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We Heal as One, We Rise as One: the Rise of Community Pantries in the Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic in Northern Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Many Filipinos, especially those from the poorest sectors, have struggled to secure their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic restrictions, and have gone hungry as a result of food system disruptions and inadequate food help from the local government. Hence, various individuals, private corporations, and organizations have emerged with various initiatives to aid fellow Filipinos in need in an effort to strengthen the current situation and address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest Community Pantry Initiatives in different parts of the Philippines are examples of this emergence. Due to this fact, the researchers conducted this study to explore the experiences of community pantry organizers and volunteers in the Mainland Cagayan Valley region. Basic qualitative research design was utilized in this study. Through purposive sampling, a total of 15 informants from the Mainland Cagayan Valley region participated in this study. The data was gathered by engaging in an online interview with the use of open-ended questions. The results revealed three major recurring themes, to wit: (1) Description of Organized Community Pantries among Informants; (2) Reasons for Organizing Community Pantries; and (3) Experiences of Community Pantry Organizers and Volunteers. In conclusion, this study highlights the different community pantries that were organized, the reasons as to why organizers implemented such an initiative, the increased civic engagement of the youth, the promotion of pro-social behaviors among the whole citizenry, and the positive and negative experiences of both community pantry organizers and volunteers

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is considered as the most crucial global health calamity of the century and the greatest challenge that humankind has faced since the 2nd World War (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). This pandemic greatly affects millions of lives-both in public and private sectors. COVID-19 has affected day-to-day life and is slowing down the global economy. Furthermore, this pandemic has affected thousands of people, who are either sick or are being killed due to the spread of this disease (Haleem, Javaid & Vaishya, 2020). Due to widespread business closures especially in lower income populations, national economies are expected to contract leading to a dramatic rise in unemployment and poverty rates (Martin, et. al., 2020). To combat the aforementioned pandemic, the Philippine government implemented significant policies and guidelines, such as the implementation of community quarantine, which began in March 2020. And because of this measure, it resulted in a drastic decline in employment levels, with projections suggesting a maximum of four million people losing their jobs due to the lockdown (Salazar & Acido-Muega, 2020). Industries and organizations have felt the impact of lower revenue, resulting in less cash flow due to slow business activities. It has had a far-reaching economic consequence beyond the spread of the disease itself. The COVID-19 pandemic is indeed a global shock which involves economic disruptions to both supply and demand in an interconnected world economy. Consequently, this pandemic reduces labor supply and productivity, which also causes lockdowns, business closures, and social distancing (Chudik, Mohaddes, Pesaran, Raissi, & Rebucci, 2020). Employment in the Philippines was severely disrupted by the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and labor market, either through decreased earnings and working hours or complete job loss, which brought the number of affected workers to about 10.9 million (World Bank, 2020). Filipinos, especially those from the poorest sectors, have also struggled to secure their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic restrictions, and have gone hungry as a result of food system

disruptions and inadequate food help from the local government (Savary, et. al., 2020).

The majority of coverage of the COVID-19 crisis focuses on the disease's negative consequences and the government's ineffective response, such as the dehumanizing effects of restraint and lockdown on people (Thomson & Ip, 2020; Pistor, 2020; Monti & Wacks, 2020). Individuals, neighborhoods, and grassroots groups react creatively to these new challenges in several ways that are often secret. As governments continue to push accountability to communities, grassroots responses to inequalities in state interventions emerge in many places (Stronen, 2021). Also, as new challenges surface in the current global health crisis, more local players are taking steps to meet their needs. These approaches are revealing new perspectives on collective action, new leadership models, and shared care (Walsh, 2020; Brousselle, et. al., 2020). Various individuals and organizations have emerged with various initiatives to aid fellow Filipinos in need in an effort to strengthen the current situation and address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. When citizens believe that preexisting institutions are failing to meet public needs, when traditional roles and processes are considered ineffective and inappropriate, and when societies feel the need to react to a crisis situation on their own, emergent behaviors arise (Herbert & Marquette, 2021). The latest Community Pantry Initiatives in different parts of the Philippines are examples of this emergence.

