

19

Abstract

20 Solidarity poured out when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the Philippines. The local
21 government units (LGUs) implemented various forms of bridging assistance
22 programs to support **marginalized fishing communities**. Bridging assistance
23 programs play a critical role in supporting fishers during these challenging times. The
24 specific design of these programs would, however, depend on the unique needs and
25 circumstances of the recipients in a given area. Is the bridging assistance received
26 during the COVID-19 pandemic matched with the preferences of the fishers in the
27 Philippines? To answer this question, we explore the bridging assistance preference
28 of fishers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Magallanes, Sorsogon. Based on our
29 survey data, we found that Magallanes fishers were grateful for the bridging
30 assistance they received, with food being the predominant type of aid received.
31 There was, however, a mismatch between the received and preferred aids.
32 Magallanes fishers chiefly preferred to receive medical supplies. Accordingly,
33 respondents change toward healthy behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic
34 influenced their decision to prioritize medical supplies above other type of aids. As
35 Magallanes fishers did not experience hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic, food
36 was expected to be the least preferred among the types of receivable aids. Free
37 transportation services and cash selection preferences were driven by high
38 expenditure prices during the pandemic. This study highlights the role of data-based
39 information to increase the likelihood of successful development and implementation
40 of bridging assistance programs, be it during the pandemic or when other disasters
41 or calamities strike again.

Comment [i-1]: Why is it called a marginalized fishing community? What are the indicators and parameters for marginalized fishing communities? Then, for the case study in Sorsogon, how can fishermen survive the pandemic if they don't need food stocks? Hasn't the effect of COVID-19 disrupted work activities, such as regional quarantine policies or self-isolation for those who have been partially infected by the pandemic? Authors need to identify it implicitly first.

42 When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the Philippines, the government, in part,
43 mitigated its impacts on poor and vulnerable communities by rolling out various
44 forms of support programs. The fishers representing this group were at the front the
45 queue (Macusi *et al.* 2022; Dumilag *et al.* 2023). These programs are often referred
46 to as bridging assistance which are given to help fishers cover their basic living
47 expenses while they are unable to fish or sell their catch due to pandemic related
48 restrictions or even common calamities like typhoons, flood, earthquakes, and
49 volcanic eruptions (Figure 1). With the many forms of bridging assistance received
50 by the fishers during the recent pandemic, key elements of meeting shared decision-
51 making, particularly as to what support assistance is preferred by recipients, remain
52 perfunctory.

53 Researches that examine social perspectives posit that strong support provision
54 involves identifying the recipients' preference and providing support that matches
55 their need (Lusk & Andre 2016; Zee *et al.* 2020). Given this tenet as the core
56 motivation of this study, we turn to ask if the received bridging assistance during the
57 COVID-19 pandemic matched that of the preference of the fishers in the Philippines.
58 We took into consideration the municipality of Magallanes in Sorsogon, where the
59 primary sources of income of people there is fishing (Malto & Dumilag 2023).

60 A cross-sectional survey was used in this study. Our survey consisted of
61 respondents' demographic profiles and questions exploring the participants'
62 experiences receiving bridging assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic and their
63 preferences for support provision. The data were collected over a one-week period in
64 May 2022. Ethical approval for the project was obtained from the Research Ethics
65 Committee at the Sorsogon State University, Magallanes Campus. Purposive and

Comment [i-2]: What programs are launched by the government? You have to explain in detail.

Comment [i-3]: Is this assistance a subsidy? And what is the time period for distribution of aid? There must be a logical explanation regarding the distribution period for aid programs, especially in the context of a pandemic.

Comment [i-4]: Here, it is written that "the assistance received by fishermen is based on joint decision making, especially regarding what assistance the recipient prefers, but is still haphazard". I understand that the authors are aware that the conditions of the aid program in the field are not yet fully optimal, where the type of aid to fishermen affected by COVID-19 tends to be inappropriately targeted. For this reason, there must be a description that makes sense and contains a sentence about the reasons why the assistance accessed by the fishermen seems haphazard.

Comment [i-5]: Why is survey data collection only carried out for one week in May 2022? Is this time period sufficient to gather information from the respondents?

66 snowball sampling were used. All data were encoded into a Microsoft Excel
67 spreadsheet and populated via Google Form. The respondents prioritization
68 preferences for the type of support they received were ranked based on the
69 computed value of the coefficient of variation.

