
Uncovering the Impact: Evaluating the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) Implementation in Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur

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ABSTRACT

One of the Philippine government's responses to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the poorest of the poor is the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP). This study explored the experiences of barangay officials and staff as implementers of the program. Furthermore, the study considered how the program and its components produced the observed results based on coverage, time, and sufficiency. The study utilized a case study research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of SAP implementers. Three in-depth interviews and one focus group were conducted among barangay officials and staff. Thematic analysis was used to classify the data of the participants. In terms of coverage, results revealed that the selection and identification guidelines needed to be more evident to the program implementers. Although the program aims at providing immediate assistance to the beneficiaries, in terms of time, it took much work to achieve the allotted time for the distribution of SAP assistance due to external factors such as COVID-19 restrictions. The cash assistance was insufficient, considering the length of the imposed lockdown. Furthermore, program implementers faced challenges such as insufficient staffing, politicking, and insufficient budget for the program. To address the issues and challenges government may revisit the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program as a form of social safety net, especially during a crisis.

KEYWORDS: *Emergency assistance, Social Amelioration Program, Program Evaluation, barangay officials' experiences, social safety net*

INTRODUCTION

One of the government's responses to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the poorest of the poor is the Social Amelioration Program (SAP). The Social Amelioration Program (SAP) was the country's financial aid to assist 18 million underprivileged families greatly affected by the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) imposed by the government. This financial support is mandated under Republic Act 11469 or The Bayanihan to Heal as One-Act. The program permitted the delivery of cash emergency subsidies ranging from Five Thousand Pesos (PhP5,000.00) to Eight Thousand Pesos (PhP8,000.00) per designated beneficiary every month for two months.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) recorded that in 2018, 17% of Filipinos living below the poverty line, or about 18 million, needed assistance due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Furthermore, the unemployment rate spiked to 17.7%, accounting for 7.3 million unemployed Filipinos in 2020 from 5.5% in the previous year (Philippine Statistics Authority report, June 5, 2020). It is the highest jobless rate on record after the country imposed what is known to be the most extended lockdown in any country. In Northern Mindanao, the unemployment rate rose to 11.1 percent in April 2020 from the five percent rate in the same period in 2019 (PSA, 2020). As stipulated in DSWD Memorandum Circular No. 9, Series of 2020, there are 1,111,803 households in Region X, whereby 892,577 are said to be informal settlers and poor to near-poor. The highest number of SAP beneficiaries is in Cagayan de Oro City, with 113,206 informal and low-income families, based on a reference list made in 2015 by DSWD and a budget allocation of 775 304 850, the highest in the region. To date, 132, 209 4Ps, and non-4Ps informal and low-income families were given assistance amounting to 6,000.

The first tranche of the SAP started in April 2020. As of August 4, 2020, 8.979 million, or 77% of families who are beneficiaries of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), have received the second tranche of the relief package. This distribution of the relief package has been spearheaded by DSWD, with the local government units and other local agencies as partners in the identification, validation, and distribution processes. In response to the Pandemic's acute and critical conditions, the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) was immediately mobilized to assist families and individuals affected by the imposition of the community quarantine.

It is stated that before program implementation commences, implementers of a program should have first identified the strengths and weaknesses, including the internal and external forces (Wanjala, 2011). The strengths and opportunities, for instance, are positive forces that should be explored for a program to be implemented efficiently. However, this differs from the SAP under the Bayanihan to Heal as One-Act. The importance of assessing program implementation has been widely recognized to improve the quality of evaluation findings by providing insights into how programs function and why they succeed or fail (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000; Chen, 1998). Moreover, obtaining a good view of a program's implementation enables programmers to confidently relate programs to observed results (Dobson & Cook, 1980). Analyzing program implementation can reveal how the program was conducted and how it can be enhanced (Rossi, 2004). According to Duerden & Witt (2012), evaluations often focus exclusively on program outcomes without examining how the program and its components achieved the observed effects. Without adequate knowledge of the program's implementation, erroneous assertions about how it achieved its observed results are possible (Chen, 1998).

Hence, the study considers how the program and its components produced the observed results or showed how the program happened based on time, coverage, and sufficiency. Further, it identifies the challenges experienced by program implementers of the Social Amelioration Program.

This research makes two contributions to the literature. First, there is a need to assess programs implemented in a crisis, specifically the process implementation of the Social Amelioration Program of the government as a form of aid to those who are mostly affected. Addressing this topic will bring to light the experiences of SAP implementers and their challenges during the program's implementation. The study's findings can help national and local government agencies with the need to deliver emergency programs in times of crisis by revisiting existing policies at the national and local levels regarding crises.

Objectives of the study

The study assessed the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program under the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act or RA 11469.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How was the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) managed in terms of:
 - 1.1 Time
 - 1.2 Coverage
 - 1.3 Sufficiency
2. What challenges are experienced by the following stakeholders in SAP management?
 - 2.1 Implementers
 - 2.1.a Barangay Officials
 - 2.1.b Barangay Staff

Framework of the study

This study is anchored on the process of evaluation. Process evaluation is defined by Sheirer (1994) as "the use of empirical data to assess the delivery of programs.....verifies what the program is, whether or not it is delivered as intended to the targeted recipients and in the intended dosage." However, Patton (1997) created a more simplified way of defining process evaluation "finding out if the program has all its parts, and if the parts are functioning as they are supposed to be functioning."

