

Graduation in the Philippines during COVID-19 and beyond

May 2020

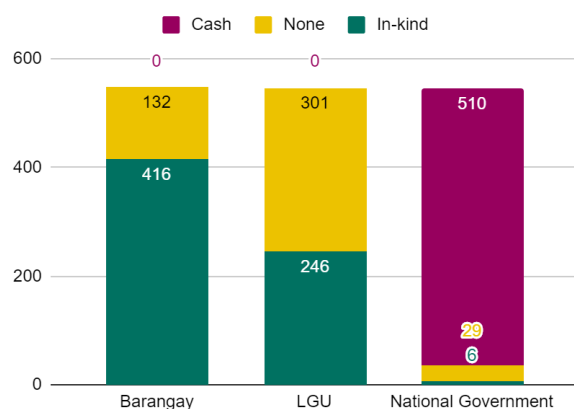
Due to the enhanced community quarantine placed in Negros Occidental, all field activities of the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE) Graduation Pilot remained suspended from mid-March to May 2020. During the quarantine period, all field staff continued to work remotely by engaging in a variety of activities to ensure the welfare of participant households. With the general community quarantine in place in Negros Occidental, the pilot team is resuming field activities with household diagnostic survey in June.

How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted the Graduation pilot?

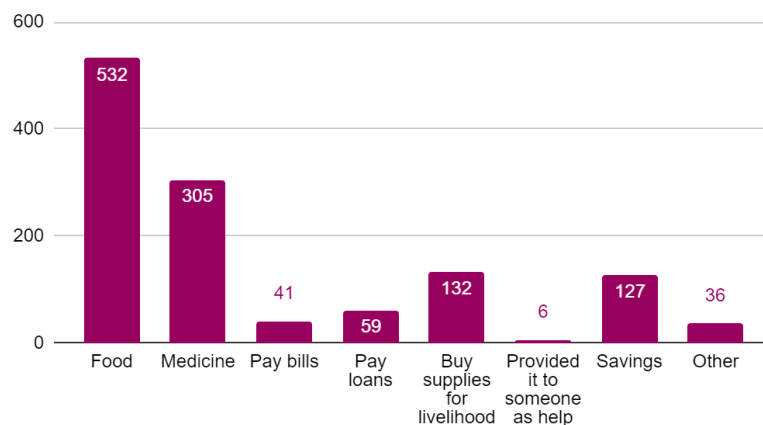
In mid-April, BRAC launched a quarantine tracker to assess the pilot participants' welfare, any assistance they may have received during the quarantine, and status of their livelihoods and savings. The survey was conducted by the Graduation Community Facilitators (GCFs) as a part of their remote check-in, performed in place of in-person coaching and monitoring activities. The GCFs used android tablets that they use to collect regular monitoring data and uploaded it real time to KoBo Toolbox, the online platform which the pilot team has also been using to collect and analyze monitoring data.

In just two weeks (April 13-30), the GCFs were able to remotely reach 548 participants (over 44% of total pilot participants) in all 29 barangays across the five municipalities. The section below includes key insights and findings from the 548 respondents in the April survey. Results from May are forthcoming to include a larger percentage of households. As respondents represent over 44% of the total pilot participants across all municipalities, the insights may be indicative of most participant experience.

Assistance provided by Different Government Bodies as reported by DOLE Participants (as of April 30, 2020)



Uses of COVID-19 Social Assistance Funds

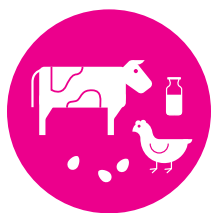


Assistance Received & Usage



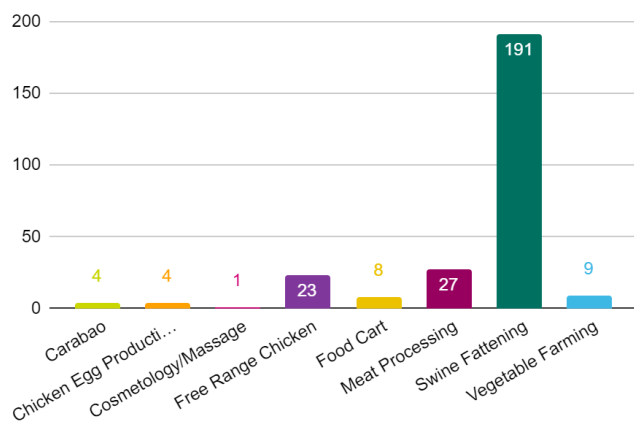
- Almost all of the participants who responded (93%) received cash from the national government, likely from the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), and many (76% and 44%, respectively) received in-kind assistance from the barangay and LGU.
- Only 11 participants reported not receiving any assistance from any official sources, typically due to lack of cash cards or changing the main grantee of the Pantawid program.
- Most of the participants utilized the assistance they received to purchase food, medicine, livelihood supplies, and savings.

