courses, coaching and mentoring, etc.) of their staff.

Supporting: There are two key observations under the SSWF supporting component. First, a formal, sixteen-hour on-boarding program is conducted by the Office of Human Resource Management for plantilla personnel in the three LGUs. For non-plantilla personnel, the conduct of an on-boarding program is the responsibility of the LSWDO. In many instances, this is an informal process that is implemented mainly by the immediate supervisor. An on-boarding program is an important component of the employee socialization process, which happens immediately after the recruitment and hiring process. The on-boarding program provides a good transition for the newly-hired personnel, enabling them to have a better understanding of the organization that they are getting into. It helps new employees acquire social and task-related knowledge faster, allowing them to become more effective in their work. Thus, if an on-boarding program is not properly provided to non-plantilla personnel, these newly-hired LSWDO staff may experience more difficulty in learning their tasks and may also have a more difficult time adjusting to the organization.

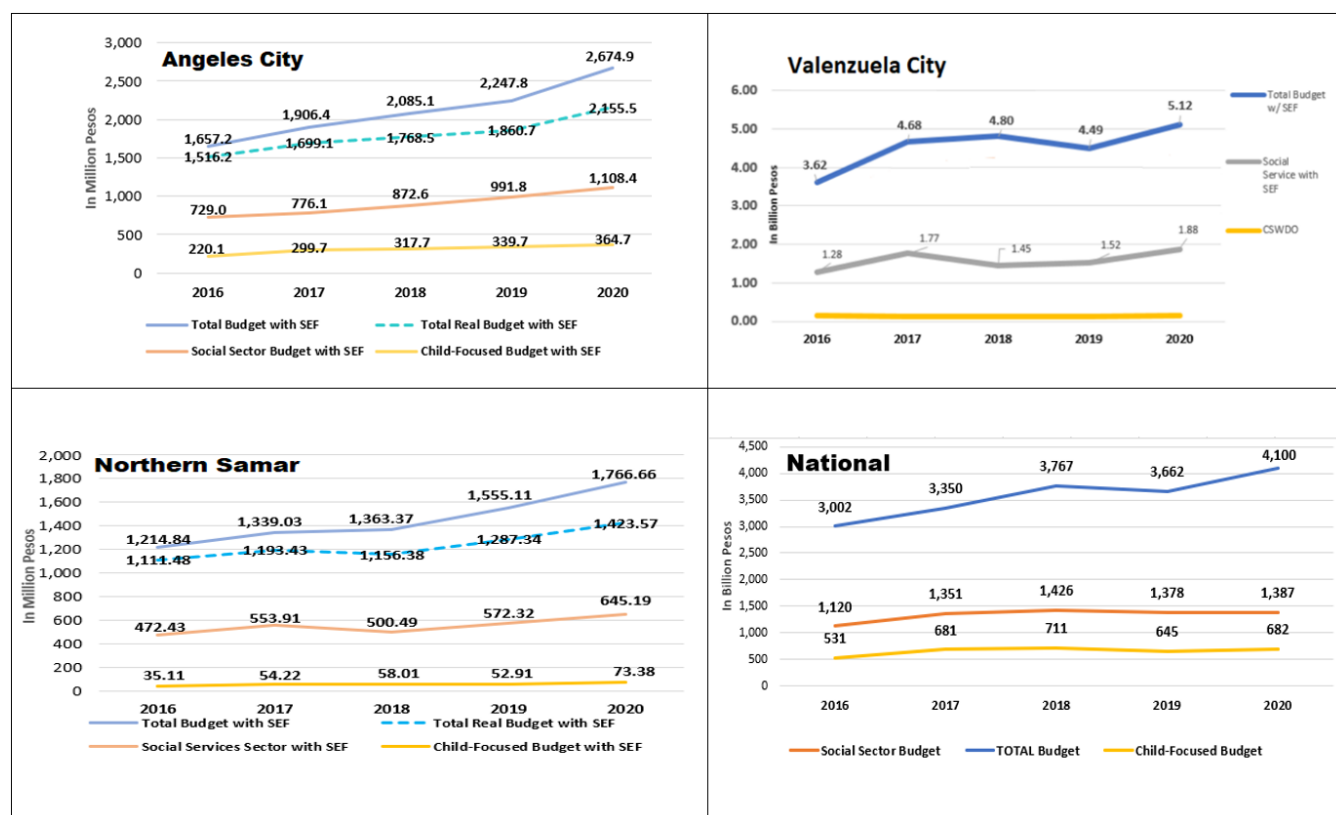
Second, feedback sessions are scheduled and conducted by the supervisors with their staff. Mid-year performance reviews and year-end evaluations are likewise conducted using the Individual Performance Commitment (IPC) form accomplished by the staff. In addition to the IPC form, a clear and relevant job description can greatly help in the performance review process.

It can help incumbents in clarifying their work priorities (given the multiple tasks that they are responsible for) and in quantifying their contribution to the work of the LSWDO. It can also decrease the possibility of having unfair assessments. However, the study found that not all SSWF are provided with job descriptions that are consistent or aligned to their current tasks.

D. Public Investments in Children and SSWF Strengthening for Child Protection

The total budget of the three LGUs covered in the study has been generally increasing along with the allocation for the social sector while the child-focused budgets have likewise increased at a slightly higher rate. These growth rates are comparable to the national average budget increments. In real terms however, the increases are essentially nominal (Table 1: Budget Overview, Three Covered LGUs and National Level, 2016-2020).

Table 1: Budget Overview, Three covered LGUs and National Level, 2016 - 2020



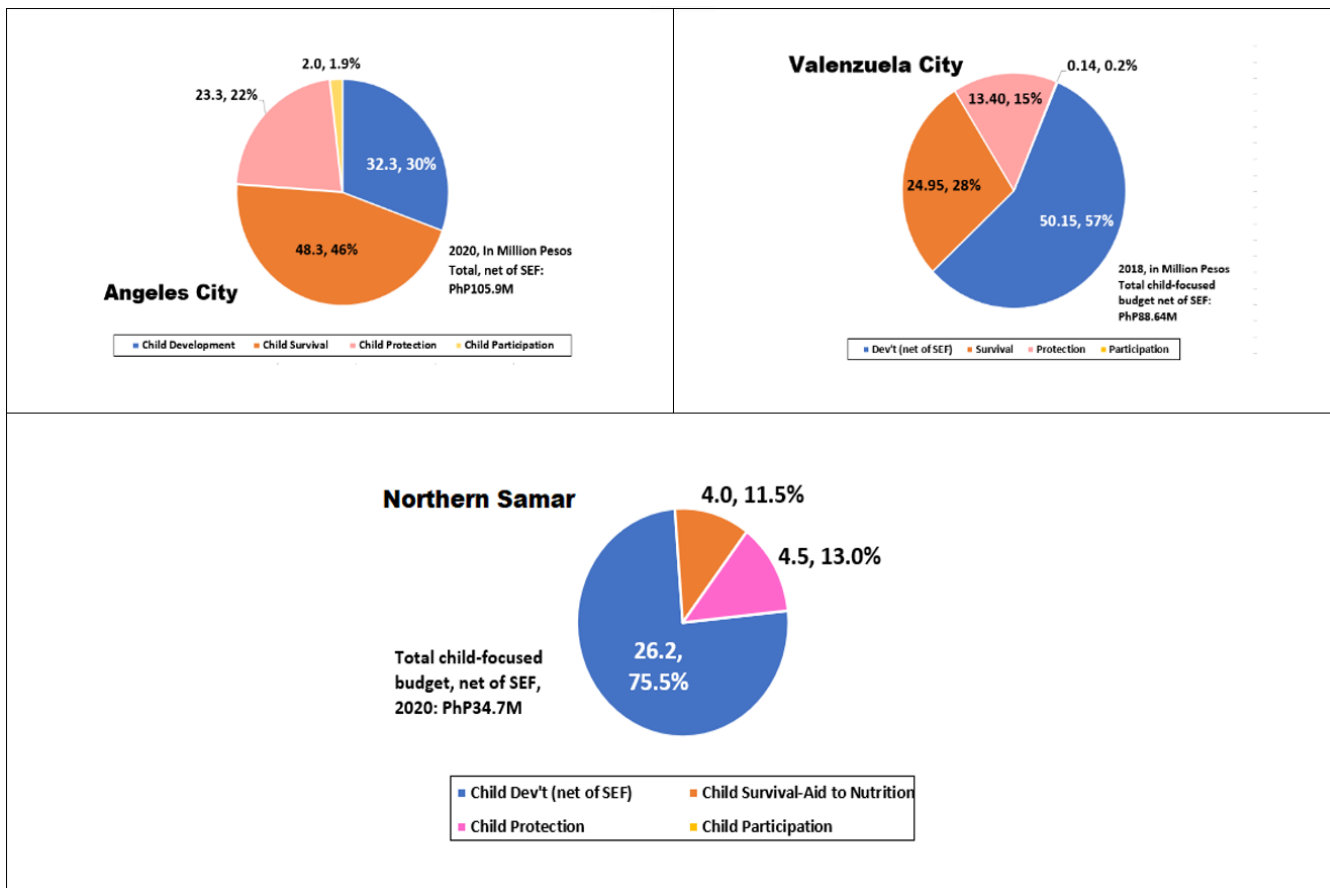
Source: Summary of Appropriations; Statement of Appropriations, Allotments, and Obligations, Angeles City, Valenzuela City; Statement of Fund Operation, 2016-2020, Northern Samar Child focused Programs, Projects and Activities (PPAs), 2016-2020, Northern Samar; General Appropriations Act FY 2016-2020

Child-focused programs, projects and activities (PPAs) are included in the Annual Investment Programs (AIPs) of the LGUs and part of these are eventually approved and incorporated in the Appropriations Ordinance. These PPAs can be classified into allocations for child development, survival, protection and participation.

Analyzing the distribution of the child-focused budget by child rights categories, Development gets the biggest share, and followed by Survival across the three case studies. Child Protection has a much smaller share across the three LGUs, while Participation is practically nil.

These findings are consistent with national trends where, by child rights categories, allocations for child protection and participation are also minimal compared with development. The low budget allocated for children, particularly for protection and participation, can be seen in the per capita allocation, both in nominal and real terms. This level of spending is way below the resources required to hire and maintain regular social workers based on the established benchmarks set by DSWD as cited above to adequately respond to the cases of violence against children (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Child-focused Budget, by Child Rights Categories, Three Covered LGUs, 2016-2020



Source: Summary of Appropriations; Statement of Appropriations, Allotments, and Obligations, Angeles City, Valenzuela City; Statement of Fund Operation, 2016-2020, Northern Samar Child focused Programs, Projects and Activities (PPAs), 2016-2020, Northern Samar; General Appropriations Act FY 2016-2020

The continuing challenge is how to increase the allocation for protection and participation in absolute terms and in terms of share in the budget pie. The study noted that what little budget went to child protection, this was mostly allocated for response programs and rehabilitation facilities, with minimal share for prevention programs. This is the situation in all three areas covered by the study.

By expense class, the LGUs covered in this study allocated a significant share of their respective budgets for Personnel Services (PS). In Angeles, for example, the average share of PS to the total budget for the period 2016-2020 is 29.1%. This may be small compared to the mandated 45% cap for personnel cost. However, this does not present the full picture since budget allocation for Job Order (JO) and Contract of Service (COS) are covered under Miscellaneous Operations and Other Expense (MOOE). This situation is reflected in the personnel configuration of the LSWDO where a significant number of personnel are JOs and COS.

The number of and budget allocations for personnel under the LSWDO have been generally increasing from 2016 to 2020 in three LGUs covered in this study. In the case of Valenzuela, the budget and number of positions for regular social welfare personnel have tripled from 2017 to 2020. The salary levels and annual increments for staff are consistent with the Salary Standardization Law. It is also noted that permanent and casual personnel enjoy substantial benefits which nearly doubles their gross income for CSWDO staff in the cities of Angeles and Valenzuela. The steady increments in the allocations for personnel, therefore, are accounted for by the annual salary rate hikes and the increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent (casual) positions.

There are concerns, however, on the significant number of plantilla positions which remained unfilled. In Valenzuela, for example, only half of the social welfare officer positions have been filled in 2020 while the social welfare assistant as well as the aide positions were never occupied from 2017-2020. For 2020, of the 90 positions available under the CSWDO, only 65 or 72% of these positions were occupied while the rest remain vacant. Moreover, tenure remains a key issue in the three LGUs given that the majority of the SSWF holds non-plantilla positions. This issue extends to staff engaged by the local government on JO and COS status. This situation also impacts on consistency and transparency in the budget process and analysis because of the difficulty in generating key budget indicators and in tracking actual expenditure on personnel.

The study notes that the LGUs covered by the three case studies have basically laid out the key components of a functional CPS. There are functional LSWDOs with financial resources and human resource complements. There are existing child protection structures which are necessary to provide care and rehabilitation to victims of abuse, exploitation and neglect, although at varying levels of scale and quality of responsiveness. A large part of the programs and budgets for child protection are earmarked for response and rehabilitation programs. The study, however, noted huge gaps in implementing and strengthening prevention programs. The LGUs continue to face challenges in data collection, information management and monitoring and evaluation systems.

In light of the various issues that have been raised, one major recommendation is for all three LGUs to invest in and develop a unified system for collecting and reporting VAC cases. There can be no organized response to VAC without reliable data. This data will be an important input to the next step, which is to develop a strategic LSWDO plan to address VAC in line with current national programs on child protection, specifically, the 3rd National Plan of Action for Children and the Philippine Plan of Action to Eliminate Violence against Children (PPAEVAC).

Generally speaking, the main problems of the three LGUs are (a) inadequate and unreliable data on VAC, and (b) inadequate structures, systems and SSWF to deal with ever-increasing VAC cases. Compared to the other two LGUs, Valenzuela City has a higher level of institutional capacity to address VAC, but the continuous rise in the number of VAC cases makes it necessary for the city to constantly hire more SSWF.

A. On Human Resources.

There are persistent challenges faced by the LGUs in strengthening the SSWF in terms of skills, capacity, caseloads, coordination, training and support. There is a need to augment the current human resource complement given the rising cases of VAC and the need for more focused work on case management and other child protection work. Sustained training of the SSWF is required to build capabilities for the various sensitive tasks they manage, coordinate and undertake. These needs are reflected in the expressed desire, particularly of social workers, for more trainings, more updated orientation on national plans related to child protection, and for additional staff to lessen their heavy caseloads.

The LGU strategic plan should include the goals and targets in VAC reduction to be achieved, as well as the programs, plans, and activities to be implemented. It should also include the structures and systems that must be strengthened and/or created in order to achieve the goals and targets. By having a clear plan and framework in addressing VAC, the LSWDO will now have the capacity to strategically plan their workforce. The next step for the LSWDO is to create a strengthening program for the SSWF that will staff the structures and operate the systems that are in place, or will be established.

However, in order to have a strong social service workforce to address the problem of VAC, it is important for the LGU to go beyond Qualification Standards and hire and retain employees that possess the competencies needed to prevent and respond to VAC. Thus, the development of a competency framework for the LSWDO is also recommended. Some examples of functional competencies for Social Worker IV would be possessing critical thinking, can competently undertake research, can engage diversity and difference in practice, can advance human rights and socio-economic justice, and possess empathy.

With regards to performance management, the identification of functional competencies for SWOs is critical in assessing the support needed by the SSWF in terms of training and development. It appears that the implementation of a formal coaching and mentoring program need to be strengthened in the LGUs under study. Coaching and mentoring has been identified as a key area for development among the SSWF, particularly those occupying supervisory positions.

It is in this context that the study recommends that the LGUs **link proactively with two national government programs - the Civil Service Commissions' PRIME-HRM and the DSWD's Technical Assistance and Resource Augmentation Program (TARA)**. These two programs will contribute significantly towards enabling the LGUs to develop the structures and systems to address VAC strategically.

PRIME-HRM is a mechanism for assessing the HRM competencies, systems, and practices of government agencies, including LGUs. The PRIME-HRM framework consists of four maturity levels - Level 1 (Transactional), Level 2 (Process - defined), Level 3 (Integrated) and Level 4 (Strategic). Performance is measured using maturity level indicators in four core HRM systems - (1) Recruitment, Selection, & Placement; (2) Learning and Development (L&D), (3) Performance Management, and (4) Rewards and Recognition.

Given that the goal is to strategically strengthen the LGU's human resources, particularly the SSWF handling CP prevention and response work, the LGUs' HRMO would need to advance to strategic HRM status (i.e. Maturity Level 4).

At this level, Human Resource (HR) would already have an integrated system that meets the long-term needs of the LGU. Some of the systems in place would be a strategic workforce planning system, a fully-functioning human resource information system, an L&D investment plan, a three-year strategic L&D plan, a strategic talent plan, and a performance management system, among others.

The DSWD TARA, on the other hand, is a program that aims to support LGUs, and other institutions and organizations to effectively implement programs, projects, and services for disadvantaged families and communities. Technical assistance is provided in the form of training, orientation, workshops, consultation, conferences, coaching, and mentoring, among others. Resource augmentation comes in the form of supplies and materials, funding, and human resources. TARA plans are implemented on a 3-year cycle. The DSWD offices, bureaus, and services are tapped by the FO to provide the identified needs of the LGU. Strengthening LGU partnership with DSWD through the TARA can significantly help not only in developing the SSWF but also in improving the entire LSWDO operation.

However, the improvement in systems and structures can only go so far if VAC cases keep rising. Ultimately, the structures and systems (and the SSWF that operates these) will be overwhelmed if the number of VAC cases continue to rise. Thus, the study also recommends that the LGUs **develop a VAC prevention program anchored on community-based education and vigilance**. This is because a community-based prevention program strengthens the SSWF by minimizing its workload, and lessens the possibility of it being overworked and overwhelmed by ever-increasing numbers of VAC cases. Tapping the local community expands the SSWF as barangay tanods, parents, youth and other stakeholders become de-facto volunteer members of SSWF, doing education, surveillance and even detection work.

Finally, **an effective and efficient program monitoring and evaluation system** needs to be established both at the community and LGU levels.

B. Partnership building and cooperation.

Partnership with national agencies, particularly with DSWD, the Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) among others will be critical in upscaling the work on child protection at the local level. Further, partnership with Civil Society Organizations

(CSOs) and Peoples Organizations (POs) can go a long way in strengthening community-based programs on child protection. Local stakeholders, including children themselves, should be given ample space to participate in the development and implementation of policies and programs on child protection. A citizens' CP constituency at the grassroots level can constructively and proactively engage the LGUs on a sustained basis to provide quality, efficient, effective and equitable CP services. This is also a good way to promote responsiveness, transparency and accountability on the part of the LGUs.

