

### **Provincial, town dads bat for the program**

During the launch, Provincial Board Member Antonio Rebong Jr, representing Gov. Josephine Sato, encouraged the participants cooperate so that “we can eradicate malnutrition in Occidental Mindoro.”

“DOST PINOY program has the full support of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan,” added Rebong, the chair of the province’s Committee on Health. Most barangays in Paluan participated in the program, including Mangyan mothers who came down with their babies and older children who qualified during the weigh-in activities.

Gov. Sato herself went personally to DOST-FNRI in February this year to request the inclusion of Occidental Mindoro to the PINOY program, bringing with her the provincial Committee of Health in full force.

Paluan Mayor Abelardo Pangilinan meanwhile enjoined the participants to “give your full cooperation to the program because it will not be successful without your support.” He noted the schedule of feeding and asked the mothers and caregivers to stick to the schedule and the corresponding activities.

### **Nutrition program for Pinoy kids**

“DOST PINOY was created to free Filipino children from the grip of malnutrition,” Director Mario Capanzana said as he revealed that, based on FNRI’s surveys, three to four out of ten children in the country are malnourished.

PINOY’s three components include nutrition education, complementary foods preparation, and feeding. It is part of a larger program called “Sulong Pinoy” that aims to address malnutrition in the country through science and technology-based interventions.

According to Dr. Capanzana, the nutrition education component is designed for mothers and caregivers of children six months to two years old who are underweight for their age. Through FNRI-trained BNS, community participants will learn the importance of nutrition, breastfeeding, and complementary foods to growing children; food safety; preparing meal plans; and growing vegetables in their own backyards.

The complementary foods component, meanwhile, involves the introduction and preparation of FNRI’s complementary food blends and snack foods. The feeding component will entail 120 days of feeding underweight children in the community.

### **Complementary foods**

Studies have shown that malnutrition among younger children is usually caused by inadequate feeding after the baby weans from breastfeeding, which is from six to 24 months after birth. Dr. Dorado said that babies are usually fed with “am” or the viscous liquid taken from boiling rice which lacks micronutrients that growing babies need. This is the reason why DOST-FNRI

developed various complementary foods to add more nutrients to the diet of children who at this age are usually weaned from pure breastfeeding and introduced to other kinds of food.

The complementary foods are available in 20-gram packs to meet nutritional needed of this age group. The rice-mongo instant blend and rice-mongo-sesame blend are designed for 6-11-month-old children, while the rice-mongo curls are intended for one-year-old children.

### **Malnutrition in the country**

WHO data show that malnutrition in the country has not substantially improved in the past years. In 1990, 34.5 percent of children 0-5 years of age were malnourished. The figure dropped a bit to 30.6 percent in 2000, and further down to 26.2 percent in 2008.

However, the seemingly downhill trend is still far away from the Millennium Development Goal of reducing underweight prevalence to 17.2 percent by 2015. To achieve this, the prevalence should be lowered at a rate of 1.29 percent annually. As of 2008, the country's underweight prevalence is still high above the target.

### **Project research component**

DOST-FNRI's Dr. Julieta Dorado, project leader, explained that the project goes beyond nutrition education and feeding the children with complementary foods. Her team will also monitor any changes or developments that resulted from the program, including the progress of the children's weight, consumption of complementary foods, and knowledge levels of participating mothers in terms of nutrition.

The findings will serve as basis in the design and implementation of a community-based nutrition intervention for infants and young children.

### **Project launchings in other provinces**

DOST-FNRI's nutrition improvement program is slated for launching in other places that registered high in malnutrition cases, such as Leyte (May 23-24) and Iloilo (June 16-17). Just like in Paluan, FNRI will also conduct nutritional classes, feedings, and monitoring in said provinces.