Status of Livelihoods

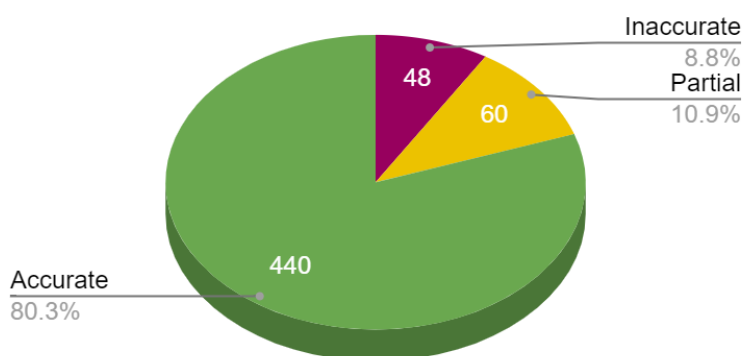


- About half of the participants (49.5%) reported that someone in their household lost their job or had to stop working during the quarantine period, while 48.72% of the participants reached by GCFs reported operational livelihoods.
- Home-based livelihoods such as swine fattening, chicken, and meat processing appeared to be operable during the quarantine period as they are not dependent on foot traffic. This indicates that livestock based livelihoods were more COVID-19 resilient.

Livelihoods selected by the Participants who were able to operate it during quarantine period (as of April 30, 2020)



Level of Hygiene Awareness (as of April 30, 2020)



Level of Hygiene Awareness



- When the participants were asked to describe two specific hygiene practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the resultant responses were: 80% correct, 11% partially correct and 8% incorrect. This indicates that through the SMS texts, virtual coaching, and prior life skills training on WASH and Communicable Diseases, most pilot participants have been able to retain knowledge of proper hygiene practices.

How are we adapting to respond to households in need?

The global pandemic presented an unprecedented set of challenges for the DOLE Graduation Pilot and its participants. In response to these challenges, below are key adaptations that will be made for the remainder of the pilot to help the participants continue to build resilience as they progress along a pathway out of poverty.



Social Protection



- Increase sensitization on hygiene and the importance of seeking stigma-free healthcare
- Dispel and eliminate any known COVID-19 myths and misinformation from social media
- Re-educate all participants on child labor and negative impacts to household welfare
- Distribute educational material (provided by the Department of Education) and continue to track the school attendance to determine if there are issues that need to be elevated to the LGU

Livelihoods Promotion



- Introduce hygiene and food preparation trainings in accordance with new regulations
- Emphasize diversification as a way to build resilience and provide specific guidance (e.g. prepared packaged food sales, bulk raw food/online sales, delivery, PPE sales)
- Provide marketing training on attracting foot traffic and custom orders post COVID-19
- Offer additional support to geographically dispersed, disrupted group livelihoods
- Investigate use of top-up support or asset replacement for those significantly impacted

Financial Inclusion



- Conduct refresher training to emphasize how to build emergency funds for future crisis
- Conduct refresher training on debt and credit risks, emphasis on repayment planning
- Increase coaching messaging on the importance of saving and restoring lost savings
- Create capital retrieval plans for funds/goods loaned or purchased to customers (credit)
- Explore available options for micro-insurance and offer as option to manage future risks

Social Empowerment



- Prioritize households for follow up who were unreachable during quarantine lockdown
- Conduct small cluster group coaching of 5-7 participants, may require more sessions
- Designate a cluster focal person to maintain contact remote check-ins when needed)
- Review life skills training topics for the remaining pilot duration to reinforce specific messaging e.g. hygiene practices, government COVID-19 guidelines, and communicable diseases
- Coordinate with the LGU and/or local NGOs to formulate a response and referral system for domestic issues and discriminatory marginalization

A versatile businessman in the making

Felix Villarez, a single father of two teenagers who he raised in Barangay Salvacion in Murcia municipality, is one of the active participants of the DOLE Pilot. Having had previous experience as a fried chicken vendor, Felix chose the **NegoKart-Fried Chicken livelihood** option among those offered by the pilot. He received a food cart, cooking equipment, ingredients, and a preliminary supply of chickens along with **training on basic business and financial management** from the pilot. Twice a month, his Graduation Community Facilitator has been visiting him at his home where he prepares chicken for the cart to see the progress of his business, **boost his confidence**, and **provide him with guidance** to address any challenges and **further improve and grow his business**. Located at the public market in Salvacion, Felix's fried chicken quickly became a local favorite. In order to meet the demands of his customers, he even employed a person to operate the cart during the week and got help from his siblings and children during the weekends.

When Murcia was placed under quarantine due to COVID-19, Felix was able to **pivot his livelihood** to adapt to this new reality. With the profit he had made and a small loan from his friends, Felix secured a permit from the local government to peddle fish and continue to have an income in the midst of the quarantine. When the quarantine is over, Felix is looking forward to returning to his fried chicken cart business and regaining the profits that he lost in this time of crisis.



What comes next?

Beginning May 16, 2020, the movement restrictions in Negros Occidental were eased as it was placed on General Community Quarantine. The project team is gearing up to resume field activities while abiding by the safeguards provided by the provincial government. As of June 2020, BRAC delivered letters to the mayors of each of the five pilot municipalities to receive special permission to resume activities. Some key upcoming activities include:

- **Rapid Diagnostic Assessment** to determine the current welfare and status of the livelihoods among pilot participants (prioritizing participants who the GCFs were unable to reach during the quarantine period)
- **Rapid Livelihoods Assessment** to identify barriers to current pilot livelihoods and identify new opportunities in the market
- **Refresher Training for GCFs** focused on safeguards provided by the provincial government, BRAC's guidelines on field activities, and design adaptations post-COVID-19
- **List of useful community resources** distributed to all participant households
- **Regular coaching and monitoring** while abiding by the safeguards of the government and guidelines from BRAC
- **Financial Literacy Re-Training Workshop** for participants to center on rebuilding savings and reducing any new indebtedness or credit constraints



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.

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