A community pantry is a program that offers food directly to people who are hungry in their communities (Sanderson, Martin, Colantonio & Wu, 2020). Some organizations depend solely on local donations. Some work with food banks and other organizations to ensure a reliable supply of food and other necessities. Other socio-civic events are often organized for patrons by others. The community pantry is not a novel concept; several have already been developed as a fast, local response to hunger. It may be similar to Western food banks, or earlier versions of community aid around the world in response to the pandemic. A community pantry's main goal is to share something with other people

(Helmick, et. al., 2020). Its organizer is a Good Samaritan in many respects, providing compassion and assistance to the less fortunate Filipinos. Those who had less were encouraged to take only what they needed from a community pantry, while those who could donate were urged to give as much as they could. Its long-term viability is dependent on public courtesy, especially among those who can afford to leave excess supplies, resulting in a system of community reciprocity among all parties concerned. More importantly, it encourages a culture of generosity, and there should always be a place for it as long as its sincerity is not questioned.

The sudden and rapid spread of community pantries in the Philippines during the country's ongoing COVID-19 quarantine is thought to have started on April 14, 2021, when local entrepreneur Anna Patricia Non collaborated with farmers and local vegetable vendors to set up a small food bank for her community on Maginhawa Street in Quezon City, with a sign inviting people to "*Give according to your ability, take according to your need.*" Non founded the Community Pantry in front of a former food park on Maginhawa Street, first purchasing vegetables from local vendors and then stocking the pantry with other necessities, including alcohol sanitizer, canned goods, and rice. People began flocking to the pantry, either to obtain food for the day or to donate products and supplies to replenish the pantry. Four days later, the community pantry had gone viral, with several similar initiatives springing up around the world, citing her act as their inspiration (Gozum, et. al., 2021). Other communities started to create their own pantries after the Maginhawa community pantry went viral on social media. As of 2021, there are already more than 6,700 community pantries organized and set-up in the whole Philippines (Del Castillo, 2021).

Sociologists claim that the spread of community pantries embodies the Filipinos' *Bayanihan* spirit (Canete, et. al., 2021; Macarraan, 2021). The essence of Filipino customs and culture is "*bayanihan*," which comes from the Tagalog word "*bayan*," which means "country, town, or group" (Barrameda & Barraemda, 2011). It refers to the fundamental

feature of Filipino culture of working together as a group to accomplish a common goal and means "*being in a bayan*" (Ealdama, 2012). The advent of community pantries demonstrates that the *bayanihan* spirit is alive and well in the midst of the coronavirus disease pandemic of 2019 (COVID-19). Certain segments of Philippine society, however, have turned this genuinely charitable act of kindness into a political problem. Critics stress that the establishment of community pantries is a form of communist propaganda. Although the establishment of public-initiated community pantries in various parts of the country is commendable, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) expressed concern that the communist movement is exploiting Filipinos' *bayanihan* in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, many organizers and volunteers of community pantries halted their operations due to the red-tagging issue, which may have caused safety and security concerns.

It is then important to conduct a study to explore the experiences of organizers and volunteers of community pantries in the Philippines, such as those existing community pantries in the Cagayan Valley Region. As of the moment, the Cagayan Valley Region, specifically the mainland Cagayan Valley, is considered as one of the hotspots of COVID-19 in the whole country. In fact, the provinces and cities in the mainland Cagayan Valley Region are already on critical and high risk epidemic classifications, signifying a red alert status on the Region's COVID-19 attack rate and growth change. Furthermore, the Department of Health stressed that the provinces of Cagayan, Isabela, and Quirino, as well as the cities of Tuguegarao and Santiago, are also at a high risk classification level (Department of Health, 2021). With this situation, local government units are implementing stricter measures and guidelines to curve the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the region which really have negative effects, especially on the socio-economic status of the people.

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative type of research utilizing basic qualitative research by Meriam and Tisdell (2016) to explore the experiences of organizers and volunteers of community pantries in Mainland Cagayan Valley Region. The informants of the study were the citizens of the two provinces in Northern Philippines who organized community pantries during the pandemic. Purposive sampling was used to select the informants of the study with the following inclusion criteria: (1) involved themselves in organizing community pantries during the pandemic, (2) at least 18 years old, (3) a resident of either Cagayan or Isabela, (4) not involved in activities of the Government and NGO, and (5) willing to participate in the study. They were assured that anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed from data gathering until the writing and publication of the research output. The informants were given corresponding codes which were referred to by codes CP1 to CP15.