A program's lack of success could be related to programming design and delivery and failure to reach the target population. The process evaluation can ensure successful program implementation and increase understanding of outcome results (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Pawson & Tilley, 2004).

According to Steckler & Linnan (2002), process evaluation involves six steps. Firstly, process evaluation includes a complete description of the program: purpose, underlying theory, objectives, strategies, expected impacts, and outcomes. Secondly, it explains all elements consistent with the optimum delivery of the programs, like strategies, activities, and even staffing. Thirdly, develop a list of potential process evaluation questions. This is to provide a better understanding of outcomes or results. As McClure, Turner, & Yorkston's (2005) stated, while process evaluation can contribute to a better understanding of outcome results, these evaluations can also be flawed with vague questions phrased in unanswerable ways. Fourth is determining methods to be employed, whether quantitative or qualitative. Fifth is program context and characteristics. Moreover, the process evaluation plan finalizes by setting up priorities and feasibility. Also, the evaluation process should include the four elements of the process evaluation: program activities delivered, program activities received, reach, and fidelity (Steckler & Linnan, 2002).

Section 3, paragraph (b) of RA 11469 states a need to immediately mobilize assistance in providing necessities to families and individuals affected by the imposition of the community quarantine, especially indigents and their families. Further, section 4, paragraph (c) states that the government would provide an emergency subsidy through the Social Amelioration Program to around 18 million identified low-income households (both 4Ps and non4Ps) for two months based on the prevailing minimum wage in a regional setting.

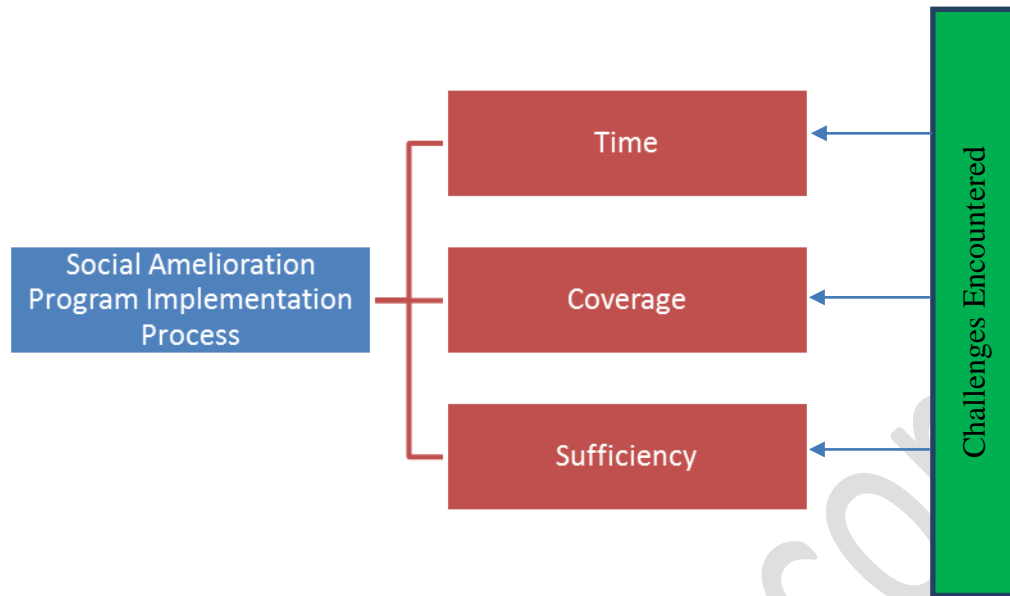


Figure 1: Schematic Diagram

The Social Amelioration Program provides low-income families with a P5,000 to P8,000 monthly cash subsidy for two months, depending on their residence. During the Pandemic, the subsidies enabled marginalized parts of society to afford essential needs. The social Amelioration Program in the Philippines is anchored on the following legal bases:

- (1) Sections 4, 5, 9, and 15 of Article II of the 1987 Constitution;
- (2) Section 11, Article XII, of the 1987 Constitution;
- (3) Section 4, Article XV, 1987 Constitution;
- (4) Republic Act (R.A.) No. 11469, "Bayanihan Act to Heal as One Act"; IAFT Resolution No. 11, Series of 2020;
- (5) DSWD-DOLE-DTI-DA-DOF-DBM Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1, Series of 2020, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Agriculture, Department of Finance, Department of Budget Management, and Department of the Interior and Local Government to the Most Affected Residents of the Areas Under Enhanced Community Quarantine.
- (6) Memorandum Circular No. 9, series of 2020, the 'Omnibus Guidelines In The Implementation Of The Emergency Subsidy Program Of The Department Of Social Welfare And Development Under memorandum circular no. 9, series of 2020 by DSWD, the main objective of the emergency subsidy program, commonly known as the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), is to 'provide comprehensive guidance on the implementation of AICS and LAG. As an intervention to aid those deemed to suffer the most significant impact of implementing the community quarantine. 'Joint circular no.1, series of 2020, provided the guidelines on the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), headed by DSWD. Other coordinating

bodies, primarily the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), shall implement social protection programs to lessen the declaration's effects on the most vulnerable sectors' economic, physical, and psychosocial well-being. This intensified government response to implementing the social amelioration measures by concerned agencies shall ensure the mobilization of the necessary resources to provide immediate assistance to affected families. Therefore, the memorandum above shall guarantee that the government fulfills the essential requirements of the affected persons to lessen the effects of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ).

