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# Listening to the Voices of Out-of-School Youth

**USAID OPPORTUNITY 2.0**

Report on Out-of-School Youth Situation, Needs, and  
Continuity of Learning Under the COVID-19 Pandemic



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# Acronyms

<b>ALS</b>	Alternative Learning System
<b>CLC</b>	Community Learning Center
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona Virus Disease 2019
<b>EDC</b>	Education Development Center, Inc.
<b>eESKWELA</b>	Community-based electronic-learning program for out-of-school youth
<b>EST</b>	Education Skills Training
<b>DepEd</b>	Department of Education
<b>GCQ</b>	General Community Quarantine
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>MGCQ</b>	Modified General Community Quarantine
<b>OSY</b>	Out-of-School Youth
<b>QDA</b>	Qualitative Data Analysis
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>TESDA</b>	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
<b>TOPs</b>	TESDA Online Programs
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>YDA</b>	Youth Development Alliance

# Executive Summary

## Background and Motivation

The USAID Opportunity 2.0 program launched in February 2020 with a goal to strengthen second-chance education programs for vulnerable out-of-school youth (OSY) in the Philippines. The project will work with the Philippine Department of Education Alternative Learning System (DepEd ALS) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to reach larger numbers of OSY across the country. Together with these agencies, the program will help transition youth to further education and training as well as immediate jobs and long-term success. While the project was in its start-up phase, COVID-19 intensified into a global pandemic. The Philippine national and local governments put in place community quarantine, social/physical distancing, and other measures to mitigate its spread. These measures are expected to affect the continuity of learning, training, and livelihoods, as well as the general economic, physical, and mental well-being of vulnerable OSY.

In response, USAID Opportunity 2.0 conducted a series of youth interviews to gather OSY perspectives and recommendations for the continuity of their learning, training, and livelihoods under COVID-19 conditions. These interviews also examined youth views on learning modalities for the delivery of DepEd's ALS Accreditation and Equivalency (ALS A&E) course and TESDA's skills training, as well as the availability of online tools and applications and youth's capacity to use them.

## Sample and Methodology

Opportunity 2.0 conducted one-on-one interviews with seventy-two (72) OSY from six Opportunity 2.0 sites. Half (36) of the youth were enrolled or planning to enroll in DepEd ALS Accreditation and Equivalency, the other half (36) in TESDA's technical-vocational skills training. The sample of youth participants is not representative, meaning the emerging findings cannot be generalized to the Opportunity 2.0 OSY population. Nonetheless, they can provide the Opportunity 2.0 project team with contextual information to inform adaptations to programming during the pandemic.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, followed by an in-depth review to identify OSY views, feelings, and experiences before and after the pandemic. Using Qualitative Data Analysis software (QDA Miner) and Excel, responses were labelled and organized into categories.

## Key Findings

### Participant Characteristics

The majority of respondents (82%) are between 18 to 23 years old, with an average age of 20 years old. The vast majority (92%) of participants are single, and eleven youth respondents have child dependents. These young parents are mostly female, are aged between 18 and 24 years old, and are both single (6) and married (5).

### Participants' Reasons for Leaving School

Respondents overwhelmingly cited financial constraints as their top reason for leaving school, namely having limited financial resources for education (58%) and needing to supplement their family's income (25%). Some respondents cited a lack of interest (10%), early marriages/pregnancy (7%), family conflicts (7%), and displacement (7%). Though male and female respondents identified similar reasons for leaving school, most respondents who identified a need to support family income are male.

### **The economic challenges brought on by COVID-19 have shifted youth participants post-training plans toward a stronger focus on work.**

The youth participants in this study identified continuity of both their education and training and their work and livelihoods as aspects of their lives most affected by the COVID crisis.

While interviews indicate that the participants value education and that they continue to aspire completing either ALS or skills training, their goals for the future have become more work-oriented due to these economic challenges. While many youth interviewed had already aimed to immediately work after completing their short-term TESDA training or ALS course, many participants indicated that the pandemic has caused a shift in their post-training plans from formal education to work. Some participants, mostly males, even suggested pursuing work as soon as the situation normalizes, without waiting to complete their training course.