C. On Spending Level on Child Protection. Finally, there is an urgent need to progressively increase the budget allocation and utilization of funds for child protection, consistent with established benchmarks, to cover resources needed to effectively address the rising cases of abuse and violence against children. This should include resources for personnel, organization development, coordination, capacity building, facility operations and maintenance,

child protection programs and services, case handling and management, information management, and advocacy, among others.

LGUs must ensure and improve the visibility, traceability and transparency of child protection budget and expenditure for effective tracking of plans, program implementation and fund utilization. In this regard, disaggregated budget lines for child-focused programs, projects and activities are recommended - from planning, to budget authorization, to fund utilization and reporting. A system for tagging of child-focused budgets is one way for ensuring visibility and traceability of funds earmarked for children. Along with this, stakeholders' participation in the planning and budget process to strengthen the public finance management for children. This study also recommends the increased allocation for prevention and early detection programs and activities such as training, information, advocacy, monitoring and referral system, and diversion activities such as sports and cultural programs and events.

This study provides insights on the critical gaps in the investment level and human resource capacities of three LGUs to effectively address the escalating incidence of violence against children. While child protection systems have been established by these LGUs (Angeles City, Valenzuela City, and Northern Samar Province), important challenges to these systems have been identified (e.g. human resources, finances, laws and policies, etc.) and recommendations have been outlined. This study underscores the value of strengthening the institutional capacity of these LGUs' SSWF in relation to planning, developing and supporting its human resources anchored on established benchmarks and standards. It also highlights the importance of significantly increasing budgetary support for child protection programs. All these will go a long way to increasing the capacity of these LGUs to more effectively combat VAC in their areas, a development outcome most worth pursuing.

⁶ A child protection system is generally agreed to be comprised of the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management.

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RAPID ASSESSMENT OF DEVOLVED EMERGENCY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The Rapid Assessment of Devolved Emergency Programs and Services attempts to assess the current capacity of local government units (LGUs) to respond to the challenges of the new normal and in anticipation of the Mandanas ruling implementation. The Mandanas ruling stipulates that LGU internal revenue allotments (IRA) should come from all national taxes, as mandated under the 1991 Local Government Code, and not from just the taxes collected by the Bureau of Internal Revenue within the LGU jurisdictions as was the usual practice. The study also aims to draw lessons and insights on the motivation of the LGUs to implement devolved emergency programs and determine LGUs emergency program success in terms of relevance, efficiency and sustainability. The key findings suggest the need to (i) strengthen the alignment and cascading of plans across all levels of administrative units; (ii) harmonize and prescribe a comprehensive information management system which the LGUs can utilize as data and information source for their local planning activities; (iii) provide guidance on the structure, staffing, and competency requirements of the LSWDOs based on the income classification of the LGUs; (iv) DSWD should create minimum standard guidelines per devolved programs and services; (v) DSWD should introduce the targeting and selection system to the implementing LGUs; and (vii) Ensure Plan and Program Accountability through Monitoring and Evaluation.

Keywords: *Emergency Programs and Services, Mandanas Ruling, New Normal*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study and Review of Related Literature

The enactment of the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991 was a major shift to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and to local government units (LGUs). Devolution, as implemented in the Philippines, involved the decentralization of certain administrative and fiscal authority and responsibility from the national government to local government. After the enactment of the LGC, the Department redirected its functions and operations and transformed from a direct service provider to a technical assistance provider. The DSWD is now a national government agency mandated to provide assistance to LGUs, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), other National Government Agencies (NGAs), People's Organizations (POs) and members of civil society in effectively implementing programs, projects, and services that will alleviate poverty and empower disadvantaged individuals, families and communities for an improved quality of life as well as implement statutory and specialized programs which are directly lodged with the Department and/or not yet devolved to LGUs (Executive Order no. 221 series of 2003).

The 1997 study *Local Government Financing of Social Service Sectors in a Decentralized Regime: Special Focus on Provincial Governments in 1993 and 1994* by Rosario Manasan analyzed the determinants of LGU spending on social services and human development priorities in 1993 and 1994. It showed that LGUs with higher per capita Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) tend to be associated with higher per capita social sector expenditure and higher per capita human priority expenditure. It was also mentioned in the study that during the early stage of devolution, provincial government expenditures on social services (i.e. total social services, education, health and human development priorities) appear to be unrelated to the human development index. That is, provinces with higher human development index (HDI) spent more on all the social sectors than those with lower HDI. The same study also measures degree of fiscal decentralization using four alternative indicators (i.e., Revenue Decentralization Ratio, Expenditure Decentralization Ratio, Modified Expenditure Decentralization Ratio and Financial Autonomy Ratio. Among the four indicators, the expenditure decentralization ratio provides a better picture of the degree of fiscal decentralization over time in the Philippine case. It captures very well the shift in expenditure responsibilities that devolution brought about.

The 2007 in-house study conducted by the DSWD entitled *Assessment of the Implementation of the DSWD's Devolved Programs and Services* revealed that only 60% of the covered LGUs continued to deliver all the devolved DSWD mandated services. Implementation of devolved services focuses on the family, specifically Child Care (Day Care Service, Marriage Counseling, and Responsible Parenthood). The least delivered services such as Social and Vocational Preparation for job placement, Community Participation and Skills Development Program, Social and Vocational Preparation for employment, Balik Probinsiya and Aftercare Follow-up, are no longer priority issues to be addressed. It was also observed that there are uneven levels of implementation across LGUs as attributed to budget constraints, which are affected by income of LGUs, priority and support of LCEs and other LGU officials. The same survey showed that 73% of the LSWDOs were poorly funded (PDPB, 2007).

Studies have reported how devolution in the Philippines failed to enhance community participation in some municipalities and how it sustained corruption when politicians became the center of decision-making and existing power structures persist despite decentralization, compounded by a lack of accountability measures (Liwanag and Wyss, 2018). National agencies also have not yet geared operations towards full devolution of functions as defined in the LGC, and LGUs are not yet fully empowered to take on these roles. Moreover, despite the increased revenue-raising authority given to the LGUs, studies showed that generally, the LGUs have not been able to generate sufficient revenue to cover operational costs of devolved functions. The largest income source of LGUs is still external, with the IRA from the national government being the biggest contributor. While of the local income sources, business tax was the largest contributor followed by real property tax. Throughout the years, there has been a rapid conversion of municipalities into cities which is a logical response to the existing IRA formula.

In order to accelerate the process and be able to see the output and outcome of this devolution, the national government should shift their focus from the direct provision of services to the setting of policies and standards and provision of technical assistance and financial incentives to the LGUs. Improving local service delivery is about achieving development outcomes necessary for the enhancement of human lives (Soriano et al, 2005). The effective provision of public goods and services has a big impact on the well-being of the people, especially the poor.

In terms of policies and standards, policies that would maintain optimal balance of decentralized and centralized functions needs to be established, even as the system remains decentralized overall, and also focus on providing an environment that have to be in place in order for decentralization to be effective in improving the system (Liwanag and Wyss, 2018). Further, the criteria for the allocation of multi-sectoral funds from the national and across the LGUs should be performance-based and established with clear objectives.

B. Statement of the Problem

Now that the current COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the whole country, provision of timely emergency services by the LGUs are put into test. Systems and mechanisms in place are challenged by this new normal. In addition, the LGUs are anticipating the implementation of the Executive Order No. 138, series of 2021 or the Full Devolution of Certain Functions of Executive Branch to Local Government. In anticipation of the implementation of Executive Order 138, the total shares of the LGUs from the national taxes is expected to significantly increase starting Fiscal Year 2022 in line with the implementation of the Mandanas ruling. However, this may not immediately translate into greater spending for the social welfare and development sector as observed in the previously mentioned 1997 Manasan study.

Aligned with the Department's role of being the enabler of LGUs as well as the monitor of quality assurance/standards in the management and implementation of social welfare programs and related services, the Policy Development and Planning Bureau (PDPB) spearheaded this Rapid Assessment of Devolved Emergency Programs and Services study. The evidence and results of the said study shall guide the LGUs through the Local Social Welfare and Development Offices (LSWDOs) in implementing emergency SWD programs and services anchored on the context of a new normal environment due to the pandemic and increased share from the national budget.

C. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to assess the current capacity of LGUs to respond to the challenges of the new normal and in anticipation of the Mandanas ruling implementation. The study looked into two (2) main facets of local emergency program implementation given the existing resources of the LGUs:

1. What devolved DSWD emergency programs and services are still being implemented by the LGU?
2. What are the determinants of LGUs' emergency program success given the new normal context?

The second main objective of the study is to evaluate the devolution of emergency programs in terms of relevance, efficiency, and sustainability.

More specifically, the study looked into the following:

1. What devolved DSWD emergency programs and services are still being implemented by the LGU?
2. What motivates the Local Government Units to implement any of the devolved emergency programs and services?
3. To what extent are the different administrative levels, namely the provincial, city and municipal social welfare and development offices (P/C/MSWDO) implement the devolved emergency programs and services as planned, i.e. following prescribed processes and standards as defined in the guidelines of DSWD?
4. What factors facilitated or hindered the delivery of devolved emergency program outputs? Vis-à-vis a new normal environment?
5. How will the additional resources due to Mandanas ruling affect the sustainability of existing devolved emergency programs? To what extent is the readiness of the LGUs to accommodate additional spending for emergency programs and mechanisms due to the new normal brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic?

D. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The assessment focuses on the devolved emergency programs and services that are being implemented by P/C/MSWDOs. It covers the analysis of data and information coming from the DSWD Central Office, DSWD Field Offices, Provincial, City, and Municipal Offices.

The rapid assessment employs a mixed method approach that includes qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Data and relevant information were collected through mobile means (virtual key informant interviews and online surveys). Since the study operated on a tight timeline,

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design and Respondents

This is a descriptive study that employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs to meet the objectives of the research. The three (3) methods conducted to collect data include the (1) review of available secondary data, (2) administration of online survey instrument with LSWDOs, Local Planning and Development Office (LPDO), Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (LDRRMO), Local Budget Office (LBO) and Local Accounting Office (LAO), and (3) Key Informant Interviews (KII) with Local Chief Executives (LCEs).

B. Sampling Selection and Design

There are 13 LGUs covered in this study, composed of seven (7) provinces, four (4) cities and two (2) municipalities.

Non-probability purposive sampling was employed in the selection of LGUs. Target provinces, cities and municipalities were selected using the following criteria:

1. LGUs representing the three level of service delivery (Low, Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3) based on the results of Service Delivery Assessment Tool ¹conducted by the SWIDB;
2. LGUs that are awardees of Seal of Good Local Governance² (CY 2017-2019);
3. LGUs representing the income classes (1st to 6th classes).

¹ The Service Delivery Assessment Tool is a tool developed by DSWD to assess the service delivery of LSWDOs, focusing on three (3) work areas, namely, Administration and Organization, Program Management and Institutional Mechanisms. Based on the assessment, the LSWDO's levels of SWD service delivery, from Level 1 to Level 2 to Level 3 will be identified.

² The Seal of Good Local Governance is an award, incentive, honor and recognition-based program for all LGUs, wherein the LGU has to pass the seven governance areas including Financial Administration, Disaster Preparedness, Social Protection, Peace and Order, Business Friendliness, Environmental Protection and Tourism.

Below is the list of LGUs covered in this rapid assessment study.

Table 1: Targeted sample provinces, cities and municipalities by set criteria

LGU	TYPE	SDA	SGLG	Income Class
Ilagan City	City	Level 3	3x awardee	1st Class
Iloilo	Province	Level 3	2x awardee	1st Class
Kalinga	Province	Level 3	1x awardee	3rd Class
Zarraga	Municipality	Level 3	3x awardee	4th Class
Tabuk City	City	Level 3		5th Class
Laguna	Province	Level 2	3x awardee	1st Class
Bataan	Province	Level 2	3x awardee	1st Class
Balanga City	City	Level 2	2x awardee	4th Class
Koronadal City	City	Level 1		3rd Class
Zamboanga Del Sur	Province	Low		1st Class
Abra	Province	Low		3rd Class
Surigao del Norte	Province	Low		2nd Class
Mainit	Municipality		1x awardee	4th Class

C. Data Gathering Activities

The following data gathering activities were conducted throughout the study:

Review of Documents. All existing and available guidelines on the implementation of DSWD devolved programs and services were reviewed and served as reference in developing the framework of the study. Previous local and foreign studies related to the implementation of social welfare decentralization and related administrative data were also reviewed and studied.

Conduct of Virtual Key Informant Interviews (KII). Structured interviews with the Local Chief Executives (LCEs) were conducted for the study. The KII questionnaire included questions on the political agenda of the LCE, insights on meaningful devolution and sustainability of implementing devolved emergency programs and services, their experience on Emergency Services in the context of new normal environment, and their own assessment on the readiness of their LGU on the Mandanas ruling.

Administration of Mobile Survey. For the quantitative part, the research team surveyed the LSWDOs, LPDOs, LDRMOs, LBOs and LAOs of the 24 LGUs covered. The said departments/units of the LGU were asked about the following areas and information: (1) Geographic Identification and Situation of LGUs; (2) Fiscal and Monetary Data; (3) Motivation of LGUs to implement devolved emergency programs and services; (4) Planning and Development Processes; (5) Program Management and Implementation; (6) Satisfaction on the Government Procurement Processes, Liquidation and Reporting; and (7) Experiences on the Government Process for the Management of Devolved Programs and Services.

Conduct of Virtual Key Informant Interviews (KII). Structured interviews with the Local Chief Executives (LCEs) were conducted for the study. The KII questionnaire included questions on the political agenda of the LCE, insights on meaningful devolution and sustainability of implementing devolved emergency programs and services, their experience on Emergency Services in the context of new normal environment, and their own assessment on the readiness of their LGU on the Mandanas ruling.

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D. Pre-testing of Research Instruments

All tools that were used in the study including the guide questionnaires and survey form were pre-tested prior to the finalization and the conduct of the data collection activities. Actual pre-testing of the data gathering tools was conducted in San Rafael Bulacan. These identified sites were representative of the criteria set for the target LGUs and they were also relatively near the Metro Manila area which were also convenient for the data collection team.

E. Data Processing and Analysis

All data and information were analyzed based on the conceptual framework and assessment objectives.

The qualitative data from the Key Informant Interviews with LCEs and some sections of the survey were gathered using notes and documentation. Deductive approach was used in the study which involved the analysis of qualitative data based on the research questions. Recurring themes, opinions, and beliefs were then identified, reviewed and combined to come up with the content and story of the data which answered the research questions.

On the quantitative data gathered through the survey, descriptive statistical analyses were performed on the responses of the sampled group. Measures of central tendency (means, medians, and other percentiles) and dispersion (ranges) were computed.

III. RESULTS AND SUMMARY OF OTHER KEY FINDINGS

Devolved DSWD emergency programs and services are still being implemented by the LGU

Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness, Disaster Relief, Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) and Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP) are continuously being implemented by the LGUs.

Across the LGUs surveyed in this study, the devolved DSWD emergency programs and services that they have continuously implemented includes the following, disaster mitigation and preparedness services (100%), disaster relief or response services (92%), AICS (92%) and supplementary feeding program (33%). Based on the survey conducted, other emergency programs (i.e Balik Probinsya, Cash for Work/Food for Work and Emergency Shelter Assistance) are lump under AICS and depend on the occurrence of disaster events as well as the actual downloading of funds from the DSWD.

Moreover, among the emergency services and programs, AICS consistently receives high demand, followed by disaster relief services. The programs that receive moderate demand from the communities are supplementary feeding program, food for work/cash for work, and disaster mitigation and preparedness services. Low ranking based on demand include the emergency shelter assistance and the balik probinsya program.

There was disparity between the allocation and utilization of funds on Emergency Programs and Services.

The LGUs, as mandated by the LGC of 1991 and Republic Act 10121 (Philippine Disaster Reduction and Management Act), are the first responders during disasters. This is affirmed by the data obtained from the sampled LGUs as shown in Figure 1 where budget allocation along emergency programs and services are increasing from 2018 to 2020. However, fund utilization continuously dropped from 74.3% in 2018 to 52.1% in 2020. These findings were similar to the fiscal analysis done by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) that where the 5% Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Fund (LDRRMF) fund is consistently underutilized among LGUs (PIDS, 2018).

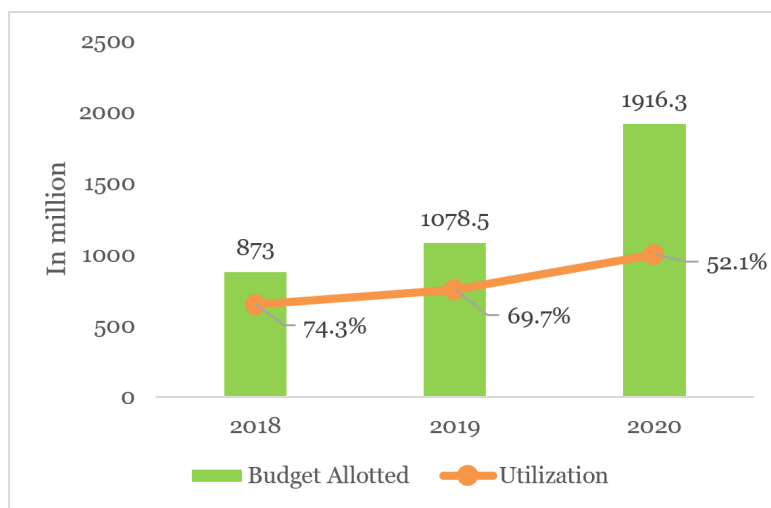


Figure 1: Budget allocation and utilization among emergency programs and services, 2018-2020

Among emergency programs and services implemented by the respondent LGUs, disaster mitigation and preparedness had the largest budget allocation with a total of Php2.7billion in 2018-2020, followed by disaster relief with Php839million and AICS with Php12.3 million, respectively.

Motivation of the Local Government Units to implement the devolved programs and services

Sufficiency of Program funds and Support from Local Chief Executive (LCE) are some of the primary motivations of LGUs to implement devolved emergency programs and services.

Motivation refers to the internal and external factors that affect the favorable or priority implementation of devolved emergency programs and services by the LGUs. Internal factors refer to controllable factors of the LGUs for the successful implementation of devolved emergency programs and services. Meanwhile, external factors are outside and under no control of the LGUs but with significant contribution in successful implementation of programs and services.

Internal Factor

Among the internal motivating factors for implementing devolved programs and services, the following got favorable responses: (1) sufficiency of program funds; (2) fiscal empowerment to generate more revenues; (3) monitoring and evaluation; (4) human resource; and (5) efficiency of program delivery.

The survey responses are aligned with the interview responses of the LCEs who mentioned that funding and availability of budget allocation is a major factor to ensure the ongoing and sustainable implementation of the devolved emergency services and programs.