The identification and distribution process will include the determination of the SAP beneficiaries following the guidelines released by DSWD. Part VI of the Memorandum Circular No. 04, series of 2020, states that the target beneficiaries shall be low-income households or subsistence economy workers in the informal economy, assessed to be the most affected by the declaration given their life situations or circumstances. However, in part IV of Memorandum Circular No. 14 series of 2020, there is an estimated five (5) million eligible families who were not included in the initial eighteen (18) million (low-income) family beneficiaries of SAP for the first tranche. Identification of the additional beneficiaries shall be subject to the provisions of R.A. No. 11469, the resolution(s) issued by the IATF-EID, and other pertinent issuances. At the same time, the distribution process may be done in the speediest means, such as direct cash payout, payment through electronic or digital means, cash card payments, transfer of funds through National Government Agencies, or any mode to facilitate the immediate distribution of the assistance.

The first key indicator is time. In the context of this investigation, "time" refers to the duration over which the provision of immediate monetary aid will take place. In this scenario, two months have been given to distribute the financial support effectively. When it comes to the management of time throughout the implementation of the program, anything that happens after the allotted time is regarded as a shortfall.

Within the second box, "coverage as an indicator" refers to the inclusion of all SAP beneficiaries following the standards. If this is not the case, all identified SAP beneficiaries will be given monetary support; in this case, the program will not have fulfilled the requirements for coverage as tightly as it should have.

The third box addresses the issue of sufficiency. Because it is an emergency cash support program, the term "sufficiency," as used in the study, refers to "food security" in meeting daily demands in response to the government's lockdown.

The final box describes the challenges encountered by implementers, including barangay authorities and personnel. It is crucial to note that the respondents' perspectives on the encountered obstacles may affect the boxes mentioned above regarding SAP's easy deployment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. COVID-19 cases worldwide

Last December, the World Health Organization (WHO) was worried about several pneumonia

cases in Wuhan City, China. After that, Chinese officials confirmed that the illness was caused by a new coronavirus (COVID-19) that they had found. The COVID-19 transmission quickly spread throughout the global premises. More than 6.28 million (John Hopkins University, 2022) deaths were linked to COVID-19 as of May 25, 2022. These figures vary by region and over time based on testing volume, healthcare system quality, treatment options, government response (Barrio, 2020; Johnson, 2020), duration after the initial outbreak, and demographic factors such as age, gender, and overall health (Ritchie & Roser, 2020).

By the end of 2021, Asia had reached its peak at the same time and at the same level as the rest of the world in May of that same year (Our World in Data, 2020). On January 30, 2020, the first instance of the disease was recorded in India. On March 24, 2020, the government of India issued an order to shut down the whole country. On January 20, 2020, it was determined that COVID-19 was present in South Korea (Gettleman & Schultz, 2020). After testing revealed that three service members were afflicted, military bases were placed under quarantine (Yonhap News Agency, 2020).

2.2. Philippines Case

In January, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the Philippines. In early March 2020, cases involving foreigners with a history of travel to the Philippines were reported abroad. Immediate investigation of the case and contact tracking were done. Several restrictions on travel to mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and South Korea were placed to prevent the spread of the disease in the country. Department of Health (DOH) elevated its "Code Red Sub-Level 1" on March 7, 2020, with a recommendation to the President of the Philippines to declare a "public health emergency," authorizing the DOH to mobilize resources for the procurement of protective equipment and the implementation of preventative quarantine measures. On March 9, President Rodrigo Duterte signed Proclamation No. 922, proclaiming a public health emergency in the Philippines.

On March 12, President Duterte proclaimed "Code Red Sub-Level 2" and ordered a partial lockdown of Metro Manila to prevent the statewide spread of the COVID-19 virus. On March 16, the lockdowns were expanded, and the entire island of Luzon was placed under "enhanced community quarantine" (ECQ). Outside of Luzon, several municipal governments implemented similar lockdowns. To alleviate the effects of the coronavirus, Presidential Proclamation No. 929, series of 2020, issued a nationwide state of emergency due to the disease caused by a coronavirus. Several procedures were employed, including face masks, enhanced health care systems, self-isolation, hand-washing, surface cleaning, physical separation, and mobility restrictions (WHO, 2020; CDC, 2020). On March 25, the President signed the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, granting him expanded authority to combat the outbreak.