70 The entire 19 coastal barangays in Magallanes were covered in this study (see map
71 in Dumilag *et al.* 2023). In total, 344 participants responded to the survey. Table 1
72 shows the summary of respondents' demographic information. Most of the
73 respondents (88%) have received support, primarily from the government (Figure 2).
74 Figure 3 shows the level of satisfaction among the respondents. Virtually all
75 respondents were satisfied with the type and quantity of assistance they received.
76 Figure 4a shows the actual bridging assistance received by the respondents. The
77 majority of the actual assistance they received was food (62.48%). It was followed by
78 cash (30.08%), supplies (6.28%), and services (1.16%), respectively. Respondents
79 mostly preferred to receive medical supplies (alcohol, face masks, and medicine,
80 respectively), followed by free services –free transportation, medical, and livelihood
81 services, respectively (Figure 4b). Food was the least preferred, with canned goods
82 being the least of the choices.

83 Our findings suggested that fishers in Magallanes were grateful for what they
84 received, albeit mismatched to their needs. It appeared that the fishers in
85 Magallanes preferred medical supplies and free services, especially the free
86 transportation services, over those of cash or food supplies. It is highly likely that the
87 choice of medical supplies over other selections follow shift response of local of
88 Sorsogon towards healthy practices during the COVID-19 pandemic (Longavela *et*
89 *al.* 2023). Free public transport services as the next preferred support assistance

Comment [i-6]: Considering that there were 344 respondents, it would not be logical if the interview duration was only 1 week.

Comment [i-7]: In general, the survey results show that the majority of respondents (88%) have received support, especially from the government with a fairly high level of satisfaction according to the amount and type of assistance. However, because the aid they received was more food than more urgent needs, they prioritized receiving medical supplies, free transportation services, health services and livelihood services. The facts above give rise to an ambiguous meaning, making difficult to understand which was the priority assistance from the government with the realization of what fishermen needed at that time.

90 were driven by the twice to three times increase relative to the usual fare during the
91 pre-pandemic. With the price increase of fishing-related expenditures during the
92 pandemic in Sorsogon (Dumilag *et al.* 2023), higher transportation fares would be
93 compounding for the fishers. Magallanes fishers generally did not experience hunger
94 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dumilag *et al.* 2023); therefore, it is unexpected that
95 food was the least preferred among the types of receivable bridging assistance.
96 When the lockdown came about, the most common food give away was canned
97 goods –canned sardines in particular. Sardines are abundant in Magallanes (Malto &
98 Dumilag 2023), hence this casts a Malthusian pall over the provision of canned
99 sardines to the Magallanes fishers. As one respondent alluded: “*Lawlaw na ngani*
100 *pirmi isirira, lawlaw pa su itatao. Makasasawa na!*” (“*We eat sardines everyday and*
101 *now, we’re still given the same fish. We are fed up eating them!*”)

102 During the conduct of our study, concerns were also consistently raised about the
103 need to maintain timely service provision, as it may come with important drawbacks
104 at the cost of precarity and anxiety (Bertoldo *et al.* 2022). A speedy and easy
105 application process can also be of help with flexible eligibility criteria, as in the case
106 of other fishers who were not able to receive assistance due to needed
107 requirements. It is also prudent to come up with contingency plans that includes
108 prioritization policies for elders and solo parents in the event of a predicted shortage
109 of supplies. In addition to the governing policies followed by the granting bodies, a
110 range of approaches maintain ongoing equitable access to dole outs during the
111 pandemic, disaster or calamity.

112 Overall, this study offers a useful assessment on the situations among fishers in
113 terms of their reception to support assistance, not only during the COVID-19

Comment [i-8]: “Disaster or calamity”. Is there a difference between these two words? Is it still the same definition? This isn't clear yet.

114 pandemic, but also during other disaster or calamities. Although gratitude becomes a
115 helpful way to cope with adversity during the pandemic (Bono *et al.* 2020; Fekete &
116 Deichert 2023), as expressed by the Magallanes fishers, meeting their priority would
117 be more effective of aid efforts. The mismatch between the bridging assistance
118 received and the support preferred by the fishers laid bare an emblematic case of a
119 larger challenge to seeking strong policies concerning the planning and
120 implementation of social assistance programs in the Philippines. Here, we put
121 emphasis on the role of data-based information about the need-assessment among
122 recipients to make support-giving profoundly meaningful.

