



Results from the High Frequency Social Monitoring Survey of COVID-19 Impacts at the Community Level - Philippines

Round 1, August 28-September 1, 2020

Background

- A survey of the social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable communities in the Philippines was initiated in August 2020. The first round of the community level survey reached 180 respondents in 101 barangays from 9 regions across Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The survey made use of the network of barangay officials and community volunteers organized under the National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP).
- The survey, carried out from August 28 to September 1, 2020, aims to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular to reach the poorest and most vulnerable rural communities affected by COVID-19. This note outlines the findings of the survey.

Key Findings

- The top-most pressing problems in communities are lack of income opportunities and reduction of pay, insufficient food supply and health, sanitation and nutrition. The lack of income opportunities and reduction of pay was also the main concern before COVID-19 but had worsened significantly as a result of the pandemic.
- Severe job losses were reported in more than 50% of communities, mainly occurring in the construction, and public transportation sectors.
- Loss of employment and income due to the COVID-19 pandemic is a pervasive issue affecting most areas of the survey results. This is particularly concerning as it is affecting communities that are already amongst the poorest and most vulnerable in the Philippines.
- Vulnerable and marginalized groups including, poor groups, senior citizens, women and children, have had access to COVID-19 related information.
- Barangay information campaigns are the top source of information for the communities followed by television and radio.
- Almost all communities reported having received at least one round of assistance since March 2020. Respondents perceived the groups in need of most assistance to cope



with COVID-19 are senior citizens, Persons with Disabilities, farmers and landless workers, children and women.

- A significant majority of communities have observed grievances and complaints related to the COVID-19 situation, mainly due to loss of employment/income opportunities. There has not been an increase in peace and order problems.

About the Survey

To better understand the community level socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in the Philippines, the World Bank (WB) in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), conducted a High Frequency Social Monitoring survey to assess the impact of the pandemic in the most vulnerable rural communities. This was the first round of the survey and therefore provides a baseline. Future rounds of the survey will interview the same set of respondents but include new questions to capture changes and sub-themes.

The survey was conducted through phone interviews. A total of 180 respondents, comprising of community volunteers and barangay officials identified by DSWD through the existing structure of the Kalahi CIDSS National Community-Driven Development Project (KC-NCDDP), participated in the first round of survey representing 101 different barangays. The survey was conducted between August 28 and September 1, 2020, and included respondents in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

Respondents acted as key informants and were asked to share their views on the situation in their communities. It is important to note therefore that survey results reflect the key informants' general observations, rather than the situation in their own households, and are based on their perception and knowledge of their respective communities.

The sample for the first round of the survey is relatively small and is meant to provide insights into COVID-19 impacts at the community level in poor communities covered by KC-NCDDP. It cannot be interpreted as representative of the entire country. These results complement the Philippines COVID-19 Firm Survey and Households Survey as individual components under the Real Time Monitoring of COVID-19 Impacts in the Philippines Project supported by the Australian Government. The survey will be repeated in regular intervals to gather additional data and follow up on initial findings. A second and third round are planned for February and April 2021, respectively.

Context

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020, the Philippines has consistently been among the countries with the highest number of cases in East Asia and the Pacific Region as well as among the top 20 countries, globally. COVID-19 will result in an increase in poverty in EAP for the first time in 22 years with an estimated 38 million vulnerable people who are at risk of falling into poverty. The Philippine economy contracted by 10.0 percent year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2020, the worst performance in over three decades. While unemployment fell from 17.7 percent in April to 8.7 percent in October 2020, it remains almost double the rate recorded in the same period of 2019. Remittances inflows contracted by 1.4 percent in the first three quarters of 2020. The curtailment of domestic economic activities and effects of global economic shock resulted in the sharpest



contraction in the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in over three decades with a downward projection of 8.1 percent for 2020. Consequently, the poverty incidence is estimated to increase by around 2.1 percent in 2020 resulting in an addition 2.7 million poor people in 2020 compared to 2019 estimates.¹ This is likely to affect already poor and vulnerable communities disproportionately as they are dependent on remittances from overseas and larger domestic urban areas.²