By April, COVID-19 had spread to each of the Philippines' 17 regions. In some sections of Luzon, the ECQ was extended until May 15. This covered Metro Manila, Calabarzon, Central Luzon (except Aurora), Pangasinan, and Benguet. ECQ measures were also implemented in the provinces of Iloilo, Cebu, and Davao. Other regions were demoted or quarantined as a whole community (GCQ). Following May 15, the Philippine government amended its quarantine categories under a previous announcement that "Science and Economics will be considered for any adjustments to the lockdown measures." June 1 marked the beginning of a nationwide easing of quarantine restrictions, with places formerly subject to ECQ shifting to a

less stringent quarantine. As more regions deployed a GCQ, the number of confirmed cases increased significantly.

Within this month, the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act expired. According to the federal government, the law expired on June 25 due to its sunset clause, while there were interpretations that the statute expired on June 5. According to the Constitution, Senator Sonny Angara contended that "emergency powers expire upon the next adjournment of Congress" and that the Bayanihan Act is an emergency measure. The federal administration maintains that the law's expiration date was June 25. The national government is no longer required to provide cash subsidies to households affected by community quarantine measures after the statute's expiration.

The consequences of the quarantine restrictions were much more frightening for the poor, especially when their lack of income drove them to go hungry and not purchase basics. Those who violated the quarantine regulations were arrested, including those who petitioned the authorities for assistance.

The Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Emerging Infectious Diseases, chaired by the Department of Health, developed a multi-sectoral response to the COVID-19 epidemic in the Philippines (DOH). Through the National Action Plan (NAP) on COVID-19, the government intends to limit the disease's spread and ameliorate its socioeconomic effects.

On April 9, 2020, DSWD issued Memorandum Order No. 09 Series of 2020 regarding Omnibus Guidelines in implementing the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Emergency Subsidy Program. These are explicit provisions on the identification and distribution processes of the DSWD Social Amelioration Program, particularly sections VI-A, VI-B, and VIII, with a detailed discussion of the LGUs' role in section X.

2.3. Global response to COVID-19

In response to this, the World Bank Group launched the first operations for COVID-19 (coronavirus) emergency health support amounting to \$1.9 billion to strengthen the response actions of the developing countries, which include the following: Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mongolia, Cambodia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Haiti, Ecuador, Yemen, Djibouti, Afghanistan, Argentina, India, Pakistan, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritania, Paraguay, São Tomé e Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and The Gambia. Besides, the World Bank Group had forwarded health response operations to 65 countries.

To assist COVID-19 actions that will assist nations in responding to the acute health effects of the Pandemic and promote economic recovery, the World Bank Group is prepared to yield up to \$160 billion over the next 15 months. The broader economic policy will accelerate recovery, foster growth, assist small and medium-sized businesses, and protect the poor and vulnerable. There will be a heavy emphasis on alleviating poverty in these efforts, emphasizing policy-based financing and protecting the poorest households and the environment. (World Bank, 2020)

With the fast response package delivered by the World Bank Group, it sought to provide the following: additional testing supplies and vital medical equipment; establishment of treatment centers, laboratories, and isolation facilities and wards; improvement of containment and contact tracing strategies and case detection; increase intensive care capacity through health

system capacity-building, training for emergency care doctors, nurses, and paramedics; strong coordination with the public; and social protection and education measures to help the poor and vulnerable cope with the immediate impacts of the Pandemic, such as temporary social assistance to the most vulnerable households.

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) is a form of Social Protection during an emergency.

Cash interventions helped populations afflicted by droughts, floods, storms, cyclones, displaced persons, and people with persistent food insecurity due to war and poverty (Creti & Jaspars, 2006). All cash programs aim to boost disaster-affected people's purchasing power to satisfy their food and non-food requirements or help them rebuild their livelihoods. Food is one of the most basic needs of disaster-affected populations. However, it is inefficient. Cash transfers are an acceptable emergency measure to address urgent food and non-food requirements and support livelihood recovery. These allow recipients to buy from local merchants and service providers instead of aid agencies.

According to Fenn et al. (2014), government and non-government organizations increasingly utilize cash transfers (C.T.) during disaster operations. However, the effects of C.T. are claimed to be ambiguous and variable. Their research revealed that cash transfers lowered poverty-related indices and improved food security among impoverished households.

Another research study was conducted on Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) by Nazara and Rahayu (2013) in Indonesia. The program intends to enhance the quality of human capital by providing households with financial transfers depending on their utilization of particular health and education services. Since it was the first conditional cash transfer program in Indonesia, the Indonesian Conditional Cash Transfer Programme was directed.

In a study conducted by Abdoulayi et al. (2016) on CCT in Malawi, results revealed that the eligibility criteria of the beneficiaries were based on a household being ultra-poor. It means they are labor-constrained and cannot meet the most basic urgent needs, including food and essential non-food items such as soap and clothing. Members of a household are omitted if they are under the age of 19 or above the age of 64. Alternatively, between the ages of 19 and 64 but have a persistent sickness or disability or are otherwise unable to work. They noted that beneficiary selection is made through a community-based approach with oversight provided by the local District Commissioner's (D.C.'s) Office and the District Social Welfare Office (DSO). The transfer amount varies based on household size, and there is a 'schooling bonus' in primary and secondary school. In designating representatives, about 75 percent of households had identified someone to represent them at the payment point if the primary beneficiary could not collect the payment themselves. Under program rules, if a beneficiary miss picking up their payment at the specified payment date, they can go to the District Commissioner's (D.C.'s) office to collect the payment or receive it with the following payment. The vast majority of beneficiaries understood this, though some thought the payment would be lost and were unsure how to collect missed payments.

