

Pandemic in the Philippines:
Government policies and Women's
experiences

Rowena A. Laguilles-Timog
University of the Philippines

The Philippine context leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic

1. Neoliberal
macroeconomic policies
2. Populist politics
3. Human rights violations

Feminists and other human rights
activists have called out the current
administration for being anti-poor,
anti-people, and sexist and
misogynist.

The Philippine context leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic

1. Women have higher literacy and enrolment rates than men
2. More men than women are in the labor force as well as are employed, while more women than men remain as unpaid family workers
3. Women-headed households have greater incomes, expenditures and savings than men-headed households do
4. Women comprise only a fraction of those in elective positions
5. Violence against women persists
6. **Situation stayed the same or worsened from 2020 to 2021**

The government approach to the pandemic

1. Focused on delaying spread of infection and restarting the economy over ensuring people's safety and quality of life
2. Depends greatly on loans and on the private sector for its pandemic response
3. Glosses over the scale and urgency of people's survival needs
4. Renders the care work that had been holding families and communities together invisible or unimportant
5. Misses, rejects or opposes people's initiatives as opportunities for rebuilding, reshaping economy
6. Human rights hardly considered; in fact continues to be violated

Sample Policy: Bayanihan Heal As One Act 1 (Bayanihan 1)

- Signed by the President on March 24, 2020
- Declares a state of national emergency
- Social Amelioration Program (**cash relief** from USD100 to 160)
- PhilHealth to shoulder **workers'** Covid-19-related expenses
- For health **workers**: special risk allowance, P100,000 (USD2000) in case of Covid-19, P1million (USD20,000) for family in case of death due to Covid-19
- Emergency powers for the President to realign national budget for Quick Response Fund
- The President to report to the public weekly

Sample Policy: Bayanihan 2

- Ratified by Senate on August 20, 2020
- **Cash relief** for low-income households in ECQ (highest restriction) and families of repatriated OFWs (USD100-160)
- **Cash relief** for unemployment assistance (USD100-160)
- Assistance for healthcare **workers**: P15k (USD300) for mild Covid-19, P100k (USD2,000) for severe; P1m (USD20,000) for death; other allowances for risk
- P5.6 billion in assistance to displaced public utility vehicle (PUV) **drivers**, of which P3 billion will be for jeepney drivers
- **Grace periods** for payment of goods:
 - 60 days for the payment of all existing, current, and outstanding loans falling due on or before December 31, 2020
 - 30-days on residential and commercial rents of lessees not permitted to work during the pandemic
 - 30-days for the payment of utility bills due within periods where there is highest restrictions
- Emergency powers for the President to realign national budget for Quick Response Fund

Sample Policy: Bayanihan 2

- For displaced workers in the private sector: **Cash relief** of Php5000/ USD100 (Covid-19 Adjustment Measures Program/ CAMP)
- For displaced marginalized/ self-employed workers: **Cash for work** for 10 days at minimum wage rate (Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Displaced/Disadvantaged Workers/ TUPAD)
- For displaced migrant workers: **Cash relief** of P10,000/ USD200 (Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong/ AKAP)
- For agricultural workers: **Cash relief** of P5,000 / USD100 & **Loans** up to P25,000 / USD500 for individuals and up to Php1M / USD20,000 for MSMEs

Some of women's experiences with government responses

1. Relief assistance packages are **inadequate** given the actual cost of living, inflation, and the extent of the lockdown; and remain **inaccessible** to those unrecognized as workers (e.g., farmers)
2. Access to information regarding available relief assistance is uneven at best; information is also **confusing, and interpreted differently** across various levels of government; availment processes can be **costly and confusing**; relief has been **delayed**
3. 'Investing in people's health' (e.g., trace, isolate, treat, vaccinate) has been pitted against 'opening up the economy' causing a continuing **cycle of easing mobility restrictions when cases go down, and imposing lockdowns when cases go up**
4. More **unpaid care work**, particularly given home-based schooling
5. Experiences also **varied across sectors**; for example, Filipino overseas workers have particular challenges in terms of being displaced from work abroad, wanting to or having to come home, and dealing with the lack of income as a migrant returnee.

Some impacts of the pandemic on women

1. **Pre-pandemic issues** for women workers (e.g., non-recognition, precarity) worsened and were further neglected, from industry-specific issues to increased unpaid care work
2. Greater **risk to COVID-19 infection**, given greater participation in the service industries especially the health industry
3. Lockdowns have caused massive job/ livelihood losses, even for those who are in the informal sector, and vis-a-vis inflation resulted in **reduced incomes and increased spending**
4. **Difficulty with access** to government/social services (i.e., given income loss, limited transportation options, protocols on office shutdowns, etc)
5. Increased incidence of **teenage pregnancy** as well as **maternal mortality**
6. Increased vulnerability to **domestic violence** during lockdowns
7. **Intensified role of women** leaders and women's organizations to work with and for marginalized communities