Government's Response to COVID-19

The Government of the Philippines (GoP) imposed strict community quarantine measures in its effort to minimize the spread of COVID-19. The Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in Luzon started on March 16, 2020, with varying degrees of community quarantine measures implemented over time. Areas under ECQ imposed strict home quarantine for residents and allowed only a few essential economic activities, with many firms not permitted to operate. This was in effect across the country in April 2020. ECQ was extended till May 15, 2020 in the National Capital Region (NCR), Central Luzon, and populous areas in Central and Western Visayas and Mindanao. The rest of the country was placed under General Community Quarantine (GCQ) where mobility restrictions were eased, and more firms were permitted to operate at full or below capacity. In June 2020, all 17 regions in the country were under GCQ or Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) with further easing of restrictions, except for Cebu City, which reverted to ECQ in late June. In late August/early September when the survey was conducted, NCR and surrounding areas were under MGCQ. The only survey respondent community under GCQ was Nueva Ecija in Central Luzon.

In conjunction with the different types of community quarantines, GoP has taken a variety of measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. In March 2020, the *Bayanihan* "to Heal as One Act" (Republic Act No. 11469) was passed, granting the President additional authority to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the Government adopted fiscal and monetary policies to mitigate the economic impact; testing and treatment facilities were designated in all regions; cash assistance was provided to poor households and displaced workers; subsidies were given to marginalized farmers; and the prices of basic goods were regulated. A second stimulus plan, *Bayanihan 2*, was ratified on August 24, 2020, with the aim to accelerate the recovery of businesses. In spite of government's efforts, the pandemic has heightened the vulnerabilities of the poor and marginalized groups significantly, resulting in increased unemployment, economic displacement; food shortages; and disruption in health, education and other basic services.

Demographics of Participating Barangays

The survey reached a total of 180 respondents representing 101 communities across 9 regions in Luzon (25%), Visayas (64%), and Mindanao (11%). Respondents were barangay officials and community volunteers who are active in the communities where KC-NCDDP is implemented. The respondents were asked to share their observations on various aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the situation in their respective communities.

¹ Based on the lower middle-income poverty line of 3.2 dollars a day, 2011 PPP.

² From Containment to Recovery, World Bank East Asia and Pacific Economic Update, October 2020 and Philippines Economic Update: Building a Resilient Recovery, December 2020

KC-NCDDP communities were selected based on a poverty incidence greater than or equal to 26.3 (2009 poverty threshold). The communities where the survey was rolled out are therefore a subset of the poorest communities in the country. The Philippines is extremely vulnerable to climate variability and natural disasters. The livelihoods of KC-NCDDP communities in poor, rural and remote areas rely heavily on natural resources, and natural disaster events tend to negatively affect their livelihoods, keep them trapped in a cycle of poverty, and undermine their capacity to cope with other shocks.

Seventy percent of the surveyed communities were located within Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs). The share of GIDA respondents across the surveyed island-regions resembled the sampling frame in most places.³ This was to be expected as the selection of KC-NCDDP communities was based on poverty rates and the poorest communities in the Philippines are often the most remote. About 24 % of the respondent communities were indigenous – of the indigenous people (IP) communities, 70% were in GIDA areas.

All of the surveyed regions had seen a significant number of COVID-19 cases at the time of the survey⁴. At the barangay level this ranged from very limited case numbers to more significant outbreaks. However, even barangays with no COVID-19 cases or limited cases would have been affected by the community quarantines imposed by government.

Information on COVID 19

The survey results indicate that COVID-19 related information successfully reached most vulnerable and marginalized groups equally specifically, poor groups (98%), senior citizens (98%), women (97%), and children 98%. Indigenous peoples, internally displaced persons and migrants received slightly less coverage (70%). Barangay level campaigns were the top source of information for the communities, followed by television and radio. Respondent communities also identified social media and health practitioners as additional key sources of COVID-19 information.