Son (2008) of the Asian Development Bank published a policy paper on conditional cash transfer schemes that emphasized their benefits in addressing extreme poverty and low human capital. CCT programs have proven successful in Latin American countries and are seen as a panacea for poverty. As de Janvry & Sadoulet (2006) reported, several issues confront the implementation of CCT programs and an assessment of their effectiveness. Nevertheless, cash programs have been being promoted given that general food distribution may not be

appropriate considering the following: a) Adequate supplies of food are available in the area (and the need is to address obstacles to access) and; b) The support of market systems can address a localized lack of food availability. Cash transfers also have the following advantages: a) beneficiaries' choice to purchase what they need at the moment; b) Cost-effectiveness; c) dignity; d) economic recovery; e) flexibility; and; f) empowerment (Creti & Jaspars, 2006).

2.4. Philippines Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)

For several years, cash transfers have been part of the system to help poor households manage risks and shocks during disasters in the Philippines. These include: (1) the Pantawid Pamilya conditional cash transfer (CCT) program; (2) the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) using cash-for-work; and (3) the National Community Driven Development Program (NCDD). These programs use various modalities and mechanisms for cash transfers in different stages of the post-disaster timeline (Acosta et al., 2018).

Emergency Shelter Assistance (ESA) is the most utilized disaster response device. Damage to properties is always one of the consequences of natural disasters. This assistance for repairs of damage to houses is always part of the early recovery response of DSWD. Six months after the tragedy, DSWD implemented ESA, where beneficiaries received Php 10,000 and Php 30,000, in cash or construction materials, for partially and damaged houses, respectively. To determine the selection of beneficiaries, the regional office utilized the Disaster Assistance Family Access Card (DAFAC), a list of municipalities, and several affected families from the Office of the Presidential Assistant for Rehabilitation and Recovery. Much effort in the identification of beneficiaries was processed at the LGU level. They also considered those below the poverty threshold, who have no permanent income source, and who partially damaged houses in identifying ESA beneficiaries. The appropriateness of the amount of ESA per recipient was determined after a validation report on the extent of the damage to the house. To monitor the impact of the intervention on the beneficiaries, local government units (LGUs) provided accomplishment reports regarding the implementation. The report featured observations regarding the project, areas for development, and testimonials from the recipients. There was a political intervention at various levels of governance, specifically at the barangay and municipal/city level, due to inclusion/exclusion issues.

The DSWD administers the ESCAP (or the Emergency Shelter Cash Support Project, ESCAP, in the case of Typhoon Lawin) as a shelter assistance program. In contrast, ESA's assistance may be either through the provision of material or cash still to be used to reconstruct houses. Another Typhoon, Lawin (Haima), occurred and was regarded as the third most intense tropical cyclone worldwide in 2016. The DSWD's Quick Response Funds offered financial support to 208,551 households. The principal financial conduit was the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP).

The disbursement of the assistance was conducted in batches depending on the availability of complete data, including LBP enrollment. The cash card modality was used primarily for families in the municipalities and families living near cities with access to ATMs.

2.4.1. Social Amelioration Program (SAP): Philippine's Economic response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19

On March 24, 2020, the Bayanihan Law⁴ was passed to execute a \$4 billion social

amelioration program (SAP) for low-income and vulnerable families afflicted by the Pandemic. The SAP supplied 18 million households with monthly payouts between \$5,000 and \$8,000 for two months (Gudmalin, C. Parente-Calina, L. Balbosa, J., Mangahas, M.A., & Samoza, M.A.) (2020).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), in partnership with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and local governments, has been authorized by the Bayanihan Act to lead SAP implementation. The task force organized a working group to design a plan for identifying eligible recipients and implementing the cash distribution, including monitoring and reporting on implementation progress to the President and Congress and protecting the funds from fiduciary risks. (Gudmalin, C. Parente-Calina, L. Balbosa, J., Mangahas, J., & Samoza, M.A. (2020).

Memorandum Circular 09 series of 2020 states that to expedite the delivery of urgently needed cash assistance to the most affected families in areas subject to the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), DSWD Field Offices must: (1) Coordinate quickly with LGUs to forge a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with them. (2) Facilitate the transfer of money to the LGUs within twenty-four (24) hours after receiving a signed MOA and budget proposal from the LGU (Mesa, 2020)

Identification and Distribution of SAP to beneficiaries

The barangay shall identify and prepare the list of qualified beneficiaries based on the eligibility requirements provided under Memorandum Circular 09 series of 2020. Selecting the beneficiaries should be agreed upon with local community committees and checked based on the agreed criteria. Beneficiaries should receive an identification card; if this is not possible, ensure that a community member or staff member from that village can identify each beneficiary. The listed beneficiaries will be profiled using a Social Amelioration Card (SAC). The SAC shall be the mechanism for eligible families to access any social amelioration programs from any government agency, including the DSWD.

