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Social Protection and the World Food Programme in the Philippines

Scoping study

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WFP and Social Protection in the Philippines: a scoping study

I. Introduction, aim, and methodology

For decades, the Republic of the Philippines (the Philippines) has grappled with two persistent policy challenges: malnutrition among children under 5 and pregnant women in the poorest income quintiles, and recurrent climatic shocks and conflict, which pose a serious risk to the socioeconomic development gains that have been made. In line with global trends, social protection has witnessed a substantial expansion in the Philippines over the past decade and made an important contribution to the country's social development and poverty reduction.

As envisaged in the WFP Strategic Plan 2017- 2021¹, WFP has increased the attention it devotes to building the capacity of Government agencies globally and has been focusing on strengthening its role as an enabler of food security and nutrition solutions. Similarly, WFP in the Philippines has gradually shifted its focus from direct implementation to capacity strengthening of the Government of the Philippines (GOP). Indeed, the WFP Country Strategic Plan (CSP, 2018-2023) for the Philippines focuses on informing national policies, facilitating knowledge transfer, and providing technical support to the GOP, also in social protection. Since 2018, WFP supported social protection delivery through a range of technical assistance, digital advisory services and solutions. In 2020, WFP also played a key role in supporting the social protection emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with the recent WFP Strategy for Support to Social Protection (WFP Social Protection Strategy- WFP, 2021), WFP in the Philippines views the strengthening of national social protection systems as an important avenue for improving food security, addressing the root causes of malnutrition, and helping people to deal with risks and shocks. WFP in the Philippines requested support from WFP Regional Bureau Bangkok to conduct this scoping study to gain a better understanding of the key national and international social protection actors, their policies, plans, and initiatives, with a view to improving WFP's strategic role, niche and value added

in this space, as well as to gain insights into the key challenges and opportunities for support to social protection in the Philippines.

This report consolidates the findings from the scoping study and provides a set of recommendations for defining and improving WFP's role, engagement, and strategic partnerships in support of national social protection. The report is structured as follows: Section II) describes the country context by outlining the challenges of persistent malnutrition and recurrent risks and shocks; Section III) outlines the social protection system architecture - specifically the main national policies, legislation, priorities and trends; Section IV) provides an overview of the key national social protection actors and programmes; Section V) discusses the main challenges and opportunities to advancing Zero Hunger and shock response through social protection in the country; Section VI) presents the key initiatives of international actors in support of the social protection system in the Philippines; Section VII) concludes with a set of recommendations.

Methodology

Primary data collection was carried out between July and August 2021 through 28 qualitative semi-structured interviews, conducted remotely with key informants based in the Philippines and in Bangkok, Thailand. These included representatives from the GOP, WFP and other UN agencies, The World Bank (WB), The Asian Development Bank (ADB), and one national research organisation (see Annex I and Table 1). Secondary data was collected through online research using existing global and country-specific English documents of thematic relevance. Key informants also shared additional documents, including those not publicly available.

1. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/wfp-strategic-plan-2017-2021>

II. The Philippines context

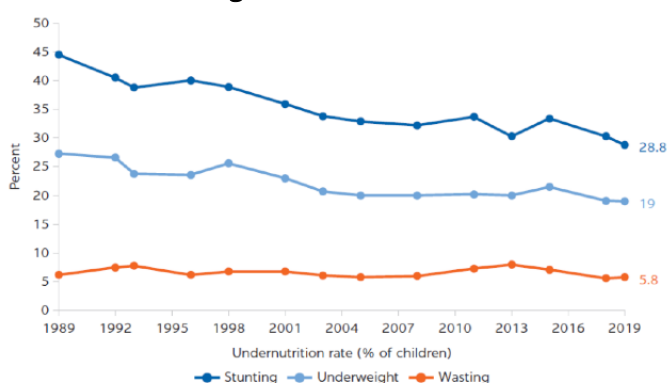
The WFP Social Protection Strategy outlines two interconnected priorities for WFP's engagement in social protection: to help people meet their food security, nutrition and essential needs, and to help people manage risks and shocks (see Figure 1, Part 2 - Priorities). As elaborated in this section, these two priorities reflect the two main policy challenges that the Philippines has been confronted with for decades.

The challenge of Zero Hunger in the Philippines

Increased economic growth, declining poverty rates and higher standards of living have still not resulted in better nutrition outcomes for children under five and for pregnant women in the lowest income quintile.

