

COVID-19 Pandemic: Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Moving to the Next

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RESOLUTIONS

WHEREAS, the outbreak of a new type of coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, that causes the COVID-19 respiratory disease, was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020;

WHEREAS, the global pandemic has affected all sectors and aspects of society, aggravated existing societal gaps and problems, and hampered national development;

WHEREAS, there is a need to build resilience against biological and environmental threats, and ensure that the food system is dedicated to improving the health and nutrition of consumers;

WHEREAS, a balanced approach to conservation and sustainable use of natural resources should be adopted because of its significant impact on the food system, biodiversity, natural products development, and prevention of transmission of zoonotic diseases;

WHEREAS, developing and modelling interventions that are supported by an adequate information infrastructure can provide important insights in the crafting of public health policy, and assessing the impact of biological and environmental hazards and threats;

WHEREAS, state-of-the-art laboratories in virology are indispensable in detecting the emergence of viral variants through genomic surveillance to guide the development of public health protocols and policies;

WHEREAS, the pandemic calls for a digital transformation of society, the adoption and development of information and communication technologies and practices that promote efficiency, continuity of work, and public safety;

WHEREAS, the pandemic has amplified the need to enhance the resilience of our educational system to ensure the continuity of learning using digital and other flexible learning approaches;

WHEREAS, there is urgency in accelerating economic recovery to avoid deeper economic scarring that further erodes the potential for long-term growth and development;

WHEREAS, there is a need to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach on health

issues and problems brought about by the pandemic in order to enhance an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach involving all sectors to promptly respond to the crisis, implement reforms and programs, instill preparedness, and promote national recovery and resilience;

NOW, THEREFORE, it is hereby resolved to recommend that the concerned sectors take the following actions:

* *Lead Agency/ies*

I. FOOD, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

1. Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)*, Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Health (DOH), Department of National Defense (DND), and Philippine National Police (PNP)

Promote consumption of locally-produced plant-based healthy food, including functional foods to reduce environmental footprint, boost the local economy, and improve natural body defenses against infection through the use of a science based diet, such as the planetary health diet:

- a. As guide for disaster relief and feeding programs;
- b. And food systems as the overarching guide in school feeding programs and curricular revisions; and
- c. As guide in formulating menus for camp canteens, hospitals, and combat food rations of the DND and PNP;

2. Department of Agriculture (DA)* and Department of Transportation (DOTr)

Improve access to affordable and nutritious food, and establish a resilient local food system by providing facilities for storage, processing, packing, and logistics to service population centers, with emphasis on nutritious but highly perishable food products such as fish and other seafoods, fruits, and vegetables:

- a. Establish food terminals and/or agribusiness corridors;
- b. Improve farm to market roads, sea ports and airports to facilitate movement of food; and
- c. Harmonize policies and regulations on the marketing and movement of truckers and transporters of food commodities;

3. State Universities and Colleges (SUCs)*, DA*, Local Government Units (LGUs), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and Land Bank of the Philippines

Promote farm and aquaculture diversification using locally adapted and preferred foods such as root and tuber crops as alternative staple and seaweeds to support local farmers, healthy diets, and stewardship of the environment: fruits, and vegetables:

- a. Establish diversified demonstration farms and aquaculture projects;
- b. Prioritize diversified farms in credit programs; and
- c. Establish research programs to support farm and aquaculture diversification;

II. VIRAL EVOLUTION AND MODELLING INTERVENTIONS

1. Department of Science and Technology (DOST)*, CHED, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Implement modeling interventions, curricular and research programs.

- a. Expand efforts on the advancement and mainstreaming of data analytics and quantitative modeling through recruitment, training, mentoring, scholarships, research funds, and establishment of ethical standards;
- b. Develop curricular programs on viral evolution, strengthen training and mentorship, and provide research funds to advance virology, wildlife ecology, and conservation; and
- c. Integrate the study of infectious diseases and health system resilience research into the agenda of existing network of research centers and graduate programs;

2. Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT)*, DOH, and National Privacy Commission (NPC)

Use of the information advisory portals and COVID-19-related software:

- a. Strengthen the different pandemic and disaster information advisory portals to efficiently and effectively collect and disseminate relevant, reliable, accurate, and easily understood information (e.g. death, infection rate, record of vaccination, etc.) from the local or LGU-level; and
- b. Convert COVID-19 related software applications to open source systems to foster public evaluation and scrutiny especially in terms of privacy and security;

3. DOH*, DOST, and DENR

Strengthen the biosurveillance system to calibrate public health protocols and policies.

- a. Support a comprehensive genomic biosurveillance system covering all parts of the country to include detection of variants of concern, emerging variants of SARS-CoV-2 and real-time virus tracking and analysis;
- b. Support the participation of the Philippines in the World Health Organization (WHO) Global SARS-CoV-2 laboratory network that works on the surveillance, research on variants of concern, and evaluation of impacts on diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines; and
- c. Expand the Philippines Inter-Agency Committee on Zoonoses (PhilCZ) to include the DOST for zoonotic virus documentation and surveillance to strengthen national and transnational boundary cooperation within the Southeast Asian region to prevent illegal wildlife trade and monitor zoonotic viruses.

III. DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS AND STANDARDS TO ADDRESS PANDEMICS AND OTHER HAZARDS

1. National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)*, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), DICT, DOST, Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and LGUs

Develop digitalized support systems for:

- a. Optimized allocation of resources and management of goods and services across LGU boundaries in times of pandemic and other crises;
- b. Real-time monitoring of pandemic-related data; and
- c. Adaptive response or feedback system-driven interventions to the COVID 19 pandemic to optimize limited resources;

2. Civil Service Commission (CSC)*, Department of Budget and Management (DBM), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and DOST

Push for the creation of plantilla items related to IT and other technology services to ensure continuity of government service during pandemics and other disasters and develop standardized tool/s to record, track, and monitor outputs of personnel in alternative work arrangements (AWAs), such as work-from-home (WFH).

3. Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)*, DOTr*, Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), and DOST

Strengthen support for green spaces and smart communities/regional planning.

- a. Update the regulations and standards for buildings, to include climate change adaptive design and construction methods, tools and materials, following an All-Hazards Approach in disaster risk reduction and management; and
- b. Build and rebuild transportation systems to encourage distancing and to provide adequate ventilation.

IV. EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

1. DepEd*, CHED*, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)*, DOST, DICT, DBM, and the Legislature

Accelerate innovation in education at all levels from Basic, Higher, and Voc-Tech.

- a. Strengthen ICT for the delivery of online education at all levels.
 - i. Develop a nationwide ICT infrastructure, which includes geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas; and
 - ii. Provide the needed devices for both faculty and students;

- b. Enable the delivery of online education at all levels.
 - i. Develop flexible online strategies, including blended learning, open source materials, and video conferencing;
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 - iii. Decongest the curriculum and allow schools to select topics that promote depth of understanding and critical thinking;
 - iv. Develop alternative systems for student counselling, emotional and mental health, student activities, and physical education; and
 - v. Support faculty development to strengthen capability and effectiveness to teach online;
- c. Ensure continued skills development in experimental and laboratory courses in science, agriculture, health, and engineering programs, thesis and dissertation work; and
- d. Strengthen vocational and technical education to meet the increasing technological needs of a competitive workforce.

2. DBM*

Prioritize the allocation of funds for the acquisition of ICT facilities as well as operating costs needed for digital learning for both public and private schools;

V. BALANCING THE ECONOMY AND HEALTH

1. DOH*, DILG, DBM, DOST, and NEDA

Strengthen the test-trace-treat systems and ramp up vaccination:

- a. Enhance the fairness or inclusiveness of access to tests, treatments, and vaccination across population groups and locations;
- b. Improve coordination between LGUs and relevant national government agencies in contact tracing, data reporting, and containment policies and guidelines;
- c. Provide fiscal and technical assistance to LGUs lacking capacity for contact tracing and outbreak containment; and
- d. Develop and implement incentive schemes and communication strategies to address vaccine hesitancy.

2. NEDA*, DBM, Department of Finance (DOF), DTI, DOLE, DSWD, DILG, DICT, and DOST

Contain further economic scarring by rapidly implementing government assistance to the poor, most vulnerable groups, and high-contact industries:

- a. Strengthen the governance of economic aid, effectively making such aid well-targeted, transparent, fair, efficiently administered, and time-bound;
- b. Bridge the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots, expanding access to online schooling and work-from-home arrangements; and
- c. Ramp up retraining and reallocation programs to help address pandemic induced jobs-skills mismatch;

3. NEDA-Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)* and DBM

Fast track the rollout of the digital National Identification System to facilitate the implementation of social programs, such as the efficient transfer of amelioration funds to recipients

VI. HEALTH SYSTEMS RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

1. DOH*, Office of Civil Defense (OCD), DILG*, and LGUs

Design and provide capacity building programs for LGUs in the formulation of a comprehensive health emergency response, development, and preparedness plan for pandemics;

2. DSWD* and Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID)

Institutionalize social protection systems (e.g. access to health care, sickness benefits, unemployment insurance etc.) for immediate and expeditious social assistance (e.g. cash transfer) as part of crisis response;

3. Office of the President*, DBM, and DOF

Fast track the passage of the bill creating the Virology and Vaccine Institute of the Philippines and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and allocating funds for their establishment and operations;

4. DOH*, DICT, Presidential Communication Operation Office-Philippine Information Agency (PCOO-PIA), DILG, and LGUs

Enhance health communications and referral system.

- a. Improve COVID-19 referral system and install communication infrastructure where people can easily access needed information, even at the barangay level;
- b. Implement targeted public health information campaigns and promote active community participation; and
- c. Develop effective and socially sensitive communication strategies that build on Filipino culture and values to improve and sustain compliance and safety protocol, address vaccine hesitancy, and provide correct and accurate health information in the different media platforms.

5. DOH*

Revisit and re-assess the devolved set-up of the health care delivery system building on its strengths and continually addressing gaps that have been made prominent by the COVID19 pandemic to make the health system better prepared for future pandemics and achieve Universal Health Care;

VII. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

NEDA*, DICT, Philippine Competition Commission (PCC), and NPC

1. Accelerate improvement of the internet quality and make it equitable; i.e., more affordable for everyone. Ensure that everyone has access to the internet during the pandemic.
 - a. Ensure that government agencies, especially critical institutions in the fight against pandemics, have access to reliable and secure networks (cybersecurity). Government agencies must be considered as reliable areas for information access and transfer.
 - b. Ensure that educational institutions (HEIs, research units) have access to reliable and secure networks. Teachers and Scientists must be able to rapidly get, communicate, and disseminate information.
2. Make public data open, freely available, and downloadable in user-friendly and digestible format, making them ready for analysis for health, food security, education, research and development, and data-driven policy.
3. Create plantilla items for Chief Information Officer of data-rich and critical government agencies. Create a department or committee of experts in data privacy and AI ethics who will serve as guardians; this will be composed of academics, ethicists, human rights lawyers, anthropologists, technologists, and industry experts to minimize abuse or misuse of data and AI algorithms especially during the pandemic.

Citation:

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