

WFP Introduces BAMBINA to Parents and Caregivers in the Bangsamoro Region

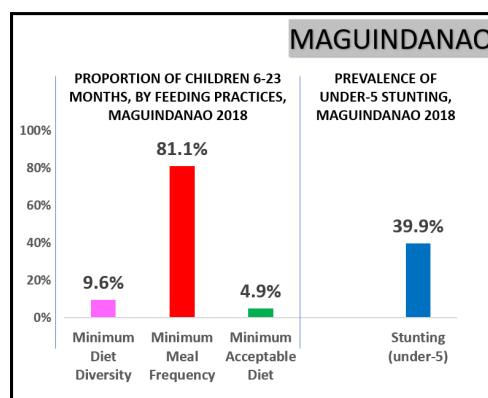
COTABATO, PHILIPPINES—

“What you eat affects the baby, right? Like vegetables, they are very healthy, that’s what the baby needs inside. [...] They say it greatly depends on what the mother eats.” This hopeful reflection is from a resident of the Municipality of South Upi in Maguindanao. The young woman, pregnant with her first child, participated in the first phase (Formative Research) of a social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) project of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), between December 2020 and February 2021. Compared to typical behaviour change communication (BCC), both aim to change behaviour by targeting knowledge and emotions, but SBCC looks beyond the immediate influences of family and peers. It also considers the wider community and environment—a first of its kind in the country.

Better Access of Mothers and Babies on Integrated Nutrition Agenda project, also known as BAMBINA, is providing insights into the socio-cultural barriers which contribute to poor dietary practices among women and children, and the motivators that play a critical role in improving such practices. The research aims to improve the nutrition situation in Maguindanao by addressing these barriers to access and reinforcing the value of a nutritious diet.

Maguindanao province has one of the highest stunting prevalence rates (39.9 percent, eNNS 2018) in the country. It is linked to the high cost of nutritious foods and it is also heavily affected by protracted social conflicts in the region, coupled with climate shocks.

WFP supports almost half of Maguindanao’s local government units through small-scale direct nutrition interventions in stunting prevention and dietary intake improvements.



Source: 2018 Expanded National Nutrition Survey

Over the years, WFP has understood that better access and preference of nutritious food in the province requires more than food assistance. Behaviour change in the communities leads to better decision-making in food planning and household resource allocation.

As such, BAMBINA deeply examines the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of pregnant and lactating women, mothers of children under 5, their families, including spouses and grandparents, women of reproductive age, adolescents. It also encompasses other stakeholders such as local decision-makers, health workers, nutrition volunteers, and religious leaders. Collectively, this vital information helps inform the government, system-wide, on ways to enhance or redesign its nutrition-related strategies and action plans. In addition, BAMBINA complements the broader priorities of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Zero Hunger on hunger-related issues.

KNOWING OUR COMMUNITIES BETTER

The first half of BAMBINA’s data collection was conducted in Barangays Nuro and Blensong in the Municipality of Upi and in Barangays Kuya

and Pandan in South Upi. The project team conducted surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The questions ranged from food choices and nutrition-related decision-making in the home, to myths and taboos, to challenges in eating nutritious meals, and to sources of information about food and nutrition. With the help of project partners from the RHUs and barangays, the team obtained data from 43 diverse participants—a remarkable accomplishment given the pandemic-related restrictions and risks.



2 December 2020. Research Assistant, Sheryl Anne Rosales, conducts an in-depth interview with a participant from Barangay Kuya, South Upi.

The data collection was a learning experience for both the project team and the participants. *“I am also thankful for joining this activity, my thoughts and consciousness about healthy eating were awakened”*, one of the participants from Barangay Pandan in South Upi stated at the end of the interview. *“Most responses from the interviews reflect vegetables as the households’ staple food. I wonder why the malnutrition rate in the province is still high”*, one of the WFP research assistants observes during the data collection process.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

WFP’s long-standing relationship with the Integrated Provincial Health Office (IPHO) in Maguindanao was a key entryway for BAMBINA. On 4 December 2020, WFP coordinated with IPHO officers to introduce the project, identify target areas and highlight WFP and IPHO’s shared goals to improve the nutrition situation in local communities through this new approach.



4 December 2020. BAMBINA’s Research Assistants Juanito Sayago, Safara Sedik, and Michael Salise going over the project details with Provincial Health Officer Dr. Elizabeth Samama and Provincial Nutrition Action Officer, Dr. Baiking Balinte.

With the support of IPHO, the project team worked with four municipalities for data collection, including Upi, South Upi, Datu Odin Sinsuat, and Sultan Kudarat. A series of meetings - virtual and face-to-face - were held, especially with Rural Health Units (RHU), to coordinate the project’s objectives and activities. In South Upi, WFP met with the local chief executive and RHU staff on 20 November 2020.

South Upi Mayor Reynalbert Insular gladly welcomed the team and expressed his support for the project.

Similar signals of strong support were also given by the other municipalities. Despite the restrictions and strict health protocols of the province due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration on project activities was still possible.

The WFP research team met online with project partners who systematically approached and implemented the planned activities in accordance with data collection and field visit schedules. Navigating through this new, remote ways of working brought on by the pandemic, meant numerous online meetings with mobile connections facilitating the completion of the project’s first half of data collection activities.



25 November 2020. A group photo of one of the team’s online meetings with the Municipal Registered Nutritionist-Dietitian (RND) of Upi, Jacqueline Gurtiza, Municipal Nutrition Action Officer (MNAO), Rolando Juan and the barangay health workers (BHWs).

It was a humbling experience for the team to be supported so well under these challenges by barangay health workers, midwives, barangay officials, and health and nutrition volunteers in achieving the project’s activities in the communities.

WFP completed the second half of the data collection in February 2021. This was followed by a three-day strategic planning workshop where WFP’s BAMBINA research team conducted an in-depth analysis of the data and created early drafts of an action and planning strategy.

NEXT STEPS

It is through nutrition initiatives like BAMBINA, especially through its formative research process, that ground truths about the root causes of malnutrition will be known. It also helps that the IPHO and local government units (LGUs) in the province think the same, as they vow full support to this initiative.

The findings of BAMBINA will be presented to the Government of the Philippines and development partners in the first half of 2021 for the subsequent development of SBCC strategy. A media landscape analysis will also be commissioned to complement this research, also expected in early 2021. The findings and recommendations will also serve as WFP’s contribution to improving the National Food Policy developed by the Inter-agency Task Force on Zero Hunger, with the analysis contributing to both Maguindanao and broader nationwide nutrition and food security initiatives.

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