Since the early 2000s, the Philippines has experienced robust economic growth at an average rate of 6.3% per year, accompanied by a significant decline in poverty, from over 26% in 2009 to 16% in 2018 (Cho et al., 2020). However, these positive trends have not resulted in improved nutrition in the most at-risk segments of the population: children under five and pregnant women, as mentioned above. As Figure 2 shows, for nearly 30 years, the rates of wasting and stunting among children under five have remained largely unchanged (World Bank, 2021a). The 2015 National Nutrition Survey found that in the poorest income quintile, almost half of children under five were severely stunted and that pregnant women were nutritionally at risk, with a prevalence of 17% of low birthweight rates (Cho et al., 2020). According to the 2019 Expanded National Nutrition Survey, stunting rates are significantly higher in rural areas (30.4%) than in urban areas (26.4%) (World Bank, 2021a). In addition to anthropometric differences (stunting, underweight, and wasting), micronutrient³ malnutrition—the so-called “hidden hunger”—is also highly prevalent in the country (Cho et al., 2020; World Bank, 2021a; WFP, 2018). In 2019, data on anaemia showed that 38% of children 6–11 months and 26% of children 12–23 months were iron deficient, and 20% of pregnant women were anaemic (Cho et al., 2020).

Figure 2: Malnutrition trends in the Philippines for children under age five, 1989–2019



Source: World Bank, 2021a

Lack of access to a diverse diet, inadequate care and feeding practices for mothers and children, limited access to health and environmental services, poverty and deprivation are among the main drivers of persistent undernutrition in the Philippines (World Bank, 2021b). In 2019, only 58% of children ages 0–6 months were exclusively breastfed and a mere 10% of children 6–23 months were fed a nutritionally adequate diet (World Bank, 2021b). The poorest households typically eat a diet heavy in rice with limited food diversity and animal protein intake. In 2018, WFP conducted a country-wide nutrition situation analysis, the Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG). The results showed that across all regions, the modelled household of five members would not be able to afford a nutritious diet if paid a minimum wage only (WFP, 2018).

Early projections indicate that the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating already high levels of childhood undernutrition in the country. A nationwide survey conducted by Innovations for Poverty Action in 2020 found that 75% of respondents had difficulty buying the same amount of food they could buy before the pandemic because their household income had dropped, and 26% had to limit portion sizes, while 20% had to reduce the number of meals eaten in a day⁴. UNICEF's recent estimations indicate that the prevalence of underweight children in the Philippines may increase between 0.03 and 0.08% and wasting between 0.03 and 0.1% as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (UNICEF, 2021). In 2020, WFP revisited the Cost of

3. Such as vitamin A, iron, zinc, folic acid and iodine.

4. <https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/Philippines-RECOVR-Survey-Analysis.pdf>

Diet component of the 2018 FNG analysis⁵ and found that from January to May 2020 the cost of a nutritious diet had increased by 5% for all Filipinos (WFP, 2020).

The impact of shocks and conflict in the Philippines

The Philippines is at high risk of hydro-meteorological, geological, and seismic hazards. According to the 2020 World Risk Report, the Philippines is the ninth country in the world most affected by extreme weather events (WRI, 2020). An archipelago of 7,641 islands with almost all major cities located along the coastline, the Philippines is prone to coastal hazards such as typhoons, storm surges and rising sea levels (World Bank, 2021b; UNISDR, 2019). Typhoons and floods accounted for the overwhelming majority (80%) of natural disasters that occurred in the country over the past half-century (Jha, 2018 in UNISDR, 2019). The Philippines is also located within the Pacific Ring of Fire between the Eurasian and Pacific tectonic plates and thus earthquakes and volcanoes are serious risks (UNISDR, 2019). Furthermore, the country's climate is strongly influenced by the El Niño climatic events.

In late 2019 and early 2020, the country was hit by a highly unusual series of disaster events, which included one El Niño event in 2019 causing a longer dry season, three earthquakes in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in October and November 2019, typhoons Tisoy and Ursula in December 2019, another earthquake in BARMM in December 2019, the Taal volcano eruption in 2020, and typhoon Rolly in November 2020, followed by typhoon Vamco a few days later (World Bank, 2020a).

Recurrent disasters threaten the gains that the country has made in socioeconomic development, poverty reduction and food security. Since 1990, the Philippines has been affected by 565 disaster events which have caused a combined estimate of USD 23 billion in damages, mostly from super typhoons (Jha, 2018 in UNISDR, 2019). Food production of rice in particular, is often affected by large-scale disasters: in 2013, typhoon Haiyan alone caused an estimated loss of 260,000 tons of rice, resulting in severe food shortages across the country and pushing an estimated one million people into poverty (UNISDR, 2019). In May 2019, the El Niño-

induced drought prompted rising inflation and agricultural production losses of 447,889 metric tons equivalent to PHP 7.96 billion (USD 137 million)⁶. The combined cost of damage to infrastructure and agriculture caused by typhoons Tisoy and Ursula in 2019 and the Taal volcano eruption in 2020 is estimated to be USD 245 million (World Bank, 2020a).