### **Youth participants need support during the pandemic, particularly pertaining to their work and livelihoods and their studies and training.**

Youth respondents overwhelmingly identified work and livelihoods as their main priority during the pandemic, aligning with their changes in post-training goals. The youth participants expressed a need for support in terms of work and livelihoods, identifying job provisions or business start-up funds as possible livelihood assistance for themselves and their parents. Many youth respondents also identified education and technical training as a priority, expressing a need for support in terms of resumption of school classes, provision of gadgets needed for online learning, and support in obtaining school supplies.

### **Youth participants draw strength from their families and possess some basic coping skills.**

The youth interviewed commonly identified their families as their source of inspiration and support to cope with the COVID-19 situation. Youth narratives illustrated their strong drive to help their families. Both male and female participants suggested that family is their stronghold in these times of crisis, sharing that their relationships with their family members have become stronger during the pandemic. Respondents expressed that following health protocols, thinking positively, and doing positive things has helped them cope with the situation.

### **Youth participants are open to innovative ALS learning and TESDA skills training modalities but are wary of their associated challenges.**

Many of the ALS youth interviewed expressed an openness to ALS modular/flexible and online learning, or eSKWELA, as alternative learning methods during the pandemic. While they cited their safety and protection against COVID-19 as the main advantage of such methods, they identified distractions at home as a potential challenge to the approach. Similarly, youth cited the convenience of technology-based learning as the main advantage of eSKWELA but were concerned about their health and safety in e-learning centers. Learning through radio left youth divided, with many expressing openness, but many still expressing apprehension associated with the potential limited interaction between learners and instructors in case of questions, as well as learning distractions and difficulties at home

The TESDA youth interviewed were generally open to a blended learning approach and online program since these modalities align with their preference to complete and obtain a certification while studying at home. Youth cited communications technology problems, such as lack of a good phone and weak Internet connection, fewer hands-on skills demonstration, less interaction with trainers, and learning distractions at home as potential challenges for these methods.

## Youth participants lack access to communication and information technologies for learning.

Even though the majority of the youth interviewed have access to smartphones, interview responses suggest that they do not all personally own the smartphones they are using, and these devices have limited features and capacities to view videos and other online applications. The interviews indicate that mobile devices are the only likely option through which the participants can access remote online learning, since nearly all respondents have no computers, laptops, or tablets, and only about a small number expressed having experience using computers. All youth interviewed use social media, most commonly Facebook and Facebook Messenger, and many of them can connect to the Internet using mobile data load.

## Implications for Youth Programming

While the youth participants in this study are not necessarily representative of the Opportunity 2.0 youth population, their responses can provide insights for programming decisions.

1. The interview participants indicated an emerging preference to work both during and after completing their ALS or TESDA skilling training, highlighting the importance of strongly integrating work readiness modules into ALS and TESDA curricula, both in terms of content and timing of delivery. This may mean introducing transition-to-work curriculum for both wage employment and self-employment early in the ALS A&E curriculum to provide flexibility for youth to explore work-while-studying/training options. The emerging working-while-studying reality may have programmatic implications, particularly for ALS, in terms of program design, scheduling, duration, contact hours, modes of learning, pace of learning, and need for flexibility of program study options.
2. Incentives could be provided for second-chance and higher education and training. Youth may need to be re-oriented on the long-term and better employment benefits and career advancement opportunities that come with pursuing higher education and training. Considering the study participants' financial constraints, monetary incentives for youth continuing to higher education could be provided, such as scholarship programs sponsored by local institutions including the local government. Given the current shift to online and blended learning, these scholarship programs may need to include access to ICT devices and Internet connectivity.
3. This study's participants draw strength from their families and possess some basic coping skills that enable them to address social and mental health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs that build on youth's strong family ties and further strengthen youth's social support systems, as well as interventions that develop youth's emotional wellness and resilience, could complement education and employment/livelihood programs.
4. Interview responses suggest that youth could be made more aware that alternative learning modalities can be both engaging and safe. ALS enrolment campaigns, for example, can be enhanced with clear, localized information dissemination on ALS delivery modalities that highlights the advantages or benefits of alternative modes of learning, while addressing perceptions and apprehensions that youth may have.
5. Programs could address the youth's technological constraints, particularly access to computers and Internet, and should motivate youth to build their skills in using these new tools and gadgets for learning. Youth in this study are familiar with social media, specifically Facebook and Messenger, but have not explored other applications used for online learning. With universal access to mobile phones and very high percentage use of Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and SMS, these platforms could be used as tools for learning delivery, learning support by teachers and peers, advocacy and information sharing, networking and peer-to-peer communication, and even learner- or beneficiary-level participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E).