The local government, with the assistance of a community-level social worker, will deliver cash transfers to eligible recipients (Gudmalin, C. Parente-Calina, L. Balbosa, J., Mangahas, J., & Samoza, M.A. (2020)

If the cash grants are delivered in the community, you should select a safe, controlled location and ensure that distributions are made to small groups of recipients. In the implementation of SAP, the beneficiaries were recognized using the Social Amelioration Card (SAC). The SAC served as the mechanism for eligible families to access social amelioration programs from any government agency, including the DSWD. Staff and committees should supervise the identification and verification of beneficiaries during distributions, and payment sheets should be verified. In deciding the size of a cash grant to meet basic needs, the difference between the cost of the essential goods and services that households need and what they can acquire (or consume) from their existing food sources and income should be calculated. In the case of the emergency subsidy provided by SAP, the subsidy amount was based on the prevailing regional minimum wage rates.

Moreover, identifying appropriate and safe methods to deliver and pay cash is essential in planning cash programs. The aim is to reduce risks to the relief agency when transporting and distributing cash, reduce risks to the project recipients after the distribution, and reduce the

management load on the implementing agency. In implementing the SAP, cash distribution was done door-to-door or per beneficiary in the specified distribution point(s). The beneficiary shall be called from their home in the said location to receive assistance.

There are three options for transferring the cash:

- The local banking system
- Money-transfer companies or institutions
- Direct delivery and payment by the implementing agency

For instance, using local banks to disburse cash in Iran after an earthquake, wherein the government set up bank accounts for beneficiaries, to which cash was transferred directly. However, that would not be as effective as the other options, especially if households are far away and cannot access local banks.

The DSWD shall distribute the social amelioration measures identified under these guidelines through the LGUs and other coordinating agencies (e.g., PNP and AFP). The subsidy shall be computed based on the prevailing regional minimum wage rates. Cagayan de Oro City, under Region IX, shall receive the amount of 5,000.00 pesos. In Memorandum Circular No. 09, series of 2020- Omnibus Guidelines in the Implementation of the Emergency Subsidy Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, section VIII stated that the DSWD, in the distribution of its social amelioration programs, may resort to the most expeditious means which may include any of the following:

- Direct cash payouts.
- Payment through electronic or digital means.
- Cash card payments.
- Transfer funds through NGAs, LGUs, or other modes to expedite assistance distribution.

They provided that the cash payout by the LGU shall either be through door-to-door or per beneficiary in the specified distribution point(s), where the beneficiary shall be called from their home in a said location to receive the assistance.

2.5. Importance of Assessing Process Implementation

Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of analyzing program implementation (Moncher & Prinz, 1991; Gresham & Gansle, 1993; Durlak, 1998). Understanding if a program was successfully implemented enables researchers to interpret the relationship between the program and observed outcomes with greater precision. Implementation study also enables researchers to identify program components and the degree of program integrity associated with each, facilitating more precise replication of the intervention. Without a good grasp of these challenges, it may be difficult for practitioners to repeat previously successful programs due to a lack of information on how to conduct the program most effectively and the amount of integrity necessary to create observable effects (Backer, Liberman, & Kuehne, 1986). When combined with result evaluations, implementation evaluations can also help identify effective programs and practices (Duerden, 2012).

At the core of the implementation is program integrity, defined as the degree to which a

program is implemented as planned initially. Program integrity consists of five primary dimensions: adherence, dosage, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation; adherence refers to how closely program implementation matches operational expectations; dosage represents the amount of a provided service received by a participant; quality of delivery deals with how the service was provided; participant responsiveness measures individuals' engagement and involvement in the program and lastly; program differentiation identifies program components to ascertain their unique contributions to the outcomes (Duerden, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a case study research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of SAP implementers. A case study is a systematic and thorough investigation of a group, individual, or community in which the researcher examines in-depth relating to several variables. (Heale & Twycross, 2017). According to (Baxter & Jack, 2008), case study methodology allows researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts.

Specifically, a descriptive case study was utilized in the study. According to Yin (2003), the case study design is appropriate when the focus of the study is the 'hows' and 'whys' and when you cannot manipulate those involved in the study. A descriptive case study describes a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003). This approach is based on the constructivist paradigm.