The key informants observe that their communities generally had high awareness of key risk mitigation measures including in particular the use of masks (85%), staying at home and avoiding outdoors (62%) and social distancing (60%) as the top actions cited. The survey indicated that the importance of handwashing (44%) and avoidance of crowded places (33%) were less recognized as key mitigation measures. These areas might therefore be issues for future education and communications campaigns to further strengthen awareness and risk reduction at the barangay level.

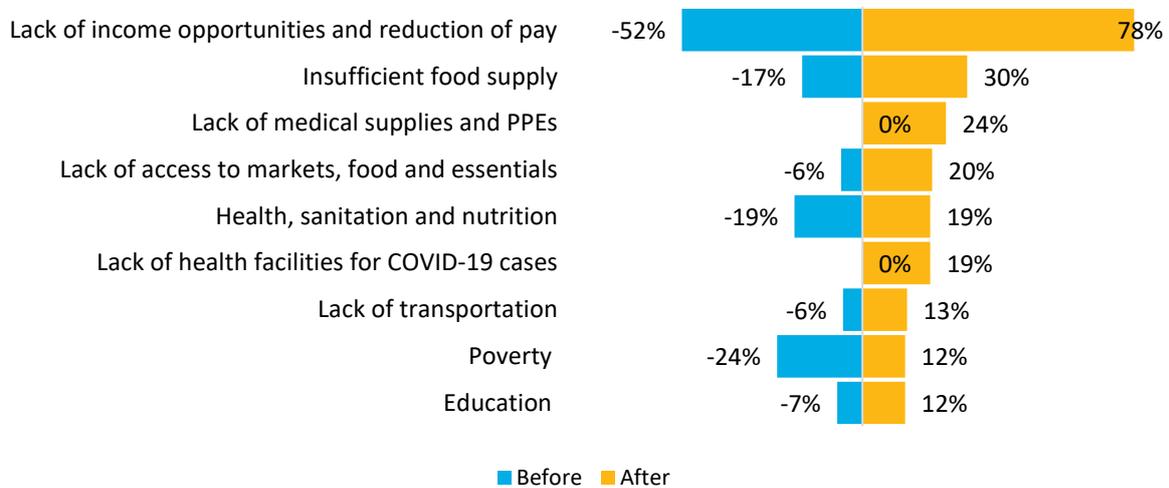
³ GIDA as classified by DSWD

⁴ Only one of the municipalities in the sample had no reported COVID-19 cases at the time of the survey, August 2020. From: Department of Health COVID Tracker: <https://www.doh.gov.ph/covid19tracker>

Perceived Challenges

The lack of income opportunities and reduction of pay, insufficient food supply and health, sanitation and nutrition were consistently reported as the top-most pressing problems both before and after COVID 19. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, significantly increased the perception of the lack of income/reduction of pay from 52% pre COVID-19 to 78% during COVID-19, an increase of almost 26% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Top perceived problems before and after COVID-19



