

## Coming together amid social distancing



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Reaching out to one another at a time of social distancing.

Though it is true during these trying times that we must maintain a physical distance of one to two meters from each other, we must not be distant from one another in terms of compassion, in terms of assistance and support.

Frontliners need our support, and the poorest families need our help.

This is what the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), the Philippines' major private sector vehicle and coordinator for disaster management, had in mind in launching three COVID-19 response projects together with its partner business organizations.

PDRF started life in 2009 when the leaders of some of the country's biggest business and non-government organizations banded together to form the Philippine Disaster Recovery Foundation and to commit to support the reconstruction programs of government in light of natural disasters and calamities.

In 2013, after successive disasters, which included the world's strongest recorded super typhoon Haiyan (locally known as typhoon Yolanda), PDRF was reorganized as an umbrella organization of the private sector for disaster preparedness, relief, and

recovery, with programs for post-disaster recovery in the five key sectors of shelter; livelihood; education; environment; as well as water, infrastructure, sanitation, and health.

In 2015, its corporate name was changed to what it is today to capture the entire disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) framework.

The foundation is currently co-chaired by Manuel V. Pangilinan (MVP) of the MVP Group of Companies; Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala, chairman and CEO of Ayala Corp.; and Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, former Archbishop of Manila and now prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples at the Vatican.

It has the indefatigable Rene “Butch” Meily as president, the equally hardworking Veronica Gabaldon as executive director, and the inimitable Bill Luz as chief resilience officer.

As an initial response to the COVID-19 crisis to help urban poor residents in Metro Manila during the time of the enhanced community quarantine, PDRF, in collaboration with 20 top business groups, raised at least P1.62 billion to fund the distribution of grocery vouchers to a target of over 1 million households in poor Metro Manila urban communities.

Dubbed as Project Ugnayan, the distribution of these food certificates redeemable for groceries was carried out with Caritas Manila’s Project Damayan.

To date, Project Ugnayan has distributed about P1.37 million worth of gift certificates to 5.44 million families or around 7.6 million people.

It has been considered as the single largest private sector-led fundraising collaboration for households affected by the quarantine, a no-fuss and no-politics initiative.

Among the donor companies in Project Ugnayan are the Aboitiz Group, Lopez Group, Alliance Global Group, Ayala Corp. and Zobel family, AY Foundation and RCBC, Bench, Century Pacific, Concepcion Industrial, DMCI Group of Companies, Gokongwei Group of Companies, Enrique Razon-led ICTSI, Jollibee, Mercury Drug Corp., Metrobank, Nutri-Asia, Liwayway Marketing Group, the MVP Group, Pilipinas Shell, Puregold, Ramon S. Ang and family, SM Group, Sunlife of Canada, Unilab, AlphaLand, Cebuana Lhuillier, Chito Madrigal Foundation, Coca-Cola, Glorious Commercial Exports Inc., FEU, First Life Financial Co., Focus Global, Penshoppe, PepsiCo Foundation and Shang Properties.

Aside from Project Ugnayan, PDRF also launched Project Kaagapay: Protect our Healthcare Heroes to “help bring immediate aid to healthcare professionals and hospitals that are front and center in fighting the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

This fundraising initiative, in partnership with Zuellig Pharma, ABS-CBN, Metro Drug, and Go Negosyo, aimed to raise over P100 million for much-needed personal protective equipment (PPEs) and ventilators for hospitals in Metro Manila.

As of this writing, a total of 6,750 PPEs were already distributed to frontliners in various hospitals across Metro Manila. Project Kaagapay seeks to provide at least 50 ventilators and 30,000 PPEs.

Also, as a form of support to our frontliners and health heroes, PDRF launched the Project Pagasa to “help scale up medical response efforts in the Philippines and build the pandemic response expertise of Filipino healthcare workers.”

Under this project, a COVID-19 Training of Trainers Program for Philippine Health Workers was recently held together with the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies (Watson Institute, Brown University) and international relief organization Project HOPE.

Almost 90 doctors, nurses and other health professionals from all over the country took part in the four-day training.

All these efforts continue to this day.

This COVID-19 pandemic ushers in what is called a “new normal,” where life during and after this coronavirus crisis shall never be the same again.

One thing remains steadfast, though, and this shall hold true until the last vestige of the virus has been wiped out, God-willing: that we, as a people, remain tough and resilient, and that part of this resilience is responding to the need to be of aid and of service to our fellow women and men.

May the efforts and the good works of groups like PDRF multiply a hundred, nay, a millionfold.