

Public-Private Dialogue

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Mindanao, Southern Philippines / Education and Employment Opportunities for Youth

by

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Background and Context

The USAID-funded **Philippines Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev)** project provides critical training and post-training support to Out-of-School Youth (OSY) in areas such as life skills, civic engagement, entrepreneurship and job placement. The five-year MYDev project began in 2013 and partners with the Department of Education's Alternative Learning System (ALS) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to offer demand-driven skills training to youth. The project has established Out-of-School Youth Development Alliances (OSYDAs) that convene local government, academia, the private sector and national government agencies to discuss issues related to OSY in eight conflict-affected regions. National and local governments are working to expand and scale these alliances.

Youth and Inclusion Dimension

MYDev supports vulnerable, Out-of School Youth between the ages of 15 – 24 by increasing access to education, employability, and improved life skills. The youth in Mindanao are from conflict-affected regions where females in particular tend to have lower employment rates due to existing gender barriers. To ensure that vulnerable youth are at the center of MYDev programming, the project established a mechanism for inter-agency, public-private, civil society collaboration that is focused on youth development and treats youth as partners, not just mere beneficiaries. Through such a youth-centered inter-agency mechanism, known as the Out-of-School Youth Development Alliances (OSYDAs), MYDev program interventions were envisioned to help strengthen the social contract between vulnerable youth and their respective communities.

Partnership, Structure and Processes

The OSYDAs are the key drivers of programming with MYDev. The success of the MYDev program in facilitating private sector support for vulnerable youth owes much to the catalytic role played by local governments, with the support of national government line agencies. In their capacity as chair of the multi-sectoral OSYDAs pioneered by MYDev, local government representatives have been instrumental in mobilizing private sector support for out-of-school youth. This includes soliciting private business participation in job fairs and advocating for on-the-job training and employment opportunities for MYDev program completers. The local government chair of the Zamboanga OSYDA, Mr. Christian Olasiman, says that the local government is in a strategic position to advocate and mobilize the interest of the private sector to support vulnerable youth engagement. Accordingly, the Zamboanga City Social Welfare and Development Office has actively partnered with MYDev and relevant national line agencies (i.e., TESDA, DOLE, DTI and DepEd) to organize and promote job fairs to bring prospective employers and MYDev program completers together. Mr. Olasiman said, *“The city government of Zamboanga is looking at a range of strategies to mobilize private sector interest and support for at-risk youth. This includes encouraging private companies to identify specific target numbers of youth they might be able to engage for on-the-job training and/or employment, and exploring possible tax discounts/incentives for employers who provide on-the-job training or employment opportunities for out-of-school youth.”*

This engagement of the private sector as partners in youth development has been critical to the success of MYDev. Beneficiaries of project-sponsored training programs gain opportunities for on-the-job work experience and employment. In Cotabato City and Zamboanga City, MYDev has been able to secure the support of over 20 private sector employers for on-the-job training, apprenticeships and employment placement for its program graduates. These include commercial enterprises, department stores, retail stores, supermarkets, hotels and restaurants, construction suppliers, fish processing factories and canneries, and health and personal service providers. Private sector partnerships have been facilitated by local Chambers of Commerce and local government units that view youth as both fuel and beneficiary of economic progress and development. MYDev graduates are recognized as a source of skilled labor that will help drive inclusive economic growth in local communities. There is also a strong sense of corporate social responsibility anchored on a desire to help youth secure gainful employment. By early 2017, almost 300 MYDev completers have been offered employment and close to 400 have benefited from apprenticeship programs provided by private sector partners and employers in these two cities.

However, having the private sector as an active program partner is not enough to transform the lives of out-of-school youth. It requires the youth themselves being committed to their own learning and self-development, and actively participating in training programs designed to develop employable skills needed by prospective employers. In MYDev, such youth participation is facilitated by engaging out-of-school youth as partners and champions of their own development. Through the OSYDA mechanism, out-of-school youth representatives have an opportunity to provide inputs to the planning and program design decision-making process. Every MYDev training program also has a built-in life skills development component designed to equip learners with essential work-related skills such as group leadership,

managing interpersonal skills, team work, communication skills, customer relations, and work ethics. Beyond increasing youth's employability, development of these soft skills builds their self-esteem, self-determination, self-confidence, a belief in the value of education, and a sense of hope and personal empowerment. These attributes prepare them for the challenging process of seeking employment as well as facilitate their engagement as members of civil society with confidence to engage in socio-political processes. The achievements of the program help shatter traditional community stereotypes of out-of-school youth as victims of social alienation and sources of threats to peace and social order. In contrast, they are now viewed as valuable contributors and assets to the community.