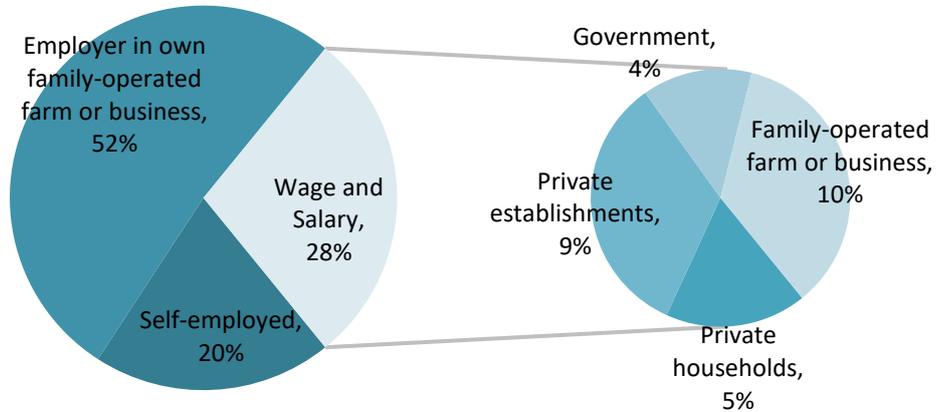
Those reporting food supply issues almost doubled from 17% to 30% during COVID-19 while health and sanitation remained consistent pre- and post- COVID-19 situation (19%). With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, a new set of challenges was also reported, including the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies (24%) and a lack of health facilities for COVID-19 cases (19%).

While poverty pre-COVID was cited as one of the top challenges to communities (24%), post-COVID-19 this was not rated as highly. This might be explained by the structure of the question where respondents were asked only to provide their three top perceived challenges and with the arrival of COVID-19 just communities were facing more pressing problems including PPE, health facilities and food supply. Based on the top 3 most pressing problems after COVID-19 (lack of employment/income, food supply and PPE/medical supplies), poverty clearly remained a persistent problem.

Economic Profiles

The survey results indicate that majority of community members in the respondent community barangays were employers in their family-operated farms or business (52%). Self-employment came in second with 28%, of which a majority were engaged in family-operated farm or businesses and private establishments (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Share of barangays by work done of majority of community members

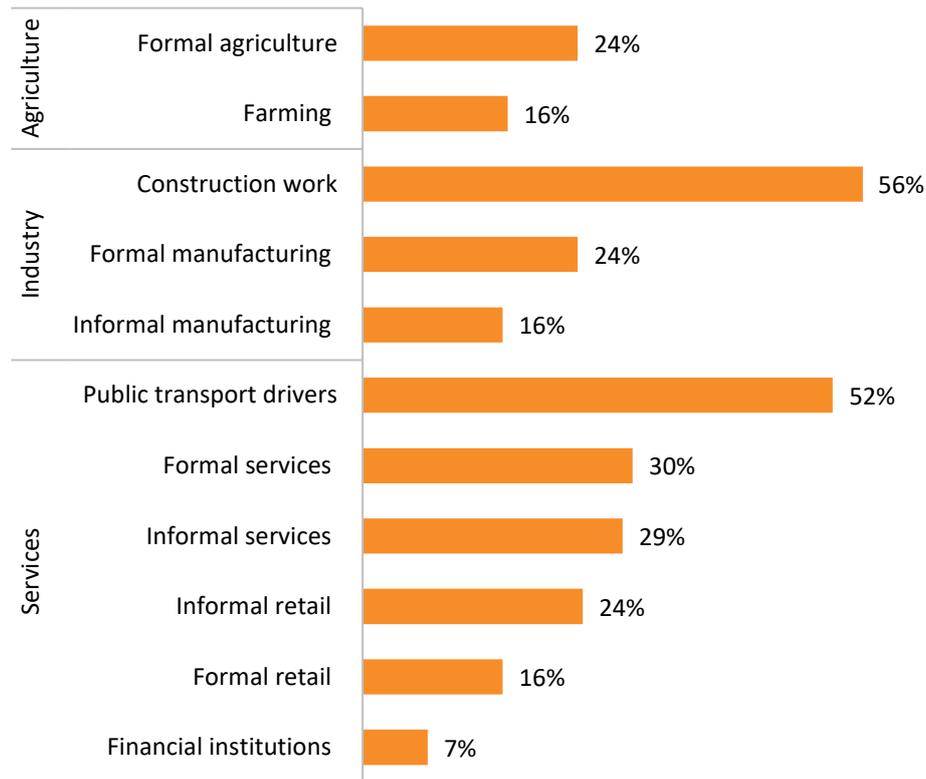


Employment and Economic Impact

The community-level survey shows that respondents observed *severe* job losses as a result of COVID-19 in more than 50% of the respondent communities. The economic impact is particularly worrisome as the surveyed communities are already a subset of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the Philippines and with the severe job losses communities are at risk of further increases in poverty.

