

Good afternoon everyone!

At the onset, please allow me, in behalf to the DSWD to congratulate the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, particularly the team led by Mr. Jose Ramon Albert for coming up with this study entitled “Social Pension Beyond Ten: A process Evaluation of the DSWD Social Pension (SocPen) Program for Indigent Senior Citizens amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

The study extensively presented a detailed analysis of the processes in the implementation of the program from beneficiary validation and enrollment up until the payment of social pension to the indigent elderly. It carefully and analytically highlighted deficits and grey areas at every stage while carefully considering the different circumstances such as the very limited financial and human resources and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that influence the effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of the program.

As we continually reform while we perform our responsibilities along the SocPen Program, we shall consider all the recommendations namely increasing the value of cash assistance anchored on an enhanced targeting system, introducing stratified mode of cash support, deployment of staff who will solely be engaged in the implementation of SocPen, updating the SocPen Operations Manual, use of Listahanan database to standardize social pension application process, use of updated social pension beneficiary database to conduct data analytics, and digitalization of cash payments.

As earlier stated, the detailed analysis of the processes internal to DSWD and to a certain extent the engagement of the local government unit laid down the premise and provided a solid ground for the said recommendations, taking note that most of these processes are led and owned by the DSWD.

As a quick update on the efforts of the Department to enhance our processes, may we share that we are constantly updating of the program’s Standard Operations Procedure and the Citizen’s Charter in line with our ISO certification. SocPen National and Regional Program Management Offices are in constant coordination to update the SocPen Database. We are also participating in various inter-agency as well as legislative discussions relative to the proposed increase in subsidies as well as the schedules and mode of payments and distribution. The Covid-19 pandemic led to the conceptualization of mixed mode of subsidy distribution. Hence the Department forged partnership with the Landbank of the Philippines to maximize the use of UCT cash cards in the provision of socpen subsidies. We have already submitted 3.4M registered socpen beneficiaries to the LBP and more than 300,000 cash cards were already distributed. As we speak right now we are also undertaking a review of the SAP implementation and we shall use the insights on engaging FSPs in the digitization of payments of SocPen subsidies.

The study also presented a comparative analysis of the social pension programs in the ASEAN plus Three highlighting the importance of human rights-based approach on care and support for older persons espousing further the need to revise the way we view the elderly and ageing. The

paper also underscored that we should also recognize that while some of our elderly are vulnerable, others are physically healthy and capable of engaging in physical activities.

Shifting perspectives on the needs of our clients will also allow us to pan out and be able to see other key players in the government, private and business sectors, and the society in general. This will permit us to look into their capabilities to contribute in enhancing the program for the elderly and somehow address the key challenges along limitations on financial and even human resources.

Moving forward and anchored on the results of this study, we could perhaps overlay the lens of the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach as we come up with a more comprehensive response to the needs of the elderly not only of the frail and the sickly but of those who are still physically healthy but have peculiar difficulties as senior citizens.

We note that we have beneficiaries, or elderly who may be poor and vulnerable but possess employable skills and could possibly be engaged in employment. Perhaps we could look at how the business sector could move further onwards with their initiatives along hiring older persons in certain jobs that fit their skills. We could also look into the local labor market studies that some LGUs may have and use this as a reference in identifying capability trainings for the elderly to develop their skills that match the labor market opportunities at the city or municipal levels.

Now, still along whole-of-government and whole-of-society-approach, since the study also highlighted that most of the beneficiaries use the pension they receive for medicines, we could also look at how health programs for senior citizens could be further enhanced to minimize their personal medical and medicinal expenses. While the social workers of the program integrate these concerns in the social case management process, including medical assistance as a major component of the program will institutionalize the role of key stakeholders in protecting and promoting the welfare of the elderly. Along these we could look into partnerships with the DOH and check on how we could intensify the provision of affordable and accessible medical services and enhance PhilHealth coverage for the elderly.

Thank you for your kind attention and again, congratulations to the PIDS.