EDC field staff worked with local governments to establish a network of OSYDAs in the cities and municipalities covered by MYDev. The membership and structure of the alliances vary from site to site depending on local context. Usually, however, the alliance is chaired by a local government executive (i.e., the City or Municipal Mayor) with representatives from the Department of Education (DepEd), TESDA, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI); private sector representatives; training providers; and vulnerable youth representatives.

The mandate of the OSYDAs is to prioritize, plan and oversee skills training and alternative learning programs for youth that are aligned with local labor market requirements, and to facilitate referral and information exchange so that MYDev completers have opportunities for post-training activities such as job fairs, on-the-job training, work experience, scholarships for continuing education and training and ultimately employment. Each alliance member continues to pursue their own mandate and set of responsibilities, but the OSYDA ensures that the respective mandates of alliance members are integrated with a common focus on youth development. The private sector is represented in the alliance by local chamber of commerce representatives, who help ensure that youth program identification, prioritization, design and implementation are anchored in local private sector human resource requirements, thereby increasing employability of MYDev program completers.

Results so far

- Trained 19,273 out-of-school youth in life skills, basic education and technical skills;
- 10,155 Out-of-School Youth certified with nationally-recognized vocational credential, improving employment options;
- 15,246 (6,205 females/9,041 males) OSY enrolled in technical skills training;
- 9,830 Out-of-School Youth gained life skills and either re-engaged in basic education or acquired locally validated vocational skills;
- 4,027 out-of-school youth enrolled in Alternative Learning System (ALS) programs;
- 8 local OSYDAs developed, all operating independently and engaging private sector to directly employ youth, paying for training in many cases;
- Enabled Out-of-School Youth Development Alliances to conduct local market analyses, providing guidance to local training providers on skills training courses;

- Organized summits at six sites to allow youth to demonstrate newly acquired skills, showcase products, and present entrepreneurial business plans, as well as to provide youth with links to job referrals;
- Scaling up approaches and tools (Life Skills; Market Analysis) through national government youth programs, agencies, and donors;
- Inclusive engagement of highly marginalized Out-of-School Youth (OSY) sub-populations to address gender LGBTI, PWD, and other issues related to equality.

Expected Results

Expected results from the local governance strengthening activities include OSY Development Alliances with strengthened capacity to deliver high quality services and increased counterpart resources to support OSY programs. For the youth themselves, expected results are that OSY have improved positive perceptions of their community and government and are contributing to peace and stability in Mindanao through improved life skills, increased civic engagement, strengthened local government, and increased employability. Thus far the project has exceeded its target to reach 19,000 OSY.

Challenges

Often, the end of a short-term skills training program means receiving a certificate, but leaves little tangible opportunity for real life work experience or sustained employment. This is not through lack of effort or ability on the part of the youth, but simply because opportunities for employment in many communities may be limited. Or there is a preference for traditional graduates of formal schools, colleges and universities. Or worse, there is a perception among employers and other community leaders that those coming from such vulnerable youth groups are uneducated, unskilled, disinterested, and lack the necessary work ethic. Even if these youth have completed skills training or alternative learning programs, such programs are frequently viewed as second rate, low quality and lacking credibility, substance and relevance.

In the context of Mindanao, the lack of local industries and employers, coupled with limited resources of government agencies to support employment and livelihood for out-of-school youth, particularly in the eight areas where MYDev operates, is a challenge. MYDev has developed networks and strategies including the OSYDAs in an effort to link youth to employment opportunities where most employment is through small and medium enterprises (SMEs) rather than large companies. This means that only a few youth might be placed with each employer, creating issues when trying to provide thousands of youth with work-based and employment opportunities. MYDev program strategies have emphasized the need to diversify the private sector partners and explore unique and strategic partnership arrangements with the private sector for specific education and training opportunities for OSYs, particularly in areas where there are industries and SMEs.

Biography of the Author

Mrs. Laura Dillon-Binkley

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Mrs. Dillon-Binkley currently provides support to youth entrepreneurship elements of youth development and workforce readiness programs with the Education Development Center (EDC). Most recently she was the deputy head of a \$40M USAID-funded Alternative Basic Education (ABE) project in Liberia that provided literacy, numeracy, work readiness and life skills as well as livelihoods training to youth ages 13-35 with no or minimal levels of education. The project worked through Ministry of Education schools and teachers, provided ABE classes to employees of large multi-national companies, and linked youth to internships in the private sector. County Alliances were organized to bring together government, private sector and civil society actors to further support advancing youth opportunities. Prior to that, Mrs. Dillon-Binkley has worked on or supported activities in agriculture, food security, community development, governance and anti-corruption, and demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. She has a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Arts in International Peace and Conflict Resolution. She has experience working throughout Anglophone and Francophone Africa, as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, and Haiti. She is a native English speaker and speaks fluent French.