Comment [i-9]: Through a field survey, this study offers an accurate assessment for policy formulation regarding the planning and implementation of social assistance programs in locations affected by COVID-19, but it should also emphasize the weaknesses of the study for the direction of future study development.

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151 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

152 This study was underwritten by the Department of Science and Technology–
153 National Research Council of the Philippines (DOST-NRCP) under the KTOP–
154 COVID program (*Kapakanan ng Tao sa Oras ng Pandemya – COVID*) awarded to
155 R.V. Dumilag. Dick M. Barreda took photos appeared in figure 1. The authors would
156 like to express their gratitude to the Magallanes LGU and to all the Magallanes
157 fishers who participated in this study. We are also thankful to J. D. Bailon, L. D.
158 Berdin, V. L. Chua, L. E. H. Corral, J. M. Hibay, A. T. Omoto, E. G. Orgela, L. C.
159 Mendoza and M. H. San Pablo.

160 **Table 1.** Summary of the demographic profile of respondents in this study.

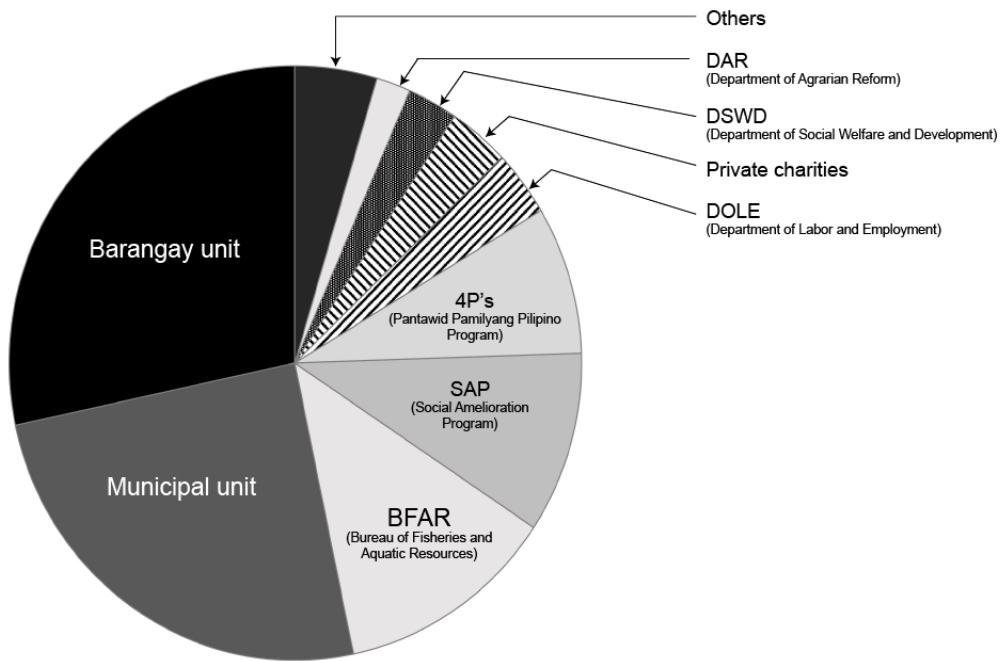
Demographic variable	Percentage (n = 344)
<i>Sex</i>	
Male	94
Female	6
<i>Age</i>	
12 – 23	3
24 – 35	23
36 – 47	28
48 – 59	31
60 – 71	13
72 – 83	2
<i>Civil Status</i>	
Single	14
Married	75
Others	11
<i>Household size</i>	
1 –3	20
4 – 6	58
7 – 9	17
10 –12	4
13 – 15	1
<i>Highest educational attainment</i>	
No proper education	1.5
Elementary	45
High School	48
Vocational course	1.5
College	4