# Key Findings

## Listening to the Voices of Out-of-School Youth

Report on Out-of-School Youth Situation, Needs, and Continuity of Learning Under the COVID-19 Pandemic



1

### Study participants' post-training plans have shifted toward a stronger focus on work.

There are still many youth (71%) who are determined to complete their ALS and TESDA courses, and thereafter work to help their families.

2

### Study participants need support for their work/livelihoods and their studies/training.

89% of respondents identified work and livelihoods as their priority need while 74% indicated support for education and trainings as their priority need.

### 3 Participants draw strength from their families and possess some basic coping skills.

Most of the youth hold on to their families as their source of inspiration and support to cope with the COVID-19 situation.

### 4 Participants are open to innovative ALS learning and TESDA skills training modalities.

75% of ALS students while all TESDA respondents were generally open to flexible or blended learning modalities.

5

### Participants lack access to communication and information technologies for learning.

78% of the youth have access to communication using phones while 97% have no computers, laptops or tablets, indicating that use of mobile phone is the only likely option they have for remote online learning.



# I. Introduction

Implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC), the USAID Opportunity 2.0 program was launched in February 2020 with a goal to strengthen second-chance education programs for vulnerable out-of-school youth (OSY) in the Philippines. The project will work with the Philippine Department of Education Alternative Learning System (DepEd ALS) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to reach larger numbers of OSY across the country, and prepare them to transition to further education and training as well as immediate jobs and long-term success. While the project was in its start-up phase, COVID-19 intensified into a global pandemic. The Philippine national and local governments put in place community quarantine, social/physical distancing, and other measures to mitigate COVID-19's spread, affecting the entire country including Opportunity 2.0 implementers and stakeholders and the out-of-school youth that the program intends to reach. These measures are having profound impacts on families and whole populations and are expected to affect the continuity of learning, training, and livelihoods, as well as the general economic, physical, and mental well-being of vulnerable out-of-school youth.

As a result, USAID Opportunity 2.0 identified COVID-19 responses to support the Department of Education's Learning Continuity Plan for Alternative Learning Systems as well as TESDA's *Abot Lahat*, a three-phased approach for workforce development in the new normal. As a program that values giving youth a voice, Opportunity 2.0 sought to listen to the perspectives of out-of-school youth through a series of interviews to better inform programs for their positive development under COVID-19-affected conditions.

## II. Objectives

The Listening to the Voices of OSY study aimed to gather perspectives and recommendations from a selection of out-of-school youth concerning the continuity of their learning, training, and livelihoods during COVID-19. This study explores four major aspects of the lives of out-of-school youth before and during the pandemic, specifically participants':

- education and employment or job status,
- relationships with family and peers and how they are coping with the ongoing crisis,
- priority needs and perceptions in terms of continuing education through ALS or training through TESDA programs, and
- access to technology before and during the crisis, as well as their preferred tools for communication and education.