This study utilized an online interview through the use of ZOOM and Google Meet as its data collection technique. A semi-structured interview was employed in this study which is considered as the most common data collection technique in qualitative research (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016; Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Schmidt, 2004). An interview protocol, which enables the researcher to take notes about the responses of the interviewee (Creswell, 2007), served as a guide during the conduct of the interviews. The validated and pilot-tested interview protocol contained interview questions which were contemplative of the specific research questions. Online interviews with each of the 15 informants were sustained until data saturation was reached. The interviews were transcribed following the denaturalized approach to transcription. Speech fillers, pauses, and extralinguistic and paralinguistic elements were deliberately removed. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and manual transcription produced fifteen individual verbatim transcripts. In addition, photos of community pantries were also requested to the informants for documentation.

The interview transcripts were analyzed following three major stages: open-coding, axial coding and selective coding (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While reading the

interview transcripts, open coding was done by literally underlining and highlighting significant statements, and writing notes and comments on the margin. Initial codes were identified based on the significant statements and marginal notes. Open coding was repeatedly done across all the pages of the transcripts. Axial coding was used after the open coding by classifying and tabulating the identified initial codes, and similarity or identity of the meanings of the initial codes were the basis for classification and tabulation. The initial categories were subjected to selective coding, the final stage of qualitative data analysis, whereby overlapping categories were lumped together after a thorough analysis. The number of categories was finalized using the CERES criteria for the determinations of categories (Ballena & Liwag, 2019): (1) Conceptual congruence, (2) Exclusivity, (3) Responsiveness, (4) Exhaustiveness, and (5) Sensitivity. Conceptual congruence of themes was observed when all of them belonged to the same conceptual level; in short, parallelism was observed in the phraseology of themes. Second, exclusivity means that one identified theme should mutually exclude the others; thus, overlapping of themes was avoided. Third, responsiveness was maintained when the identified themes are the direct answers to the research problems or objectives of the research. Fourth, exhaustiveness was followed when the identified themes were enough to encompass all the relevant data contained in the transcripts. Fifth and last, sensitivity was observed when the identified themes were reflective of the qualitative data; in short, they had strong and material support from the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research study explored the experiences of the community pantry organizers and volunteers in the Northern Philippines. Major findings were considered in this study, wherein it talked about the community pantries that were organized amidst the pandemic, the reasons as to why the organizers and volunteers engaged themselves in such activity, and the experiences of the organizers and volunteers. Three major recurring themes were revealed in the study, which included: (1) Descriptions of the organized pantries among informants; (2) Reasons for Organizing Community Pantries; and (3)

Experiences of Community Pantry Organizers and Volunteers.

Theme 1. Description of Organized Community Pantries Among the Informants

One of the major themes that was revealed in the study is the description of the organized community pantries that were conducted by each informant. The results of the data gathering showed that the community pantries that were conducted were composed of essential goods and needs. There was a static and mobile type that was also commonly used as a youth-oriented organized community pantry.

a.) Static- Type of Community Pantry

The informant described that this kind of community pantry is located in one place only where people will get what they need and will give what they can. Verbalization of the informant is as follow:

CP11: *“We set up tables where we put up all the prepared goods. The community pantry that we organized is static. The people are coming to get what they need and to give what they can.”*

The concept of a community pantry is similar to the barter system in the olden days, wherein people resorted to exchanging goods or services in order to live. The idea is simple enough. People drop off whatever food they can donate — fresh vegetables, sweet potatoes, canned goods, etc. — at a specific location in the community, and only those who can't afford to buy their own have to line up to get what they need for free. The community effort works as simply as its core principle: Everyone is free to donate as much as he can, but no one should get more than what he needs.

b.) Mobile- Type of Community Pantry

The informants described this pantry wherein the organizers did not stay in one place only. They went to different locations to conduct such activity. It is the opposite of static- type of community pantry. A verbalization of the informant is as follow:

CP07: *“I think our pantries are the same in terms of goods provided. It is just that we implement it thru mobile and not static. Also, we*

are open to voluntary giving which is the true concept of community pantry.”

