

Narrative of Philippine Government Strategy to Curb the Wuhan Virus (COVID 19) Pandemic

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Abstract: *When news came that a strange virus is discovered in China and the possibility of the outbreak, government prepared to contain it by introducing several measures to stop it. The advent of pandemic, which is not usual, caught government official off-guarded. This study helps, how Philippines respond to COVID-19 pandemic; what are the notifiable complaints encountered by the citizen; how was SAP distributed and how it affects the citizens; and how to improve the Government responses to pandemic based on the study. This study is limited to the existing condition in the Philippines beginning at the time the president declared lockdown to prevent the entry of virus right its doorstep until the present situation. This is a qualitative method, describing the data in the IATF, DOH, and social media which reports the situational experience in the pandemic. This is a narrative of what has been seen, reported by media and experienced at the onset of the pandemic.*

Every time the city or municipality increases the quarantine protocols, people think where to get food. This is true in the city, but those in the rural area, the increase in the quarantine protocol would mean an income to them since SAP will be distributed to those who are qualified.

Compulsory use of face shield and face mask can open the economy without much risk.

There should be treaty to treat aliens wherever they are, like a citizen of the country during pandemic. Sending them homes would eventually spread the virus.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Government, Philippine, Wuhan, virus, pandemic, narrative*

I. Introduction

The unprecedented pandemic makes the countries confuse on what to do and how to curb the spread of the Wuhan Virus. Truly, the virus may cripple the economy or the country if people are not properly oriented and the local government units do not have specific protocols to follow.

Rich countries may crush if the responses of the leaders are not judicious. Note that the end goal of each country is to defeat an unseen enemy. Countries may only be prepared in physical adversaries where targets are sighted. They are not prepared and have no weapons to kill a common enemy of mankind. There only means of knowing the enemy is the knowledge in science.

This study is made to guide country that is about to experience or is now experience the pandemic. History would tell that this is what Philippine do during the pandemic. If all these go well, the next generation would just simply follow what this government do during similar crisis. Thus, this study would simply set the table, and the next generation is only to eat.

In the absence of the basic knowledge of the nature of the enemy, the only means of winning the fight, is know our defenses. The moment this pandemic, initially heard through mass media, everybody become hysterical. Rich and poor become alike for no one will be exempted in this deadly virus. Probably, the reason why such a reaction is that, this unprecedented, none of us witness the 1918 influenza pandemic which kills millions of people around the globe. The magnitude of its effect, leaving the victims either dead or alive, which basically depends on immune system, which also varies depending on the age of the victims and the healthcare facilities of the country.

There are sources that the origin maybe in China as the outbreak started from Hubei the Capital of Wuhan, China as people sells wild animals as their exotic foods. These animals such as bats and pangolins are sold in the wet market. These animals mentioned, are the carrier of the corona virus which causes influenza like illnesses with symptoms on fever, shortness of breath and cough. In some cases, diarrhea may come at the advance stage in a symptomatic patient. The asymptomatic patient does not show any symptoms, which is more

dangerous because the infected person is not aware that he is contaminated with the disease. Furthermore, these asymptomatic persons may cause of the surge of the infection. However, history of travel to the place or country where there is a reported outbreak of the corona virus may help in self-assessment. The mass testing will help to determine whether person infected is not practical at all, at the moment, due to lack of test kits as this pandemic is unprecedented and all countries are not prepared to produce the immediate needs of other countries. Besides, it is not a guaranty that those who are tested negative cannot be infected anymore as the virus is suspended in the air for several months or even a year or more. Thus, mass testing is not logical at an early stage.

II. Statement of the Problem

1. How Philippines respond to COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the notifiable complaints encountered by the citizen in:
 - a. ECQ,
 - b. MECQ,
 - c. GCQ
 - d. MGCQ?
3. How was SAP distributed and how it affects the citizens?
4. How to improve the Government responses to pandemic based on the study.

III. Review of Related Literature

Poor societies more vulnerable to public health emergencies. The available data with respect to the coronavirus crisis reveal that the majority of countries affected by the pandemic belong to the developed economies. It argues that the inequality among nations does not have any significant relation to disease movement, infection, and high mortality rate. However, addressing the problem of urbanization and investing in public health will be crucial in terms of confronting the socio-economic ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Maboloc, 2020:30(4) 158-161).

Persons with impairment are the most neglected sector in society. This inquiry looks into the social and medical model in terms of analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic to persons with developmental disorder. The paper argues that the medical model is insufficient to account for the needs of persons with disability. While the medical model requires that individuals with impairment should be given priority in terms of access to effective treatment, policy must have a full awareness of the social context of cognitive disability in the midst of a public emergency. (Maboloc, 2020:30 (5) 234-237).