Decades of unrest, displacement and economic stagnation in BARMM have resulted in widespread underdevelopment, poverty, and malnutrition in the region. BARMM (the former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, ARMM, see Section III) has long been affected by internal unrest and conflict, including clan feuding, local disputes over resources and community rights, political and armed conflicts by nationalist/separatist groups, and violent extremism (World Bank, 2021b; Rowe, 2019). Recurrent conflict and natural disasters are the main drivers of forced displacement in the region: in April 2020, over 350,000 people were estimated to be internally displaced⁷. The interplay of conflict, weather-related shocks, poverty, and economic marginalisation have had a major negative impact on the population. Between 2015 and 2017, BARMM recorded the lowest (0.583) Human Development Index of all regions (NEDA, 2021). According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 61.8% of the BARMM population in 2018 lived below the poverty line, making BARMM the region with the highest poverty rate in the country (vis-à-vis 16.7% nationally)⁸. In 2015, across all regions, the highest prevalence of stunting among children under five (45%) was found in BARMM (World Bank, 2021).

5. The FNG methodology combines a Cost of the Diet analysis with a comprehensive review of existing secondary data on markets, local dietary practices and malnutrition to identify barriers to a nutritious diet. For more information see: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000099672/download/>

6. <https://www.rappler.com/business/neda-says-el-nino-caused-inflation-uptick-may-2019>

7. <http://www.protectionclusterphilippines.org/?p=2421>

8. <http://rssoarmm.psa.gov.ph/statistics/poverty>

III. Social protection in the Philippines: system architecture

National policies and legislation on social protection

The GOP's commitment to universal social protection is embodied in the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines, which underlines the state's responsibility to protect the welfare of its citizens. The Constitution's article on social justice and human rights mandates the Congress to "give highest priority to the enactment of measures that protect and enhance the right of all the people to human dignity, reduce social, economic, and political inequalities, and remove cultural inequities by equitably diffusing wealth and political power for the common good⁹".

Since 2007, the Philippines has established key legislative tools on social protection, consisting of series of national resolutions and executive orders. The key ones are listed in Box 1 below:

Box 1: Key legislative tools for social protection in the Philippines

- **Resolution No. 1**, series of 2007, establishes a common definition for social protection and its component parts. Social protection consists of the: "policies and programs that seek to reduce poverty and vulnerability to risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized by promoting and protecting livelihood and employment, protecting against hazards and sudden loss of income, and improving people's capacity to manage risks¹⁰". The four component parts of the national social protection system are: Labour Market Programmes, Social Insurance, Social Welfare¹¹, Social Safety Nets.
- **Resolution No. 2**, series of 2009, establishes a Sub-Committee on Social Protection (SCSP) with oversight on national social protection objectives and priorities under the National Economic and Development Authority.
- **Executive Order No. 867**, Series 2010, provides for the adoption of the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction (Listahanan) as the nationwide repository of data on poor households- or social registry, and its use for the targeting of social protection programmes.
- **Resolution no. 7**, series 2021, adopted the Philippine Roadmap on Adaptive Shock Responsive Social Protection (ASRSP) as the overall framework for strengthening the shock responsiveness of the social protection system through anticipatory actions and ex-ante mechanisms.

- **Resolution No. 3**, series of 2012, establishes the Social Protection Operational Framework and Strategy as the basis for harmonizing and implementing social protection programmes in the country. In 2018 the Framework was revised and enhanced (Enhanced Social Protection Framework) to align it to the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022 and other key documents, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection (DSWD and SC-SP, 2018).

Social protection has gained increasing prominence in national development plans, policies and visions. The The PDP 2017-2022 is the overarching GOP strategic framework for national development planning and is aligned to the Ambisyon Natin 2040¹². Chapter 11 of the PDP 2017-2022 "Reducing Vulnerability of Individuals and Families", dedicated entirely to social protection, underlines the need for universal and transformative social protection as a key pathway towards reducing vulnerability to risks and disasters and building socioeconomic resilience (NEDA, 2016a). In February 2021, the PDP 2017-2022 was revised and updated (Updated PDP 2017-2022) to account for and respond to the new challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 11 on social protection was also revised and some of the national priorities identified in the revised chapter are outlined below.