The results show that the organizers conducted a Mobile Pantry Program that directly serves clients in areas of high need in an effort to supplement other hunger-relief agencies in that area. Through a Mobile Pantry, a truckload of food is distributed to clients in pre-packed boxes or through a farmer's market-style distribution where clients choose to take what they need. The Mobile Food Pantry is one of the innovative and effective ways to bring much needed food, specifically products, into areas that have been deemed food deserts.

c.) Youth- Oriented Organized Community Pantry

This kind of pantry is initiated by the youth. It is commonly organized by youth leaders and other youth members of the community. They organized their own community pantry to genuinely help needy neighbors and not because of the bandwagon. Youth organizers are neighborhood organizers who conduct different civic activities, such as community pantrys. They recruit other youth to accompany them. Furthermore, they also work with other youth leaders to implement community and neighborhood improvement projects. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP09: *“Our community pantry is initiated by the youth volunteers of our very own barangay.”*

CP13: *“The community pantry that we had was initiated by a group of friends.”*

CP15: *“It was initiated by both youth volunteers and some professionals.”*

There are a lot of civic activities that citizens manifest in order to support each other, especially those who are greatly affected by this pandemic, as well as those who have less in life. Most recently, Filipinos have also been involved in organizing community pantries to help those who are in need, especially during this pandemic. Mostly, the community pantries that were conducted were initiated by the youth. Research has consistently shown that participating in communities and being a part of groups working together on an issue has

numerous benefits for young people themselves. When youth feel empowered to take action, and when they see that their efforts achieve positive change, it can have a profound and lasting impact (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

d.) Composed of Essential Goods and Needs

One of the major descriptions of the informants regarding the community pantry they conducted was composed of essential goods and needs such as vegetables, rice, eggs, and many more. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP02: *“The community we’ve organized is more on essential and healthy foods. We also put a couple gallons of alcohol for the people to refill their bottles.”*

CP03: *“The community pantry we’ve conducted was for those who do not have anything to eat and for those who can’t afford to buy foods for their daily living. We gave vegetables, rice, etc.”*

CP05: *“The community pantry that we organized was all about feeding the hungry and binding people together. It was composed of basic necessities such as vegetables. The community pantry that we organized is a significant movement but it cannot save us from the pandemic for the basic reason that they are designed for a specific purpose.”*

The responses of the informants show that the main description of the community pantry is giving essential goods and needs to the people, especially to the needy and less fortunate ones. A community pantry serves as a service that provides food directly to locals suffering from food insecurity. Food pantries can be either permanent locations or mobile distributions. These pantries are often the only source of free healthy and nutritious food in a neighborhood, and they often provide other critical resources such as nutrition education, health screenings, seasonal food baskets and back to school supplies. A community food pantry’s mission is to directly serve local residents who suffer from hunger and food insecurity within a specified area (Rose, 2008).

e.) Sustainability of Community Pantry

One of the major descriptions of the community pantry organizers and volunteers is the sustainability of the program. Some were able to sustain the program for a month, while others were able to sustain it for just a day or few days. The informants revealed the reasons why they find it difficult to sustain the pantry for a longer period of time, which include the limited number of donors, the conflict with the schedules of most organizers since most of them are undergraduates, and lack of funds considering the fact that most of the organizers belong to the age group 20-24 who do not have stable and permanent jobs. Some of the verbalizations are as follows:

CP01: *“Honestly it’s just a trend especially if people are really not knowledgeable enough to that. So we sustain it in at least a month but due to personal problem and business of our coordinators not enough funds we decided to end it by giving seeds for them to plant and will reap in the future.”*

CP04: *“Due to unprecedented circumstances, we failed to sustain the program and was not able to gather enough donations to continue the program due to work and school related activities.”*

CP07: *“We started last week of April and we ended it last week of May for the reason that we don’t have enough budget and donors also.”*

The responses of the informants show that the sustainability of the projects would depend on the commitment of united communities, the goodwill of donors, and the level of organization of such pantries, especially for those who source goods from farmers or companies. Other times, pantries work more like grassroots initiatives, run by members of the community themselves. Some are membership-based, where neighbors are asked to donate a small weekly fee to sustain the pantry in exchange for access. Others work without rules and regulations—anyone is free to take what they need and give whatever they can. These were some of the reasons why community pantry organizers find it hard to make the project sustainable. The informants were all

private individuals. Therefore, they had a problem implementing the project because there was no help from big organizations or establishments. The informants were mostly young people. Thus, the schedule of work and schooling became the reasons why they weren't able to sustain it longer. In addition, since the community pantry was mostly initiated by youth volunteers and other private young individuals and young professionals, one factor that affects sustainability is the age gap. It was revealed by the informants that they weren't able to sustain the community pantry for longer due to school-related and work-related activities. This shows that due to their responsibilities as students or young professionals, conducting a community pantry for a longer period of time has become difficult.

