



The Journey of Social Workers and Development Workers in times of pandemic COVID' 19 in Tacurong City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a narrative on the experience of Social Workers and Development Workers in Tacurong City, Province of Sultan Kudat, Philippines. It focuses on the implementation of Social Amelioration Program (SAP), one of the interventions in responding the world to experience this pandemic, which started April 2020 when the Department of Health confirmed the local transmission of Corona Virus Disease (COVID '19) in the Philippines. The Aid to Individual in Crisis Situation (AICS) and Livelihood Assistance Grant (LAG) are the programs under Social Amelioration Program(SAP) to augment the basic and financial needs of heavily affected families by pandemic as well as the livelihood assistance for the economic recovery of the beneficiaries. Food packs distribution were given also to affected families through house to house delivery especially during the community quarantine. The Department of Social Welfare and Development is the lead agency in the implementation of Social Amelioration Program and the Local Government Units-Social Welfare and Development Workers are the main actors in the implementation.

Keywords: *Pandemic, COVID'19, Social Amelioration Program, Aid to Individual in Crisis Situation, Livelihood Assistance Grants, Social Welfare and Development Workers, And Front Liners.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID'19 was discovered in China in December 2019 that all nations in the world were affected and the first time in the history to experience this pandemic in the whole world. Coronavirus is a viral respiratory illness that can cause symptoms of fever, cough, muscle aches, headaches, and diarrhea. Some patients with COVID 19 develop pneumonia and may need to be hospitalized.

Amidst to this pandemic, social workers and development workers who are front liners are in urgent need to respond the most affected families in delivering basic social welfare services, psychological first aid especially those who were admitted in the hospitals because of COVID 19 and those who were in isolation facilities (Locally Stranded Individuals and Returned Overseas Filipinos) because in the national health protocols, they were required to undergo 14 days quarantine before returning to their residence/families. Locally Stranded Individuals (LSI) are those individuals who are coming from other places and regions within the country and wanted to go home during lockdown and community quarantine while Returned Overseas Filipinos are those who returned to the Philippines from other countries.

Social Workers and Development Workers are the main actors since the start of COVID 19 until this time they are still in the field to work with community people to follow up the social welfare and protection program and to continue the services to all sectors in the community. The social welfare and social protection programs were not hampered and we continue our projects and activities provided we follow the standard health protocols on this new normal. Though we have difficulties and challenges in program implementation because of our patience and resiliency we were able to overcome and we were able to survive.

Objectives of the paper are: 1. To document the action taken by the local government of Tacurong City in responding to the challenges of COVID 19. 2. To provide a bird's eye view in implementing the services of the Department of Social Welfare Department regarding the Social Amelioration Fund; the implementation of Emergency Subsidy Program (ESP) in the form of Assistance to Aid to individual in Crisis Situation (AICS) and Livelihood Assistance Grants (LAG) to families during the COVID 19 pandemic. 3. To present the journey of the social workers and social development personnel helping the community of Tacurog City in coordination with various local agencies in distributing the funds and related assistance provide by the National Government through the Local Government Units (LGUs).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 New Governance

The process of democratic governance entails a bureaucratic system that follows hierarchical model (Weber, 1947). He believed that bureaucracy was the most efficient way to set up an organization, administration and organizations. In a bureaucratic organization, everyone is treated equal and the division of labor is clearly described for each employee.

According to Morgan and Cook (2014, p.4), "New public management (NPM) strives to make the services provided by the government more responsive and accountable to citizens by applying businesslike management techniques with strong focus competition, customer satisfaction, and measurement of performance." However, the narrow business-like focus of governance gave rise to a new perspective that puts substantive political values at the center of governance.

The New Public Governance (NPG) has three salient points: "First, NPG is value centered; it argues that the goal of government is to promote the largest common good...The second characteristic of NPG is its emphasis in creating government processes that facilitate the generation of implementable agreements among a wide range of stakeholders. The final characteristic of NPG is that it views the creation of public good as a coproduction process involving the public, private market, and non-profit sectors." (Morgan & Cook, 2014, p. 5-6). These three characteristics creates a view that there must be a synergistic relationship among the public, private and nonprofit sectors for optimum achievement of common good.

The trends in public administration and governance according to Guy and Rubin (2015) are: "1. Higher life expectancy and falling birth rates increase the proportion of elderly citizens, challenging the solvency of social welfare system, pension, and health care. 2. The implications of the rise of citizens' expectation for government performance. 3. Information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed society and connected the globe, testing governments' ability benefits of ICT. 4.the interconnected global economy see continued increase in capital flow and international trade.5. the continuing constraint of public debt. 6. Global power is rebalancing and this requires that international institutions and national governments have a great focus on maintaining transparency and inclusiveness. 7. By 2030 two thirds of the world's population is forecast to live in the cities." (p. 279).

