

Avoiding Hunger during Crisis Situation in Philippines: The COVID 19-Challenges

Abstract

People's livelihoods and other assets of the people concerning agricultural production and food supply are currently being affected by COVID-19 crisis. Change in both food production and consumption may be expected and this will require urgent and critical decisions on how to prevent the threat of food/resource scarcity and hunger including risks to biodiversity, health and well-being of households within the poverty threshold.

Keywords: COVID-19 crisis, food/resource scarcity, agricultural commodities, Hunger

Introduction

"Hunger during the time of crisis can escalate into pandemonium." The government needs to ensure food supply availability and price stabilization in the next coming weeks amidst the pandemic COVID-19. With the local and nationwide distribution of food packs to aid families with critical need for food supplies, it poses growing demands not only for canned goods or processed products but more so with fresh produce from our local farmers. The limitations on mobility and possible price increase in most of the basic food and agricultural supplies may likewise be an issue resulting from interruption in agricultural products supply chain. This would eventually affect the accessibility of these by farm families and availability of the same on the tables of the commons especially the most vulnerable sectors of our communities.

The pressing issue today among local governments is how to sustain supply of foods among poor families and other vulnerable sectors of their community. In the days, weeks, and months ahead, the continuous production, processing, packaging and delivery of basic food commodities to major consumption outlets is essentially a challenge. Availability and accessibility of safe, nutritious and affordable food and basic agricultural commodities

needs to be sustained in the farmlands, markets and tables of all families which the local government must proactively deal on as this crisis progresses.

The local governments as a major frontline in ensuring the safety and security of constituent-families while under this health emergency must take an integrated approach to secure enough food and agricultural produce including other basic services that must be readily available, accessible, stable and affordable to all especially the poor and disadvantaged.

Change in both food production and consumption may be expected and this will require urgent and critical decisions on how to prevent the threat of food/resource scarcity and hunger including risks to biodiversity, health and well-being of households within the poverty threshold. Food security, as articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, is a serious concern and calls for collaborative and integrated initiatives among various sectors in simultaneously providing enough access to safe food, in quantity and quality, to meet the nutritional needs of affected families, while reducing environmental impacts.

According to NEDA (March 19, 2020), there is a high level of uncertainty surrounding the current public health crisis since there are still many unknown facts concerning COVID-19. Related economic indicators remain limited, hence, well-coordinated measures guided by a comprehensive plan are crucial to mitigate the social and economic impact (neda.gov.ph, March 24, 2020) that may bring by this abnormal situation.

Therefore, the need for immediate interventions is inevitable to be rolled out by the local government units to ensure food sufficiency – that is safe, healthy, and nutritious foods, meeting the daily dietary requirements of highly affected or vulnerable families while their livelihoods are disrupted as this enhanced community quarantine in Luzon still remain. Moreover, prolonging the temporary stoppage of economic activities means breaking the chain of development and delivery of services of various sectors, particularly agriculture produce, affecting the marginalized and vulnerable groups of the community.

The urgency for strategic positioning through expanding partnership with the private industry, local government units, farmers' and fishers' group is vital under these extraordinary times. This is to assure that no threat of food shortages and the locals have sufficient and available supply as the outbreak persists. Strategic and sustainable policy options are highly essential to either mitigate and/or arrest the impact of this catastrophe to human health and well-being.

Vulnerability (COVID-19) cum Livelihood Assets Assessment

People's livelihoods and other assets of the people concerning agricultural production and food supply are currently being affected by COVID-19 crisis. This uncontrollable human health shock may or may have adverse effects to these capitals of the municipalities.

Assessment of community assets is important to determine its capacity in sustaining agricultural production in order to maintain the food value chain sustainable not only in respective communities but also to other major consumption areas. This assessment will gain an accurate and realistic understanding of family's strengths (assets or capital endowments) and how they can convert these into positive livelihood outcomes, through the valuable partnership among stakeholders, making them more self-sustaining and self-reliant.

Participatory Governance and Processes

In essence, participatory governance and processes are critical this time in response to the potential social and economic impact that this crisis have caused and might cause in the future. The various stakeholders known to have effective participation to local governance in terms of programs and projects implementation needs to be tapped. Its existing programs and projects including the best practices can be adopted and may serve as basis in tailor fitting of doable and sustainable measures to address the issues on food resiliency and livelihood security among those highly affected barangays and families (i.e. farmers, fisherfolks, ambulant vendors and other low-income earners).

In addition, the active involvement of various social institutions (i.e. CSO, NGAs, NGOs, Academe, Private Organizations etc.) are highly enjoined since they are the ones with greater and potential socioeconomic opportunities that may offer to the community.

Development Results (Outcomes/ Impacts)

As a strategic response, a household-centered sustainability plan is highly recommended to address the short and long-term concerns in warranting stable and sustainable food production and supply – that is safe, nutritious, and affordable.

Conclusion

The plan ultimately intends to encourage inclusive engagements among various sectors highlighting the participation of barangays and families in creating integrated, household-based and sustainable food and livelihood programs like backyard/ packet/ vegetable gardening, communal vegetable gardens among others. With their involvement in the policy and decision-making processes, families would feel the sense of ownership and shared responsibility in finding solutions, thereby, guarantees commitment in its implementation and making them a more self-sustaining and self-reliant communities in the long run.

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