Theme 2: Reasons of Organizing Community Pantry

a.) Socio- economic Reasons

The informants revealed that the status of the citizens in the community inspired them to organize a community pantry. Generally, the informants mentioned that their main reason is to help the people especially those who have less in life. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP02: *"To help the unfortunate people especially in far flung places where stores are far away from their home. Instead of traveling just to buy food, they will just walk down their street and pick up the food they need for free."*

CP03: *"Because we want to help especially the people who are in need and less fortunate."*

CP07: *"Because of the quarantine status in our place. This time of pandemic we need to help hand in hand. "*

The results show that solidarity among people is still there. Civic activities are carried out to support one another, especially during a pandemic. As stated by Barrameda and Barrameda (2011), this only shows that the culture of solidarity through compassion (*damayan*) and cooperation (*bayanihan*), which are ancient Filipino customs, is alive and thriving in the Covid-19 pandemic.

b.) Political Reasons

One of the major reasons why informants conducted and organized a community pantry is due to the lack of help from the government. Wherein, what people received were not enough to sustain their needs. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP04: *"We have conducted such activity due to the following reasons: 1. We were inspired by the Mabuhay Community Pantry. 2. We saw lack of support from the local officials wherein in our location they have only conducted at least once or twice in giving "ayuda" to the needy. 3. People need something to eat but there are some who can only afford to eat once a day due to financial constraints. 4. We believe that service to humanity is the best work for life."*

CP12: *"Not everyone was fortunate to receive a help from the government for we cannot deny the fact that we have a limited support from them."*

This shows that the support received by the people from the government was not enough. Thus, it inspired other people to take action to help their community. It showed the importance of civic engagement in embracing the responsibilities of citizenship with the obligation to actively participate, alone or in concert with others, in volunteer service activities that strengthen the local community (Adler & Goggin, 2005). It is the community taking the initiative for the poor to meet their most important basic needs, when the state should be the one providing this in the first place. Community pantries are a way for individuals and private groups to attempt to address gaps in the way the government is handling the twin problems of unemployment and hunger. In a crisis, it should ensure the survival of its people. And it starts by putting food on the table of every household. Whether community pantries continue while the crisis exacerbates, the state must do its job: it must sustain the population by using all its resources intelligently and faithfully for the people.

c.) Promotion of Civic Consciousness

The informants revealed that one of the major reasons why they conducted a community pantry is to inspire other people to do the same. Many of them mentioned the importance of civic engagement. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP03: *“I organized such activity in order to let people feel the essence of solidarity. That despite the struggles that we are facing, we have each other’s hands. We people should live with the life of others most especially those who are in the margins, we need to consider them in every decision that we choose and every step that we take because at the end of the day, they are still part of the country.”*

CP05: *“We are inspired by the Maginhawa community pantry and we also want to help in our own way to also inspire others.”*

As revealed by the informants, civic consciousness has a great importance. Thus, people should be aware of what is happening and should consider the lives of other people. This shows that people can also be motivated by other people. When they see some individuals doing something for their community, these actions can serve as an inspiration for the other individuals to do the same. Despite the challenges people are facing, solidarity among people is still visible. The result of the study shows that civic consciousness influences the progress of the state and society. In the absence of civic consciousness, human beings will become selfish and all the activities will be for their own achievements. Civic consciousness has to be developed in order to ensure the welfare of all and the reconstruction of society. The basis of civic consciousness is the recognition that if the activities of each individual are for the well-being of society, social problems can be solved (Tindowen & Bagalayos, 2018). These results supported the study of Yue and Yang (2021), wherein they mentioned that in order to support one another during this COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative for people to engage in pro-social behaviors. Pro-social behaviours are voluntary actions intended to benefit

other people, which include physical help, emotional comfort, and financial or social assistance (Tindowen & Bagalayos, 2018).