2.2 Philippine Republic Acts

Republic Act No. 6975 December 13, 1990 is an act of Congress establishing the Philippine national police under the reorganization of the Interior and Local Government. Section 1 This Act shall be known as the "Department of the Interior and Local Government Act of 1990." Section 2. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the State to promote peace and order, ensure public safety and further strengthen local government capability aimed towards the effective delivery of the basic services to the citizenry through the establishment of a highly efficient and competent police force that is national in scope and civilian in character. Towards this end, the State shall bolster a system of coordination and cooperation among the citizenry, local executives and the integrated law enforcement and public safety agencies created under this Act.

In 1991, Republic act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code was enacted into law, transferring control and responsibility of delivering basic services to the hands of local government units (LGU). It aimed to enhance provision of services in the grass roots level as well as improve the efficiency in resource allocation. Further, it sought to widen the decision-making space by encouraging the participation of stake holders, especially in the local level.

Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code was enacted into law, transferring control and responsibility of delivering basic services to the hands of local government units (LGU). It aimed to enhance provision of services in the grass roots level as well as improve the efficiency in resource allocation. The police force shall be organized, trained and equipped primarily for the performance of police functions. Its national scope and civilian character shall be paramount. No element of the police force shall be military nor shall any position thereof be occupied by active members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

In 1968, Republic Act 5416, known as the Social Welfare Act of 1968, created the Department of Social Welfare, placing it under the executive branch of government. In 1976, the Department of Social Welfare was renamed Department of Social Services and Development (DSSD) through Presidential Decree No. 994. DSSD history Executive Order No. 123, reorganizing the MSSD and renaming it Department of Social Welfare and Development on January 30, 1987, it was signed by President Corazon C. Aquino. the Department was 'evolving from mere welfare or relief agency to greater task of development'.

Then after almost one decade, Republic Act 7160 otherwise known as Local Government Code was passed. The DSSD Alongside with other national agencies had to "shift gears", it had to devolve its implementing functions together with its programs and services, direct service workers, budget corresponding to the salary and funds of the staff and programs, and assets and liabilities to the Local Government Units starting in 1992. It is almost 30 years or 3 decades of devolution but there are still issues, concerns problems and challenges encountered by the local social and development and here comes the devolution 2. The Mandanas Ruling on full devolution in the 2022 is still under discussion and planning stage of the concerned agencies.

The Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, also known as the Bayanihan Act, and officially designated as Republic Act No. 11469, is a law in the Philippines that was enacted in March 2020 granting the President additional authority to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. The act will provide government funds to stimulate the economy while strengthening the health sector and the government's pandemic responses. The Social Amelioration Program grants a P5,000 to P8,000 monthly cash subsidy to low-income families for two months, depending on the area of residence. The subsidies provide marginalized sectors of society the means to afford basic needs during the pandemic.

2.3 Management

Management is the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling human and other organizational resources towards the effective achievement of organizational goals. (Dyck & Neubert, 2012). The Four Management Functions: Planning: deciding on an organization's goals and strategies. Organizing: ensuring that tasks have been assigned and the structure of organizational relationships facilitates meeting goals. Leading: relating with others so that their work efforts achieve organizational goals. Controlling: ensuring actions are consistent the organization's values and standards.

Mainstream managers perform effectively when organizational efficiency, productivity and competitiveness are maximized. They plan via measurable goals and rationally-designed strategies; organize via standardization, specialization, and centralization; lead via motivating others to achieve organizational goals and control via vigilant monitoring of performance.

Multistream managers perform effectively when virtues are practiced in community and happiness is achieved. They plan via practical wisdom, participation and higher-order goals; organize via courage and experimentation; lead via relational self-control and treating members with dignity; and control via fairness and being sensitive to sub-optimal conditions. Mainstream management emphasizes materialism and individualism; effective management is about maximizing productivity, profitability and competitiveness and self-interest serves organizational needs.

Multistream management emphasizes multiple forms of well-being for multiple stakeholders and effective management is about working with stakeholders towards creating a balance among multiple forms of well-being, which include: aesthetics, emotional, physical, social, intellectual, individual, ecological material and spiritual. (Dyck & Neubert, 2012).