Similarly, the BARMM regional development plan focuses on social protection. The passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law in 2018 and its ratification in 2019 provided for the establishment of a new political entity in the Philippines, the formal replacement of ARMM with BARMM, and the formation of the new Bangsamoro Government. This was the result of several years of peace talks between the GOP and various autonomist groups, with the latter calling for devolution of power from the central government (World Bank, 2021b). In 2020, BARMM developed its first regional development plan, the Bangsamoro Development Plan (BDP) 2020-2022, as the blueprint for development in the region. The BDP 2020-2022 is articulated in 13 chapters, aligned with the PDP 2017-2022 and Ambisyon Natin 2040. The overall goal of the BDP 2020-2022 is "to uplift the lives of the Bangsamoro and [to] establish the foundations for self-governance through moral governance" (BARMM, 2020). The BDP 2020-2022

9. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/>

10. <https://neda.gov.ph/as-delivered-secretary-pernias-presentation-on-social-protection-and-human-capital-development/#:~:text=%E2%80%99C%20Social%20Protection%20constitutes%20policies%20and,improving%20people's%20capacity%20to%20manage>

11. Social welfare was replaced with the term social assistance in the 2018 Enhanced Social Protection Framework

12. In 2016, NEDA adopted Ambisyon Natin 2040, a 25-year long-term vision and plan to transform the Philippines in a prosperous middle-income country free of poverty. The vision embodies three elements to ensure that Filipinos are: i) socially cohesive (matatag), ii) comfortable (maginhawa); and iii) secure (panatag) (NEDA, 2016). Similarly, the PDP 2017-2022 is organised along three main pillars: Malasakit (building a high-trust society), Pagbabago (transforming towards equity and resiliency), and Patuloy na Pag-unlad (increasing growth potential).

Goal Number 5 “Improving Access to and Delivery of Services for Human Capital Development” focuses on social protection and the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) is the agency responsible for its realisation (Ibid.).

In addition to national legislative and policy provisions, the Philippines has ratified several international conventions on universal social protection These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Philippines has also agreed to ILO’s Recommendation 202 adopted at the International Labour Conference in June 2012, in which it commits to establishing a national Social Protection Floor (SPF). As elaborated in the following sections, concrete policy steps are currently being implemented to effect this commitment.

The ASEAN, of which the Philippines is a member, has developed a number of instruments to guide social protection and disaster risk reduction approaches to increase resilience in the region. Through the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection of 2013, ASEAN member states, including the Philippines, committed to taking actions to extend universal social protection. More recently in 2021, the ASEAN Secretariat produced the ASEAN Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection to Increase Resilience¹³ (ASEAN Guidelines) to provide a common understanding on how countries in the region should incorporate disaster risk considerations into social protection systems. Additionally, the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021-2025¹⁴ includes strengthened ASRSP as a key outcome under its Priority Programme 2 “Prevention and Mitigation”. Two related outputs are:

- (Output 2.5.1.1) Action plan and relevant capacity

The building blocks are: institutional capacity, information and data management systems, flexible program design, flexible delivery system and flexible financing.

National priorities in social protection

The adoption of the SPF is a national priority. The finalisation and official adoption of the SPF, which, as discussed in Section VI is led jointly by ILO with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), is indicated in the Updated PDP 2017-2022 as a key step for advancing a universal social protection system. The Updated PDP 2017-2022 also notes the intention to issue “a policy directive... to officially adopt and enumerate [SPF] components” (NEDA, 2021: 206). Similarly, the SCSP Social Protection Plan 2020-2022 and the 2018 Enhanced Social Protection Framework include the adoption and institutionalization of the SPF as key priorities (DSWD, 2020a; DSWD and NEDA, 2018).

The current administration is committed to addressing the persistent challenge of malnutrition. In 2016, President Duterte expressed his commitment to end hunger and malnutrition in the country¹⁶. Since then, important policy and legislative advances have taken place. In 2018, Republic Act No. 11037 (National Feeding Law) institutionalized the National Feeding Programme (NFP) for undernourished children in public day care centers, kindergarten, and elementary schools. In 2020, the President signed Executive Order 101 to establish the Inter-Agency Task Force on Zero Hunger (IATF-ZH) to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 on Zero Hunger. Led by the Cabinet, the IATF-ZH was responsible for the formulation of the 2020 National Food Policy, to which WFP has also been providing technical input (see Section VI). In 2021, the Philippines participated in the Global Food Systems Summit¹⁷ dialogues, became

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