Theme 3: Experiences of Community Pantry Organizers and Volunteers

The respondents of the study also shared their various experiences in organizing a community pantry. It was revealed that the organizers gained positive as well as negative experiences while doing the said activity. This led us to the sub-themes which include:

a.) Positive Experiences

Under this sub-theme, it includes the experiences of the organizers as to how generous Filipinos are even in the midst of a pandemic, the promotion of the different pro-social behaviors of the local citizens, particularly in their acts of bayanihan, damayan, and their collaborative efforts as a whole. Furthermore, the organizers also shared that due to the rise of community pantries in their distinct localities, it boosted civic engagement among the youth, especially during this time of pandemic. These experiences are elaborated as follows:

1. Act of Generosity in the Midst of the Pandemic

Generosity, as defined by scholars, is the virtue of giving goods to others freely and abundantly. One of the essential things about organizing a community pantry is that it exhibits the act of generosity among Filipinos. *“Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan, kumuha batay sa pangangailangan”* (Give according to your means, take according to your need), this guiding principle of community pantries really thrived as observed by the organizers during the implementation of the pantries. The organizers revealed that even those who have less in life manifested an act of generosity by donating to the pantries since they also want to help others. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP11: *“I will never forget the father, a tricycle driver, because he really came back to buy goods just so he can donate and give to other people.”*

CP13: *“We were running out of our budget, however, we still want to help other people*

since we cannot deny the fact that life during this pandemic is indeed difficult, but we came to a point that we should stop first, however, we did not expect the help that came from a family who gave vegetables that they harvested and some of the youth members who also have plants and farm who wholeheartedly gave their harvested plants, hence, these instances motivated us to continue and to find other possible ways to sustain the activity to help more people.”

What is clearly exemplified in the community pantry is the virtue of generosity. It simply arises from reason and not from feelings or instinct. The act of giving is entirely up to the people, hence, it is purely an act of will. This was experienced by the organizers while implementing their distinct community pantries. What the organizers encountered is an act of generosity among people who are strangers to each other but were willing to help one another by giving according to their means. With this, the rationality of generosity in community pantries lies precisely in its purported selflessness and anonymity. Generosity during the COVID-19 pandemic points to how pandemics trigger an impulse to help others. One motivation for generosity stems from a recognition of social bonds. This cooperative outlook emphasizes that one’s well-being relies on the well-being of others (Forcadell & Aracil, 2021). Furthermore, being generous and playing the part of the giver is not just a noble act. It is also one of the many ways to spread joy and happiness. One cannot deny the fact that COVID-19 will have long-term consequences for the state of extreme global poverty. However, with the recent outpouring of generosity during this time, there is a reason to be hopeful. Hence, generosity and the global recognition of the social bonds that connect the world will prove integral to addressing the current world health crisis and all the global ramifications that come along with it (Juvenal, 2021).

2. Promotion of Filipino Pro-social Behaviors

Another positive experience of community organizers is that they witnessed how the citizens promote pro-social behaviors such as *bayanihan*, *damayan*, and collaborative effort as a whole. According to some organizers, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the pro-social behaviors of the citizens and it triggered a great amount of sympathy and action among them. Generally, many informants revealed that despite the health crisis we are suffering from, this did not hinder other people from manifesting the spirit of *bayanihan*, *damayan*, and the like in order to help others, especially those who have less in life. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP05: *“I’ve experience that in this time of pandemic, we only have other people’s back. We only have ourselves in this time of uncertainty. I also experienced that we need to show empathy towards others because all of us are victims of this invisible enemy, where we need to unite as one and be able to recover as one.”*

CP06: *“... during the conduct of our community pantry is we saw how our little actions can have an impact to the community. Even in the smallest ways as long as there is unity, nothing is impossible.”*

In order to support one another during this COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative for people to engage in pro-social behaviors (Yue and Yang, 2021). Pro-social behaviours are voluntary actions intended to benefit other people, which include physical help, emotional comfort, and financial or social assistance (Tindowen & Bagalayos, 2018). When faced with the threat of natural disasters or health crises, pro-social behaviours are important because they do not only benefit the help recipients, but also the help givers. Indeed, a body of research has shown that engaging in pro-social behaviours is associated with greater happiness and psychological wellbeing, better interpersonal relationships, and decreased morbidity in medical settings (Yue & Yang, 2021; Lamber, et. al., 2021). Hence, with the

experiences of the community pantry organizers, it became evident that the culture of solidarity through compassion and cooperation, which are ancient Filipino customs, is alive and thriving in the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Increased Civic Engagement Among the Youth

It was revealed by the informants that the rise of community pantries resulted in the increased civic engagement among the youth. Most of the organizers and volunteers of community pantries are composed of youth. Not only that they are organizers and volunteers, but some youth also donated basic essentials. This then encouraged more youth to participate in such activity to make a difference in the civic life of their respective communities. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP07: *“At the end of the day we realized that in this small act of kindness you can influence other youth members to also participate and organize their own pantries.”*

