

EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL MILK FEEDING PROGRAM IN THREE PROVINCES OF LUZON, VISAYAS AND MINDANAO PHASE I: COMMUNITY-BASED MILK FEEDING PROGRAM

A DA-NDA Funded Project

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Introduction/Background: The Department of Agriculture-National Dairy Authority (DA-NDA) is implementing the National Milk Feeding Program (NMFP) to address the country's problem on malnutrition and to provide a steady demand for fresh milk to be supplied by the local dairy cooperatives. The evaluation of the program impact of the NMFP was seen as necessary to provide empirical evidence on the benefits derived from the Program and basis for future action. **Objectives:** (1) To determine the impact of the NMFP in terms of contribution to energy intake and nutritional status; (2) To analyze the cost-benefit of the community-based milk feeding program; and (3) To describe the existing implementing procedures and document experiences of program implementation. **Methods:** The evaluation was conducted in one municipality each of the province of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. A total of 333 children, 2 to 6 years of age, who were enrolled in community-based milk feeding program served as the Experimental group, while 337 of the same age group selected from the same municipalities, but in communities without any milk feeding program, served as the Control group. Impact of the program was measured among study children using nutritional status as outcome indicator measuring weight and height at base, 4th and 6th month of the study period. Individual characteristics of children using a structured questionnaire were collected at baseline. Food intake with the use of 24-hour food recall questionnaire was collected before the start and on the 6th month of the feeding activity. Incidence of infections of children were obtained at baseline, on the 4th month and the 6th month of the feeding activity. Focus group discussions and individual interviews among program implementers and mothers of children beneficiaries were done to document their experiences in milk feeding activities. **Results:** Energy, protein and calcium intake of children from the Experimental group increased on the 6th month of the feeding activity. Intake of rationed milk was able to narrow but did not totally fill the energy gap of children beneficiaries. Nutritional status of children generally improved, especially from baseline to the 4th month of the feeding activity. Improvements however were not sustained through the 6th month. This may be traced to increasing leniency in the implementation of the Program's Standard Operating Policies and Procedures (SOPP) overtime. There was a positive correlation of daily mode of milk ration distribution and weight-for-height z-scores at baseline with weight-for-height z-scores of children on the 6th month, underscoring the importance of daily distribution of milk as stipulated in the SOPP. Reduced frequency on the occurrences of acute respiratory illness were counted as gains. Cost-benefit analysis showed PhP1,004,183.80 program benefits expressed as wage gain of mothers and savings from health care from the PhP859,179.36 program cost. **Conclusion/Recommendation:** Milk feeding programs contribute to the improvement of children's diet and their nutritional status. It is

recommended that compliance to SOPP be strictly enforced throughout the feeding period, including mode and frequency of milk rationing, deworming, orientation, etc. The use of a mix of intervention, such as nutrition education and use of other supplementary foods plus milk rationing, is recommended. Full logistical support from and cooperation with partner and sponsor institutions including the cost of milk, expenses for milk distribution and supplies for deworming must be available to ensure a smooth implementation of the Program.