

COVID-19 and the Urban Poor

in the Cities of Ormoc and Tagum,
Philippines

Highlights from Resilient and Green Recovery Research

A Rapid Research on the Impacts of
COVID-19 Pandemic to the Urban Poor and
Other Vulnerable Groups in the Cities of
Tagum and Ormoc

In partnership with Technical Assistance
Movement for People and Environment, Inc.
and the cities of Ormoc and Tagum



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Supported by:



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation
and Nuclear Safety



INTERNATIONAL
CLIMATE
INITIATIVE

based on a decision of the German Bundestag

OVERVIEW

For many cities, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing issues in poverty and inequality including challenges in employment and livelihood, transport and accessibility, access to basic services, and security of tenure.

The ones who suffered the worst impact are the marginalized urban populations. It is then vital to understand the situation of the urban poor to inform the facilitation and conduct of resilient and green recovery in the cities.

The **Building Climate Resiliency through Urban Plans and Designs** (BCRUPD) has initiated a rapid research in partnership with the Technical Assistance Movement for People and Environment, Inc. (TAMPEI) and the cities of Ormoc and Tagum. The research involves a

quick survey and focus group discussions (FGD) in **five barangays each in Tagum City and Ormoc City** to identify the impacts of COVID-19 in selected urban poor communities.

A key component of BCRUPD is to integrate COVID-19 green recovery technical assistance to the cities of Tagum and Ormoc for recovery planning and related project investment programming. The report is likewise intended to provide data and evidence to support policy development surrounding pandemic recovery both at the city and national levels.

This document presents highlights of results from the research. The [full documentation](#) can be accessed [here](#) for more details on the methodology, results, and recommendations.



DATA GATHERING METHOD

Data for this research was gathered through an assisted rapid survey and FGDs with respondents who were identified by the city government through convenience sampling to comply with the restrictions brought by community quarantine protocols.

The five barangays from Tagum City and Ormoc City were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Urban barangay
- With high number of COVID-19 cases
- Presence of urban poor settlements

TAGUM CITY

86 respondents
from five barangays

Magugpo East, Magugpo North, Magugpo Poblacion, Apokon, and Visayan Village

ORMOC CITY

53 respondents
from five barangays

San Pablo, San Isidro, Cogon, Punta, Tambulid

HIGHLIGHTS

Access to Health

On average, the travel time of respondents to reach the nearest health facility takes 30 minutes or less. However, lack of money remains to be the biggest hurdle in accessing healthcare. Narratives from the respondents also say that accessing health services has been extra challenging during the pandemic.

Employment and Livelihood

With no savings at hand, the lost jobs and income have translated to the inability to provide for families. Majority of the urban poor respondents were pushed to incur more debts, adding to the loans they have even before the pandemic.

Access to Education

Lack of devices and internet connectivity are the top challenges for education, as majority of the respondents reported that they experience difficulties in schooling during the pandemic.

Access to Food and Basic Goods

Lack of money remains to be the top hurdle for access to food. In Tagum, majority of the households are able to have complete meals a day, but they fear that they may run out of money for food if the pandemic continues. Backyard gardens and sari-sari store loans act as safety nets for some of the respondents.

Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices Related to COVID-19

Television, Facebook, and government notices are the top sources of COVID-19 information. Respondents carry a good understanding of disease as they are able to answer most of the COVID-19 related questions correctly. Space for isolation and access to clean water are some of the main challenges the respondents face.

Security of Tenure and Housing Conditions

Space for isolation at home is recorded to be the main challenge in case a family member gets infected by COVID-19. With housing units usually 16-30sqm in size, proper ventilation and home quarantine will be a challenge. In Ormoc, there are households experiencing threat of eviction and increasing number of families at risk to flooding.



Transportation and Mobility

Most of the respondents reported difficulties in transportation. Either they are faced with added expense in terms of transport costs or they are moved to other means of mobility like walking and biking.

Access to Public and Open Spaces

Majority of the respondents agree that public and open spaces are essential during the pandemic. While most of the respondents can access open spaces near their home, they visit these venues less often because of community quarantine restrictions.

- Most populous city in the province of Leyte
- 30% of the population lives in urban barangays
- Total of **53 respondents** from five urban barangays

Access to Health



Public/barangay clinics are the most accessible health facility (64%), followed by public hospitals (21%)

15 mins.

The time it takes most respondents travel from their residence to a health facility.