CP13: *“I and my friends organized the pantry and then when we announced that we will organize our own community pantry, more youth volunteered and donated supplies.”*

CP04: *“Our community pantry was initiated by youth members and volunteers like that.”*

One good consequence of this pandemic is that the young are taking this situation in a positive light in order to provide help to other people. According to a new UN plan to address COVID-19, young people are some of the most affected by the pandemic's socio-economic impacts. Nevertheless, young people are also among the most active in global responses. Not only are they on the frontlines as health workers, but they are also advancing health and safety in their roles as researchers, activists, innovators, and communicators. In local communities, youth are integral since they help shape their culture and have extensive social connections. In addition, they are often on the frontlines of activism and other efforts to address community problems. With this, it was proven that when youth participate, communities are stronger and more resilient (Den Broeder, et. al., 2021).

Furthermore, as stated by Chigani, et. al., (2021)) young people today don't only make up a larger portion of the global population but are also participating more in shaping social movements and discourses. This, therefore, is in consonance with the experiences shared by informants that youth are among the ones who are most active in responding to the pandemic and helping their communities remain safe and develop coping strategies.

b. Negative Experiences

This sub-theme demonstrates that, while there has been praise and support for the rise of community pantries, there have also been criticisms and abuses of their purpose. It was revealed that some of the organizers of community pantries encountered negative experiences. These experiences were categorized as red-tagging of community pantry organizers and volunteers, victims of political propaganda, and unfavourable behaviours of community pantry beneficiaries.

1. Red-Tagging of Community Pantry Organizers and Volunteers

As defined, red-tagging is the harassment or persecution of a person because of "known or suspected communist tendencies." The Maginhawa Community Pantry that was started by Ana Patricia Non was linked by the government to communist groups. Hence, Non was red-tagged and had to pause the operations of the pantry. This situation prompted other authorities in other regions to do the same with other organizers and volunteers of community pantry, wherein this was actually experienced by some of the informants of this study. Generally, informants revealed that they also had to halt the pantry operations due to their fear of their safety as well as the volunteers. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP12: *“The operation of our pantry was smooth during the first day; however, we need to stop the operations the next day due to alleged red-tagging. We had no choice since we are also afraid for our safety as organizers and volunteers.”*

CP15: *“...we were so scared so we stopped first. We assumed that red-tagging only*

happens in Manila but we also encountered the same so we had no choice but to pause our operations to give.”

Many people were able to see pro-social behaviors like bayanihan, damayan, and the like in a new light as a result of the community pantry phenomenon. According to Ana Patricia Non, otherwise known as "Patreng," the Maginhawa Community Pantry was conceived out of the inept pandemic response and that people deserve better. However, the red-tagging strategy of the authorities urged her to pause the operations. The red-tagging occurs after the Maginhawa Community Pantry is spontaneously replicated in various parts of the country (Gozum, 2021). Hence, this act diminished the essence of this initiative. Some of the informants revealed that the alleged red-tagging strategy of the authorities only shows how the government is incapable of guaranteeing the security and survival of the people during this time of pandemic. Furthermore, informants also added that pausing operations of the community pantry for a day or two would hamper the chances of those who have less in life to sustain their daily needs that the community pantries provide.

2. Victims of Political Propaganda

Propaganda is the dissemination of information-facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies in order to influence public opinion. It was revealed by some informants of this study that they were victims of political propaganda by their authorities. Some informants shared the instance wherein authorities disseminated information that they were the ones who organized the community pantry. This was a lie since it was the youth and other private corporations who started the community pantry. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP10: *“...They have a tarpaulin with the faces on it and posted it in front of the community pantry that we, youth, organized.”*

CP13: *“The experience that I do not like is that when the authorities spread rumours that they are the ones who organized the pantry when in fact we are the organizers and making efforts to gather donations...”*

As shown in the shared experiences of the organizers with regard the implementation of community pantries in their respective communities, the authorities and officials took advantage of this initiative by spreading lies and misinformation in order to manipulate public opinion. Hence, this While the victims are unaware of and are not alert to the motives of perpetrators, these perpetrators capitalize on insecurities, prejudices and limited education of the victims and on the channel algorithms. The victims therefore unwittingly aid and assist the perpetrators to (i) polarise the population for or against a particular cause, (ii) evoke emotions among the population and cloud independent and rational judgement, (iii) spread conspiracy theories and infuse distrust in the existing knowledge base, (iv) troll and infuse an existential crisis in an individual or even a group, (v) deflect blame and target another, create a parallel narrative and (vi) impersonate (Roozenbeek & van Der Linden, 2019).