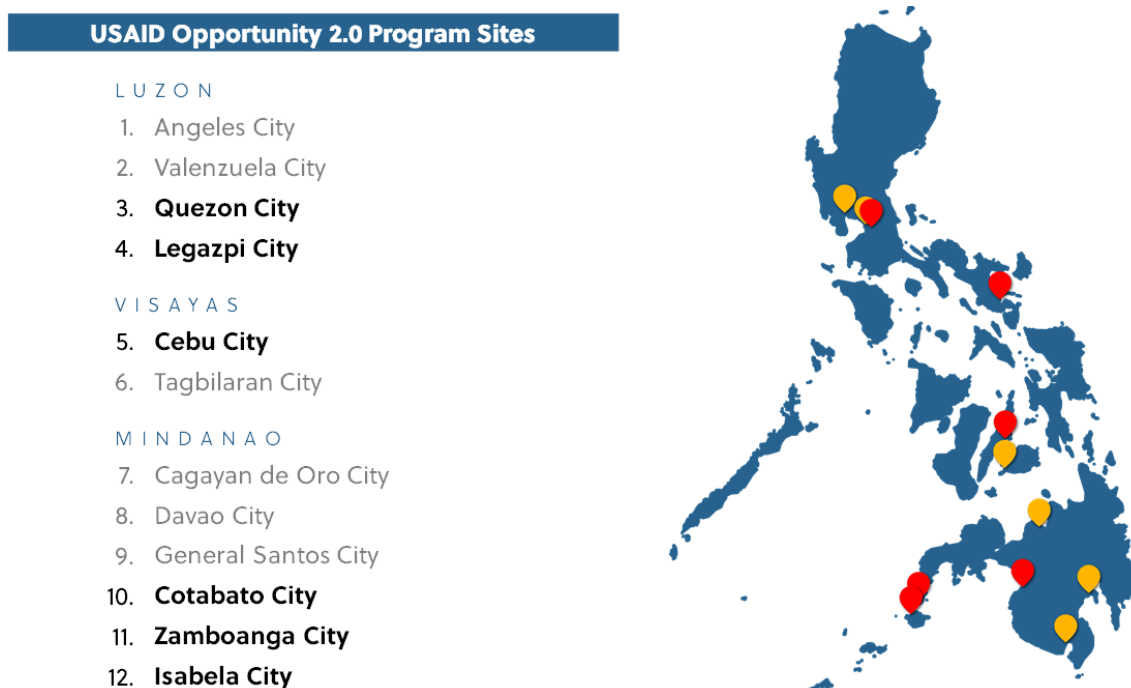
These qualitative interviews will support the Opportunity 2.0 project in understanding how to reach and engage with out-of-school youth during the pandemic, so that the program can continue to encourage their positive development.

# III. Methodology

## Sample

The Opportunity 2.0 project defines “out-of-school” youth as those aged 15-24, whose last formal education attained is at the junior or senior level high school or who have completed high school and have at most two years in college but do not have a college degree, and who have not enrolled or registered in the formal school system for at least six months before joining either an ALS or TESDA skills training.

This study recruited OSY who were planning to register in either ALS or TESDA skills training, or who were already enrolled but whose schooling or training stopped when quarantine and other health and safety measures were imposed.



**Figure 1. Location of Youth Participants (in red) within USAID Opportunity 2.0 Program Sites**

This study’s youth participants came from six Opportunity 2.0 sites (see Figure 1), namely the cities of Cotabato, Zamboanga and Isabela, Cebu City, Quezon City, and Legazpi City. At the time of the interviews, the cities of Cotabato, Isabela, and Legazpi were under Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ); Zamboanga and Quezon City were under General Community Quarantine (GCQ), and Cebu City was under Enhanced Community Quarantine<sup>1</sup>. Twelve (12) participants, with an equal number of males and females, as well as a mix of ALS and TESDA learners, were identified in each of the 6 sites with the assistance of the local ALS mobile teachers and/or TESDA trainers.

## Data Collection Tools

A Profile Form administered to youth provided demographic information for the conduct of more in-depth interviews. Unless the timeframe and context are specified, the youth profile reflects the participant’s situation before the COVID-19 situation.

<sup>1</sup> Republic of the Philippines Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases Resolution No. 46-A Series of 2020 June 15, 2020.

