Assessment of Selected Food and Nutrition Policies: OPT Revisited, The Case of Abra de Ilog

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INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition among Filipino children persist, hence the value of nutritional assessment procedures is underscored. In the Philippines, this is carried out at the local level during the annual Operation Timbang or OPT. Over the years, officials from local government units (LGU) have observed higher malnutrition prevalence rates (MPR) as reported by the Department of Science and Technology’s Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) in its periodic feedback conferences of National Nutrition Survey (NNS) results compared with their own OPT results. This has often been a cause for discussion during these meetings. Hence, a revisit of the OPT was deemed necessary to provide evidence on the comparability of the two data sets and sources of variance addressed.

This study compared the provincial estimates of malnutrition based on the 2015 Updating Survey with acceptable coefficient of variation (cv < 20%) with the 2015 OPT of these provinces to check for differences in proportion. Having provided only a descriptive information as to the comparability of the two data sets, the second assessment generated analysis at the municipal level. It described how the OPT is carried out in all of the 10 barangays in Abra de Ilog in Mindoro Occidental, determined facilitating and hindering factors in the conduct of OPT; and compared results of the OPT and the DOST-FNRI local nutrition survey.

It is believed that the OPT is a vital resource that local government units can use towards increased efficiency at tracking their nutrition situation as well as assessment of their local nutrition action plans and other nutrition-in-development programs. The study has the potential to benefit local nutrition program planning, implementation and delivery of basic services. More importantly, it can provide information that can be used in generating policy recommendations for the amendments on the national policy on OPT.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- OPT Plus involves measuring the weight, length/height of 0-71 month old children in the community conducted every first quarter of the year targeting at least 80% of the total number of PS in the recent barangay census.
- examination of OPT-related activities in 10 barangays of Abra de Ilog using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods, conducted in October, 2016 at around the same time that the second mass weighing “OPT” activities in the municipality were carried out.
- anthropometric survey (weight, height/length) conducted by DOST-FNRI in its local nutrition survey using standardized procedures
- sampling

population census of 3,542 hhds with 0-71 months old children

subsample = 657 children based on the 2013 NNS stunting prevalence in Mindoro Occidental

proportionate allocation of children among 10 barangays

youngest child used as index in case of more than 1 child qualifying

simple random sampling of children

Comparative analysis
- DOST-FNRI local survey vis-à-vis the “fourth quarter OPT” report
- computed “fourth quarter OPT” MPR (excel-based tool) vis-à-vis the same data using WHO CGS
Review of Records

Key Informant Interviews (5)

Focus Group Discussions (10)

Observation of OPT process

Field data collection

Review of Records
**RESULTS**

- According to research participants in Abra de Ilog, OPT involves mass weighing of 0-71 months old children, including height measurements, carried out during the first and fourth quarter. The municipal health officer, however, qualified that OPT is the mass weighing conducted during the first quarter and is submitted to the province.
- Facilitating factors to implementation of OPT are logistics (calibrated equipment and latest masterlist), LGU support, and budget.
- Issues with logistics, lack of manpower, work overload, low honoraria, low commitment, uncooperative mothers and high turnover of barangay nutrition scholars hinder the conduct of OPT activities.

**CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION**

- Findings reveal policy implications to the procedural implementation of the OPT Plus, in particular generation of quality data.
- The formula for the estimation of MPR is critical. As in a mathematical equation, the “numerator” is a function of the total client list (TCL) and updated masterlist, including the quality of this database. The “denominator” is a function of the 16.2 percent of projected population in estimating the number of 0-71 months old children as target coverage. In addition, the inclusion only of the barangays and municipalities with 80 to 110 percent OPT coverage in reporting overall MPR for the municipality and province, respectively. Thus, MPR reports may not entirely reflect the true prevalence rate.
- Training, continuous orientation and re-orientation of community health workers are reiterated. Provide appropriate and enough number of calibrated equipment for OPT. Review the efficiency of the 16.2 percent of projected population as basis for computing the target number of children to reduce potential sources of variance in MPR estimates between OPT and the DOST-FNRI local survey.

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**Malnutrition prevalence rate (MPR) of Abra de Ilog 2016 OPT Plus and the 4th quarter “OPT” reported lower values compared with the DOST-FNRI local survey, even when the “OPT” was assessed using the World Health Organization Child Growth Standards (WHO CGS). This has implications in determining the severity of malnutrition as a public health concern as it could mask the true picture in Abra de Ilog with an underestimation of the problem.**

**Figure 1.** Prevalence of underweight, stunting and wasting among children 0-71 months old using FNRI and OPT Plus: Abra de Ilog, 2016

**Figure 2.** Prevalence of underweight, stunting and wasting among children 0-71 months old using WHO CGS and OPT Plus: Abra de Ilog, 2016

*underweight (p<0.001) and stunting, (p=0.0001)