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Social Protection and the World Food Programme in the Philippines - Scoping Study

Executive Summary

For decades, the Philippines has dealt with persistent malnutrition among pregnant women and children under five in the poorest income quintile, climate related shocks, especially typhoons and floods, and conflict, which has long affected the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Since 2007 social protection has gained increased prominence in national development plans and policies and today the Philippines has one of the most advanced national social protection systems in the Asia Pacific region.

The World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Bureau Bangkok conducted a scoping exercise to support WFP Country Office in the Philippines to more clearly define its role and strategic partnerships in the national social protection sphere. To do so the exercise explored the

main national and international actors working in social protection, their policies, priorities and initiatives, and assessed the key opportunities and challenges that the country faces to advance nutrition outcomes and shock response through national social protection. Primary and secondary data collection for this exercise took place between July and August 2021 using qualitative research methods consisting of (28) semi-structured remote interviews conducted with informants from WFP, key external informants, and a review of global and country-specific thematic documents.

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National social protection: main actors and programmes

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is the main government entity responsible for social protection in the Philippines. Among its responsibilities are the oversight of the flagship conditional cash-based national social protection programme, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), established in 2008, and the management of the national social registry, the Listahanan. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is the main national social and economic development planning and policy coordinating agency, also engaged in social protection through its Sub-Committee on Social Protection. The Disaster Response and Management Bureau (DRMB) is DSWD's arm that is responsible for relief response, and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) attached to the Department of National Defence has overall policymaking, coordination and supervision of disaster risk management functions in the country.

In the aftermath of typhoon Yolanda in 2013 and with World Bank (WB) support, DSWD/DRMB established the Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) programme as a shock-responsive social protection mechanism. In 2021 the ECT had not been used to respond to any emergency yet, and in-kind distribution in the form of family food packs remains a key assistance modality

used by DSWD in emergency response. In 2020 and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DSWD rolled out the unconditional cash assistance, the Social Amelioration Programme (SAP), to reach both 4Ps beneficiaries (as a top-up to their regular 4Ps cash transfer) and poor and vul-nerable households who were not 4Ps beneficiaries.

In 2017 the establishment of the National Feeding Programme (NFP) bought under its umbrella the DSWD-led Supplementary Feeding Programme - providing hot meals to three- to five years old undernourished children in day care centres - and the Department of Education (DepEd)-led School-based Feeding Programme, providing school meals to undernourished children from kindergarten to 11 years of age¹. Following the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, there are plans to adapt the NFP and enable it to better respond to emergencies by switching from distribution of hot meals to students at schools or kindergartens to the provision of nutritious take-home food packs for the family.

In BARMM, the key institution with responsibility for social protection is the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD), in charge of implementing and financing a range of regional in-kind and cash-based social protection programmes, delivered both regularly and in response to crises. In addition, national programmes managed at the central level, such as the 4Ps and the NFP, are also delivered in BARMM.



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1. Furthermore, the NFP institutionalized a range of complementary services including Milk Feeding Programme, health examination, vaccination and deworming for targeted children, inclusion of fortified foods in school meals, etc.

Advancing Zero Hunger and shock response through social protection in the Philippines

Since 2016, the current administration has made ending malnutrition a top priority, through institutionalization of the National Feeding Programme (NFP) and the enactment of other important legislative advances. That said, the significant potential for improving nutrition-outcomes at scale through the 4Ps remains largely untapped and the adoption of nutrition-sensitive approaches in the 4Ps continues to lag. Some of the reasons are the difficulties that the 4Ps faces in reaching the most at-risk population groups as a result of the largely outdated Listahanan²; challenges related to the implementation of the 4Ps Family Development Sessions (FDS)³ which affect 4Ps behavioural change objectives on nutrition; nutrition not being an explicit objective of the 4Ps; and lack of inclusion of nutrition-specific indicators in the 4Ps monitoring framework.

The NFP is a nutrition-specific social protection programme and several key policy and legislative steps have sought to further enhance its nutritional value, such as the inclusion of fortified food in school meals as provided by the National Feeding Law in 2018. In practice however, the inclusion of fortified food, such as iron-fortified rice, remains unsystematic across the country with the inability of farmers to regularly source iron-fortified kernels being a key challenge to local production.