3. Unfavorable Behavior of Community Pantry Beneficiaries

Under this category, the informants of the study shared that they also experienced unfavorable behaviors of pantry beneficiaries. Generally, many informants revealed that there were beneficiaries who hoarded supplies from the pantry, did not follow the minimum health protocols, and failed to maintain the orderliness during the operation of the said initiative. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP01: *“Honestly, we were disappointed to some beneficiaries because they do not know the purpose of the activity. So, they hoarded supplies without considering others who are also looking forward for their turn to get something in the pantry.”*

CP10: *“...some doesn't follow minimum health protocols so we have to remind them all the time.”*

With these shared experiences by the informants, it diminished the importance of organizing a community pantry. The guiding principle of the initiative, “*Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan, kumuha batay sa pangangailangan*” (Give according to your means, take according to your need), was disregarded by some beneficiaries because of their greed that made them hoard supplies from the pantry. It was emphasized in the study of Rivera (2021) that with praise comes criticism, and some have expressed doubt as to how feasible or sustainable these carts can be. When we’ve seen Filipinos scrambling for “ayuda” and hoarding basic needs, it might be easy for some to equate extreme need with greed. Community pantries operate on trust systems and encourage donors to give what they can, and recipients to take only as much as they need. With this, it can be concluded that with the strict guidance of both organizers and volunteers, unruly behaviors of some beneficiaries will be ceased and sustainability of the initiative will be guaranteed.

4. Challenges in the Informants’ Logistics

Organizing a community pantry is a noble act; however, there will always be challenges that will be encountered by the organizers, most especially in their logistics during the pantry implementation. Some of the informants of the study revealed that during the organization of their respective pantries, they encountered hardships such as lack of manpower, lack of cooperation among youth members, improper distribution of goods, failure to give quality supplies and goods and insufficient donations. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

CP03: “... because of the insufficiency of goods, there were some individuals who were not given. We need to really look for those who really need it. And count the number of individuals in one barangay.”

CP06: “Lack of donations since we are in small barangay and we don't belong in known organization it's purely volunteerism.”

CP06: “One of our problem is the failure to check the quality of goods that were give since there were noodles that we bought and it has

already expired. We are thankful since only few were able to get and we have a logbook to look for those who were already given so we were able to change it.”

CP09: “At first, one of the concerns we experienced is lack of volunteers so it was hard since we’re only six who organized and we need to gather donations, then set-up the pantry and pack goods as well...”

CP15: “... one of our concerns is, although we have sufficient number of members, there were those who are still late and then others go home early even though they are the ones who should stay in the pantry.”

With these challenges experienced by the informants regarding their logistics, it proved that organizing a community pantry takes a lot of effort, time, and funds for it to be successful. The mission of a community pantry is to alleviate food insecurity and hunger, both of which are serious and growing public health concerns in low-income communities, especially during this pandemic. Fulfilling this mission comes with a great challenge on the part of the organizers. They are often faced with the challenge of balancing demand and supply to maximize the fulfillment of giving nutritional goods, while operating with limited resources. Logistical considerations have always played a strategic role in business. Among retailers and wholesalers, they transcend inventory management and transportation to include one of the most critical factors in business success—location in relation to markets or sources of supply. Among manufacturers, logistics concerns itself with matters as basic as plant location, sourcing of raw materials, and standards of customer service.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the pro-social behavior of Filipinos through the organization of community pantries, which as well made it accessible for everyone to lend a helping hand to those who have less in life. Furthermore, socio-economic as well as political reasons motivated various individuals, most especially young people, to start organizing their

own community pantries. With this, the organizers and volunteers of the said initiative experienced the spirit of generosity from their fellow citizens and were able to influence and motivate more youth to join and make a difference in the civic life of their respective communities. However, despite the remarkable result of altruism of community pantries, compassion and other pro-social behaviors, there will always be criticisms from the authorities, political propaganda of officials and unruly behaviors among beneficiaries, which were categorized to be the negative experiences of both organizers and volunteers of community pantries. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the rise of community pantries in every part of the country is a way for individuals and private groups to attempt to address gaps in the way the government is handling the twin problems of hunger and unemployment during this time of pandemic.

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