Human resource in the LGU is another major motivating factor for the implementation of emergency programs and services. Among all the surveyed LSWDOs, almost half of the total workforce is holding regular plantilla positions and the other half are holding either contractual and job order positions, especially among the technical and administrative level staff. Another highlight on human resource factors is that all of the surveyed LSWDOs and LDRRMOs affirmed that more than half of their staff are performing multiple roles in order to deliver the mandated devolved emergency services and programs.

On capability building interventions, the sampled LGUs reported that more than half of their workforce complement have attended training activities in the past three years especially on disaster mitigation and preparedness, disaster relief services, and supplementary feeding program.

External Factors

Among the external factors, support from the LCE was found to be the most important factor, followed by convergence of programs and services, resource augmentation from National Government Agencies (NGAs), Technical Assistance from the provincial government and NGAs, volunteer management, partnership with non-government organizations, as well as regulatory and oversight functions of NGAs.

Since convergence is one of the top external factors, LGUs have reported presence of mechanisms for convergence on program implementation through the institutional linkages established among the mandated local councils and technical working teams.

More than half of the sampled municipalities and cities agree that technical assistance and resource augmentation as well as joint and coordinated implementation of priority projects

some of the aspects the provincial government can look into as regards implementation of devolved emergency programs and services

The LGUs affirm that partnerships and linkages among Non-Government Agencies are beneficial for the implementation of devolved emergency programs and services because some of these partnerships result into capability-building interventions for the program staff. However, it is also noted that some of these partnerships are also one-time linkages or activities especially during disaster response wherein volunteers or partner organizations provide augmentation to the LGUs in the form of cash, in kind donations, or assist in the repacking of food and non-food items.

Extent of implementing the devolved emergency programs and services by the LGUs following prescribed processes and standards as defined by the National Government Agencies

Planning and Development Process

Majority or 58% of the LGU respondents “usually practiced” the planning and development process, however, for some LGUs M&E system and alignment of local development plan and national plan needs to improve.

For each process of local and development planning, the respondents were asked to rate their level of practice on the given statement prescribed in the DILG planning guidelines. Majority (58.33%) of the respondents “usually practiced” the prescribed processes of local development planning. However, there were some (16.67%) respondents “sometimes practiced” the given processes. Low scores are commonly attributed on the alignment of the provincial development plan to its component LGUs, inadequate monitoring and evaluation system that will be useful in assessing their own development plan.

Figure 2 shows the level of practices of LGUs on the process of development of Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan (PDPFP)/Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP), Executive-Legislative Agenda (ELA), Provincial/City Development Investment Program (PDIP/CDIP) and Annual Investment Plan (AIP). Generally, the level of practice of four (4) major expected planning documents in LGUs are point to the right and interpreted that most of the identified processes are being practiced.

When it comes to PDPFP and CDP development process, majority (58.33%) of the respondents always practiced the stated processes, however, there were 25% respondents, who rated that they “sometimes practiced” the utilization of CDP in crafting PDPFP, review of municipal/city development plan by the province and evaluation of previous PDPFP/CDP.

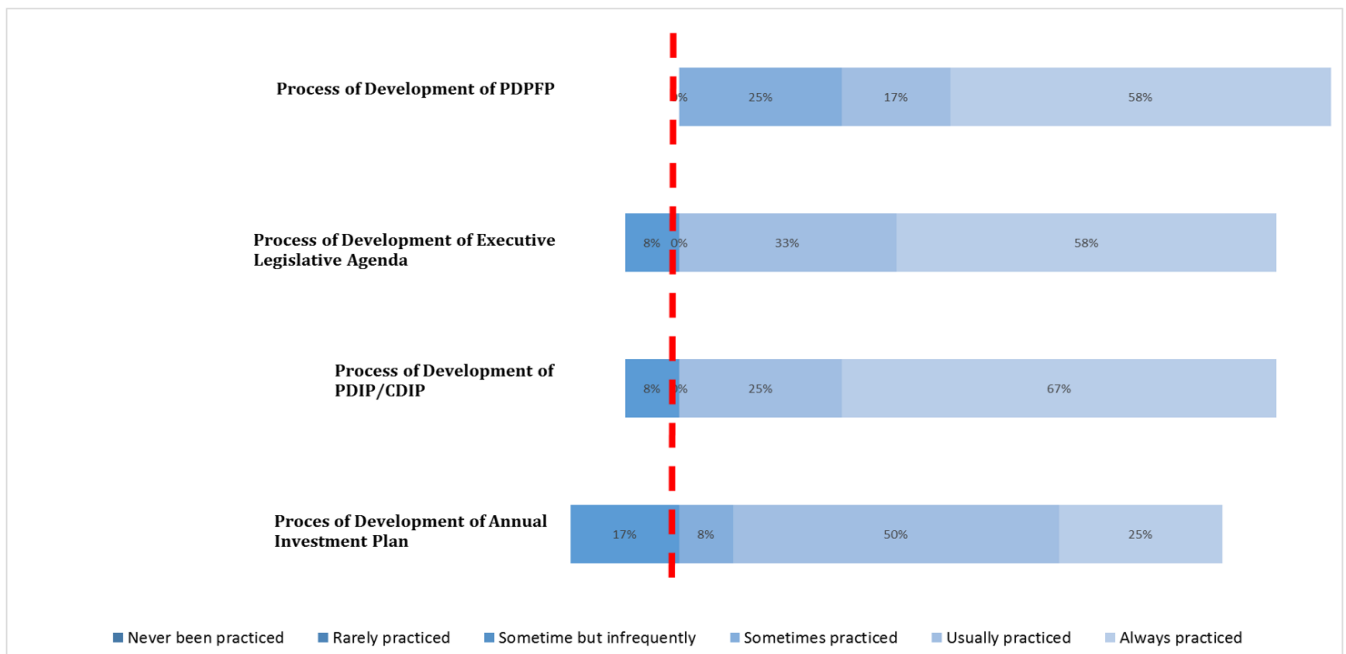


Figure 2: Level of practice on the process of LGU on the key provincial and city/municipal development plans

On the process of preparing the Executive-Legislative Agenda, covering the 3-year agenda of the LCEs, majority (58.33%) of the respondents also expressed that LGU current situations were presented in preparation for the ELA and ensure its alignment to the PDPFP or CDP. However, some areas need to be observed to ensure the conduct of evaluation of previous ELA, inclusion of intermediate outcome of social development sector and priority PPAs in the agenda of the LCEs.

The Local Development Investment Program (LDIP) is the principal instrument for implementing the CDP. It is the document that translate the CDP into programs and projects and basis by the LGU for funding in the annual general fund budget. Majority (66.67%) of the respondents always practiced the stated procedure of preparation of the LDIP. However, some LGUs (8.33%) expressed that provincial investment plan is not readily available during the preparation of LDIP and absence of previous PDIP/LDIP assessment. It is important to note that priority emergency programs and services are not also mentioned on the LGU Capacity Building Program which is an important component of the LDIP. The Annual Investment Program refers to annual slice of the LDIP which upon approval of the Sanggunian, shall serve as the basis for preparing the Executive Budget. The AIP will serve as document in preparing the annual budget document of the LGUs. Half of the respondents (50.00%) expressed that majority of the identified process of AIP were “usually practiced” by the LGUs. For some respondents with rating of neutral to sometimes practiced, low rating was observed on the availability of M&E strategies and indicators for programs and services, utilization of organizational performance indicators framework and connectivity of outcome and output indicators of LDIP.

Utilization of Planning Database

All LGU respondents have existing information system that are being used in planning and development process.

All LGU respondents have data mechanisms that provide information in drafting inputs for planning. Common data systems that are being used are the Census of Population of Housing, Climate and Disaster Risk Assessment, Localized Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, Community Based Monitoring System (CBMS) and Listahanan. This is not surprising because most of the identified information system has indicators about emergency programs and services. This study also found that in the process of planning and prioritization, some (42%) LGUs ensure the use of necessary analytical tools for mainstreaming thematic concerns in the prioritization of PPAs are applied such as the Conflict sensitivity indicators based on Conflict Sensitivity and Peace Promotion (CSPP) Principles as espoused by Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).

In the preparation of the Ecological Profile of the LGUs, the DILG CDP guidelines prescribes the utilization of the LDIS, survey revealed that small number of LGUs reported that they used it in planning development. Surprisingly, among these LGUs, utilization of LDIS garner a median score of 6. It was also observed that there are LGUs that used the Social Protection and Development Report (SPDR) and Social Protection Vulnerability Assessment Manual (SPVAM) with median scores of 5 (Moderately Utilized) and 6 (Very Utilized), respectively. These tools are expected to address the vulnerability of individual, families and communities in various risks which is also an element of emergency programs and services.

Establishment of M&E infrastructure remains a challenge among LGU respondents. Unclear datasets on emergency programs and services need to be established.

Updating the ecological profile of the LGUs is an important aspect of plan development, the DILG CDP guidelines suggest the utilization of LDIS, which is a set of indicators used for identifying issues based on the LGU's vision. However, even though there are suggested indicators being prescribed in the LDIS, the study revealed that collection of outcome and output indicators (91.67%) that will be used in updating the ecological profile and situation of LGUs (75%) remains an area for improvement. The inability of LGUs to complete the data requirements become the reason for discontinuity of CDP process.

Large number of respondents (92%) give emphasis to strengthen the conduct of monitoring and evaluation of NGA-mandated plans and other sectoral/thematic plans that are expected to be implemented at the local government. Timely assessment (83%) of existing plan needs to be ensured for the purpose of recalibration and updating. It was also mentioned the institutionalization of results matrix (75%) as basis of monitoring the progress of set targets and outcomes.

Complementation of National Development Plan and Local Development Plan needs to be examined.

The national and local government planning are separate activities and in the crafting of Philippine Development Plan a “whole-of-government approach“ is practiced.

A whole-of-government approach means that government systems and processes work together to provide ease of access and use by citizens. To realize the local governments as partners of the national government in Philippine development and other international commitment, it is expected that these plans are being localized. However, it remains areas need to be strengthened as presented by 75% of the respondents.

LGUs need to maximize revenue collections to ensure implementation of developmental projects.

Despite the taxation powers of the LGUs as granted by Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, majority of the LGUs are yet to be financially self-reliant as they continue to depend on IRA to implement developmental projects. It was highlighted that 92% of the respondents accepted that they need to improve generating own-source revenue to ensure sustainable funds in implementing their own development plans.

Along programs and services implementation, almost all (92%) of the respondents suggested that they need further technical assistance and resource augmentation from NGAs. Technical assistance can be in the form of trainings or orientation on the key programs and services that were devolved to LGUs. In terms of partnership among LGUs and provinces, majority agreed that convergence in implementing plans, programs and projects need to intensify. Convergence strategies complement programs and strategies to ensure that no household will be left behind.

LGU Budget Preparation and Prioritization

Half of the respondents (50%) affirmed that budget preparation and prioritization are always practiced to respond emergency situation at the LGUs. Among the stated processes of budget preparation that are included in the questionnaire, 50% of the LGU respondents affirmed that the following process are always practiced: 1) Inclusion of emergency programs and services in LDIP to AIP; 2) Estimation of total investment requirements and approval of budget. However, it was noted that low rating is commonly present on the aspect of M&E system and availability of indicators for program evaluation and assessment.

Targeting and Identification of Beneficiaries.

Depending on the purpose and scope of interventions, the LGUs used different information system for identification and targeting of potential beneficiaries.

Various information systems are introduced by the national government agencies to be implemented by the LGUs for planning and targeting of potential beneficiaries. Among the available information system at the LGUs, nearly all (75%) of the respondents utilized the Listahanan , CBMS, Climate and Disaster Risk Assessment and ECCD-IS.

For the purpose of identification of target beneficiaries, the Listahanan³ is strongly utilized by the LGUs with a median score of 6. High utilization of Listahanan is expected as this is the primary information management system that used for the identification and selection of potential beneficiaries for various poverty alleviation and social protection programs by NGAs and LGUs. The same median score of 6 was also rated to Climate and Disaster Risk Assessment (CDRA) which is also expected to have a high utilization rate. The CDRA aids in determining the level of risks and vulnerabilities of LGU communities as basis in coming up with priority projects, programs and activities that can be implemented take into account the climate-related hazards and potential impacts of climate change.

The CBMS is also among the other data sources used by LGUs with a median score of 5 (moderately utilized). Aside from targeting purposes, it is also recognized as the primary tool for gathering data for the preparation/updating of the LGUs Ecological Profile (PIDS, 2007). Other data systems are being used for sector specific concern and targeting, for instance the ECCD-IS is being used by most of the LGUs, however utilization is low with median score of 4.

LGU procurement and financial management

Most of the LSWDO respondents are satisfied with their experiences on the procurement of goods and services related to disaster.

In terms of LSWDO experience on the procurement process of delivering goods and services during disaster situations, four (4) programs got a median score of 6. This means that LSWDOs are satisfied on the administrative process they went through in procuring the goods and services related to disaster mitigation, disaster relief, food for work and AICS (food packs).

However, rating on procurement process related to the implementation of SFP and ESA varies that resulted to 5.5 median score. This means that LSWDOs are “somewhat satisfied” on their experience in procuring food and non-food items related to the implementation of SFP and ESA.

The research also tried to validate the satisfaction of the respondents on some aspect of the procurement process. Same findings were observed on the level of satisfaction of the stated processes and actual experienced of LSWDOs on the procurement of goods and services per emergency programs and services.

Majority (58.33%) of the respondents were satisfied with the procurement process, however, some (16.67%) respondents expressed neutral satisfaction (in between satisfied and dissatisfied). Statements that tend to gravitate towards low level of satisfaction are sufficiency of staff in their LGU procurement office, timeliness of contract awarding and issuance of notice to proceed. There are some LSWDOs with low rating on their familiarity of procurement law.

³Listahanan also known as the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction (NHTS-PR), is an information management system that identifies who and where the poor are nationwide. This system makes available to National Government Agencies (NGAs) and other social protection stakeholders a database of poor families as basis in identifying potential beneficiaries of their social protection programs and services.

Liquidation of Funds related to Emergency Programs and Services

Majority of the respondents were satisfied with the liquidation process of emergency programs and services. Overall median score is 6 and these respondents agree that liquidation processes are followed. For some areas with dissatisfaction, low ratings are associated with disposal of records and reimbursement of cash advance.

For funds downloaded from the NGAs, the majority of the emergency programs, except the ESA agreed that liquidation of funds was based on the existing COA rules and regulations.

Program implementation and Management

Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness

Fifty percent (50.00%) of the respondents Strongly Agree that program implementation processes of disaster mitigation and preparedness are adhered to. However, there were 8.33% of the respondents expressed neutral level of agreement on the stated processes. Overall computed median score of Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness was 6.5 and can be interpreted that respondent Strongly Agree that program implementation processes are followed.

Disaster Relief and Operations

Almost half (45.45%) of the respondents Agree that program implementation processes of Disaster Relief and Operations are adhered to. However, 25% of the respondents Somewhat Agree on the stated processes. Overall computed median score of respondents was 6 and can be interpreted that the respondents Agree that program implementation processes are followed. Item statements with aggregate scores below the median are the absence of COA findings on the procurement of goods and availability of evacuation centers in every barangay.

Cash for Work and Food for Work

More than half (66.66%) of the respondents rated high level of agreement that the program implementation processes of Cash for Work are adhered to. However, there were 16.67% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree on the stated processes. Overall computed median score of respondents was 5.75 and can be interpreted that the respondents agree that Cash for Work/Food for Work program implementation processes are followed. Stated program implementation processes with aggregate scores below the median are the timeliness of downloading of funds of DSWD to LGUs, clear funding support from the LGU-AIP, available grievance redress mechanism and proper monitoring and reporting of program achievements.

Emergency Shelter Assistance

All respondents gave positive rating on Emergency Shelter Assistance. Overall, computed median score was 6.0 and can be interpreted that the respondents Agree that ESA implementation processed are followed. Program implementation processes with aggregate scores below the median are the timeliness of downloading of funds from DSWD to LGUs, clear funding support from the LGU-AIP, available grievance redress mechanism and proper monitoring and reporting of program achievements.

Supplementary Feeding Program

All respondents gave positive rating on SFP. Overall, computed median score was 6.0 and can be interpreted that the respondents Agree that SFP implementation processes are followed. Stated program implementation processes with aggregate scores below the median are inclusion of SFP on the food security plan of LGUs, available grievance redress mechanism and proper monitoring and reporting of program achievements.

Assistance in Crisis Situation (AICS)

More than half (72.72%) of the respondents rated high level of agreement that the program implementation processes of AICS are adhered to as seen in Table 29. There were only 27.27% of the respondents somewhat agree on the stated processes for AICS program. Overall computed median score of respondents was 6.5 and can be interpreted that the respondents Strongly Agree that AICS program implementation processes are followed. Stated program implementation processes with aggregate scores below the median are the existence of grievance redress mechanisms, referral services for other alternative interventions are in place, after-care and other social welfare support services are offered and proper monitoring and reporting of program achievements.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Half of the respondents are somewhat satisfied with the monitoring and evaluation process of emergency programs and services; however, it was also observed that 25% each are also dissatisfied and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied on the stated processes of M&E. Overall medial score was 4 which is the lowest rating among the identified key government processes in LGUs. M&E processes that need to be further examined are the indicators along emergency programs and services, data collection template, frequency of data collection, utilization of M&E reports for decision making and dedicated staff that will handle M&E concerns.

Facilitating and hindering factors on delivery of devolved emergency program outputs

Factors affecting the success of implementation of devolved emergency programs could be aspects that are within the control of the Local Government Units or outside their control. These factors may help facilitate the success of the delivery or may also hamper the implementation if it would not meet the necessary requirements of the program implementation.

Human resource is limited and continuous capacity building should be provided to the LGUs.

Currently, the LGUs are maximizing their limited number of human resources to respond to the roles and responsibilities of the LGUs and implement the devolved programs and services. The overlapping roles of the staff affects the quality and range of work that they can manage, and further results in non-prioritization of certain devolved programs and services. The commitment, passion and continuous cooperation of staff to deliver the programs and services to the people is also notable as it helps facilitate and strengthens the program implementation even with the absence or lack of other resources. Further, during disasters, the limited manpower can be augmented by the bulk of volunteers from the communities, resulting in smooth implementation of disaster relief and response programs and services.

In terms of capacity building, the technical expertise on program implementation should be made available and accessible at the local level with continuous training and regular technical assistance provided to the field implementers. The knowledge and skills of the LGU implementers should improve along with the continuous enhancements and innovations on program implementation of the different SWD programs and services.

Technical assistance and resource augmentation are welcomed by LGUs as it greatly contributes to the delivery of programs and services.