IV. Methodology

This is a qualitative method, describing the data in the IATF, DOH, and other agencies involved. News report and social media which expose the situational experience in the pandemic is helpful in the gathering information. This is a narrative of what has been seen, reported by media and experienced at the onset of the pandemic. Particularly, this is an actual observation in Cebu City at the time when the city became the epicenter of the pandemic of the country. The spike of the virus, goes with it the spike of the graph which is undeterminable, except if certain precautionary measure are applied. These precautionary measures are the variables that help to predict the future number of person who will be infected. These variables may well be manipulated to predict the future quarantine status of a city, municipality, province, or region. The quarantine status may not be enough to accurately predict surge of the virus for it only rely on basic report of the data from the DOH. Things being constant, what will exactly point, and perhaps perfectly identify the rise and fall of the graph is the number of contact tracers and the strict implementation of the use face mask and face shield in public places.

V. Results and Discussion

The government responded the pandemic through a creation of a task force, IATF composed of several national department secretaries. This task force is chaired by a Francisco Duque III, Secretary of the Department of Health, and Co-chairperson Karlo Alexei Nograles, Cabinet Secretary. The member departments are the PNP, AFP, DILG. The Task Force is responsible to issue a community quarantine classification base on epidemic risk, economic, social and security considerations. LGUs may however appeal subject to their commitment. The resolution by the task force may then be approved or rejected by the president of the Philippines. The creation of the Task Force intended to stop the spread of the virus. The president himself, in protecting lives of its citizens declares an immediate shut down of all possible ingress to the country upon hearing of the Wuhan virus. Thus, a lockdown was implemented in NCR, which is followed by Cebu City. People were not prepared in all aspects, this resulted hunger to those families who were not able to save for rainy season. Fortunate to those who are in

government sector since salary continues even without furnishing work. Skeletal force was implemented in both government and private entities when government lower down the quarantine category to General Community Quarantine. At any quarantine level strict implementation of wearing of face mask is under the monitoring of the police officer assigned in areas where COVID-19 case is high. Later, wearing of face mask was enforced when the economy is now open under lower quarantine category especially when riding in a public utility vehicle.

Travel is impossible in lockdown or Enhanced Community Quarantine. Those who are on vacation in other countries find it difficult to go home. In the same manner, foreigners who are in the Philippines find it difficult to return to their respective countries. This was so because there was a sudden announcement to lockdown the country. The lockdown prohibits anyone to go out of their homes except for one member of the household who is in charge in buying foods and medicines. All establishments were closed except for hospital and other essential services such as food delivery, medicine and essential workforce such as banking industry and other financial services. The transition from one quarantine category to another is every 15 days, by which the president, through the recommendation of the IATF, will announce the public in television channels.

During ECQ or Lockdown, people are prohibited from going out of their household except those head of the family or any family member in the absence thereof, except senior citizen and children below 21 years old. Quarantine pass is issued and signed by the respective mayors of the city is required to bring every time he gets out of the house to buy foods or medicine. Other activities are strictly prohibited. In this period, people cannot get out to work. Violators are put behind bars or clean the streets. Work places are closed; roads are guarded by police officers and *barangay tanod* (local peace keeping force). Thus, those who earns in a daily basis, starves. The reason is that, helps only comes later. Government finds it difficult to distribute funds to those badly affected. The president did not trust the local government officials to be the in-charged in the distribution of funds. DSWD was chosen as they have the network and connections to the barangay level and those badly affected. The amount of Php6,000.00 - 8,000.00 SAP, which vary in the type of municipality, was given to each family members.

VI. Common Complaints

ECQ. Every time lockdown is declared in a city or municipality, people are complaining because this would mean no income and no food on the table. The family of those working on daily basis and those who lost their jobs because some companies declare bankruptcy or stop furnishing work due to less demand, eventually starve. Fortunate are those who work in the government; although they are not required to work, yet they are paid. The pandemic levels the field in the private sectors, rich and poor alike – both have no income. This however widens the disparity between those working in the government, who are not literally affected, and those in the private sector who are badly hit by this pandemic. Clearly, government employees who are not required to be in the working area save a lot from daily fare that they incur had they work in their respective offices. Thus, while others are starving, others are experiencing luxury and do not know what to do with their continuous monthly salary. As a result, those who lost their treasured jobs were compelled to go to their respective provinces.

The pandemic shows things that are important in life, it reveals the those who are working in the government has the greater chance of survival than those in the private sector in terms of food security. Government employees received full salary while those in the private sector find is difficult to survive without the help from government funds in a form of social amelioration during the pandemic. Moreover, the pandemic shows both equality and inequality. There is equality because rich and poor are both vulnerable to the virus. Lower or higher income where at the same level for both did not earn at all. There is great inequality between government employees and private employees. Thus, Social Amelioration Program can bridge the inequality as the latter contributes to the government through their monthly tax deductions.