The New Public Management calls for customer service as a business model in governance and the New Public Governance calls for tripartite cooperation among the public, private and non-government institutions. The combine concepts promote common good of all and the beneficiaries is the citizens. The various Philippine Republic Acts put in motion the various government agencies being called upon to serve the interest of the citizens, especially in this critical time of COVID 19 pandemic. The mainstream approach to management has concern for monetary consideration like profitability and financial wellbeing but multistream approach to management is focused on nine elements a materiality or monetary aspect is only one of the nine key concerns. New dimension of wellbeing is ecological and spiritual dimensions of our human existence.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology of this paper is qualitative (Marshall & Rossman, 2010), using multi-values (Richardson, 2015) research approaches in presenting the journey of the social workers and social developers. It is a modified single case study (Yin, 2003) on the COVID 19 response of the Tacurong City. It provides an awareness of "the critical role of patterns and context in the achievement of knowledge" (Chisholm, 1966). on how social workers responded to the COVID 19 pandemic. It is partly storytelling (Pallin, 2018) because it narrates the critical values of Philippine government at the national and local level of governance. It is heuristic (Mustakas, 1994Mustakas & Douglas, 1989) because it details the personal experiences of the social workers and concerned local government agency in managing the social assistance to the citizens of Tacurong city. It is historical (Bloch, 1962) because it presents the values espoused by democratic governance through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

IV. RESULT & DISCUSSION

4.1 The Social Amelioration Program

Tacurong City is situated at the heart of South-Central Mindanao, at the crossroads of Davao-Gensan-Cotabato highways and became a component city year 2000 through the Republic Act 8805 converting the Municipality of Tacurong to the City of Tacurong. It is the only city in the province of Sultan Kudarat of Region XI, Philippines. City of Tacurong has a total area of 15,340 hectares composed of 20 barangays. The people are migrants from the island of Panay and Negros majority are Ilonggos and Hiligaynon's became the most dominant language other tribes are Cebuanos, Ilocanos, Moro tribes such as Maranaos, Tausug and Maguindanaos.

It has a total population of 98,360 as of 2015 census survey. Tacurong is the largest in terms of population size comprising 13.4% of the total population in the province. Tacurong labor force is 34,416 as of 2020, majority (or 15.86%) of which is in the agricultural sector. According to National Statistical Coordination Board poverty statistics survey in 2009, Tacurong has the least poverty incidence among cities and has always strived to provide with feasible and sustainable services to the constituents of the City of Tacurong.

Due to pandemic, "COVID 19", the City of Tacurong, the economic and social situation of the people has been affected, due to loss of job and employment, closure of establishments, hotels and restaurant/resorts and implementation of safety and standard health protocols and the new normal policies. Amidst to this pandemic the City of Tacurong were able to fight and overcome all the challenges, difficulties and hardships in the new normal. The implementation of basic social services and programs of the social welfare and social protection are positively responded by the City Government of Tacurong.

4.2 Rationale of Social Assistance

Republic Act 11469 known as Bayanihan to Heal as ONE Act was enacted by the National Government as one the interventions to respond the problem on COVID'19. Under this program is the Social Amelioration program(SAP) this apply the implementation of Emergency Subsidy Program(ESP) in the form of Assistance to Aid to individual in Crisis

Situation (AICS) and Livelihood Assistance Grants (LAG) to families qualified as “low income- households that are applicable to communities/areas under community quarantine who are most affected of Coronavirus (COVID’19) the first time in the history of pandemic attack not only in the Philippines but it happened in the whole world. Criteria and guidelines were set by the Department of Social Welfare and Development as parameters/guide of SAP implementation in the Local Level. Social pension payout was also included during the Social Amelioration Program implementation. The implementation of this program has been a problem and difficulty among front liners because of the short period of time given to Local Government Units. The process of implementation was very stressful and all the front liners in the local level were pressurized and received many threats from the constituents and social media, had experienced fear to be transmitted by the virus. During the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) the residents were advised to stay at home or they were not allowed to go out from their residence to avoid transmission of corona virus but the front liners, one of these are social workers and development workers played a vital role in handling the constituents in the community to fight COVID’19. They were exposed to barangays and brought basic services to the affected families especially the financial assistance and livelihood assistance to augment the income of beneficiaries affected by COVID’19.

4.3 Process of Implementation

The Social Workers are still required to report in the field, they did not observe the skeletal force and the alternative work from home since they are responsible to implement the social amelioration program and because of the short period given to them in the implementation and there is given date/schedule to finish the distribution of financial assistance and livelihood assistance. Social preparation is very limited from the start of activity such as the proper profiling of affected beneficiaries to all barangays using the Social Amelioration Card administered by the Department of Social and Welfare and Development, a tool used for profiling with a complete data to be filled up by the volunteers and with assistance of Social Workers.