At the time of writing the Listahanan was being updated (Listahanan 3) but questions around its quality and reliability were raised by a number of key informants interviewed since the bulk of data collected to feed into Listahanan 3 had been collected before the COVID-19 crisis and by 2021 it was considered already outdated, in view of deepening poverty levels and vulnerabilities.

FDS are part of 4Ps conditionalities and consist of short sessions of 2-3 hours such as lectures, participatory discussions, structured learning exercises delivered following the FDS Manual that 4Ps beneficiaries are required to attend on a monthly basis.

The adoption of a shock-responsive approach to social protection has received increasing attention by policymakers and international partners, including WFP, as an avenue to ensuring a more timely and effective

emergency response to predictable and recurrent climatic shocks, typhoons in particular. In 2021, the Philippines Roadmap on Adaptive Shock Responsive Social Protection (ASRSP) was adopted as the overall government framework for strengthening social protection to respond to shocks using anticipatory actions and other ex-ante mechanisms.⁴ Despite encouraging policy advances, effective shock-response through social protection remains challenged by a number of factors, including the limited coordination between disaster management and social protection actors; a lack of actionable guidelines for flexing and scaling the 4Ps and other social protection programmes during crises; and the use of the outdated Listahanan as a reliable basis for regular targeting and in times of shocks, as the experience with the SAP distribution in 2020 also showed.

International support to the social protection system

The following Table presents the main activities that international actors, including WFP are implementing to support the social protection system in the Philippines. The activities have been organised along the building blocks related to the system architecture, programme features, and knowledge and learning elements as outlined in the 2021 WFP Strategy for Support to Social Protection⁵.

2. At the time of writing the Listahanan was being updated (Listahanan 3) but questions around its quality and reliability were raised by a number of key informants interviewed since the bulk of data collected to feed into Listahanan 3 had been collected before the COVID-19 crisis and by 2021 it was considered already outdated, in view of deepening poverty levels and vulnerabilities.
3. FDS are part of 4Ps conditionalities and consist of short sessions of 2-3 hours such as lectures, participatory discussions, structured learning exercises delivered following the FDS Manual that 4Ps beneficiaries are required to attend on a monthly basis.
4. Adopted in 2021 through NDRRMC Resolution no. 7, series 2021.
5. WFP (2021) World Food Programme Strategy for Support to Social Protection. July 2021

1. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE		
Policy and legislation	Governance, Capacity and Coordination	Platforms and infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting NEDA to establish the Social Protection Floor in the country (ILO, 2015-ongoing). Supporting DSWD and NEDA to develop, adopt and implement the ASRSP Roadmap (FAO, WFP, UNICEF, 2018-ongoing). Supporting MSSD to mainstream a Risk-informed Shock Responsive Social Protection approach in BARMM (FAO, UNICEF, 2020 – ongoing). Engaging in policy dialogues with national nutrition actors for policy changes related to food security and nutrition (WFP, ongoing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN-Development Partners Social Protection Sub-group (2019-ongoing). Social protection informal group (2019 – ongoing). Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action (TWG AA) (ongoing). Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF pilot) (2021-ongoing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting DSWD to develop its digital transformation strategy (WB, 2020-ongoing). Providing digital advisory and solution services to central and regional governments for continuity of social protection during crises (WFP, ongoing).
2. PROGRAMME FEATURES		
Registration and enrolment	Benefit delivery	Accountability, protection and assurance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting DSWD to develop a Unified Beneficiary Database (UBD) for all social protection programmes (WB, 2020-ongoing). Supporting DSWD to adopt Listahanan 3 for targeting 4Ps beneficiaries (WB, 2020-ongoing). Supporting DSWD to develop a targeting strategy (WB, 2020-ongoing). Supporting DSWD to update the FDS Manual (ADB, 2020-ongoing). Supporting MSSD to improve the poverty registry in BARMM and include risk and hazard vulnerability indicators (FAO, UNICEF, 2020 – ongoing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting DSWD to strengthen 4Ps cash delivery systems through digital payments and financial literacy trainings (WB, 2020-ongoing). Supporting DSWD to strengthen 4Ps cash delivery systems (ADB, 2020-ongoing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting DSWD to develop and implement a grievance policy and integrated Grievance Redress System (GRS) for the 4Ps and other social protection programmes (WB, 2020-ongoing).
3. KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING		
Assessments, analysis and evidence-based advocacy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence-generation on the 4Ps' potential to improve nutritional outcomes and evidence-based advocacy to DSWD and NEDA (UNICEF, WB, 2019-2021). Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) nutrition situation analysis (WFP, 2018). Survey series on welfare impacts of COVID-19 on low-income households and the role of SAP cash assistance (WB, 2020) Assessment of child poverty effects and efficacy of SAP cash assistance (UNICEF, 2020). Remote monitoring of food security, nutrition and SAP cash assistance (WFP, 2020). Case study and lessons learned on the implementation of SAP (ADB, 2020). Vulnerability and risk analyses: a) development of initial models for vulnerability maps with triggers and thresholds (WFP, 2015-2020), b) development and testing of risk indices to inform WFP geographical targeting (WFP, 2020-21) and c) analysis of impacts of climate change food security, nutrition, and livelihoods (Climate Change and Food Security Analysis, CCFSA). Supporting DSWD/DRMB to develop the Comprehensive Assistance for Disaster Response and Early Recovery Services (CARES) system through vulnerability assessments and profiling (IOM, 2020-ongoing). Supporting the Department of Science and Technology to manage the hazard and risk analysis platform (GeoRiskPH) (WB, 2019-ongoing). Supporting MSSD to strengthen risk monitoring and analysis in BARMM (UNICEF, FAO, 2020-ongoing). Study on food security and peacebuilding in BARMM (WFP and forumZFD, 2020). Testing the WFP Shock Responsive Social Protection Capacity Assessment tool (WFP, 2021). Study on synergies between agriculture and social protection (FAO, 2019). Landscape analysis of social protection in BARMM (UNICEF, 2019). Research, data and lessons learned (e.g. social and behaviour change communication – SBCC⁶) on food security and nutrition to influence national food security policy dialogues (WFP, ongoing). 		

WFP's role and recommendations for engagement in social protection in the Philippines

Based on WFP's historic engagement with the government, and its extensive emergency response experience, WFP can engage in a number of strategic areas around social protection and the ASRSP agenda in the Philippines. These include using its food security and nutrition expertise to inform ongoing nutrition-sensitive advocacy efforts to harness the 4Ps and the NFP potential for improving nutrition-outcomes, more systematically exploring opportunities for creating complementarities between its interventions, tools and learnings and those of social protection programmes, and strengthening support to social protection in BARMM.

Key recommendations are summarized below and more detailed ones, including their level of priority, are provided in the main report. To ensure the timely and effective implementation of these recommendations, WFP in the Philippines should consider expanding and sustaining its long-term workforce capacity with relevant social protection expertise.

Area of Work 1: "Contribute to strengthening the national social protection system architecture"

To advance the ASRSP agenda WFP should, under the TWG AA umbrella:

- Discuss key priorities and next steps for implementation of the ASRSP Roadmap and identify clear opportunities for engagement and support.
- Keep a close eye on the development of DSWD's digital transformation strategy to: a) understand how to best leverage and use the in-house expertise that WFP has built in digital solutions and technical advice to support the implementation of the strategy, fill gaps, and provide relevant technical support and, b) explore options for integration and/or promotion of interoperability of the various vulnerability, hazard, and risk analyses, indices and related platforms and databases developed by WFP and other actors
- Ensure that integration and/or interoperability of platforms and databases provide a solid basis for the establishment of commonly agreed thresholds and triggers for activation of social protection and humanitarian response.

- Support DSWD to develop actionable guidelines for flexing and scaling the 4Ps and other social protection programmes (e.g. the NFP) when crises hit.