The common complaints are basic skills in survival which is to have foods at the table. This is scarce due limited if total prohibition to work. Since activities are prohibited, some resulted to a lowly form of livelihood; i.e., begging. Essential Workers find it difficult to work due to limited transportation services. Companies which are essentials such as food services, pharmacies and hospitals provide their own shuttle services. Some politicians provide shuttle services to front liners for future investments if they are not philanthropist.

MECQ Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine

Still movements are limited; it is a development of ECQ if there is a decrease in number of infected person from the virus. Nevertheless, people are still prohibited to go out and work. In this time, the budget of the family continues to deplete. The transition would mean another 15 day without income. The more violators were caught during this period other engage into online business just to earn a living. Although malls were closed but

online business grows in number and delivery services were double as the latter are exempt from quarantine control checkpoints.

GCQ General Community Quarantine

The most awaited part of the pandemic is the day prior to the expiration of the quarantine period which the president announces to the public the next quarantine status of their respective city, municipality, province or region. People will be very happy if their LGU quarantine status will be relaxed; more so if they become General Community Quarantine.

MGCQ

Modified General Community Quarantine is more relaxed than the rest of the community quarantine. It is the normal life with the threat of the virus. Thus, wearing face mask and shield, observe social distancing and proper hand washing shall be observed while the economy is now open.

Clearly the graph showing the number of infected by the virus goes down if the variable of lockdown or other measure is strictly implemented. But what motivates them to stay home? None, except for a minimal amount of rice which may be enough for less than two weeks, plus five sardines and less than ten noodles. Thus no matter how the government will force people to stay home, and punish those violators with stiffer penalties, that cannot prevent a person with empty stomach to look for foods. Every time, their children cries for food, a good father of a family, values life rather than facing the penalty of violating the Bayanihan Act, which prohibit any person to go out of their houses.

SAP Distributions

Although the president ordered not to go out of their houses, people still goes out. The reason is to feed their families. For four months people stop moving and stop earnings because of lockdown, there budget is already depleted. If they depend on their daily earnings, after a single day of no income, the rest of the days they will starve to death. As a consequence the president instructed to give money to those who are affected so that they will not go out of their houses. True, the only way to curb the Wuhan Virus is to stop moving, and the only solution so that people will stop moving, is that the government will provide each household the income that they lost prior to the pandemic.

The pandemic may be viewed as an equalizer. It has the positive and negative effect. For those who are not working or not employed prior to the pandemic, this could be an income. Comparably, life in the province has much enough if you know how to plant. Unlike in the city, if there is no help from the government such as the SAP (Social Amelioration Program) although not enough, people will starve. Every time the city or municipality increases the quarantine protocols, people think where to get food. This is true in the city, but those in the rural area, the increase in the quarantine protocol would mean an income to them since SAP will be distributed to those who are qualified.

VII. Conclusion

The unprecedented happenings shocked the world and countries scampered and do not know what to do. Government exerts effort to prevent the entry of the virus but to no avail. Unexperienced leaders humbled themselves to the overwhelming number of Corona virus cases. The medical front liners became the pawn of this war against unseen enemies. At its onset nurses and doctors who consist of 30 percent are the major casualties. The War against COVID-19 may not fit to those in the medical profession as they are not trained in the Art of War. Thus they become fallen heroes.

VIII. Summary

The national government created Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for COVID-19. The DOH is task to report cases and classify as Influenza-like illness (ILI), Persons under monitoring (PUM), and Persons under investigation (PUI). Regional Directors are going to report to the National Government to the specially created Task Force. DOH is also in-charge in the contact tracing of those tested positive of COVID-19. All these tasks are intended to flatten the curve. The IATF determines which of these provinces, or islands to remain in Community Quarantine (Observe Social Distancing), Enhance Community Quarantine (Observe Social Distancing and Suspension of public and private utility vehicles) or Total Lockdown (no one is allowed to go out except the head of the family having a quarantine pass issued by the LGU and the front liners). This is intended to curb the effect of the pandemic.

Recommendations

Every responsible citizen do their share by staying home, observe social distancing, washing hands with any disinfectant. Some write articles to inform and use the said article as a guide in the future pandemic.

Compulsory use of face shield and face mask can open the economy without much risk.

The LGUs have different strategy to curb the pandemic; after all, they have different cases, scenarios, which the National may not have the prognosis as much as the LGU does.

There should be treaty to treat aliens wherever they are, like a citizen of the country during pandemic. Sending them homes would eventually spread the virus.

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