Results suggest that the job losses were particularly severe in the construction sector (56%) and public transportation (52%). When looking at cumulative job losses (including both *severe* or *some* job losses), the construction sector and public transportation remained the most affected with 92 % of respondents reporting either severe or some job losses in their communities. Informal services (e.g. laundry women, hairdressers and small canteens) and informal retail (e.g. sari-sari stores, street vendors and markets) were also reported to have suffered significant cumulative job losses with respectively 85% and 81% job losses. Only the financial sector saw relatively fewer job losses with 51% of communities affected by job losses (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Incidence of severe job losses



The farming sector⁵ also reportedly had relatively less *severe* job losses, but still significant job losses reportedly in 70% of communities in formal agriculture and 61% in small scale farming (subsistence backyard farming or small-scale farming by families for food security and commercial purpose). This is significant as 52% of the surveyed communities were mainly self-employed in family operated farms/businesses. The findings of the community survey therefore indicate that self-employed/family-owned businesses were seeing revenue losses and income decline. This correlates with the findings of the household survey which showed that 23% of farmers are reporting declining revenues.

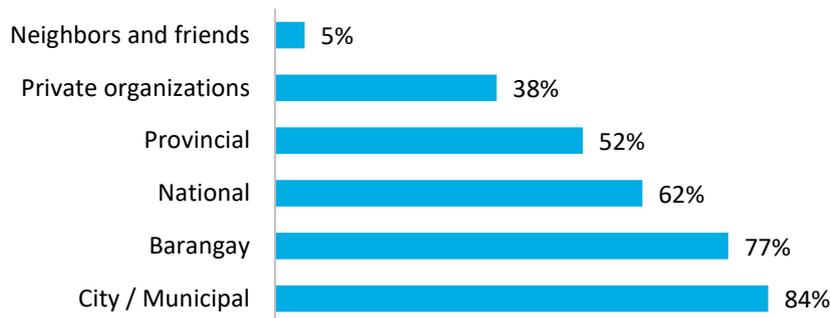
⁵ Informal farming (subsistence backyard farming or small-scale farming by families for food security and commercial purpose) and formal agriculture (plantations and large-scale farming).

COVID-19 Assistance Provided

The community respondents reported that 99% of the communities have received assistance since March 2020. The survey did not focus on the types of assistance received, but due to the poverty levels in KC-NCDDP target communities, it seems safe to assume that there is significant overlap with recipient communities of the GPH’s conditional cash transfer program. The community groups perceived by respondent to be most in need of assistance to cope with COVID-19 were senior citizens (59%), Persons with Disabilities (36%), farmers and landless workers (27%), children (21%) and women (19%).

The main sources of assistance were reported to be from the City/Municipality LGU, the Barangay, the national government and the Provincial Government. Private organizations were reported as an additional source of assistance (Figure 4).