Constructivism recognizes the subjective ability of an individual in meaning-making. Thus, participants will be able to describe their experiences while close collaboration between the researchers and the participants is achieved (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

The study used an unstructured interview guide containing open-ended questions to capture the feelings and thoughts of the implementers as they narrated their experiences. Questions included in the interview guide will undergo validation from experts to ensure that key questions and answers will be gathered. Data will be triangulated using multiple sources, such as researchers' field notes derived from participant observation, documentation, and informal interviews. This strategy is best for enhancing the credibility of the data gathered (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

The inclusion criterion for the study participants was a local official or staff member before the outbreak of the Pandemic. Focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted at a designated location and time by the researcher and study participants. For IDI, the average interview time was about an hour and a half, while for the FGD, one and a half to two hours. After the interview, the transcript was immediately available.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Pseudonym	Sex	Civil Status	Age	Position	# of years in service	Ethnicity
IDI						
Marie	Female	Married	33	OIC-MSWDO	1 year and 5 months	Subanen
Sam	Male	Married	31	Punong Barangay	3 years	Subanen
Julz	Male	Married	38	Barangay Kagawad	4 years	Subanen
FGD						
Isa	Female	Married	39	Barangay Kagawad	4 years	Subanen
Mariz	Female	Married	22	BHW	2 years	Subanen
Jessa	Female	Married	36	Day Care Worker	4 years	Subanen
Maricel	Female	Married	42	Barangay Kagawad	4 years	Subanen

Based on table 1, most of the participants were female, comprising 71.42%. In terms of position, most of them are Barangay Kagawad, with an average of three years in service. All participants are married, with an average age of 34.42.

The result of the qualitative data has the following emerging themes of the experiences of the Social Amelioration Implementers;

1. SAP Implementation is based on time, coverage, and sufficiency.
2. Challenges experienced by the SAP implementers

Theme 1: Implementation of the Social Amelioration Program: Midsalip's Case

Subtheme: In terms of coverage

According to the Barangay Kagawad focus group discussion, more than 4,700 numbered and sealed Social Amelioration Cards (SAC) were delivered to Midsalip for profiling purposes. This is the primary identifier used for SAP beneficiary identification. In addition, following the DSWD SAP Guidelines, these SACs were allocated evenly across the 33 barangays of Midsalip based on the poverty incidence rate of each barangay and the other affected target beneficiaries. However, this has decreased in terms of coverage. The captain of the barangay relayed his story, saying:

"Considering the limited funds allotted to the municipality of Midsalip, only 2,240 were approved as per "slot" provided, and 1,135 were left out (those who were not catered to due to lack of funds) - this is for the 1st Tranche DSWD SAP." (Sam, IDI 1, Punong barangay)

During the focus group, it was noted that the number of beneficiaries in barangay Midsalip has decreased from 168 to 72 due to a shortage of money. This case was supported by the OIC declaration, MSWDO's, which stated:

"According to SAP Guidelines, all beneficiaries were considered based on the findings and adequate attention. However, after the validation, the barangay's limited funding necessitated the assignment of priorities. (Marie, IDI, OIC-MSWDO)

According to the Philippine National Agency (2020), the selection guidelines have become an issue nationwide, as many of those who claimed to be "qualified" were not included in the list. Government information is incomplete. It is unclear whether all families will sign the SAC or only selected families in targeted areas. It is unclear if the barangay, municipal/city, or provincial government is responsible for distributing and collecting SACs (G-Watch, 2020). Other factors contributing to the problematic coverage are the lack of a unified database for identifying recipients and the program's scope (Gudmalin, Perante-Calina, Balbosa, Mangahas & Samoza, 2020).

Subtheme: In terms of time

In the case of Region IX, each DSWD SAP target beneficiary shall get P5,000.00, depending on the regional minimum wage rates in effect (MC 09, S'2020, Part V, 2nd paragraph). RA 11469 did not specify a payment schedule but merely mentioned two (2) cash subsidy delivery tranches (Protecting the Poor and Vulnerable against the Pandemic). However, it was clear that the assistance has to be given to the target beneficiaries for fourteen (14) days, between the last week of April to the first week of May 2020 (Omnibus Guidelines, 2020). Given the difficulty of the situation, it was challenging to achieve the allotted time for the distribution of SAP assistance.

According to the barangay captain, "There was not enough time already for DSWD to conduct it themselves. That was why Barangay Officials and workers were tasked to identify the SAP beneficiaries. Thus, the barangay was tasked to help facilitate and identify SAP beneficiaries".

In the focus group discussion, participants shared that:

"Several meetings and orientations were made at the regional and local levels initiated by the DSWD with other stakeholders. These included DILG (MLGOO), PNP, Municipal Treasurer's Office, Municipal Accounting Office, Mayor's Office, MSWD Office, LDRRM Office, and the Rural Health Unit." (Julz, IDI 3, barangay Kagawad)

At the local level, Marie, the OIC-MSWDO, shared during the IDI that a meeting was called for among the Barangay Kagawad. She said:

"Thirty-three (33) Punong Barangays with all expected stakeholders were invited for a meeting. The lists of final beneficiaries were provided during the meeting. They were instructed about the distribution process to avoid chaos and disorganization at the distribution venue."

According to a report submitted to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2020, one of the challenges faced by the implementers was attributed to the restrictions imposed, security and health risks, and the program's scope. According to Lofredo (2020), no one is prepared for the rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2. Thus, this poses a challenge to all governments' world. Challenges to the implementers have been made about the said program's qualified beneficiaries and releasing the cash subsidy, which resulted in unwanted conditions (e.g., violation of social distancing measures) during the distribution. In addition, according to Cervantes (2020), the stringent validation process of local government units (LGUs) in finding qualified recipients created substantial delays in the supply of Covid-19 financial support. He also mentioned that emergency subsidies were delayed due to rebel threats to security.