During the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) the National Government issued an order that all the residents could not go out in their houses and stay at home policy to avoid transmission of the virus, thus emergency assistance were provided to all affected household families with food assistance, house to house delivery. The cash assistance under Social Amelioration Program was distributed to affected beneficiaries through the assistance of Inter agency task force composed of Philippine National Police, Military, Barangay Officials and volunteers, Rescue Team, LGU personnel’s, Social Workers and Development Workers.

The Office and barangays were given only seven (7) days in the profiling, then follows the assessment and validation of the household families to be qualified for the cash assistance of Social Amelioration Program, then after the finalization, comes the encoding of names of beneficiaries and preparation of payroll. The City of Tacurong has 17,607 beneficiaries/slots allotted by the DSWD for the assistance in the amount of Five Thousand Pesos (Php 5,000.00)/households. It was really a big challenge to all social workers because the LGU was advised to finish within thirty (30) days implementation. With the help of partners and stakeholders in the LGU, the distribution of Social Amelioration Program to beneficiaries was successfully completed to the target date of implementation and the 17,607 target beneficiaries were given the assistance.

House to house delivery of cash assistance to beneficiaries who have physical and mental disability (persons with disabilities) senior citizens that cannot go to the venue to claim their assistance. It was really a sacrifice among social workers and development workers but with the support of Local Government Unit and Department of Social Welfare and Development Region X11 and Interagency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, the implementation process for the whole community quarantine was done well and properly implemented. Interagency task force is organized by the executive of Philippine Government to respond to affairs concerning infectious diseases in the Philippines.

Incident Management Team (IMT) is also a team organized to manage the logistical, fiscal, planning, operational, safety and community issues related to the incident/emergency. Incident Management Team is composed of different private and public sectors which the City Health Officer in the local level is the lead agency in overall management and operation of activities related to health issues on COVID ’19.

Standard Health Protocols had been observed like wearing of face mask, face shield, regular washing of hands, using of alcohol and sanitizers and observed social distancing to avoid transmission of virus. Corona Viruses are a large family of viruses causing a range of illnesses, from the common cold to more serious infections such as those caused by Middle East Respiratory Syndrome-related Coronavirus (SARS-Cov). Coronavirus can also cause a variety of diseases in farm animals and domesticated pets. (<https://doh.gov.ph>, COVID-19).

The Local Government of Tacurong has positively responded to combat the COVID’19 through the unending support of our local officials with the leadership of our active Chief Executive and the support of National Lines Agencies by extending financial support through Bayanihan to Heal as One act. Isolation Facilities were provided to LGU Tacurong for 14 days quarantine to COVID’19 positive cases and for Locally stranded individuals and returned overseas Filipinos as required by the Department of Health and respective Local Government Units. Monitoring and operating expenses of the isolation facilities and foods of the beneficiaries (COVID cases, LSI and ROF) were charged to Bayanihan budget.

Bayanihan to Heal as One Act is the law enacted by the Government to give support financially and economically affected families of COVID’19, known as Republic Act 11469 or Bayanihan Act in the Philippines that was enacted in March 2020 granting the President additional authority to combat the COVID’19 pandemic in the Philippines and

because of the proclamation of state of health emergency that affects the Filipino health condition and to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the country. <https://en.wikipedia.org>.

4.4 Journey of the Social Workers

The social workers and development workers in the LGU Tacurong City in times of pandemic COVID'19 were able to face the challenges and responded the needs of affected families through distribution of food packs and relief goods, distribution of cash assistance, livelihood assistance grants, psychosocial services and other social welfare and social protection services like handling of minors involved in juvenile delinquency, child abused, violence against women and children and extended psychological first aid to locally stranded individuals and Returned Overseas Filipino Workers. Social Workers and Development Workers had contributed significant accomplishments in times of pandemic especially on Social Amelioration Program implementation which includes the profiling, assessment and validation of beneficiaries, distribution of cash assistance, relief assistance, pay out of Social Pension to senior citizens, livelihood assistance grants ,assist Locally stranded individuals and Returned overseas Filipino workers upon their admission in the isolation facilities and upon their discharge to provide psychological support to them and to their families.

Amidst to this pandemic, we became strong individuals and productive because of the challenges we experienced that we have not experienced before, a unique experience and we have always a positive thought to serve more and save more lives of the people in the community. We are so fortunate because of the positive response and cooperation of the barangay leaders and community people in the community who help us in the smooth implementation of Social Amelioration Program (SAP) and help us to facilitate the implementation process of social welfare and social protection programs. They are our great partners and volunteers in the community. We would like to give our gratitude and appreciation to them for their unending support especially in empowering the community people to become positive in all endeavors in combating COVID'19.