As defined by the DSWD, Technical Assistance (TA) consists of non-monetary interventions which are designed to enhance the capacity of LSWDOs based on needs assessment, for the effective implementation of Social Welfare and Development programs, projects and services. While Resource Augmentation (RA) is the provision of support to LGUs/LSWDOs for the immediate response and early recovery of victims of disaster and implementation of other LSWD)-led programs and projects as mandated by existing laws and as may be provided for by existing DSWD policies and programs. The continuous provision of technical assistance and resource augmentation (TARA) is not just limited to those provided by the NGAs but also includes those from NGOs, CSOs and other partner organizations. Nonetheless, 92% of the LGU respondents identified the TARA from NGAs as one of the top areas that needs to be strengthened on the implementation of programs and services. Technical assistance from NGAs serves as continuous guidance to the field implementers with the changing policies and procedures for program implementation, as well as in resolving issues and concerns in program implementation. This is very necessary since most of the policies for devolved emergency programs and services are still centralized and crafted at the national level. Likewise, the technical assistance provided by other partners and stakeholders serves as additional or alternative input for the LGUs. This is evident in providing humanitarian response to communities during disaster or emergency situations.

Moreover, the provision of resources to augment the capacity of the LGUs to deliver the programs may come in the form of money, manpower, materials, equipment including office space or venue. Gathering resources is then dependent on the role of the LCEs to generate and look for resources aside from the usual inputs provided by the government. The strong partnership and good relationship with other stakeholders are main factors in having additional resources, however, not all LGUs can generate such resources since this is dependent on the their economic status.

Support from stakeholders and partnerships were established that helped facilitate the program implementation

The proper and constant coordination with the different national and regional government agencies helped facilitate the proposals, requests and queries of the LGUs on program implementation. Moreover, the linkage of the LGU with the Congressional office is also a major contributor in the good implementation of the different programs and services through the provision of additional fund sources or introduction of partnerships with other stakeholders. Consultations are also another effective way to show support and coordination among stakeholders, as LGUs are informed and consulted in the different program implementation processes, where they can air out their opinion and feedback.

For disaster relief programs and services, the support would primarily come from humanitarian groups and organizations to provide additional relief goods and send volunteers in the delivery of goods and services particularly for communities in far flung areas.

The establishment of partnerships through Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding also helped in the fast delivery of the program and services. For instance, the partnership with local service providers for the supplies of relief goods contributed to ensuring the fast distribution of relief packs during disasters as well as during the nationwide and localized lockdowns. It also helps the LGUs provide immediate assistance to individuals in crisis situations, by ensuring that they have established partnerships with local hospitals, schools and other service providers.

Stronger data management mechanisms as well as monitoring and evaluation is needed to have evidence-based program implementation.

The availability of targeting and selection mechanisms for the different SWD programs and services remains to be a clamor of the LGUs to the national agencies. Currently, the LGUs do not have access to the database of poor households and are not knowledgeable and skilled enough on the existing targeting system being used. This somehow affects the implementation of the social protection and social welfare programs as the LGU are not well capacitated to handle concerns on targeting and selection of the devolved programs and services. The survey results showed that Listahanan and Community Based Monitoring System are only moderately utilized by the LGUs for planning development, and only the Census of Population and Housing has a very high utilization rate. Data sharing protocols and mechanisms would also be a further concern as the efficiency of the procedures should be taken into account.

Moreover, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were barely discussed by the LGUs and it was also found to be one of the areas that the LGUs want to be strengthened. LGUs normally follow the NGAs' reporting standards but do not go into detail about other aspects of monitoring and evaluation activities. The production and use of M&E reports is another area that has to be improved. In the survey conducted, 92% of the LGU respondents claimed that NGAs should spearhead the monitoring, timely assessment and evaluation of local plans for improvements in program implementation. Nonetheless, a centralized framework that directs the implementation of monitoring and evaluation both at the local and national level can enable a more structured approach to monitoring and evaluation and would further aid in tracking program performance in achieving the intended outcomes.

Political factors and local security contribute to the program implementation approach.

One of the primary factors affecting the delivery of programs and services at the local level is the political inclination and personal interest of the LCEs. The development agenda of the locality tend to focus on the areas supported by the LCEs which affects the continuity of development as a whole. For instance, LGU who have less opposing political parties are inclined to have continuity of projects and will have greater chances of success in achieving long-term outcomes in development. Moreover, although check and balance should still be observed, the conflict between the executive and legislative branches of the local government also causes delays in the implementation of programs and delivery of services.

The interplay of the roles and responsibilities of the different LGU offices, committees and councils also affects the functionality of the local government to facilitate timely and efficient processes along program implementation.

The security aspect and peace and order situation in the locality also affect the delivery of programs and delivery of services. These factors challenge the implementation of devolved emergency programs and services in areas with high incidence of crime or ongoing armed conflicts. Armed conflicts and high crime rates adversely impact the coverage and quality of SWD services, and which in turn negatively affects local development and economic activity.

Availability of funds is the primary factor that facilitates or hinders delivery of devolved emergency programs and services.

Implementation of devolved emergency programs are greatly dependent on the available funds at the LGU level, with 42% of the LGUs ranking the sufficiency of funds as the top internal factor motivating and affecting the service delivery. This LGU funds could come from Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), local taxes and fees, as well as grants and loans from banks and other institutions. Given that the IRA is not enough for LGUs to implement locally planned projects, along with the devolved programs and services, the LGUs would look for other funding sources through prioritization of business and economic sectors to gain higher local revenues. In fact, 92% of the LGUs responded that improvement in generating own-source revenue effort should be strengthened in terms of plan implementation. The increased funds would then capacitate the LGUs to provide more services and further enhance the delivery of programs and services. Along with its availability is the timely downloading of funds for the implementation of devolved programs and services. The delays in downloading of funds, as experienced by the LGUs, tend to hinder the willingness of the LGUs to continuously implement such programs.

Given these considerations, the LGUs strategize on good fiscal management. The efforts of the LGUs are leading towards saving on expenditures and improving tax collection and other revenue sources. Some of them even established special units to focus on such initiatives. Related to this is the promotion and actual practice of bottom-up planning and budgeting, which promotes participatory planning and budgeting processes at the national and local level through the genuine involvement of grassroots organizations and communities. These are done through consultations and discussion meetings with different groups to gather their insights on local development and provision of services to the communities.

As the sources of funding grow, implementers may have access to better resources, such as engaging in capacity building efforts on program implementation, hire more manpower, establish and strengthen institutional mechanisms through provision of incentives, as well as expanding the targeting and selection of beneficiaries. This may be doable if the demand for SWD services at the local level would remain constant. However with the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be expected that the need for social services may also rise, resulting in extending the programs and services to a wider range of beneficiaries rather than improving the existing program inputs.

Same programs and services will be funded and continued with increased coverage and scope for the individuals and communities.

The implication of the Mandanas ruling is the increased share of LGUs budget base by 2022, which could also be explained as letting the LGUs get the “same slice but from a bigger pie”. Given this scenario, and with the existing development plans of the LGUs, the additional resources would increase the coverage and scope of the same programs and services. This is further validated by the survey responses which indicated that 92% of the LGUs believe in increased coverage as an effect, while all LGUs agreed that additional resources would lead to increased assistance in their localities. This would mean that they can cater to a greater number of beneficiaries for the existing programs and services and increase the amount of assistance that is being provided.

Further, there is also an emerging view from Local Chief Executives (LCEs) that DSWD programs and services should not be devolved because of the high budgetary requirements in its implementation, and LGUs may not be able to manage the funding requirements despite the increase as a result of the Mandanas ruling implementation. LGUs also have their own social responsibility to its constituents, just as DSWD has responsibilities as the executive arm of the Office of the President. Also, SWD programs and services do not have any income-generating aspect for the LGUs which could compensate for the expenditures and help gain resources.

More strategic and localized approach on program development and implementation may be visible.

Once the LGU gets hold of the increased resources, they would now have greater autonomy and capability to manage the resources. And since the LGUs believe that they have the actual data and situation at the grassroots level, they can now explore a more strategic and localized approach on implementing the existing emergency programs and services. Along with this, the LGUs can enhance existing programs and services or may create new ones that are more beneficial to their communities. The LGUs would then be treated as total and effective partner of the national government in the implementation of programs and services.

Extent of readiness of the LGUs to accommodate additional spending for emergency programs and mechanisms.

Planning has started and consultation with partners and constituents are being conducted to determine the needs.

The LGUs are hoping that greater resources and power would be granted to them soon as a result of the Mandanas ruling. Most of the LGUs covered by the study have ongoing discussions and planning sessions with their stakeholders to gauge their actual needs and prioritize the different sectors properly especially with the pandemic that we are now facing. The LGUs are also starting to ensure that the institutional mechanisms for the different stages of program implementation are already in place.

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Performance in past disasters and emergency responses of the LGUs has prepared their absorption capacity for the devolution of programs and services since the implementation of the LGC. They have managed to strategize and maximize their resources in order to provide for the need of their constituents, along with assisting the national government in the implementation of the whole-of-government initiatives. LGUs have also managed to re-allocate their budget for pandemic response, focusing their efforts on the gaps of the national agencies in the implementation of the programs and services. Although not all LGUs support devolution of SWD programs and services, some LGU believe that the devolution of the actual programs and services is a different matter from implementing the Mandanas ruling and providing additional budget, because devolution of programs and services will also entail capital outlay and other costs on the part of the LGUs.

Furthermore, although the local economies have really slowed down with the pandemic, the LGUs believe that the implementation of Mandanas ruling could help boost the local economy. Thus, they are ready to accommodate and continue the adjustments that they have been doing in their respective areas. This is evident with the quick provision of relief during the pandemic, the supplementary financial support that some LGUs were able to provide to those individuals excluded from Social Amelioration Program, and with the support that they provided to locally stranded individuals, returning OFs, and COVID-19 patients.

Innovations on policies and procedures, IT systems, as well as digital payments are available at the local level.

Given the nature of the new normal, the LGUs have also started doing adjustment on other factors affecting the efficient delivery of programs and services. Policies and procedures for implementation of programs have relaxed and adjusted particularly on procurement and finance related services. Likewise, upgrading and improvement of IT systems are already in place for most of the LGUs, they have started using the online platforms for communication and data organization through database and command centers. The use of digital payment transfers is also being explored by the LGUs to cope with the demands of the new normal.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

On Planning and Development

Strengthen the alignment and cascading of plans across all levels of administrative units

The DILG together with NEDA and all other national government agencies like the DSWD should work together on how existing planning guidelines may be improved and harmonized. This can be done through series of consultations and discussions among the different NGAs and taking into consideration the feedback of the end-users through the LGUs. Moreover, these various plans should be properly cascaded from national to regional to province to city/municipality level.

Harmonize and prescribe a comprehensive information management system

The DILG, NEDA, and PSA should work together to provide a harmonized and comprehensive information management system which the LGUs can utilize as data and information source for their local planning activities. The availability of disaggregated data would be significant on this aspect. This will also ensure that necessary capacity building efforts will be provided to further enhance the knowledge and skills of the end-users of this information management system.

Advocate the institutionalization and establishment of working groups like the Social Protection Action Teams and Local Poverty Reduction Action Teams

The DSWD should advocate the institutionalization and establishment of working groups to ensure that social preparation activities are conducted along participatory planning and budgeting. These working groups like the Social Protection Action Teams and Local Poverty Reduction Action Teams would help provide and validate socio-economic data which in turn would be used to prioritize SWD projects. Likewise, these working groups would also help in ensuring that SWD programs and services are integrated in the local development plans.

Provide guidance on the structure, staffing, and competency requirements of the LSWDOs

The DSWD should provide guidance to the LGUs on the minimum and maximum level of prescribed model of structure, staffing, and competency requirements of the Local Social Welfare and Development Offices based on the income classification of the Local Government Units. Through this way, the LGUs would have sufficient human resources to provide timely and relevant SWD programs and services. This should also be prioritized as there has been insufficiency of human resource during the initial years of devolution brought by the implementation of the LGC.

Consider the additional fund and physical/space requirements of the LGUs in delivering emergency services and programs brought about by the new normal context

With the new normal brought by the pandemic, the LGUs are challenged in providing timely emergency services and programs. The current guidelines and processes need to be adjusted considering that the LGUs strive to gain enough resources and meet the needs of their constituents. Although the LGUs has proven their capacity, it is still necessary for the NGAs to assess the need for additional funds and physical/space requirements of the LGUs in delivering emergency services and programs brought about by the new normal context.

On Program Implementation

DSWD should create minimum standard guidelines per devolved programs and services

Each DSWD program and service that will be fully devolved to the LGUs must develop a minimum standard guideline which will set the minimum resources, scope and processes. The guidelines should further contain provisions on the creation of grievance redress mechanisms for all devolved programs and services as this was one of the weakest areas in the current implementation of devolved programs and services. Furthermore, the minimum standard guidelines must be developed through a participative system of consultations wherein all the insights and opinions of the LGUs will be properly assessed for consideration and inclusion in the said guidelines. Considering also that the DSWD already has a baseline data on the status of the LSWDO service delivery, the capacity of the lowest ranking cities/municipalities must be considered in the guidelines. Aspects including human resource and indicative step-by-step process of program implementation must be cited in these guidelines, emphasizing that the LGUs should always consider their local situation in the adoption of the program/services.

DSWD should provide continuous technical assistance and resource augmentation on program implementation

The DSWD should, and as expected by LGUs, provide continuous Technical Assistance and Resource Augmentation (TARA) as part of systematic guidance and support especially since the need for social services may rise along with the increase in budget for the LGUs. This is also important because for the longest period of time, the DSWD has gained the technical expertise to manage and implement the different SWD programs and services. Likewise, if additional programs and services will be devolved to the LGUs, it is more reasonable to provide TARA particularly at the onset of the devolution. The sustainability of the implementation of the different programs and services are also dependent on the transfer of knowledge, skills and resources to the LGUs. Though there maybe LGUs that are already capable to implement the devolved programs and services on their own, the provision of TARA as the need arises should still be properly observed.

DSWD should introduce the targeting and selection system to the implementing LGUs

Once the different programs and services are devolved to the LGUs, it would be mandatory to provide them with the appropriate information on the targeting and selection system that is currently or was previously used to identify the beneficiaries of the different programs and services. Other than the access to and data sharing, the DSWD should provide technical assistance on putting data management systems in place. Introducing these systems may also further enhance the targeting and selection mechanisms, taking into consideration their knowledge on the varying situation at the grassroots level. However, given the political considerations, the use and modification of these systems should be properly observed and monitored at the national level for the purposes of check and balance.

On Monitoring and Evaluation

Ensure Plan and Program Accountability through Monitoring and Evaluation

Every plan and programs must be evidence-based and supported by clear datasets. The main intention of devolution is to ensure the LGUs' accountability, transparency and participatory process in developing plans and programs implementation. Monitoring and Evaluation will help the LGUs to ensure accountability to its stakeholders and clientele. The M&E system should look into enhancement of participation of communities and beneficiaries to become partners of development and increase financing in social services that will cater to the intended needs of the beneficiaries. The M&E can serve as a diagnostic tool to measure the planning parameters, revenue generation and expenditure of LGUs on social service.

In every program and services to be devolved by the DSWD, the Department must always ensure a clear M&E framework and results matrices for monitoring and performance assessment of the LGUs in undertaking the devolved activities. The DSWD is one of the NGAs with high appreciation of M&E, however, in the program development process there is a need to intensify the inclusion of all aspects of results-based monitoring and evaluation. There is a weak compliance with DSWD reports at the local level, most of the data are coming from its own community based and residential facilities. For some beneficiary level indicators, data collection is not regularly conducted.

In every program and services to be cascaded at the LGU level, the Department must ensure a clear program M&E framework, results matrices and reporting system that are generated based on the consultation with the intended users. Good outcome and output indicators of sustainable emergency programs and services must ensure the communities and beneficiaries are empowered to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation with significant impact on their lives.

Harmonize the existing M&E system in the LGUs to avoid duplicity of efforts

While the LDIS and RaPIDs datasets or list of indicators is the recommended tool of DILG in monitoring and evaluating local situation, there are some instrumentalities used by NGAs such as the CBMS, Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG), Family Risks and Vulnerability Assessment (FRVA), Conflict Sensitivity and Peace Promotion (CSPP) and Listahanan that are evidently using in the planning and program implementation at the LGUs which requires additional resources and extra efforts for LGUs to establish. The NGAs must ensure harmonization of these information systems to avoid duplicity of efforts. It is important to review the “MUST Indicators” in the LGUs that are significantly contributing in achieving the provincial, regional and national development plan of the Philippines.

Invest on the M&E Human Resource

As much as possible, the LGUs must invest in M & E human resources that would be responsible for data collection, preservation and safekeeping of the data retained at the provincial and city or municipal level that have significant bearing on policy and decision-making of the NGAs and LGUs. Given the nature of the new normal, the LGUs must continue upgrading and improving its data ecosystem including the appropriate metadata through investment of Information and Communication Technology that can be easily accessed and ensure the integrity and safety of the gathered information against unnecessary leakage and access by unauthorized persons. In coordination with PSA, NGAs and State Universities and Colleges, each LGU Department must be given sufficient capacity building training related to Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation, data tabulation and analysis that can be utilized in generation of data and reports for evidence-based planning and policy development.

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PROCESS EVALUATION OF SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this evaluation is to: (i) assess the extent to which the Supplemental Feeding Program (SFP) was implemented as planned, (ii) investigate how SFP resources, activities and outputs are contributing to the delivery of outcomes, (iii) assess the SFP in terms of its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and potential impact in line with the evaluation criteria set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), and (iv) inform the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in implementing the impending devolution of SFP implementation to the local government units (LGUs). This study was conducted by a team of researchers from DSWD and external partners. The evaluation team led the planning and implementation of the research project including data gathering and analysis of the study. The evaluation report intends to answer the evaluation questions and highlight the facilitating and hindering factors in the implementation of SFP Cycle 8. SFP Cycle 8 was implemented in 2018-2019 which served a total of 1,729,189 children beneficiaries. A mixed-method approach was adopted by the study, where quantitative information was generated from use of administrative data and survey results, while qualitative information were based from the conduct of desk research, consultation workshops, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition, especially among children, is a continuing problem in the Philippines. In 2011, the United Nations Children's Emergency Funds (UNICEF) cited malnutrition as the primary cause of death among children below 5 years old. The latest National Nutrition Survey (NNS) in 2015 said that 33.4% were stunted and 7.1% were wasted among children from 0-5 years old. Poor nutrition compromises the learning ability and intellectual capacity of children that leads to low adult productivity and earnings.

To address malnutrition, the Philippine government has formulated the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) 2017 - 2022 which will served as the blueprint of the integrated programs for nutrition interventions. It generally aims to improve the nutrition situation of the country such as in reducing the levels of stunting and wasting among 0-5 years old to 21.4% and less than 5% by 2022; reduce inequality in human development outcomes and child and maternal mortality.

