

Correspondence

Philippine community pantries as a way of helping the marginalized during the COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRACT

In a previous correspondence, the author tried to establish the crucial relationship of the country's public health with the government officials' economic decisions and actions. Understanding such, we look at the perspective of the handling of the pandemic, in terms of economic decisions and actions, in the Philippines. In the country, complaints from the citizens surfaced because the government failed in providing an appropriate response to the economic imbalance generated by the pandemic. Thus, in this paper, we surveyed the sudden engenderment of community pantries in the Philippines as a way of filling the gaps of the government.

Keywords COVID-19 pandemic, community pantries, marginalized, Philippines

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments were forced to impose lockdowns to mitigate the spread of the virus. With this, a number of human operations were halted so people are forced to stay at home. This safety protocol of staying at home, which everyone is required to observe, resulted in some workers in a no-work-no-pay scheme and small businesses struggling financially. For this reason, the author of a previous correspondence tried to establish the crucial relationship of the country's public health with the government officials' economic decisions and actions.¹ However, in the Philippines, a number of complaints from the citizens were received by the government because of the way the pandemic is being handled. Thus, in this paper, we look at the Philippine government's economic response and the genesis of community pantries.

The economic imbalance during the pandemic is a reflection of the way the Philippine government handled the situation. During the first months of the lockdown, the government had a Social Amelioration Program (SAP) through the distribution of *ayuda* (financial assistance) to help the marginalized sector of the country. It is with this program that a previous correspondence proposed that the distribution of *ayuda* must be given weight so that the well-being of the least

well-off will be prioritized.² However, during the distribution of financial aids, complaints from different citizens surfaced because they claim that there is an unfair distribution due to some corrupt politicians.³ Until now, many Filipinos are relying on financial assistance because of company closures and employee retrenchment.

In early April 2021, the government once again imposed lockdowns because of a second surge of COVID-19 cases. However, this time, the SAP was not a viable option because funding was running low. In addition, government intervention to ease the financial struggles of the most affected people was nowhere to be found. It is because of these predicaments that community pantries were established. Community pantries are the result of the efforts of concerned citizens to somehow meet the primary needs of people.⁴ The main concept of these pantries is to encourage people to give whatever they can and get from the pantry what they only need. Community pantries have alleviated some of the material problems of people.

The concept of a community pantry proves that the virtue of solidarity can be our companion for us to get through this pandemic.⁵ However, solidarity and the success of community pantries can only be achieved only if people become mindful of the things they get from the pantry. Not only

should mindfulness be practiced in easing vaccine hesitancy but it must also be observed even in the efforts of people to survive the effects of the pandemic.⁶

Even though this initiative is successful, it is important to highlight that community pantries are not there to replace the government's role, nor support citizen's needs in the long run. In the end, the prime duty still falls on the government since they are obligated to serve its people towards the common good and public service.⁷

Authors' contribution

All authors contributed to all aspects of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

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