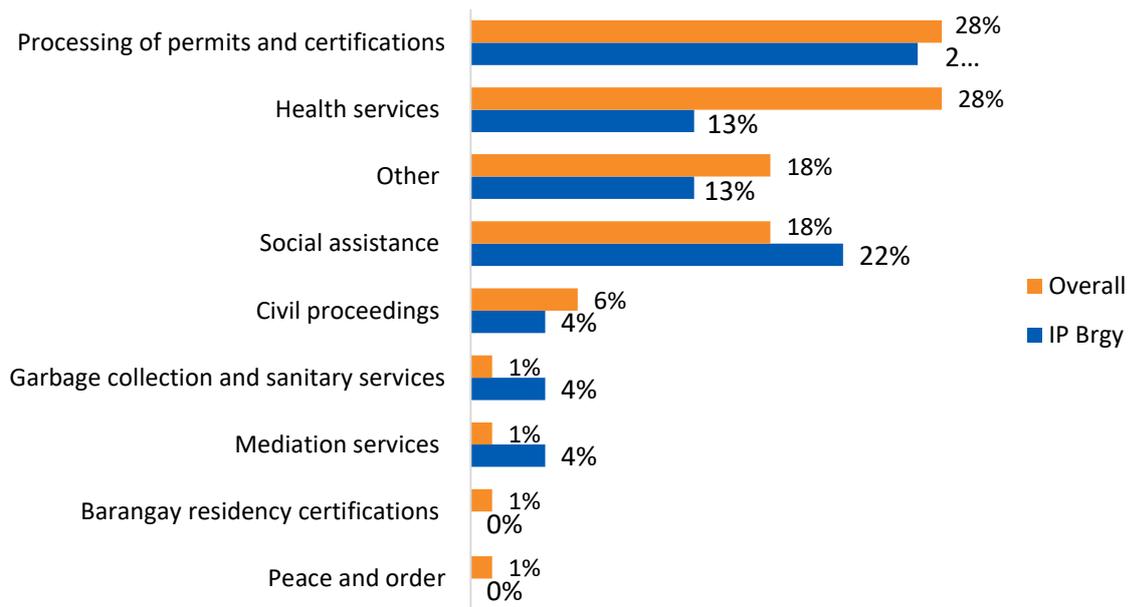
Figure 4. Sources of assistance



Government Services

At the municipal level, a little less than half of the respondent communities were finding municipal services affected by the pandemic (44%). In particular permit processing, health services and social assistance were altered. IP barangays were less inclined to find municipal health services affected but more likely to find social services more limited (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Municipal services affected⁶



At the barangay level, only 32% of the respondent communities found that barangay services have been affected by COVID-19. Of this group, the majority of the respondents again pointed to health services and social assistance as the top services negatively affected by the pandemic. Interestingly, at the barangay level IP communities were more likely to find health services lacking during the pandemic than the overall sample of communities and IP community respondents again also pointed to social assistance as a key service affected. This might indicate that IP communities more often rely on barangay health services than municipal health services, which could be explained by the GIDA status, i.e. that IP communities were more likely to be remote and suffer from constrained access to the nearest larger town/city.

Grievances and Complaints

The large majority of respondent communities (83%) observed grievances and complaints related to COVID-19. The most common causes of grievance were loss of employment, lack of sufficient food/water, lack of supplies and medical facilities, and government’s response to the crisis. The identified primary cause of grievances, i.e. loss of employment, corresponds well with previous findings that lack of employment and loss of income was the top perceived challenge and emphasizes the severity of job losses, and the assumed impact on income.