Subtheme: In terms of sufficiency

Most participants recognized that the amount given to the beneficiaries was insufficient. Considering that this will run for two months, they said it would be difficult for the family of four to provide for its basic needs. Hence, they shared:

"The local officials augmented food and other basic needs of the beneficiaries. The mayor and vice-mayor were very supportive during the lockdown. The subsidy shall be computed based on the prevailing regional minimum wage rates, considering the amount given under the DSWD's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program and the rice subsidy, which is estimated at an average of PhP1,350.00 per month per family. The national government will augment the CCT and rice subsidy with ESP to reach the herein mandated PhP5,000.00 to PhP8,000.00." (FGD transcript).

Marie-OIC-MSWDO shared the same sentiment. She said:

"Knowing the realities of today, particularly of the prices of common commodities, the amount of subsidy for Region IX, which is P5,000.00, is not sufficient. Despite that, aside from the food packs provided by the Local Government Units, there was not enough to support the needs of a household minimum of 5 members during that time." (Marie, IDI, OIC-MSWDO)

Over 3,600 households were surveyed countrywide between June and August for a study titled "Remote Household Monitoring Survey on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Implementation of the Philippine Government's Social Amelioration Program." Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated they used the money to pay off their debts. While the food was the main priority for most recipients, many reported that the aid helped them purchase hygiene kits, pay for essential health and medical bills, and pay off previous debts (Cudis, 2020).

Theme 2: Challenges Experienced by SAP implementers

According to the study, the challenges experienced by the participants can be sub-thematized based on the following: 1. Not enough budget; 2. Politicking; 3. Lack of cooperation among members; 4. Not enough workforce

Sub-theme: insufficient budget

According to the participants, implementing the SAP program in the barangay was very challenging. One of the challenges they shared was the exclusion of other identified

beneficiaries. It was a unanimous sentiment during the FGD when they shared that:

"Meager fund allocation for the Municipality of Midsalip – particularly because SACs were supposedly 4,700, but only 2,240 were given allocation, and there were still 1,135 left out. We had to clarify why this was changed during the implementation." (FGD transcript)

Sub-theme: Politicking

They have also highlighted that 'politicking' has affected the process. During the IDI, Marie, the OIC-MSWDO, shared:

"Sigig ilis-ilis sa lista, iyahay og adto sa opisina sa MSWDO kay ipasulod ang tawo ni Kapitan, tawo ni Konsehal." (The list is always changing; (officials) go to the MSWDO one by one because they want a supporter of the barangay Captain or council to be included)

Sub-theme: insufficient staffing

The workforce is one of the many factors affecting the delivery of the program. According to Marie, OIC-MSWDO, she said:

"...Gamay ra and tawo sa MSWD Office and divided at that time because others are at the Municipal Gymnasium assisting in the repacking of food packs to be distributed, and if there were only enough manpower, Dili na magka-bilar-bilar ang mga taga-MSWDO ug Dili ma delay ang proseso." (There was not enough workforce at the MSWD Office. It was divided during that time because others were at the Municipal Gymnasium assisting in repacking food packs to be distributed. It would not have been delayed if there had been enough workforce.) (Marie, IDI, OIC-MSWDO; FGD transcript)

Sub-theme: Identifying SAP beneficiaries

According to the focus group, "there was no consultation conducted though it is understood given the urgency of the need to respond to the pandemic. But a data bank would help clarify this issue is the barangay has." (FGD, transcript)

The lack of a uniform database for identifying receivers was a barrier to SAP installation, according to Gudmalin, Perante-Calina, Balbosa, Mangahas, & Samoza (2020). No single database determined Bayanihan Law household eligibility. Some databases were based on obsolete polls. Government entities had to immediately update, integrate, authenticate, and validate this information.

CONCLUSION

Since the Social Amelioration Program was hastily implemented, government agencies might benefit from assessing its implementation. The narratives of the local implementers shed light on how successful SAP implementation is as a social safety net during a crisis. With a firm understanding of SAP challenges, it would be easier to repeat previously successful programs because implementers will need to gain how to conduct the program most effectively and the level of integrity necessary to create observed effects (Backer, Liberman, & Kuehne, 1986). Implementation assessments can assist in discovering effective programs and practices when combined with results evaluations (Duerden, 2012). Several studies have shown the value of analyzing program implementation (Moncher & Prinz, 1991; Gresham & Gansle, 1993; Durlak, 1998). Many things have been required to deal with the challenges, one that was done

by this research was examining the program's implementation in terms of time, coverage, and sufficiency. Although the government may undertake other forms of assessments nationally to see a bigger picture, this research is one of the stepping stones to examining how successful the SAP implementation was and what areas of concern need attention. The study's results are hoped to improve future decisions the government may undertake relative to the crisis. However, the government may consider a national database for social welfare programs, enhanced coordination between barangays and local governments, strengthened transparency measures, and improved health promotion programs (Apostol et al., 2020).

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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