The involvement and participation of all stakeholders both national and local agencies it may private and public organization, financial capacities and resources made the success of implementation in combating the pandemic. The was a very short of time given to Local Government Units to implement the Social Amelioration Program. Social Preparation is not well implemented due for immediate response of basic social services to affected families of the pandemic.

4.5 Lessons Learned

In the whole duration of Social Amelioration Program implementation, it was learned that there is a proper coordination of COVID'19 Task Force and had organized Incident Management Team. Each committee members played their roles and responsibilities to respond the need of less fortunate members of the community through proper distribution of financial assistance and other services to combat COVID'19.

It was a very challenging experience among the social workers and development workers. The difficulties and pressures had been overcome and properly implemented and well accomplished.

The success of the program relied on the strong involvement and cooperation of different stakeholders in the locality and the support of the national government in terms of providing financial, social and economic resources.

V. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the SAP reflected the four (4) important functions of management in terms of Planning, Leading, Organizing and Controlling the program as we responded to the challenge of COVID 19 pandemic in Tacurong City.

5.1 Planning process.

This process we learned lots of difficulties and it involves from the orientation on the implementation of social amelioration program by the Regional Office and DSWD Central Office through virtual via ZOOM. It was the first time that we have experienced because face to face conversation is not allowed due to standard health protocols and from that time we used to be familiarized and accepted the new normal. All the conferences/meetings done through virtual.

In the local level, orientation, meetings, consultation were done through barangay clustering and big crowd was really avoided. Health protocols must be strictly observed. As front liners we need to be resilient and patient because we are not working alone but we need the assistance of local officials and stakeholders to combat COVID'19.

In planning process, we have given only one week (1) to plan the activities and programs based on the guidelines and criteria issued by the National Government (DSWD) and the rest of the implementing national agencies. It was so very stressful because the Bayanihan budget will be downloaded directly to Local Government Units for the implementation of Social Amelioration Program.

5.2 Leadership

The role of the leaders of various agencies is critical and is considered the most important factor in the implementation of SAC because the Local Chief Executive has the overall command, political will and determination. The LGU Tacurong was serious in implementing the program and therefore delivered properly the basic social services to affected beneficiaries in times of pandemic. Because of the strong and unending support of our local officials it facilitated and made easy for front liners to do the job to help Tacurongnons.

Organizing. Organizing is not easy in a democratic and bureaucratic governance. We did also the organizing process in the implementation of Social Amelioration Program by having a number of meetings and consultations with the Interagency Task force/Incident Management Team, Barangay leaders, volunteers and stakeholders to organize a Technical Working Group and a secretariat for Social Amelioration Program Task Force for proper implementation of the program. Each member of the committees had their specific role and functions like for peace and order /security

(AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) in charge of this committee, medical workers (CHO) for health concerns, Sangguniang Panlungsod (City Councilors) in charge of the legislation of the resolutions and ordinances related to COVID '19 issues and problems, the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) as the lead agency in the local level in Social Amelioration Program Implementation and to determine and identify who are the qualified beneficiaries of the cash assistance.

Controlling Process. The last that we also considered is the controlling process, the control of program implementation originated from the National Government specifically the DSWD National to DSWD Regional Level. Although the SAP Budget is directly downloaded to our City Government but still, we need to follow the guidelines from the higher ups, we need to have a close coordination with DSWD 12 team because of the reporting and monitoring system that they required us for immediate documentation and prompt reports for daily submission in their level as part of their controlling procedures. Above all, the guidance and protection of the Almighty Father who is always in our daily undertakings, for all the strength, power, knowledge and wisdom to continue our unending services and efforts in times of pandemic.

In summary, it is concluded that the Journey of Social Development Workers contributed much to the social, psychosocial and economic development of the community people in times of pandemic especially to those families who were financially affected by the COVID'19. The Social and Development Workers became strong individuals and were productive because of the challenges they had not experienced before. This unique experience gave them opportunity to have always a positive thought to serve more and save more lives of the people in the community. Paraphrasing Nietzsche (1888): What did not kill the social and development workers, it made them stronger. More stunning is what Taleb (2012) says: What does not kill you will kill others. The social and development workers became antifragile. COVID 19 made them stronger and gain a new source of power and strength.

It is further concluded, that working together with team work, with proper planning, with good leadership and management, with proper organizing and controlling with involvement and participation of all sectors may lead to the success of program implementation.

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