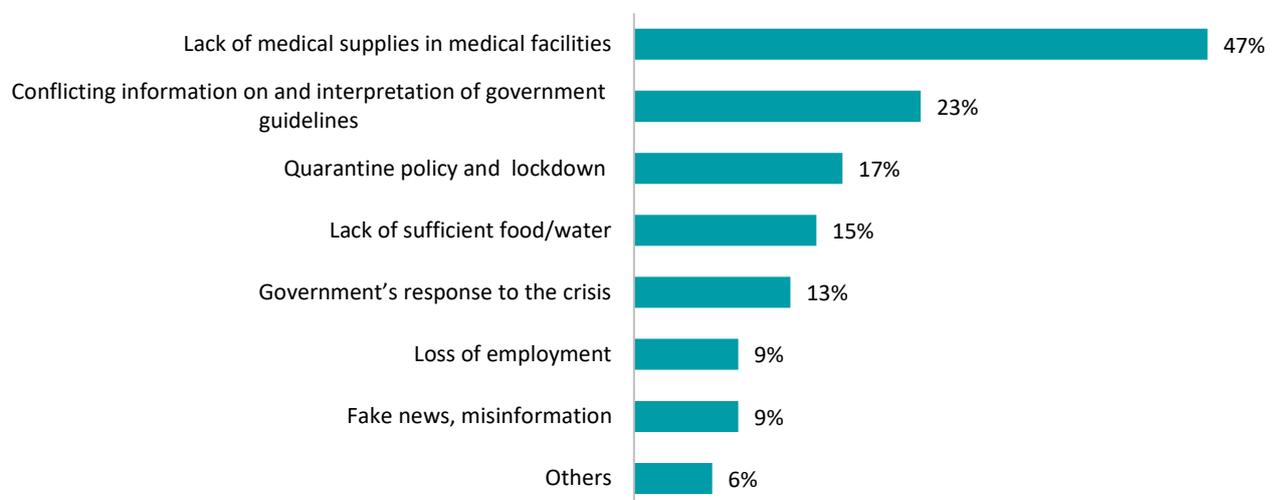
⁶ The category “other” covers multiple different answers, including closing of the municipal hall, project implementation halted, transportation and delivery services affected, municipal assemblies/meetings and seminars limited. None of these sub-categories are, however, significant in numbers and have therefore been left under the “other” category.

Among those who referenced “government response” (23%) as a cause of community grievances, 68% cited the lack of or too little (cash) assistance as the main cause. While 99% of communities have therefore received assistance, some still found the assistance insufficient to address their needs.

Social Cohesion – Peace and Order Problems

A significant share of communities (74%) have not observed any peace and order problems (i.e. violence and conflict) as a result of COVID-19. The share of IP communities that reported peace and order problems was slightly higher at 35%. Of the 26% of community respondents that did report observing peace and order problems caused by the pandemic, the large majority pointed to a lack of medical supplies in medical facilities. The second and third highest categories were (i) conflict information and confusion on guidelines; and (ii) quarantine policy and lockdown. It is worth noting that while lack of employment and income loss was seemingly the main concern and also a main driver of grievances at the community level, it did not seem to result in peace and order problems (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Cause of peace and order problems



Of those who respond “government’s response to crisis” as a cause of peace and order problems, 33% referred to problems in distribution of SAP and 33% cite too strict quarantine guidelines. In the subset of IP communities, 100% of respondents who cited “government’s response to crisis” pointed to SAP distribution issues. COVID-19 related discrimination was reportedly also not a pervasive issue at the community level. Only 25% of respondent communities reported discrimination. Of those discriminated against, potential and actual COVID-19 patients were at the top of the list with migrants and internally displaced people (IDPs) in second place.



Next Steps

The survey results demonstrate that poor communities are experiencing significant economic impact from the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated risk mitigation measures put in place. The main issue that is prevalent throughout several of the survey results is the challenges communities are facing on loss of employment and income.

To address the significant economic impact in already vulnerable communities and complement other initiatives, the GPH approved a scale-up of the KC-NCDDP for \$300 million, funded through a loan from the World Bank, in support of COVID-19 early recovery in rural poor communities. Through the KC-NCDDP's Disaster Risk Operations Modality (DROM), the project will support an open menu of basic services/facilities that are responsive to the specific needs of the communities in the COVID-19 context, including a strong focus on livelihoods. The next phase of KC-NCDDP will support 676 poor communities in rural areas across the Philippines.

The survey results will be shared with government and other stakeholders as a component of the Real Time Monitoring of COVID-19 Impacts in the Philippines Project. The second round of the survey is scheduled for February 2021. It will use of a panel approach and interview the same set of respondents as under the first round, with additional respondents to ensure strengthened geographical coverage across the country. Future rounds of the survey will strengthen the validity of results and will provide an opportunity for focusing in on sub-themes, including gender and coping strategies, or new themes that emerge as relevant, including the roll out of a vaccine.

Acknowledgement

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