Discuss with DSWD/DRMB and the WB, the respective roles that the ECT and the CERF Pilot's would play in emergency response (e.g. whether the CERF Pilot could serve a 'gap filling' or other function), activation protocols for these two cash response modalities, targeting mechanisms and criteria, payment delivery mechanisms, cash transfer values, etc.

Drawing on the 2021 Global Food Systems Summit⁷, the Global Coalition for School Meals⁸ and the DepEd Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of School-Based Feeding Programme⁹, support the DepEd to explore options for outsourcing the production of iron-fortified rice of the School-Based Feeding Programme to the private sector across all phases, from kernels to rice blending.

Area of Work 2: "Support enhancements to the quantity and quality of national social protection programming"

- To support the nutrition outcomes of the family food packs distributed during emergencies, explore with DSWD/DRMB (and the CARES system being developed with IOM support), DepEd, and LGUs and other relevant interlocutors, options for the provision of technical assistance for the design and inclusion of fortified rice in the food packs, to ensure effective and swift procurement, preparation and timely delivery.
- To improve 4Ps' nutritional outcomes, gauge DSWD and ADB's interest for WFP's involvement in the provision of technical support to the ongoing review and update of the FDS Manual, currently led by ADB, with a specific focus on food and nutrition modules.
- Consider piggybacking on existing 4Ps' payment delivery mechanisms for WFP future cash-based interventions and explore options for the provision of technical assistance to support the roll out the ECT as a shock-responsive social protection mechanism.

6. In October 2020 WFP launched the social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) research in BARMM to explore the socio-cultural factors that contribute to poor dietary practices among women and children and identify enablers and motivators that can improve those practices. <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000102103/download/>

7. See for example the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/23rdASEANSummit/5.%20asean%20declaration%20on%20social%20protection_final.pdf

8. <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

9. <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-begins-building-global-coalition-support-school-feeding-worldwide>

Cross-cutting to Area of Work 1 and 2: “Knowledge, learning and advocacy”

- To enhance WFP’s positioning and visibility as a credible partner in ongoing efforts aimed at strengthening the nutritional outcomes of the 4Ps and the NFP, ensure that future external-facing knowledge base on nutrition is designed, where appropriate, to also investigate and discuss implications for social protection policy and programmes and that relevant recommendations for the social protection sector are developed.
- With UNICEF, discuss the opportunity for a joint initiative focused on: a) drafting and publishing a joint synthesis report on qualitative and quantitative findings and lessons learned from the 2020 SAP cash assistance and, b) conducting evidence-based joint advocacy, also including ADB, to DSWD and NEDA on findings and lessons learned from the experience of the 2020 SAP cash assistance.
- Drawing on findings from the WFP SBCC research in BARMM, develop relevant recommendations for DSWD, DepEd, and NEDA on how to positively influence the behaviour of beneficiaries of social protection interventions to improve their health and nutrition outcomes.
- Leveraging the results and recommendations of the 2018 FNG analysis, explore opportunities for advocating to DSWD and NEDA, jointly with UNICEF and the WB, for the inclusion of nutrition indicators in the 4Ps.
- Use the upcoming CERF Pilot to produce a study to publish evidence and lessons learned on the effects of anticipatory cash transfers on targeted households.

Area of Work 3: “Improve the effectiveness of social protection in the shared space between humanitarian, development and peace actors”

Draw on the evidence generated through the systemic conflict analysis conducted under the WFP Food Security and Peacebuilding project in BARMM (and other projects, as relevant) to:

- With the MSSD, explore options for piloting the introduction of social cohesion indicators in one (or more as feasible) MSSD social protection programme.
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Area of work 4: “Build social protection partnerships”

A partnership-oriented approach should be at the core of WFP’s engagement in social protection in the Philippines and should be systematically guiding efforts to implement the recommendations outlined above. WFP should establish and strengthen collaborative relationships with:

- NEDA to advance social protection policy dialogues and advocacy.
- DSWD to jointly explore priorities and areas of support in line with the recommendations provided.
- WB, ADB, UNICEF, IOM, ILO, FAO to collaborate in areas outlined in the recommendations provided.