

Graduation in the Philippines during COVID-19 and beyond

April 2020

Given the rising number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the declaration of a local General Quarantine in Negros Occidental, the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE) Graduation Pilot in Negros Occidental suspended all field activities effective March 16, 2020 through at least April 2020. All field staff have moved to remote work, engaged in a variety of activities to ensure the welfare of households and staff alike is prioritized while pilot progress is maintained as conceivable for the benefit of participating households.

What are we doing during the COVID-19 crisis?



Disseminating health awareness messaging to the community

Coaching is one of the core elements that distinguishes the Graduation approach as a human-centric and needs-based methodology in which the coach acts as a trainer, mentor, monitor, and resource to link households to services. For the past few weeks, Graduation Community Facilitators (GCFs) have converted their in-person coaching and monitoring activities to digital check-ins by phone and SMS for welfare and livelihood updates and to share health messaging from national government and Local Government Units (LGUs) on hand-washing, social distancing, and general health and WASH practices to curb the spread of COVID-19. This messaging has been especially important for households with vulnerable members and those continuing work on operating haciendas. For group livelihoods, this includes empowering the elected Presidents and Secretaries to serve as peer mentors and resources for the group.



“ **Where possible, we continue the delivery of assets to beneficiaries with added health precautions. We believe these livelihoods will both serve as an important cushion now and help them get back on their feet after quarantine.**

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- Marlowe Popes | Project Coordinator



Putting livelihoods in the hands of the most vulnerable

Recognizing the inextricable value of livelihoods even during crisis, asset delivery to 27 remaining households receiving individual livelihoods continued within the allowable movement restrictions until March 20, 2020. Staff involved in this process were provided with hand sanitizers, masks, and plastic gloves for their safety and protection and maintained distance of 6 feet or more during the process. As many households are engaged in food enterprises, we have continued to provide guidance through calls and SMS on business sustainability and food sanitation practices.

Kun makabatyag sang sigedas nga ubo kag sipon, mataas nga lagnat kag pangabudlay sang pag gin hawa magpa consulta dayon sa inyo barangay health center.

If you experience continuous colds, high fever, difficulty in breathing and sore throat please consult with your *barangay* health center immediately.



Mapping progress to chart proactive pathways forward

Tracking a household's progress out of extreme poverty requires the close monitoring, rapid analysis, and response that is central to Graduation programming. Therefore, the team is committed to continue remote monitoring of the households to provide them with as much virtual support as possible and make adjustments to the upcoming pilot activities to address the impact of the virus and the lock-down.

- The team is tracking whether households are receiving aid from the Barangay or the City, particularly the cash aid from the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) launched by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as there seem to be discrepancies in the amount distributed. Additionally, the project team will keep track of the beneficiaries from low-income families who are eligible but do not receive the cash aid to share it with the LGUs.
- The team continues to maintain close collaboration with local officials at DOLE, DSWD, and the LGUs. Based on information that the GCFs received from their beneficiaries, the project team coordinated with the local municipal officials, the PESO (Public Employment Service Office) Manager and the Mayor who established a system of designating a team or person to purchase basic necessities for beneficiaries who were unable to access markets during the lock-down in E.B. Magalona municipality.
- During this time, the local and global project team are using data from the pilot's digital monitoring system to deepen analysis of the baseline, current conditions of the households, progress trends, and anticipated hurdles in immediate and longer-term as a result of the virus and lock-down. This is taking place through routine calls to discuss refinement of the tools, best practices, and lessons learned thus far.
- Focus areas for the team include i) preparation of life skills topics to reinforce in the final months of the pilot; ii) revisit challenging topics on business management, financial literacy, and marketing to feed into remedial training; and iii) develop take-home and visual training aids that will be distributed to all beneficiaries post-lockdown on health and hygiene, family care, and business viability and sustainability.



What comes next?

As the situation is rapidly evolving, the project team will remain vigilant and proactive, devising possible modes to engage before it is too late to act. Some steps include:

- Request an extension in pilot duration to ensure much-needed support is possible after the crisis. The path to rebuilding will be steep for many beneficiaries.
- Continue to work closely with DSWD and LGUs to reinforce government health messaging and build on the guidance provided by existing social protection programs.
- Advocate for emergency resources for Graduation pilot households based on assessment.
- Develop tools and trainings for households to immediately return to field activities when safe to do so to a) conduct a rapid diagnostic of household welfare post-lockdown, b) provide immediate relief where needed and possible, and c) offer guidance on rebuilding disrupted livelihoods and lives.

Graduation programs are designed to build the resilience of poor households by addressing the whole of their most pressing needs. We remain committed to ensuring this is possible during the crisis and beyond.