Lack of money for healthcare
Top reason for difficulty in accessing health services

EXTRA CHALLENGE

Respondents informed that there were changes in the hospital services starting the onset of COVID-19. It has become more difficult to access services like check-ups. Both public and private hospitals require COVID-19 tests which expense is charged to patients amounting to Php1000 to Php1500.

Awareness of COVID-19

A good understanding of COVID-19

Almost all (98%) of the respondents know that COVID-19 virus spreads via respiratory droplets and 85% understand that symptoms include fever, fatigues, dry cough, and muscle pains. Also, 81% agreed that avoiding crowded places is a preventive measure of COVID-19 transmission.

Top sources of information on COVID-19



Television



Government notices



Facebook

Top perceived reasons on spread of COVID-19



No handwashing practice
No access to clean water
No space for social distancing and isolation

Lost Jobs & Increasing Debts

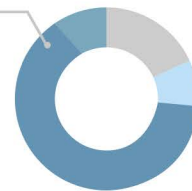


86%

Percentage of respondents who lost their job during the pandemic

Reduced monthly income

68% of the respondents earn less than Php4000 per month as of April 2021, brought by lost jobs and livelihood



Before the pandemic, most respondents earn Php4000 to Php8000 per month. Their income significantly reduced with the onset of COVID-19. Most of the respondents (40%) said that their income has reduced by more than 50% below usual income. This has brought them way below the poverty threshold in the province of Leyte which is at Php9,826 per month.

PUSHED TO THE EDGE

Only 6% of the respondents have savings, saying that their income before COVID-19 was just enough for their daily needs. Twenty one percent have resorted to selling assets to cope with the pandemic.



IN DEBT FOR FOOD

47 out of 53 respondents have taken loans and 91% of them reported that they use the money for food purchases.

“Livelihood is difficult nowadays. We have neighbors who sometimes give us food. We also buy on credit from the sari-sari store so we at least have something to eat,” said a 53-year old father with two differently-abled household members.

Access to Food

70%

of the respondents said they **lack enough money** to buy food

30%

experienced **skipping meals** during the last three months

92%

are **worried** that they would run out of food



SAVED BY SARI-SARI STORES

The role of sari-sari stores during the pandemic have been highlighted by the respondents as crucial to their food needs. The sari-sari stores allow credit to their neighbors and they also provide a credit line for workers to access food and other basic items when it is not yet their payday.

Housing Conditions at Risk



Percentage of households that lacks an **isolation space** in case a family member gets infected by COVID-19.

TENURE THREATS

25%

A quarter of the respondents experienced threats of eviction.

16-30
sqm

Average size of housing units of the respondents.

THE GROWING RISK IN BARANGAY SAN PABLO

There is an uncontrolled and unmonitored migration of people from nearby municipalities to the village of San Pablo, Ormoc City. They occupy risky areas like riverbanks and unfinished barangay roads. There are now 125 households living in the area, all at risk to river flooding.



Public and Open Spaces

85% Percentage of respondents who agreed that open spaces are **important** during a pandemic



10-15 minutes



Around one-third of the respondents said that they can access public open spaces within 10 to 15 minutes from their homes by walking. Meanwhile, another 38% said that they are not near any open spaces.

42%

MOSTLY STAYING AT HOME

More than 40% said that they **never accessed open spaces** during community quarantine. Some 15% visit once a week, and another 13% visit once a month.

LESS FREQUENT VISITS

Respondents said that due to the pandemic the frequency of them going to open spaces or public parks has **minimized** or they even stopped going for fear of contracting COVID-19



Affected by Transportation Restrictions

55%

Percentage of respondents who said that they were affected as users of public transportation



DOUBLED FARE

In one village, public utility vehicle fares doubled, from PHP 10 to PHP 20.

23%

perceived that there is lack of transportation available during the pandemic

Education Situation



Almost 8 out of 10 respondents reported that they have household members who **dropped out of school** during the pandemic.

Top challenges of the current education situation:



Lack of technology **devices** for online learning



Inaccessibility of **internet** connection

Only **3%** reported to have stable internet connection at home

OPTIMIZATION OF PUBLIC AND OPEN SPACES



Considering the data on open spaces, the city can look at designing or redesigning its network of parks and public spaces that can facilitate benefits for COVID-19 response and recovery.