161



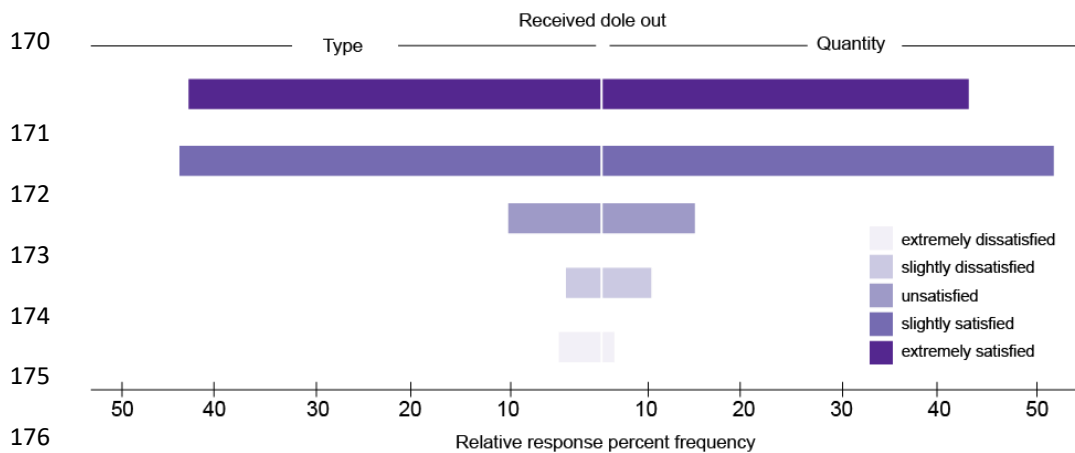
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163 **Figure 1.** Actual photos showing fishers receiving bridging assistance from the local
164 government of Magallanes in Brgy. Biton, Magallanes, Sorsogon. The dole out was
165 given in the aftermath of Typhoon Melor (Nona), consisting of rice, packed noodles,
166 and canned sardines.



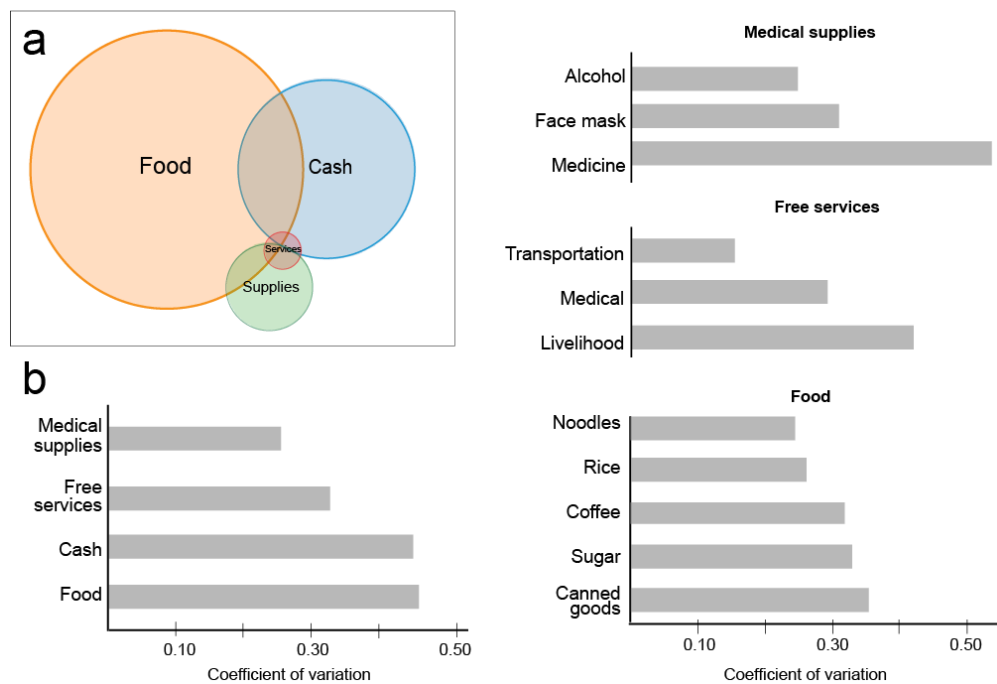
167

168 **Figure 2.** Sources of bridging assistance received during the COVID-19 pandemic
169 among the fishers in Magallanes, Sorsogon, Philippines.



177
178 **Figure 3.** Satisfaction level among the fishers in Magallanes, Sorsogon, Philippines
179 on the type and quantity of support assistance they received during the COVID-19
180 pandemic.

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181

182 **Figure 4.** Actual dole out received [a] and preferred type of support assistance [b]

183 by fishers in Magallanes, Sorsogon, Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic.