

## Business Comes Together for the Battle Against COVID



*By Guillermo M. Luz, PDRF Chief Resilience Officer*

The COVID health emergency has quickly evolved into a socio-economic crisis for the economically-vulnerable of the country. The Enhanced Community Quarantine, while necessary for containing the spread of the coronavirus, has also had the effect of creating economic strains and stresses on workers, businesses and institutions. Most of all, it has created difficulties for the poor, primarily the urban poor.

In my column last week, I wrote about what some companies were doing as a way of assisting their own employees, partners, and even the employees of their partners. A significant amount of resources has been set aside by companies for this purpose. This week, I'd like to focus on Project *Ugnayan*, a special project of the private sector with the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation and Caritas Manila (through its Project *Damayan*).

*Ugnayan* is a project to provide unconditional emergency cash transfers to the poorest of the poor in Greater Metro Manila (includes Rizal, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna) to enable them to purchase food for their families. As you know, they have been without work and pay for two weeks now as a result of this enhanced community quarantine and putting food on the table for these families has become a very real challenge.

*Ugnayan's* goal is to feed 1.0 to 1.5M families by providing them with P1000 per family. The money will come in the form of Gift Certificates or Grocery Vouchers which are redeemable in supermarkets for food and grocery items. The gift certificates are distributed by Caritas' Project *Damayan* through their parish priests, social action directors, community volunteers, and barangay captains.

Here's an update on where we are since we started operations on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

First of all, through the generosity of private corporations and individuals, we have raised pledges of P1.5 billion to fund this program.

We have entered into a partnership with Caritas' *Damayán* project to distribute the gift certificates. Since Saturday, 21 March, Caritas and the parish priests have distributed P83.5 million in gift certificates to 83,525 families in the dioceses of Manila, Antipolo, Cubao, Imus (Cavite), Caloocan, Malolos (Bulacan), Novaliches, Paranaque, Pasig, and San Pablo (Laguna). That's equivalent to around 417,625 people served. They continue to distribute more gift certificates.

We expect to release more gift certificates / grocery vouchers so we reach 296,500 families or approximately 1.48M people by this weekend. We cannot say enough about how this project has been executed by Caritas. Through them, a network of parish priests, social action directors, and barangay volunteers have moved house-to-house in the poorest barangays to distribute the gift certificates. At all times, they have practiced the proper physical distancing following the operational manual which they co-developed. We have provided them with the appropriate safety gear for their use. The delivery teams have made a listing of the recipients. The dedication, passion, and care with which they have carried out their tasks has been absolutely amazing.

Additionally, *Ugnayan* has also allocated P200M to ABS-CBN's *Pantawid ng Pagibig* program, another partner which has also been reaching poor communities by distributing food packs through Local Government Units.

This close partnership within the business community has enabled us to marshal the collective resources and expertise in the private sector to be able to respond to a crisis. We hope to expand this network of businesses, professionals, and individuals. Could we encourage you to reach out to your colleagues to join us in this important undertaking?

We will keep you updated regularly through the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation's website ([www.pdrf.org](http://www.pdrf.org)) and Facebook pages.