The DSWD contributes to achieving the goal of the PPAN by implementing the SFP. Under the SFP, the DSWD provides food to the children beneficiaries in addition to their regular meals to target undernourished children to improve and sustain their nutritional status. The SFP provides children with hot meals served during their snack/meal time, for a minimum of five (5) to a maximum of seven (7) days a week for 120 days. The feeding program is managed by the children's parents and/or caregivers based on a prepared cycle menu using available indigenous food. Children beneficiaries are weighed at the start of the feeding and monthly thereafter until completion of the 120 feeding days to determine the improvement and sustenance in their nutritional status.

SFP aims to provide supplementary feeding to children in child development centers (CDCs) or supervised neighborhood play (SNP) using indigenous foods and/or locally processed foods equivalent to 1/3 of Recommended Energy and Nutrient Intakes (RENIs); improve knowledge, attitude and practices of parents and caregivers through intensified nutrition and health education; and, improve and sustain nutritional status and growth of all children covered by the program.

This program is aligned with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the successor global agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, the DSWD's strategic goal, which addresses extreme poverty and hunger. The development hypothesis of the SFP is that if children are given enough nutrients in their early years through the SFP, they will grow up strong and healthy and improve their learning and intellectual capacity. This will lead to a healthy workforce that will maximize the demographic dividend of the country, thereby improving its economic potential.

The implementation of SFP involves several entities. In line with Administrative Order (AO) 04, Series of 2016 or the Amended Omnibus Guidelines in the Implementation of the SFP, the LGUs through the Provincial/City/Municipal Social Welfare and Development Offices (P/C/MSWDOs) help the DSWD in implementing the SFP. The LGUs assist in the fund management of the program and provide guidance and technical assistance to the CDCs/SNPs workers who directly supervise parent groups in the conduct of daily feeding.

This mechanism also leads to complicated processes resulting in operational challenges including fund liquidation and procurement issues. Since its inception, the SFP has not been evaluated comprehensively, undermining DSWD's ability to learn from its implementation. To help improve the future SFP cycles implementation as well as with the impending devolution of SFP implementation to the LGUs, it is necessary to conduct a Process Evaluation to fill this gap.

Program Target and Actual Number of Beneficiaries Served

The DSWD started implementing the SFP in 2011. Through the years, the SFP's implementation and monitoring went through various changes resulting in eight implementing cycles from 2011 to 2018. Referencing eight (8) DSWD Administrative Orders, changes in SFP included the following: (i) target beneficiaries expanded to a nationwide coverage of 2-12 year old children in varying context; (ii) distribution point included Supervised Neighborhood Play; (iii) feeding duration expanded to 120 days; (iv) cost per child's meal increased from PhP12.00/meal in 2011 to PhP13.00/meal in 2014; and (v) partners and process involved non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and legislators, among others.

The target beneficiaries of SFP are children aged 5 years old and below who are participating in SNP and enrolled in CDC, as well as malnourished children aged 5 to 12 years old not in CDCs. Meanwhile, the program does not cover out-of-school children aged 5 years old and below who are not catered through SNP and CDCs. The program is also limited to reporting weight for age or weight for height as measure of nutritional status of the children beneficiaries. Other indicators of malnutrition such as stunting or height for age is not reported by the program. Further, the program lacks a monitoring system to gauge the improvement of children and parent beneficiaries' KAP on nutrition and health.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Malnutrition is situation where a person fails to meet (undernutrition) or exceeds (over nutrition) his/her nutrient and energy intake versus what is required to maintain growth, immunity and organ function. Undernutrition is further categorized as (i) moderate acute malnutrition (wasting), (ii) acute malnutrition (wasting), and (iii) chronic malnutrition (stunting) (World Food Programme, 2012). Chronic malnutrition is associated with higher morbidity and mortality and is irreversible. It therefore must be prevented (WFP, 2012). Malnutrition is prevalent among children globally, with more children aged 6-23 months suffering from acute malnutrition (WFP, 2012). In the Philippines, malnutrition is a continuing problem such that in 2011, the UNICEF cited malnutrition as the primary cause of death among children below 5 years old. The latest NNS in 2015 said that 33.4% are stunted and 7.1% are wasted among children from 0-5 years old.

The Philippines has been trying to address the malnutrition problem for decades. As early as 1974, the National Nutrition Council (NNC) has rolled out interventions on food assistance, health protection, information and education, and food production (Solon, 1979). The country has implemented several feeding programs, which in recent years have undergone various modifications in their objectives, target beneficiaries, and modes of service deliveries.

In 1997, the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the Food for Education (FFE) program to address short-term hunger among school-age children (Albert et al., 2015). In 2005, the DepEd and the DSWD launched the National Supplemental Feeding Program (NSFP) (DSWD, 2007) to decrease the rate of underweight children.

The NSFP gave on-site feeding for 60 days to target children in day care centers and schools. In the same year, the DepEd and the DSWD implemented the Food for School Program (FSP) as part of the country's Accelerated Hunger Mitigation Program (ACMP). Through the FSP, children in day care centers, pre-schools and Grade 1 classes in 49 target provinces, received a kilo of rice.

In 2006 the government streamlined the FSP process with the DepEd taking charge of distributing rice and feeding children in schools, while DSWD focused on feeding children in day care centers. Consequently, the DSWD launched the SFP in CY 2007, where it distributed milk and hot meals to pre-school children in day care centers in the priority provinces of the NNC (MC.4, S. 2007).

In 2011, the Department of Health (DOH), the DepEd, and the DSWD implemented parallel feeding programs. The DepEd implemented the Breakfast Feeding Program (BFP) to address malnutrition among public school children, specifically, the undernourished kindergarten and Grade 1 to 3 children for 100-120 days. By 2012, DepEd's BFP transitioned into the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) and underwent further refinements. It focused on feeding severely wasted school-aged children, while implementing complementary activities such as deworming, waste segregation and composting, gulayan sa paaralan, and the integration of Essential Health Care Program (Tabunda et. al., 2016).

The Philippine Government acknowledges the problem of undernutrition among Filipino children, through the passage of the Republic Act 10410 or the "Early Years Act (EYA) 2013" and Republic Act No. 11037 or the "Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act" in 2017 .

The DSWD continued implementing the SFP as part of its contribution to the government's ECCD. The SFP provided hot meals during snack / mealtime to children from five (5) to seven (7) days a week for 120 days. The feeding program was managed by parents / caregivers based on a prepared cycle menu using available indigenous food supplies. Children beneficiaries were weighed from initial feeding and monthly thereafter until completion of 120 days to determine improvement and sustenance in their nutritional status (AO4, S. 2016).

A strategic review of food security and nutrition in the Philippines highlighted the lack of timely and reliable data and differences in national (i.e. NNS) and barangay level OPT Plus data, to which LGUs normally rely for planning purposes (Briones et. al, 2017). A process evaluation of the DepEd's SBFP cited lack of standard weighing protocols and equipment (Albert et.al, 2015). The DOH reported intra-sectoral and intersectoral management and coordination challenges in the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Program (DOH, 2011).

Targeting issues in the SFP resulted to leakage and under-coverage rates. The geographic targeting methodology used by the program was unable to account for gaps in the income class of municipalities within the same region. This resulted to a 62% leakage rate and 80% under-coverage rate in the DepEd component; and a 59% leakage rate and 75% under-coverage rate in the DSWD component (Manasan and Cuenca 2007). The DSWD's use of day care centers (DCCs) as distribution points left 16% of the total number of barangays (those without DCCs) unserved (Manasan and Cuenca 2007).

Conceptual Framework

This evaluation study intended to answer overarching questions such as: (i) What factors facilitate or hinder the performance of the SFP? (ii) What good practices and lessons does the SFP have that can be shared with DSWD and other stakeholders? (iii) What gaps, issues and constraints did the SFP encounter in program implementation and how can these gaps, issues and constraints be addressed? To facilitate the analysis, these questions were re-classified under three research areas: (i) Quality of the Theory of Change (TOC), (ii) Quality of Implementation and (iii) Influencing Factors. Each research area comprised a set of Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) related to the criteria proposed by the OECD-DAC.

Quality of Theory of Change explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, program of policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts. This research area is composed of relevance (extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries' global country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change) and coherence (compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution. Meanwhile, Quality of Implementation pertains to the extent to which the intervention is achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups (effectiveness); the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way (efficiency); the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects (potential impact) and; the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue (sustainability).

The conceptual framework adopted in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

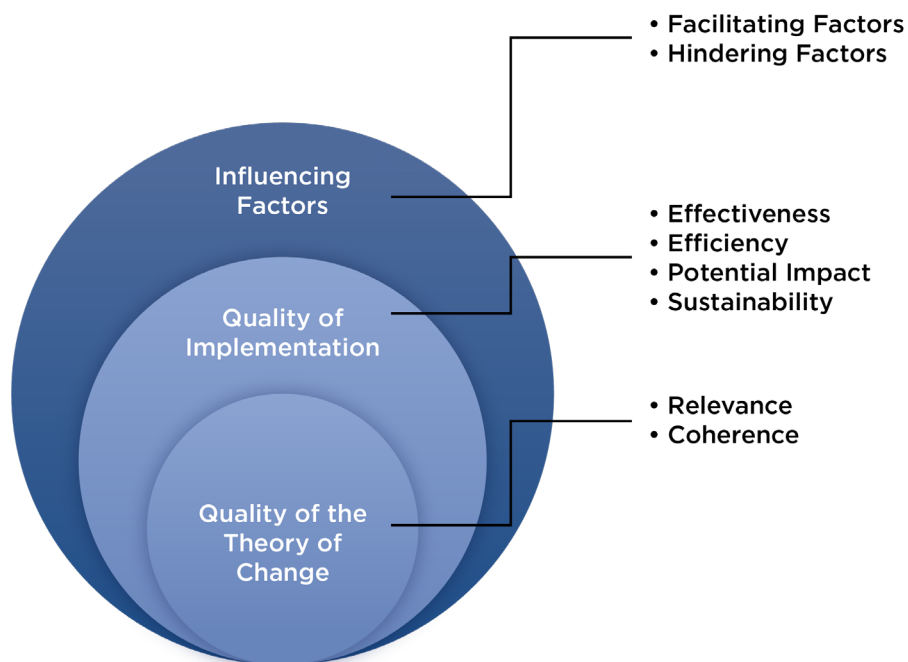


Fig. 1. Study Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was adopted by the study, where quantitative information was generated from use of administrative data and survey results, while qualitative information were based from the conduct of desk research, consultation workshops, KIIs and FGDs.

The desk research was performed through a review of all relevant policies, documents, and reports. Meanwhile, the survey was administered to a sample of LGUs that implemented SFP Cycle 8. The final sample size was 113 cities and 356 municipalities or 469 LGUs in total. The survey questionnaire consisted of questions on LGU characteristics and those related to the OECD-DAC criteria.

KIIs were conducted to DSWD officials and staff who are program managers and implementors of the SFP in order to collect relevant information about the conception of the program, its history and milestones, strategic focus, and facilitating and hindering factors at different levels of implementation. The Undersecretary for Special Concerns, the Assistant Secretary for Statutory Programs, as well as the Director and SFP Focal Persons of the Program Management Bureau were the identified key informants. Further, FGDs were conducted with various stakeholders and implementers on the ground to gather qualitative information about their good practices, issues and challenges encountered, and notable anecdotes in implementing the SFP Cycle 8. Specific groups engaged were SFP Focal Persons from various LGUs, parent beneficiaries, CDC workers, and suppliers for the SFP Cycle 8.

A consultation workshop with SFP Focal Persons from DSWD Field Offices was also conducted to validate the preliminary information gathered. The workshop served as a venue for the SFP Focal Persons to converse about SFP Cycle 8 to discover its uniqueness, make sense of the data available, re-imagine the future of the program, and give life to the participants' vision for the program.

All data gathering activities were conducted online and were compliant with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The informed consent of the participants was secured and the information collected was only used for the purpose of the study.

FINDINGS

Description of Data

A. LGU Engagement

The respondents of the survey were SFP Focal Persons within the LGU who got involved in and are knowledgeable about the 8th cycle implementation of SFP. A total of 184 valid submissions out of the sample size of 469 LGUs were received, resulting in a response rate of 39%. Most (73%) of the respondents were the designated or alternate SFP focal persons. While the others were either the supervisor, child development worker or encoder (27%). Nine in ten (93%) of them were female and the median age was 48 years old. They have been in their current position for an average of 10 years.

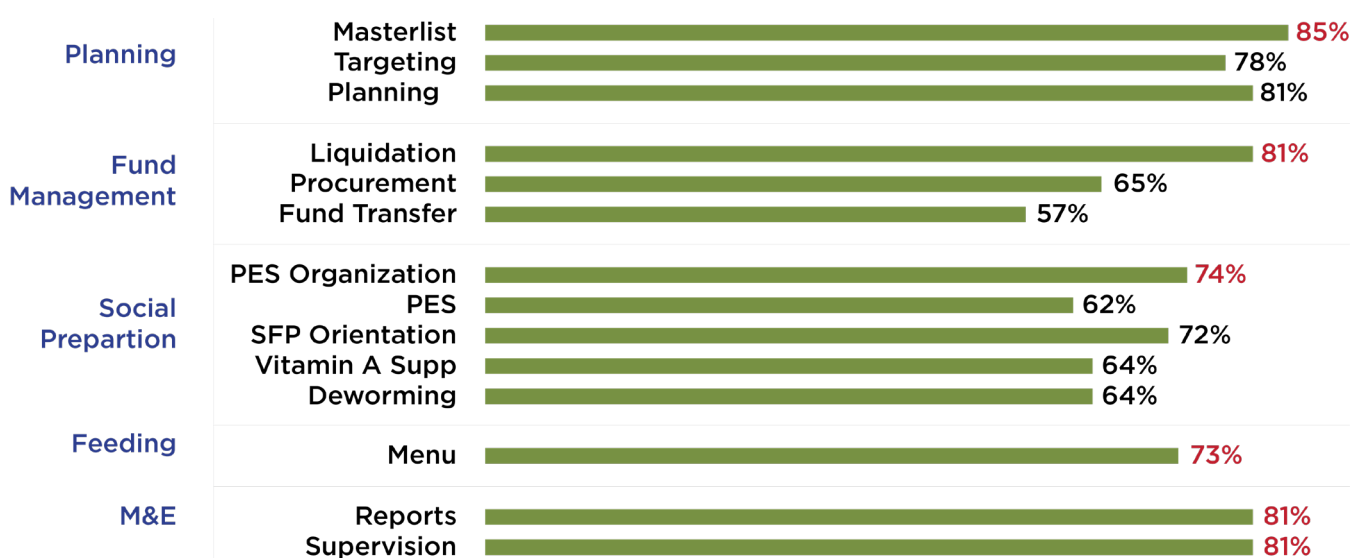
Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to Region

Region	Frequency	Percent to Total
NCR	10	5
CAR	6	3
I	13	7
II	5	3
III	15	8
IV	25	14
V	7	4
VI	22	12
VII	14	8
VIII	13	7
IX	8	4
X	7	4
XI	9	5
XII	7	4
XIII	7	4
TOTAL	184	100%

B. Level of LGU Involvement in SFP Implementation

LGU respondents were heavily involved in the implementation process of the SFP Cycle 8. On the planning stage, 80.7% of respondents were highly or very highly involved in local level planning. Particularly, about eight in ten LGU respondents were either highly or very highly involved in the initial preparation (78.5%) and finalization (85.1%) of the master list of beneficiaries. On fund management, a majority of LGU respondents were either highly or very highly involved in the transferring of funds from their LGU to the Barangay or Child Development Center (CDC) Parent Group (56.5%), procurement and delivery of goods and utensils (64.6%) and liquidation of funds (80.7%). On social preparation, about six to seven in ten LGU respondents were either highly or very highly involved in deworming (64.1%), vitamin A supplementation (63.5%), SFP orientation sessions (71.3%), parent effectiveness sessions on nutrition and health (61.9%) and organization of parent groups (73.5%). On feeding, 72.9% of LGU respondents were either highly or very highly involved in the preparation of menu and meals. Lastly on monitoring and evaluation, 80.7% of LGU respondents were either highly or very highly involved in the supervision of feeding sessions and preparation of monitoring reports.

Fig. 2. Level of LGU involvement in SFP



C. LGU Characteristics

On the average, an LGU has 82 CDCs and 50 SNPs, but the majority or 66.3% of LGU respondents have no SNP within their community. Further, an LGU has an average of 22 public primary schools, 2 public markets, 25 health centers and 184 food gardens within its locality. Water distillery stations were the most commonly reported source of drinking water with 65.2% among LGU respondents. More than half of them (55.8%) reported that tap water is also a common source of drinking water in their locality. While 15.5% identified water pump as a source of drinking water as well. In the past five years, 78.5% of LGUs received the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG). During the implementation of the SFP Cycle 8 in 2018 to 2019, 53.0% were SGLG recipients.

The 184 LGUs surveyed have an average of 74 male and 83 female regular employees. Of which, an average of 1 male and 6 males were assigned to the implementation of SFP Cycle 8. Some LGUs lacked the needed equipment for SFP. Computers are useful in managing the database of children beneficiaries. However, the survey found that around three in ten (28.7%) LGUs had no desktop for SFP, while four in ten (43.1%) had no laptop for the program. Internet connection, which is important for communication purposes, is not available in four out of ten (42.0%) LGUs. In terms of equipment used to measure the nutritional status of children beneficiaries, two in ten (20.4%) LGUs had no weighing scale. Similarly, two in ten (23.2%) had no height measuring tool.

RESULTS

1. On the extent to which the SFP was implemented as planned and how SFP resources, activities and outputs are contributing to the delivery of outcomes

For each stage of the implementation processes of SFP, the respondents were asked about their level of agreement on particular statements. On targeting and strategic planning, almost half (45%) of the respondents strongly agreed that all target beneficiaries in the initial master list were included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) budget. Majority (64%) of the respondents strongly agreed that all target beneficiaries in the LGU were covered by the SFP during its 8th cycle implementation. Majority (58%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the LGU and DSWD was signed and completed by the 1st quarter of the year. While, almost half (48%) of the respondents moderately or strongly agreed that their LGU opened a bank account solely for SFP. A few (19%), however, said that such process is not applicable to them. In terms of identifying the beneficiaries, most (72%) of the respondents moderately or strongly agreed that there was no variance between the initial and final master list of beneficiaries.

When it comes to fund management, a majority (63%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they properly conducted the procurement of goods based on legal standards. Majority (52%) of them moderately or strongly agreed that their LGU procured supplies and goods for SFP before June of the implementing year. Most (69%) of the respondents moderately or strongly agreed that at least 30% of the food supplies were procured from poor local farmers within the community.

In terms of the social preparation stage, three in four (75%) respondents strongly agreed that all children beneficiaries were dewormed before the start of the 120-day feeding sessions. Similarly, about three in four (74%) respondents strongly agreed that all children beneficiaries were supplemented with Vitamin A prior to the conduct of feeding sessions. Almost all (98%) of them strongly agreed that all children beneficiaries' height and weight were measured before the conduct of feeding sessions. Also, about nine in ten (89%) respondents moderately or strongly agreed that CDCs and SNPs within their LGU conducted at least one Parent Effectiveness Sessions (PES) before the start of feeding sessions.

Most (77%) of the respondents strongly agreed that CDCs and SNPs successfully organized a parent group before the start of the 120 day feeding session. About half (45%) of them strongly agreed that CDCs were able to conduct nine PES. While the majority (56%) of the respondents strongly agreed that CDCs were able to conduct PES on health and nutrition modules. Similarly, the majority (53%) of them strongly agreed that CDCs were able to conduct PES on family and parenting.

The feeding is among the most important stages of the program. Most (71%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the city/municipality received from DSWD the cycle menu reflecting 1/3 RENI per meal. Majority (66%) of them strongly agreed that the city/municipality distributed the cycle menu with adjustments to all CDCs and SNPs. While 62% strongly agreed that they distributed the adjusted cycle menu reflecting 1/3 RENI to all CDCs and SNPs.

Also, 64% of the respondents strongly agreed that parent groups always prepared the supplementary food equivalent to 1/3 RENI. Majority (58%) of the respondents strongly agreed that portioning of served food was equivalent to 1/3 RENI. About half (49%) of the respondents strongly agreed that rice served during feeding was always iron fortified.

Most (88%) of the respondents strongly agreed that children beneficiaries washed their hands with soap before every feeding session. Similarly, 86% expressed the same about children beneficiaries washing their hands with soap after every session. Most (88%) of the respondents strongly agreed that children beneficiaries prayed before every SFP meal. Similarly, 73% expressed the same about children beneficiaries praying after meal. Also, 72% of the respondents strongly agreed that children beneficiaries brushed their teeth after every SFP meal.

Regular monitoring of the progression of the program beneficiaries is necessary. Most (82%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the children beneficiaries' height and weight were monitored as required based on standards. Half (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed that supervision of feeding sessions in the CDCs was conducted once a week. Majority (55%) of the respondents strongly agreed that DSWD was able to conduct a monitoring visit in the city/municipality. Majority (52%) of the respondents strongly agreed that data/information on beneficiaries was disaggregated based on required disaggregation. Six in ten (61%) respondents strongly agreed that their LGU received technical assistance from the DSWD-FO. Almost half (47%) of the respondents strongly agreed that there were other children who received supplementary feeding.

During the planning process and actual implementation of SFP Cycle 8, majority of the respondents considered to a very large extent the children beneficiaries' sex and nutritional status. However, less than half of them integrated the children's location, religion, family income, ethnicity, disability and critical illness.

Key Takeaways

On Targeting and Strategic Planning

1. Some CDCs were compelled to extend the program to those children who were not enrolled resulting to an over accomplishment against the target beneficiaries.
2. Targeting of beneficiaries was quite problematic, because the program covers all children in CDCs, regardless of nutritional status. The weight of children are not actually considered in the initial targeting of the program. For instance, only 28.43% overweight children improved to normal nutritional status in SFP cycle 8, which is significantly lower compared to the Severely Underweight and Underweight children beneficiaries.

On Fund Management

1. Most LGU participants from FGDs preferred the fund transfer scheme as it allows them to manage their funds effectively and efficiently.
2. Targeting of beneficiaries was quite problematic, because the program covers all children in CDCs, regardless of nutritional status. The weight of children are not actually considered in the initial targeting of the program. For instance, only 28.43% overweight children improved to normal nutritional status in SFP cycle 8, which is significantly lower compared to the Severely Underweight and Underweight children beneficiaries.
3. Procurement of supplies was relatively easier under the fund transfer scheme, and parents or communities were involved better. Comparing the 8th cycle with the more recent cycles of SFP, some participants could not help but underscore the difference it made when bidding and the final selection of suppliers was done at the level of LGUs. They explained that this enabled them to be more flexible not only with respect to the bidding process but also to the actual delivery of expected products or services from the suppliers. They could also control their timetable at their own pace.
4. Conversion of supplies to cash/ cash advances also allowed for greater flexibility on several levels. To them, this enabled more leeway with respect to managing procurement effectively and efficiently and to ensure observance with deeper aspects otherwise overlooked in ground implementation including religious and other cultural sensitivities (e.g. pork meal as 'haram' for Muslims).
5. However, supplier participants preferred the centralized and/or regionalized bidding. According to them, regionalized procurement is a measure towards greater transparency because it ensures that funds for the program do reach the intended beneficiaries. Some of the participants even shared how the regionalized procurement done by DSWD would help in addressing LGU-level corruption.

On Social Preparation

1. LGUs recommended that implementation would be easier if there is a provision of measuring equipment like salter scale and microtoise for the CDCs.
2. Parents' roles in SFP were seen to be a key element in implementing the program as sharing of responsibilities among parents made the program implementation more effective.

On Feeding

1. Some FGD participants narrated that in some areas, cycle menu was not often followed, especially in areas where CDCs are located remotely and where the workers lack appliances for proper storage such as refrigerator, cooler and icebox.
2. Some FGD participants also shared that some children in CDCs did not prefer the meals based on the prescribed menu. They recommended that there should be some kind of creativity in preparing the meals.

2. Assessment of SFP in terms of Key Evaluation Questions

Relevance

The majority (52%) of survey respondents expressed that the objectives of the SFP Cycle 8 were valid to a very large extent in their respective localities. Around seven in ten (69%) of them perceived that the program's contribution to the reduction of malnutrition rate was highly relevant.

Coherence

Most (82%) of the respondents said that their city/municipality collaborated with internal and external partners in implementing SFP Cycle 8. Subsequently, the majority of those who collaborated with internal and external partners identified the DOH (83%) and DSWD National Program Management Office (NPMO) (81%) as their partners. Meanwhile, only 9% of the respondents said that they collaborated with development partners in implementing the SFP Cycle 8.

The frequency of conduct of meetings varied among the identified internal and external partners of the respondents. In six out of nine identified partners (DepEd, Department of Agriculture – National Meat Inspection Service [DA-NMIS], National Food Authority [NFA], cooperatives, development partners, and private organizations), the respondents answered “sometimes” as the frequency of conduct of meetings with the partners.

The respondents reported that they included their identified partners' contributions and assistance in their respective office reports to a moderate extent. This was the case for all identified partners except for DSWD NPMO, which the respondents said that they included the agency's contributions and assistance to a large extent in their reports.

ON QUALITY OF THEORY OF CHANGE

1. Participating parent beneficiaries in FGDs reported a significant improvement in their children's intellectual and learning capacity because of the nutrients they get from SFP. This is in line with the program's theory of change, implying that the program outputs contributed to the intended outcomes and desired impact.
2. The basic causes of malnutrition, which are at the societal level, can be considered as concerns that are untouched by SFP. Feeding is not enough and a holistic approach is required for programs addressing malnutrition to be relevant. Despite the supplementary meals served to children beneficiaries and training sessions on nutrition and health, it would be difficult for a poor household to support and sustain the intended program outcome if it lacks the resources to consistently provide adequate and nutritious food to its members. The inadequacy of resources (financial, human, physical, social and natural capital) may be outside the scope of the program but are necessary gaps that need to be addressed in collaboration with other programs of DSWD, national government agencies, and civil society organizations.
3. The general sentiment of the participants was for the program to continue, as they see it necessary for their children's well-being. Other parents also acknowledged how SFP somehow alleviates their burden in budgeting their limited resources to feed their children.
4. Even though coherence has the lowest average summary score compared to the other KEQs, SFP can be considered coherent with most of the best practices done by other similar nutrition programs.
5. SFP has been working well with DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. Noting that the children of Pantawid families, who were required to maintain a class attendance of at least 85% per month, were encouraged to attend school, or in this case CDCs, due to the hot meals served through SFP.

Effectiveness- Outcome

The respondents positively acknowledged the extent to which SFP Cycle 8 contributed to the improvement of nutritional status of the child. Majority (51%) responded "very large extent" while 41% answered "large extent." The respondents generally gave positive feedback on the effectiveness of sessions in improving the participants' Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) on nutrition and health. Majority (57%) of them said the sessions are highly effective while 34% said that the sessions are moderately effective. All of the respondents affirmed the contribution of SFP Cycle 8 both to the improvement of children's knowledge, attitude and practices on nutrition and health. In the improvement of children's knowledge on nutrition and health, half (50%) of the respondents said that the program contributed to a large extent. Almost half (49%) of the respondents said that SFP Cycle 8 contributed to a large extent in the improvement of children's attitude and practices on nutrition and health. Similar percentage expressed a large extent of contribution of the program to the parents' knowledge (48%), attitude (47%), and practices (46%) on nutrition and health.

Effectiveness- Outputs

In terms of delivering the program outputs, 45% of the respondents said that children participate to a large extent in health/nutrition education sessions. On the other hand, 51% of the respondents said that children beneficiaries participate to a very large extent in the conduct of the feeding sessions. Generally, the beneficiaries were satisfied with the food served in the program based on the assessment of LGUs. Majority (61%) of them rated the food provided in the SFP Cycle 8 as good in terms of adequacy, 58% rated the same in terms of appropriateness, while 60% rated the food served as very good in terms of quality. Most (70%) of them said that children beneficiaries were highly satisfied with the hot meals served. Meanwhile, 39% of the respondents said that parents participate in PES to a large extent. About half (46%) of them said that parents and caregivers participate to a very large extent in preparing the snacks/meals given in SFP Cycle 8. Also, 40% of the respondents said that parents attended nine (9) or more SFP Cycle 8 PES in their city/municipality. When it comes to the satisfaction on the training sessions received, the majority of the respondents expressed that both parents (53%) and children (54%) beneficiaries were highly satisfied.

Though attendance to CDC/SNP is not among the intended outputs of the program, the majority (55%) of the respondents said that the SFP Cycle 8 contributed to the improvement of children's CDC attendance to a very large extent. Based on the assessment of the respondents, 28% said that the SFP Cycle 8 contributed to the improvement of children's SNP attendance to a large extent. In contrast, 27% of them said that the SFP Cycle 8 did not contribute at all to the improvement of children's SNP attendance.

Efficiency

Seven in ten (70%) respondents moderately and strongly agreed that there could have been more efficient ways to implement the SFP. Nevertheless, many of them believed that various processes and structures within their LGU were already established to support the implementation of the program. In particular, more than 40% of the respondents consistently answered that the guidelines and policies, SFP Operations Manual, nutritional status database, profiling of beneficiaries, monitoring and evaluation system, coordination mechanisms, time management, capacity building plan, and physical and financial plan were established to a large extent.

In terms of fund management, eight in ten (80%) respondents strongly agreed that the fund for SFP Cycle 8 implementation was well-managed. Majority (52%) of them strongly agreed that they received the program fund from DSWD in a timely manner. About three in four (74%) of the respondents reported affirmatively on the efficient procurement of goods and utensils. Very few reported existence of liquidation issues or audit findings. However, the majority (51%) of them believed that there are other ways or approaches to achieve the results of SFP with less funds.

When it comes to human resources, majority of the respondents affirmed that the number of personnel dedicated for the SFP was sufficient.

In particular, 64% of them moderately or strongly agreed that the number of DSWD staff allocated for the program was sufficient, while 68% of them responded in the same manner for the number of LGU staff allocated. The capacity of which was sufficient to a large or very large extent according to a majority (62%) of respondents. At least 65% of the respondents also reported that the number of volunteers, parents, CDC workers and health workers involved in the program were sufficient. Meanwhile, almost half of the respondents thought that the number of partners (48%) and suppliers (47%) were not sufficient.

With regards to time management, 88% of the respondents affirmed that the allotted time for SFP Cycle 8 was managed and coordinated efficiently. Most (72%) of them reported that time management was established in their LGU to a large or very large extent. About half of the respondents, though, thought that there are other ways or approaches to achieve the results of the program with less time.

Potential Impact

The average malnutrition rate among children beneficiaries in CDCs and SNPs after the implementation of SFP Cycle 8 decreased to 8% from the baseline value of 13%. Though this 5-percentage point decrease is only reflective of the children beneficiaries in the CDCs and SNPs of the selected LGUs who responded to the survey. Breaking down the computed baseline malnutrition rate per region, respondent LGUs from MIMAROPA posted the highest average malnutrition rate across its CDCs and SNPs at 22%, while Region XI had the lowest at 6%. After SFP Cycle 8 implementation, region XII posted the highest average malnutrition rate at almost 19%, while region XI remained consistent in posting the lowest malnutrition rate at 1.4%.

Even though region XI posted the lowest malnutrition rate, region V had the most improved malnutrition rate with an average of almost 14-percentage point decrease, while malnutrition rate in region VII increased with almost 4%.

Sustainability

Nine in ten (91%) of the respondents expressed that it is likely or highly likely that the positive effects of the SFP Cycle 8 will be sustained. Half of the respondents believed that the parents were only a little or somewhat capacitated to provide the primary nutritional needs of their children prior to their participation in the program. But most (87%) of the respondents claimed that the parents were much or very much capacitated after their participation in the program. Moreover, the majority of the respondents reported that the sustainability or post-feeding plan and mechanisms in synergy with national government agencies, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for post-implementation of the program, were established in their LGU to a large or very large extent.

ON QUALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. While there are several positive feedbacks in terms of improved KAP on nutrition on health, there is no existing tool to measure this outcome.
2. There is no existing consolidated data for the training sessions conducted such as PES.
3. SFP is also seen as helpful in making the parents fully committed and involved in the process of making sure that their children eat nutritious food.
4. However, some parents provided minimal non-mandatory financial contribution. Parents also extended to financial contributions as one parent shared how they mobilized funds for buying gas stove monthly. They also provided ingredients that they could find from their gardens.
5. Some LGU respondents recognized that there weren't enough human resources to cover the tasks to be performed in SFP. This is also true in the consultation workshop with SFP focal persons wherein they recommended an additional workforce in the FO level.
6. An indirect impact was also seen in the implementation of the program which is the increase in attendance in CDCs/SNPs.
7. One of the highlights seen in sustaining the program was the existence of community and backyard gardens. When there is a lack of budget allocations for meals of children, fresh greens from the community and backyard gardens are being used by the day care workers and parent beneficiaries.

3. On the impending devolution of SFP implementation to the LGUs

A majority or 73% of the respondents somewhat, much and very much asserted their capacity to continue implementing the program without the technical assistance from DSWD. Similarly, a majority or 58% of the respondents were somewhat, much and very much confident that their respective LGUs have the capacity to implement future cycles of SFP without fund support from DSWD.

In the impending devolution in 2022, the LGUs should implement or continue to implement social welfare services such as SFP as enshrined in Section 17 of the Local Government Code, and align with the set policy and service delivery standards provided by the DSWD, through the transition plan.

For the SFP, DSWD will continue the provision of technical assistance and resource augmentation for the 5th and 6th class municipalities, as part of the Department's commitments in the Zero Hunger Policy of the current administration.

CONCLUSIONS

On the SFP Theory of Change

The TOC is an essential element of Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation. It provides a logical framework that explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts. This subsection discusses the findings of the research team in evaluating the quality of the SFP's TOC in terms of relevance and coherence. In particular, the ensuing discussions try to elaborate about the extent to which the SFP's objectives and design respond to its beneficiaries' needs, and the compatibility of SFP with other similar interventions.

LGU SFP Focal Persons who responded to the survey acknowledged the relevance of the program as it continues to contribute in addressing malnutrition. Likewise, it also contributed to the improvement of children's intellectual and learning capacity. However, the basic causes of malnutrition, which are at the societal level, can be considered as concerns that are untouched by SFP. Despite the supplementary meals served to children beneficiaries and training sessions on nutrition and health, it would be difficult for a poor household to support and sustain the intended program outcome if it lacks the resources to consistently provide adequate and nutritious food to its members. The inadequacy of resources (financial, human, physical, social and natural capital) may be outside the scope of the program but are necessary gaps that need to be addressed in collaboration with other programs of DSWD, national government agencies, and civil society organizations. Implementers and beneficiaries, alike, particularly those who participated in FGDs greatly perceived SFP as a necessary program in their communities. The general sentiment of the participants was for the program to continue, as they see it necessary for their children's well-being.

Coherence has the lowest average summary score compared to other KEQs. Most LGU SFP Focal Persons who responded to the survey collaborated with internal and external partners in implementing SFP Cycle 8 such as with the DSWD-Program Management Offices (DSWD-PMOs) and the DOH. Only and less than half collaborated with the other external partners. Nevertheless, SFP can be considered coherent with most of the best practices done by other similar nutrition programs.

On SFP Implementation

According to Wright (2014), programs oftentimes fail to reach desired outcomes in the "real-world" because these programs are simply not implemented with quality. Process evaluation focuses on the implementation process and answers the question of how well the program is being implemented. This subsection discusses the findings of the research team in evaluating SFP's quality of implementation in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, potential impact and sustainability.

It can be noticed in the evaluation matrix summary that there are several indicators assigned to measure the effectiveness of SFP. It is divided into three sections which are effectiveness in delivering outcomes, effectiveness in delivering outputs and effectiveness of LGUs in implementing the program. Through survey, FGDs and KIs, SFP Cycle 8 is seen to be effective in delivering the outcomes which are the improved/sustained nutritional status of children beneficiaries and improved KAP on nutrition and health of children, parents and caregivers. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the data for nutritional status will still be validated as there are some inconsistencies in the data provided by LGUs. While there are several positive feedbacks in terms of improved KAP on nutrition on health, there is no existing tool to measure this outcome. The program is also perceived to deliver the intended outputs such as children served with hot meals for 120 days and training sessions to improve KAP. While the first indicator has complete and accurate data in the LGU and regional level, there is no existing consolidated data for the training sessions conducted such as PES. Based on the guidelines, parents should attend/participate in at least nine (9) PES for SFP. In terms of LGU implementing SFP, issues related to targeting and identification of beneficiaries, fund management and feeding were raised.

According to survey respondents, the program is efficient in terms of human and financial resources and time management. Nevertheless, lack of staff in the regional and LGU level is seen to affect the efficiency of the program. This is also true for the financial resources wherein parents and LGUs have to augment to support the smooth implementation of SFP. For time management, the period to comply with liquidation reports is seen to also affect efficiency as this will have an implication for the implementation of the next cycles.