TAGUM CITY

- Capital of the province of Davao Del Norte
- With population of more than 250,000
- Total of **86 respondents** from five urban barangays

Impact to Jobs and Household Income



29 out of 86

respondents who have household members that lost jobs during the pandemic

- 32% of them resorted to selling and pawning properties to cope
- 75% of them don't have cash savings

Top reason for taking up loans:

Food purchases



PRE-PANDEMIC DEBTS

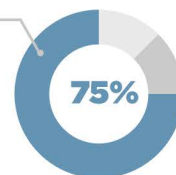
Some of the respondents have mentioned that they already acquired loans before the pandemic but due to several challenges brought by COVID-19 to their income and job security, some of them had to look for alternative financial sources which is through availing another loan from loan companies or friends

Relying on loans



Percentage of the respondents who have taken loans since the start of the pandemic

Almost half of them carry debts of more than PHP 15,000



Health Accessibility

30 mins.

For most of the respondents, health facilities can be accessed in 30 minutes or less



Public hospitals are the most accessible health facility for the respondents (44%), followed by private hospitals (24%), and public/barangay clinics (21%)

Difficulty Levels

34% indicated that it is difficult to access medical services, 38% said it is moderately difficult

Access to Food and Basic Goods



Most of the respondents revealed that their households are still able to have **complete meals in a day** during the pandemic. However, 74% of them are worried they would run out of money to buy food supplies.



Proximity to market is not an issue since the barangays are located near mobile stores and supermarkets.

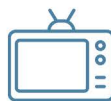
Planting **crops and vegetables in backyards** are also practiced by many households to cope with food issues, the respondents reported.

COVID-19 Knowledge and Attitude

NO space for isolation

Top difficulty faced by the respondents in preventing COVID-19 spread. Followed by **lack of space for social distancing and lack of access to clean water.**

Majority of the respondents know the general facts about COVID-19, with 44% answering all COVID-19 related questions correctly.



Television is the most popular source of information on COVID, followed by **government notices** and **Facebook**.



Photo by City Government of Tagum

Connectivity and Education



67%

Percentage of respondents who admitted that attending classes during the pandemic became difficult.

Top difficulties in attending school during pandemic:

- No internet connection
- No laptop or equipment for online classes
- A lot of school requirements

Only **14%** of the respondents have fast and stable internet connection at home, **35% have no internet access** at all



Transportation and Mobility

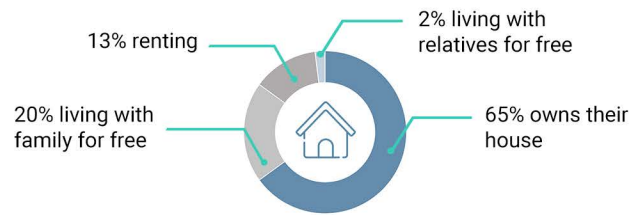
63% of the respondents said they were affected by the pandemic in terms of transportation.

EXTRA EXPENSE FOR COMMUTERS

From the usual seven-seater capacity of Tagum's local tricycles, the LGU imposed a three-passenger rule for all public tricycles or pedicabs all over the city, which made transportation even harder, especially for commuters during the pandemic.



Housing Conditions



The above chart shows the percentages of respondents who own their house, rent, or live for free. It is also important to note that though a huge portion answered that they live in a house that they own, many of them do not own the land on which their house stands.



No adequate ventilation, no space for isolation – such are the difficulties that majority of the respondents will face in case a family member contracts COVID-19. The photos above show samples of housing conditions from some of the respondents.

Relevance of Public and Open Spaces

- 87% of the respondents confirmed that open or **public spaces are available** near their home, this includes parks, gymnasiums, and other facilities.
- 84% responded that open spaces or public parks are **essential during the pandemic**.

The respondents' top suggestions on the use of open spaces:



Venue for physical fitness



Space for mobile vendors



Alternative venue for school classes



Initiatives for urban and community gardening



Photo by City Government of Tagum



The **Building Climate Resiliency through Urban Plans and Design (BCRUPD)** is a capacity building project funded by the German government's International Climate Initiative (IKI), and is being implemented by UN-Habitat in partnership with the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and other key government agencies.

In support of the National Climate Change Action Plan and the Nationally Determined Contributions, it will enhance national and subnational government capacities to guide and manage urban growth and green recovery with resilience principles and practices. The project will supplement existing planning guidelines and develop knowledge through policy inputs, capacity development, and demonstration activities. The cities of Tagum and Ormoc are being assisted on green recovery from Covid-19 impacts through capacity building and national-subnational collaboration.

Cover page photo: City Government of Ormoc
Other photos courtesy of TAMPEI, Ormoc City and Tagum City
Icons via Flaticon.com



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