Potential impact in terms of addressing malnutrition in the country is also generated from surveys, FGDs and KIs. The participants understand that SFP is just one component to combat malnutrition and at least for the 8th cycle, majority of children beneficiaries improved their nutritional status. The key informants from the DSWD CO acknowledge that there is so much more to be done to realize the impact of the program in the national level.

One of the highlights seen in sustaining the program was the existence of community and backyard gardens. This alleviated situations when existing allocations could not meet the present needs. Data from the survey and FGD also support that beneficiaries were capacitated to be able to sustain the benefits of the SFP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To Program Management Bureau

1. Strengthen inter-agency coordination and collaboration to ensure that the SFP objectives are complemented by other social protection programs. Explore partnerships with other stakeholders especially NGOs which can cater to children not enrolled in CDCs or SNPs. The NGOs may be tapped to cover potential children beneficiaries who may not be covered by the current SFP guidelines. For coherence, it is recommended to sustain partnership with NGAs and explore how partnerships with other stakeholders can be strengthened.
2. The development of tools is necessary to effectively achieve outcome and output indicators of the program. In particular, tools for measuring KAP on nutrition and health should be developed and be cascaded to the FO, LGU and CDC levels.
3. For strategic planning, make the program more inclusive and equitable. Review and revise program guidelines to ensure that children's location, religion, family income, ethnicity, disability and critical illness are factored in the planning process and implementation of SFP.
4. Review current monitoring tools used in all levels of implementation (from the CDCs/ SNPs to the DSWD CO) and improve these based on feedback from key stakeholders of the program.
5. For the financial resources, generate added support from other stakeholders, especially from the LCEs for children not covered under the program. Services of NGOs such as Kabisig ng Kalahi as partner in the region (Php70, 000.00 for 120 days with reporting expenses, aside from the milk program) can help augment the program. It is also recommended to increase the budget of hot meals and operational and administrative funds.
6. Develop comprehensive technical assistance plan for key implementers based on identified gaps and issues experienced by the LGUs. Maximize the use of different modes of communications in providing technical assistance.

To DSWD Field Offices

1. Sustain the good performance of LGUs in the conduct of social preparation activities and actual feeding sessions and provide incentives to encourage low-performing LGUs.
2. For program efficiency, increase the workforce in the FOs and recommend the same to the LGUs. Most importantly, push for the regularization of staff to address inefficiency in human resources.
3. For time management, develop mechanisms to ease in the preparation of liquidation reports.

4. To ensure sustainability of the program, empower LGUs and stress to them the importance of health and nutrition rather than infrastructures. PES should also be strengthened and enhanced.

To partner LGUs

1. Further promote local procurement of goods especially from poor local farmers within the community. This is consistent with the provision of RA 11037 (Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act) on Procurement of Goods and Services: “The Department of Budget and Management, Government Procurement Policy Board, and the Commission on Audit, in consultation with the NGAs, are hereby mandated to specifically establish and promulgate a community-based mode of procurement, liquidation and audit that will ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the Program.”
2. Mobilize resources to augment the lack of equipment for SFP implementation and monitoring. Considering the sizeable data to be managed in implementing SFP, all partner LGUs must ensure that the SFP staff have dedicated computers, other IT equipment, and weighing scales among others.

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MONITORING DIGITAL FINANCIAL PAYMENTS OF CASH TRANSFERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Prepared by: Innovations for Poverty Action Philippines

Authors:

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ABSTRACT

As countries turn to cash transfer programs as a way to quickly provide economic relief to households affected by COVID-19, digital cash transfers, for example via mobile money payments, have emerged as an efficient and safe way to disburse funds at scale. However, it's important to remain aware of key challenges that persist in last-mile delivery of these services. Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), in collaboration with the World Bank and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), implemented a monitoring study of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) Tranche 2, an emergency and cash subsidy program during the time of COVID-19. In this round, DSWD provided beneficiaries the option to receive payments via digital payments, partnering with six financial service providers (FSPs). This payment scheme was added with the goal of fast tracking the distribution of financial assistance to the affected families. The purpose of this research was to map key challenges that persisted in the last-mile delivery of these services, specifically on the beneficiaries' wellbeing and financial health, Government-to-Person (G2P) payment experience, program awareness and financial service use.

Key findings from the survey showed that the program itself was successful. Reported satisfaction with withdrawal experience and awareness of key components of the program remained high. Individuals benefited from services that may otherwise be unavailable to them under direct cash aid. SAP was designed to target poor Filipinos affected by quarantine restrictions. Beneficiaries surveyed reported suffering from poor financial health with no savings left at the end of the month, burdened with outstanding loans through informal lenders and not having the ability to cover emergency expenses. The DSWD, through the FSPs, opened accounts for SAP 2 beneficiaries who opted to receive digital payments. However, few respondents were aware that these accounts existed and even fewer used the available financial services in these accounts.

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IPA recommends the following:

- Shift to disbursing both regular and temporary aid through digital channels;
- Continued collaboration with FSPs to standardize the onboarding and account processes, develop communication strategies that support full FSP account usage, and support efforts to improve digital financial literacy; and
- Development of a unified, standardized database and management information system that will improve the quality and integrity of DSWD's data framework and leverage on PhilSys for the identification and verification of beneficiaries.

Keywords: *Social amelioration program, digital payments, COVID-19 emergency aid, financial service providers, financial technology*

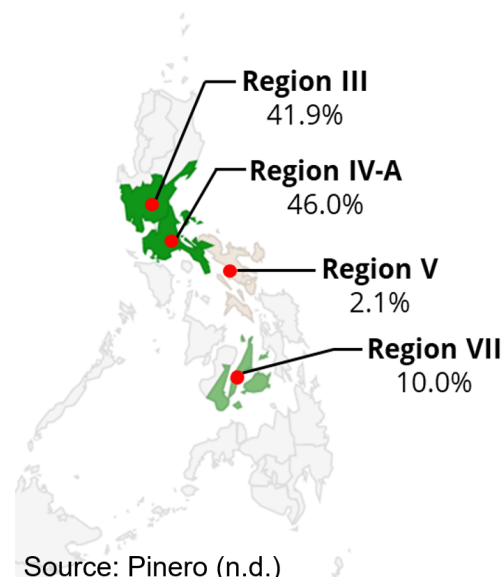
BACKGROUND

As the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 unfold in the Philippines, the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities across income classes, pushing an estimated 1.5 million families under the poverty line (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2020). The Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has implemented the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), which is an emergency subsidy and cash transfer program to support vulnerable households during the time of COVID-19. Digitizing these payments has potential to create substantial increase in access to formal financial institutions and allow efficient and safe disbursements at scale. The DSWD tapped digital financial service providers to distribute the second tranche of emergency cash subsidies under the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) to fast track the disbursement of financial assistance to affected families. However, it is important to remain aware of key challenges that persist in last-mile delivery of these services. It is especially important to pay attention to digital delivery solutions for underbanked beneficiaries and those without experience using digital channels such as mobile money.

The DSWD had collaborated with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and the World Bank to understand the experience of these digital cash transfer beneficiaries and their usage of mobile money products to identify pain points and develop solutions for future digital cash transfers. There is also special interest in long-term outcomes such as financial inclusion of the unbanked, and its impact on the empowerment of women.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Through the Policy Development and Planning Bureau (PDPB), IPA coordinated with two DSWD offices to obtain relevant administrative data in January 2021, both the Financial Management Service (FMS) and the Information and Communication Technology Management Service (ICTMS) departments. The FMS data provides information on the disbursement of SAP via the financial service providers and the ICTMS data provides further information on the household demographics and characteristics from the Social Amelioration Card.



However, there were several issues that IPA encountered with the administrative data that required extensive cleaning to resolve. IPA faced further challenges in merging the FMS and ICTMS data together. Unfortunately, the two datasets do not share a unique identifying variable to allow for a perfect merge. The best alternative was to merge selected imperfect string variables together using records linkage methods, which is essentially a fuzzy merge.

The entire process of fuzzy merging the administrative data took four weeks as each iteration across 500,000 observations takes approximately 48 hours to complete. IPA was able to clean and merge 65% of the data for Regions III, IV-A, V and VII.

Respondents from these four regions received their digital payments at a later time in the SAP disbursement and nearer to the start of the remote survey implemented by IPA. Out of the 2,481,393 successfully merged households, IPA surveyed 5,000 randomly selected beneficiaries between February to April 2021. The sample was stratified based on key variables such as region, date of payment and the financial service provider.

IPA employed and trained a team of three field coordinators and 24 field enumerators at the onset of data collection. All interviews were conducted in the respondents' local language over phone using SurveyCTO Collect. Enumerators were assigned based on the region and its local language. The field staff made 35,743 calls to 11,821 households to reach the targeted 5,000 interviews (i.e., 7% response rate). In keeping with recommended remote interview durations, the average interview lasted 33.5 minutes. While remote data collection entails more phone calls to reach the sample to address lower response rates and require shorter interview durations and shorter surveys, IPA follows strict data quality protocols to ensure it is the best alternative to in person data collection. Data was double encrypted from encoding in SurveyCTO by the enumerator to data analysis by the research team. The survey instrument was designed in collaboration with DSWD and the World Bank. The survey was translated, back-translated and programmed in six languages local to the regions: Bisaya, Bicolano, Hiligaynon, Kapampangan, Pangasinense and Tagalog.

KEY QUESTIONS

In this study, IPA sought to first understand the beneficiary experience with the digitized system of payment transfers by monitoring key questions about their G2P payment experience:

- Map beneficiary (by gender, geography, and economic status) motivation, awareness, expectations, and satisfaction during each stage of the customer journey to receive their payments via a financial institution account (account opening, activation and usage, G2P payment delivery, cash-out or digital payments) and if those expectations have been met;
- Understand challenges or pain points that recipients faced in receiving their payments (including fees, queues, and leakage);
- Consumer protection issues, either overall or issues with specific providers (including complaints handling, complaints resolution processes, transparency, and information disclosure);

And secondly, to explore as well the beneficiaries' financial service use:

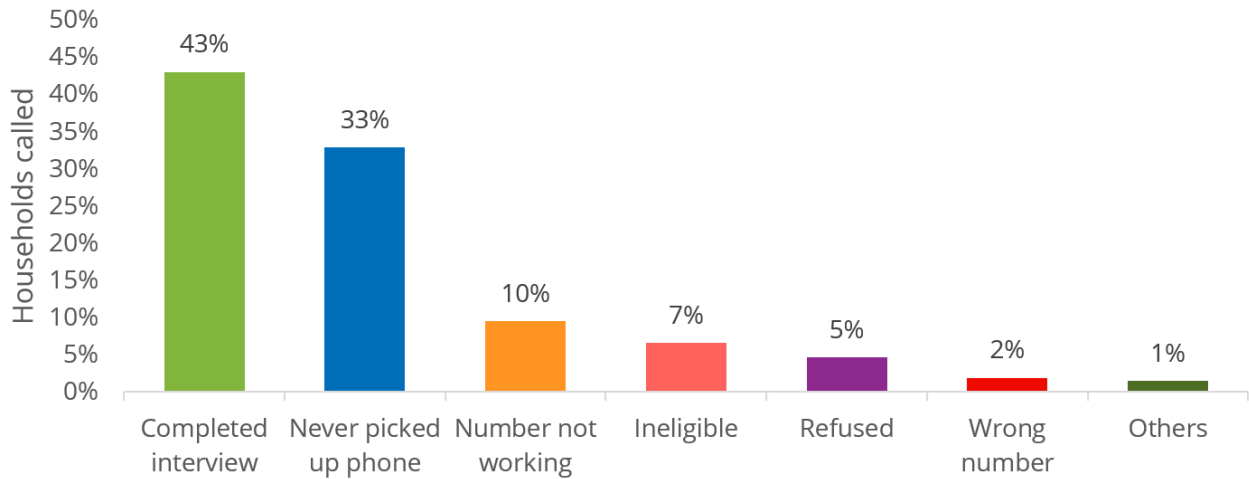
- Understand recipients' current use of financial services and products (savings, banking, mobile and transactions) outside of the G2P payment (informal and formal);
- Understand recipients' current use of mobile phones and mobile money, including acquisition (type of phone, method of payment, cost), ownership (individual or shared) and ongoing cost (for talk, text and/or data);
- Understand recipients' barriers to accessing digital transfer payments or reasons for intending to keep or stop using their mobile money accounts for other financial transactions.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

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However, there were several issues that IPA encountered with the administrative data that required extensive cleaning to resolve. IPA faced further challenges in merging the FMS and ICTMS data together. Unfortunately, the two datasets do not share a unique identifying variable to allow for a perfect merge. The best alternative was to merge selected imperfect string variables together using records linkage methods, which is essentially a fuzzy merge.

Figure 1. Interview status among households contacted, N=11,821

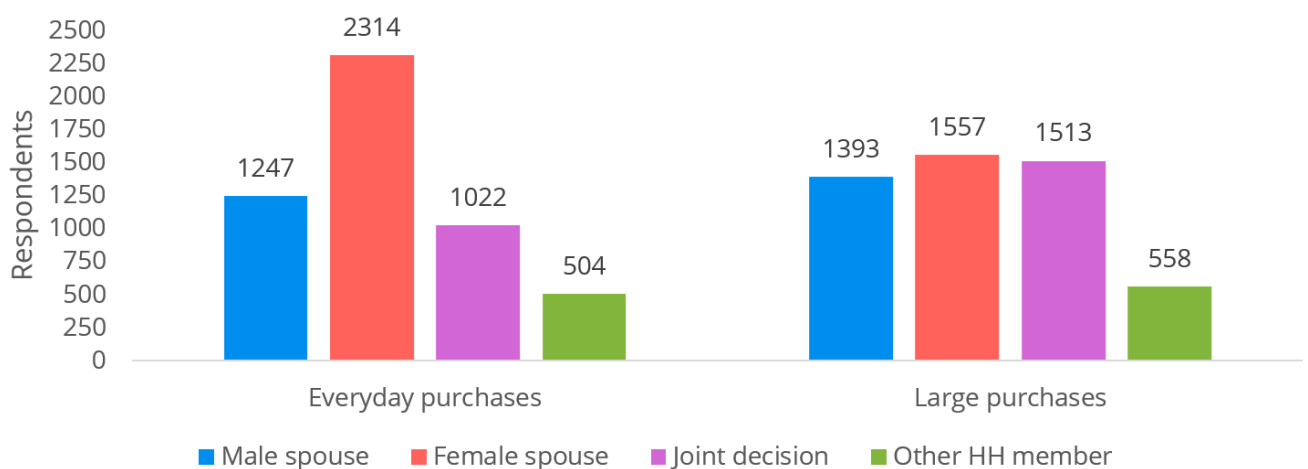


SURVEY RESULTS

Profile of Respondents

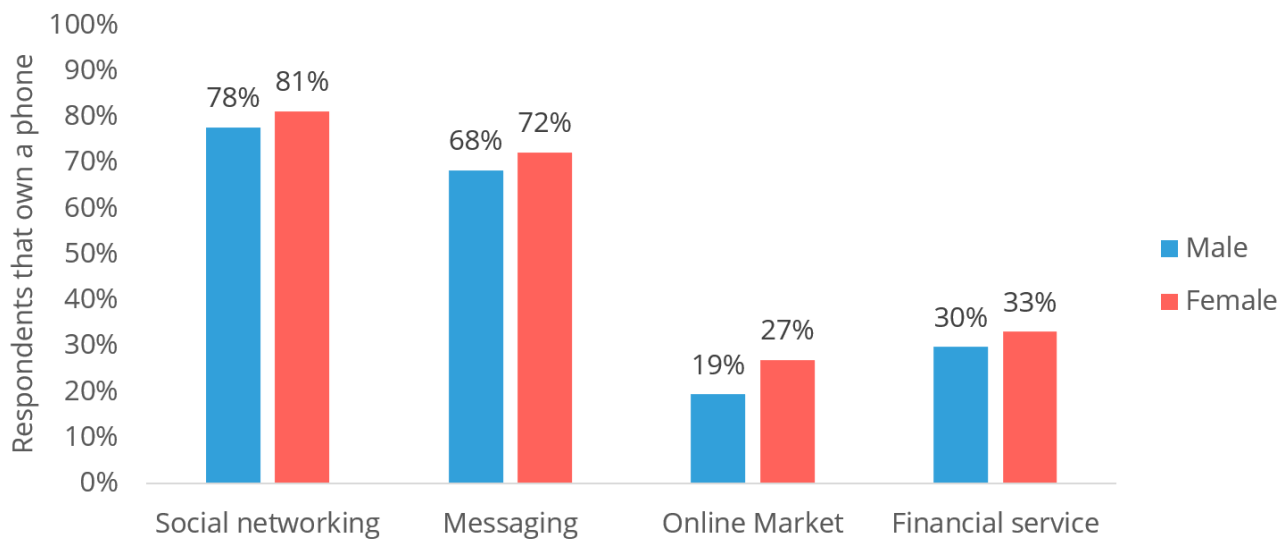
The distribution of respondents across regions corresponded to local population. The average respondent was 41.5 years old from a 4.5-member household with 2.6 children. They had received approximately one SAP payment via cash in a previous tranche and another SAP payment digitally. Respondents were 55% male and 62% had at least completed secondary education. While majority of household income earners were the male spouse (65%), the main household decision-maker for everyday purchases and large purchases were often the female spouse (45%, 31%). Quarantine restrictions during the pandemic has also shown to affect income, with respondents reporting a rise in unemployment by 7% since February 2020. This resulted from a decrease in self-employment (-2.4%), employment without contract (-3.2%) and employment with a contract (-1.9%).

Figure 2. Main household decision-maker across respondents



There are opportunities to promote digital financial accounts among SAP beneficiaries, with 96% of respondents having access to a phone. Increasing access to formal accounts specifically among women is promising with 84% of women owning a phone compared to 79% of men. Among those who own a phone, 69% own a smart phone, which is a requirement to install some FSP applications to access digital accounts. Most respondents that own a phone know how to use its basic functions such as answering or ending calls (97%), dialing phone numbers (94%), and sending or reading text messages (95%). However, only 65% browse or use mobile applications. While majority of respondents have a personal account in social media applications (79%, 70%) such as Facebook and Messenger, only a third own an account in applications that offer financial services (31%) such as PayMaya or GCash.

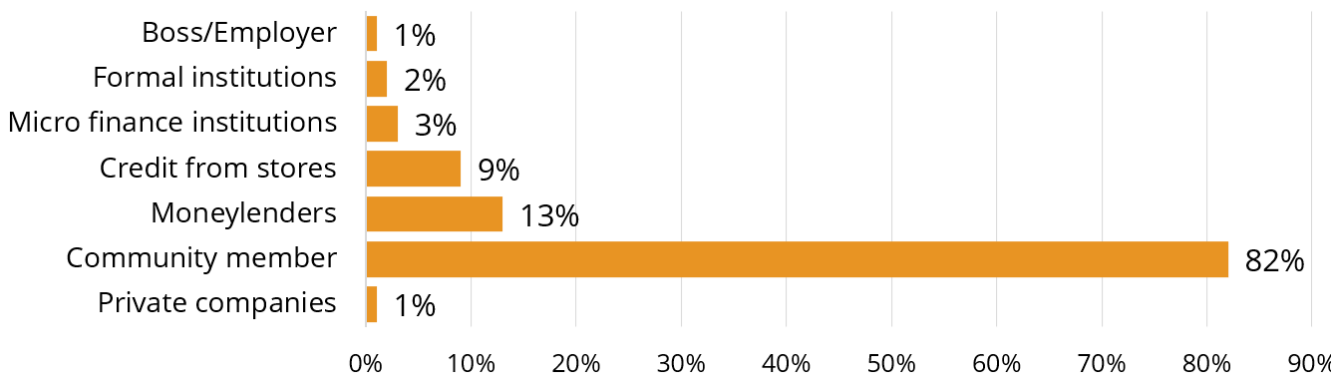
Figure 3. Ownership of accounts across different types of mobile applications, N=4060



Financial Awareness, Capability and Health

Though there is a need for financial services amongst beneficiaries, most are inexperienced with formal channels to access them. Eighty-two percent of respondents know where the nearest bank is located however only 9% have an active bank account. Seventy one percent also have outstanding loans that amount to approximately Php 14,000 on average. Majority of loans are informal, coming from community members (82%), moneylenders (13%) and store credit (9%). Only 3% of respondents took out their loan from formal financial institutions or private companies. The loans were mostly spent for daily necessities.

Figure 4. Source of outstanding loans, N=3964



SAP was designed to target the poor affected by COVID-19 quarantine measures and the study sample indicates beneficiaries suffer from poor financial health. Most respondents' main income source does not come from formal employment (77%), income is given via cash basis (88%), and is disbursed frequently in a month (61%). The pandemic had affected household incomes with 70% of beneficiaries reporting reduced income relative to pre-pandemic times. Only 31% of respondents had reported having money left over after the end of a typical month. Almost all monthly expenses are also on daily necessities such as food (99%) and utilities (98%). When asked where they can source funds to pay off an emergency expense of Php 10,000 within the next 30 days, 26% reported that they could not pay it off at all. Among those that could, 79% reported that it would be very difficult.

SAP 2 Program Awareness

Awareness among respondents with regards to key aspects of SAP was high. All respondents know that SAP is a government aid program with 66% of respondents able to name DSWD as the implementing agency. Almost all respondents did not pay a facilitation fee to get selected into SAP (99.7%) and understood that they were entitled to receive cash payment of about Php 5,000 to 8,000 (99%). Eighty-nine percent cited poverty or low income as a basis for being eligible to receive SAP. This is followed by marital status (18%), COVID-19 (17%) and age (13%).

A portion of respondents know to how to reach the barangay hall (50%, 53%) or the DSWD (37%, 49%) if they have any questions or concerns. A small number (7%) reported that there is no one to contact if they had any questions. This number increases to 24% of respondents for those who report having concerns. Beneficiaries would benefit from more information on mechanisms to resolve concerns regarding the program.

In contrast to the respondent's high program awareness, awareness of the FSP and the FSP account was very low. Account awareness also significantly varies between FSPs. Only 31% could correctly recall which FSP disbursed their SAP payments overall. Recall was highest for GCash (78%) and PayMaya (67%) among beneficiaries. However, other FSPs fare significantly lower such as StarPay (10%), UnionBank (3%), Robinsons Bank (2%) and RCBC (0%). Particularly for the brick-and-mortar banks such as RCBC and Robinsons, respondents would report either "a bank" in general or the name of another bank.

Table 1. Cross-reference between FSP according to administrative data and survey data

	GCash	StarPay	UnionBank	RCBC	Robinsons	PayMaya	Total
FSP	78%	10%	3%	0%	2%	67%	32%
Pawnshop or Remittance Center	17%	71%	48%	34%	0%	19%	41%
Bank, not FSP	3%	14%	32%	58%	89%	2%	21%
Mobile wallet	1%	1%	3%	2%	0%	2%	2%
Dragon Pay (P2P)	0%	0%	12%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Barangay or LGU	1%	2%	1%	3%	9%	1%	1%
Others	0%	1%	1%	3%	0%	9%	1%
N	1569	1420	898	789	47	290	5013

*Column headers represent the FSP according to the FMS administrative data submitted by the FSPs.

Furthermore, only 16% of respondents reported having an account for their SAP payment. Of these respondents, only 58% reported that the FSP account can be used for something else other than receiving government payments and only a third (38%) have used other features such as receiving or sending remittances and paying bills. This lack of awareness and adoption of the beneficiary accounts opened by the FSPs limits the program's impact on financial inclusion.

Table 2. Awareness of FSP account and account features, N=5080

Account for SAP	N	%
Has an account for SAP	789	16%
Can use account for...		
Receive remittances	302	6%
Pay bills	187	4%
Send remittances	174	3%
Purchasing	150	3%
Save / Deposit	99	2%
Purchasing load	21	0%
Take loans	17	0%
Take insurance	4	0%
Can only use account for SAP	304	6%
Used account for...		
Receive remittances	183	4%
Pay bills	92	2%
Send remittances	97	2%
Purchasing	98	2%
Save / Deposit	43	1%
Purchasing load	12	0%
Take loans	1	0%
Take insurance	0	0%

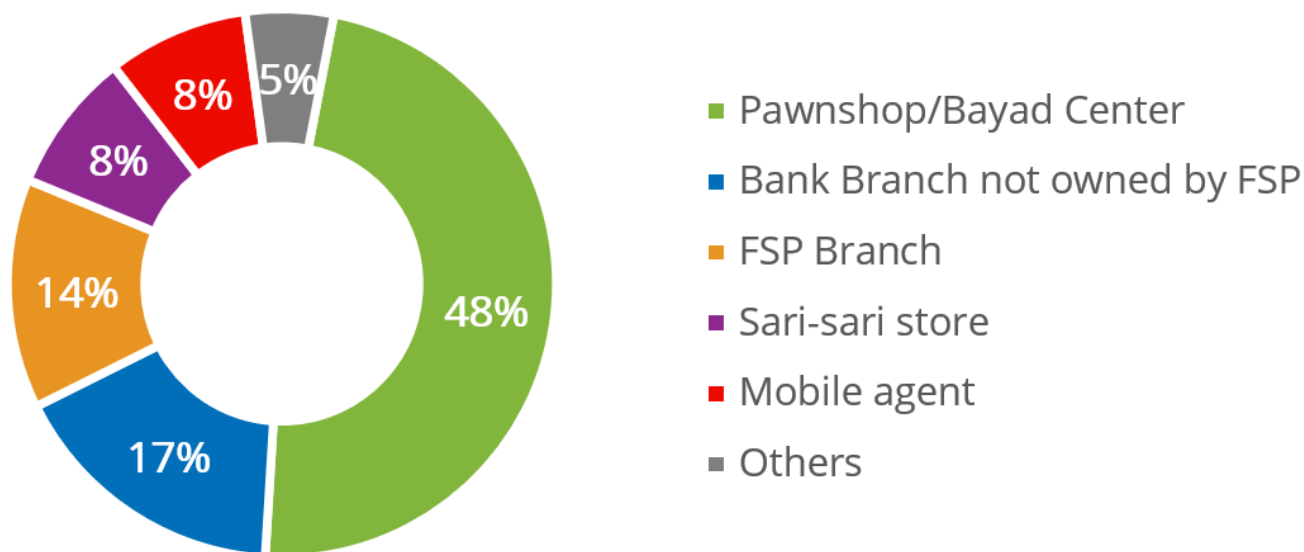
Program Experience

A key goal of the study is to map out the SAP 2 beneficiary experience in order to understand pain points and identify solutions to improve the program. SAP 2 beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the digital payments via FSPs. Beneficiaries reported that they could submit their application or the social amelioration card to their barangay (71%) and/or to DSWD (32%) to register for the program. The beneficiary then learns of their SAP payment either via SMS (48%), their barangay (50%) or some other means (2%).

Almost all beneficiaries withdrew the entire SAP allowance (99.8%) in one transaction (93%). Sixty-two percent of respondents collected the SAP payment themselves. Ninety-six percent of respondents were required to show something as proof of their identity during withdrawal, such as a government issued ID (88%) and the SAC (53%). Majority did not have reported difficulties in their SAP withdrawal (63%). However, among those who did report difficulties, most complained about the queue time (29%).

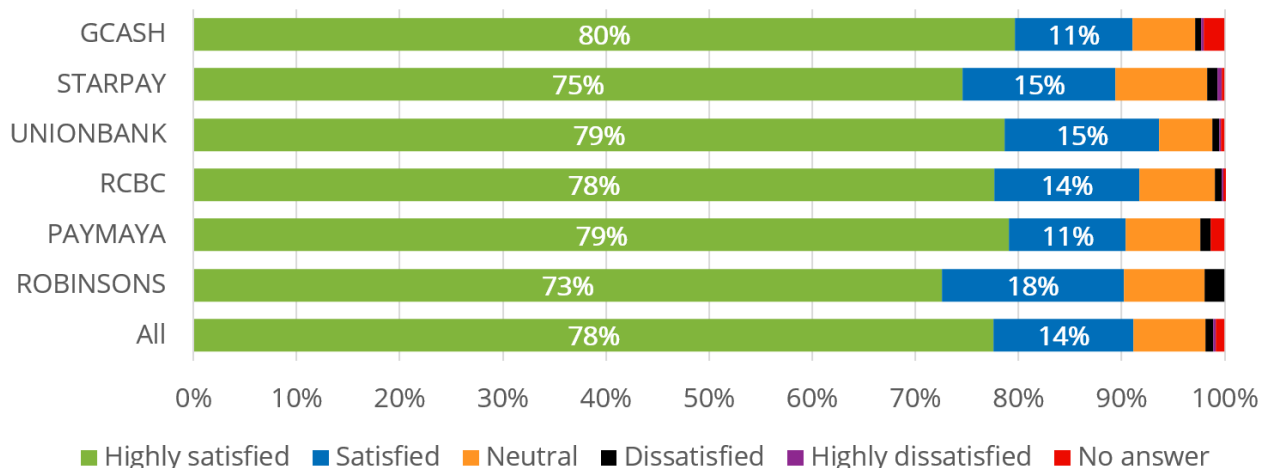
Travel time to cash out the digital payments remains an issue. Seventy-four percent had to travel outside their barangay to the payment point. Locations where respondents withdrew their allowance were mostly concentrated in pawnshops (45%). This is followed by brick-and-mortar banks (16%) and the FSP's branches (13%). Though the distribution does vary depending on the FSP, beneficiaries benefited from more than one location to withdraw.

Figure 5. Distribution of payout points, N=5090



In general, beneficiaries reported a positive withdrawal experience through the SAP 2 digital payments. Ninety percent reported high satisfaction with SAP withdrawal. The median time spent in queue averaged to an hour across beneficiaries, while the median withdrawal fee was about Php 50. The queuing time and withdrawal fees do not significantly affect the beneficiaries' satisfaction rating, which may indicate that the time and monetary costs of withdrawals were favorable compared to the respondents' past experiences with aid payments.

Figure 6. Reported satisfaction with SAP withdrawal across FSPs, N=5090



Nevertheless, satisfaction rates do differ depending on certain variables. Individuals with higher levels of education and individuals that experienced problems with withdrawals tend to be less satisfied. In addition, individuals who received their FSPs also differed in terms of satisfaction ratings. Beneficiaries who received SAP payments from GCash tend to be more satisfied relative to those who receiving payments via other FSPs. Table 3 presents the correlates of satisfaction for financial service providers in comparison to GCash. In comparison to GCash, StarPay fared the worst with the lowest satisfaction.

Table 3. Correlates of satisfaction - financial service providers

FSPs	coefficient	s.e.
PAYMAYA	-0.081 [*]	(0.045)
RCBC	-0.079 ^{**}	(0.031)
ROBINSONS	-0.099	(0.124)
STARPAY	-0.11 ^{***}	(0.025)
UNIONBANK	-0.061 ^{**}	(0.027)
N	5046	
R^2	0.01	

***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level.

Withdrawal costs also significantly differ among FSPs. In particular, the mean time cost is lowest for GCash at 1.87 hours but highest for StarPay at 4.25 hours, which is a 127% difference. It is most difficult to commute to and queue at the payment points for StarPay at 24 and 195 minutes, respectively. Robinsons Bank has the longest withdrawal processing time at the payment desk at 12 minutes. The shortest commute and queue time was reported by beneficiaries under GCash at 17 and 70 minutes, respectively. RCBC takes the shortest time in processing withdrawals at nine minutes. It is also important to note that there are significant differences between the mean and medians across the time costs, which indicate large outliers. For example, the mean queue time is 127 minutes while the median queue time is 60 minutes, which is a difference of 112%.

Table 4. Reported time spent in withdrawing SAP allowance

		GCash	StarPay	UnionBank	RCBC	PayMaya	Robinsons	Overall
N		1575	1446	917	809	292	51	5090
Travel time in mins (one way)	Mean	17.14	24.40	22.45	19.82	20.86	19.62	20.85
	Median	10.00	20.00	20.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00
Queue time in mins	Mean	69.53	194.69	127.77	127.25	69.74	180.96	126.56
	Median	20.00	120.00	60.00	90.00	30.00	120.00	60.00
Time at desk in mins	Mean	9.78	10.43	9.27	8.88	9.04	12.04	9.71
	Median	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	10.00	5.00
Total time cost in hours*	Mean	1.87	4.25	3.01	2.93	1.99	3.87	2.96
	Median	1.08	3.12	2.18	2.25	1.33	3.17	2.00

*The time cost is the average of the sum of the queue time, time at payment desk and twice the travel time.

In addition to having the highest time cost for withdrawals, StarPay also has the highest total financial costs. On the other hand, mobile wallets such as GCash and PayMaya, who had the lowest time costs, present much higher withdrawal fees. Robinsons Bank and Union Bank, who had one of the highest time costs, present the lowest financial costs at 114 and 120 pesos, respectively. This may indicate some form of trade-off between the time and monetary costs of withdrawals for certain FSPs.

Table 5. Reported fees spent in withdrawing SAP allowance

		GCash	StarPay	UnionBank	RCBC	PayMaya	Robinsons	Overall
N		1575	1446	917	809	292	51	5090
Withdrawal fee	Mean	96.54	57.22	52.70	50.82	79.03	49.35	68.05
	Median	100.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00
Travel fee (one way)	Mean	21.61	41.15	34.06	38.67	25.23	39.02	32.58
	Median	0.00	25.00	20.00	25.00	0.00	30.00	20.00
Total financial cost*	Mean	136.69	138.08	120.29	128.45	134.86	114.19	132.44
	Median	110.00	100.00	90.00	110.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

*The financial cost is the average of the sum of the withdrawal fee and twice the travel fee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Shift to disbursing both regular and temporary aid through digital channels

Adopting digital payments as another channel to quickly disburse cash aid to the poor led to a positive experience overall for beneficiaries. Digital beneficiaries benefitted from services that may otherwise be unavailable under direct cash aid. Reported satisfaction was high and costs of withdrawal were kept at a minimum. Some were even able to choose between different payment points. The average beneficiary only spent ten minutes travelling to the payment point and 60 minutes in queue. For those who received their payment from mobile wallets, the average time spent queuing was even much lower at 20 to 30 minutes. Average travel fees were also zero under these mobile wallets, and only Php 20 to 30 for the rest.

In addition, though account awareness remained low, the creation of FSP accounts for these underbanked beneficiaries presents an integral milestone in increasing financial inclusion amongst the poor. If supplemented with further interventions to raise awareness and encourage account usage, beneficiaries would have greater access to formal financial services that were previously out of their reach.

IPA strongly recommends shifting to disbursing both regular and temporary aid through digital channels. While digital transformation is usually costly at the onset, digital disbursements offer a low-cost and efficient channel for future emergency cash aid that would lead to greater returns for DSWD.

Continue collaborating with FSPs to foster awareness

In general, the challenges faced by the SAP 2 beneficiaries in using the financial services provided by their new digital accounts can be summarized as follows:

1. Most SAP 2 beneficiaries are inexperienced with formal financial services

There is high reported ownership of smartphones and high usage of mobile applications. Very few respondents reported needing help using a phone. However, there is a significantly lower adoption of online financial services compared to, for example, social networking services even if most beneficiaries had needed to borrow money in the past. Notably, most beneficiaries' main income source is given in cash and most loans are sourced informally. Though 82% of respondents know where the nearest bank is, 80% have never even owned a bank account.

2. SAP 2 beneficiaries lack awareness about the account created for their SAP payment

Beneficiaries were given temporary restricted accounts by their FSPs, which they can convert to a verified full-feature account within 12 months. However, 68% of beneficiaries could not name the same financial service provider that disbursed their payment according to the administrative data. Only 16% reported having an account for the SAP payment. Among this small portion of respondents, only 38% have used features in the account other than receiving their SAP allowance. It is therefore unlikely that beneficiaries will be converting their accounts within the timeframe without intervention.

While beneficiaries do require financial services, it is clear that they lack awareness of even the existence of these services made available to them. To overcome these challenges, there is a need to ensure that these financial accounts from the FSPs as well as their numerous benefits are properly communicated to beneficiaries. IPA recommends further collaboration with the FSPs in designing programs to better meet financial inclusion goals. These include:

- Standardizing the onboarding and account processes,
- Developing communication strategies to support FSP-usage, and
- Supporting efforts to improve digital financial literacy.

Improve the quality and integrity of the data framework

Ensuring and maintaining high quality data is an integral component in shifting towards more digital platforms in delivering government services. Poor quality data can negatively affect program delivery. For example, no household ID in even one data source would require manual or fuzzy merging of datasets, which is a costly, time-consuming, and inefficient process that could halt operations for an extended amount of time. Incorrectly encoded phone numbers would also prevent FSPs from reaching beneficiaries, leading to a failure of disbursements.

High quality data opens many possibilities for government, from beneficiary targeting to evidence-based decision-making. Data can inform both policy-making and operational processes. It can prevent program spillovers and help detect problems early on.

IPA recommends improving the quality and integrity of DSWD's administrative data framework. In this vein, IPA has provided capacity building workshops on monitoring and evaluation to key offices in DSWD. With increased collaboration from ICTMS and other relevant departments, DSWD can develop a unified, standardized database and management information systems. In addition, DSWD can further capitalize on the Philippine Identification System (PhilSys) for the identification and verification of beneficiaries.

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