Interview Guides<sup>2</sup> were developed, with separate guides developed for ALS and TESDA respondents, to obtain participants' perceptions of each program's specific learning modalities. The guides are organized according to the following themes:

- OSY Situation Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- OSY Relationships with Family and Peers Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- OSY Coping Mechanisms
- OSY Priority Needs
- OSY Perceptions of Learning and Training in the New Normal
  - Perceptions of ALS Learning Modalities
  - Perceptions of TESDA Skills Training Options
- OSY Use of Social Media and Online Platforms

The team also captured Youth Stories through several in-depth interviews, which illustrate the situation, priority needs, challenges, and plans for the future of one youth in each site. The Youth Stories are in Annex 1. Data Collection

While focus group discussions were initially planned, community quarantine conditions, the inability to meet face-to-face, and mobility restrictions on youth under 21 years old led the team to conduct individual interviews by phone.

Youth Profiles and Interviews were conducted over the phone, with audio recording and written documentation. Facilitators and documenters from each of the sites were engaged to gather data. Appropriate protocols were observed for obtaining consent from the youth or their parent/guardian to participate in the recorded interviews. A total of seventy-two (72) youth were interviewed from June 22-July 15, 2020.

## Data Analysis

The Profile Form was analyzed to obtain summaries of the quantitative variables therein. The mean, percentage, and frequency of responses were computed and the data disaggregated by gender, site, and type of course, as applicable.

A narrative analysis method (or content analysis) was applied to analyze youth responses to the qualitative interviews. By listening to audio recordings and reading the transcripts, the analysis team was able to conduct an in-depth review of the participants' responses. Using Qualitative Data Analysis software (QDA Miner) and Excel, the responses were labelled (coded) and grouped into categories (indexed). The categories were not predetermined but evolved as youth responses were analyzed. Results were disaggregated by sex and training program (ALS or TESDA) as applicable.

## Limitations

The sample of youth participants is not representative, meaning the emerging findings cannot be generalized to the Opportunity 2.0 OSY population. Nonetheless, they can provide the Opportunity 2.0 project team with contextual information to inform adaptations to programming during the pandemic.

The qualitative analysis approach was conducted by an external analyst, meaning findings are somewhat based on their understanding of and exposure to the context. A sense-making discussion with youth, not undertaken in this activity, could further validate the findings.

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<sup>2</sup> The English and Tagalog versions of the Interview Guides can be found in Annex 1.

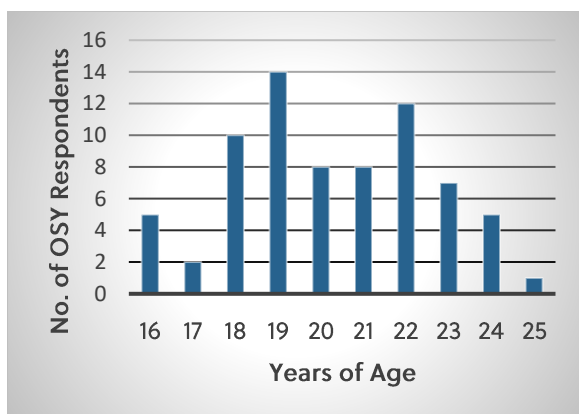
# IV. Findings and Discussion

This section contains the findings from both the youth Profile Forms and Interviews.

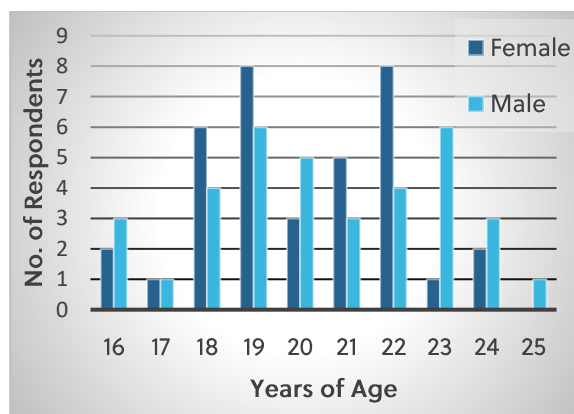
## Participant Demographics

**Age.** The average age of the youth respondents is 20 years old. Fifty-nine of the 72 respondents are between 18 and 23 years old. Seven respondents are below 18 years old, while six respondents are older than 23 years old.

**Gender.** As designed, there are equal numbers of female and male respondents. Thirty-two of the 36 females are 18 to 22 years old. Male respondents are more spread-out across different ages (see Figure 3).

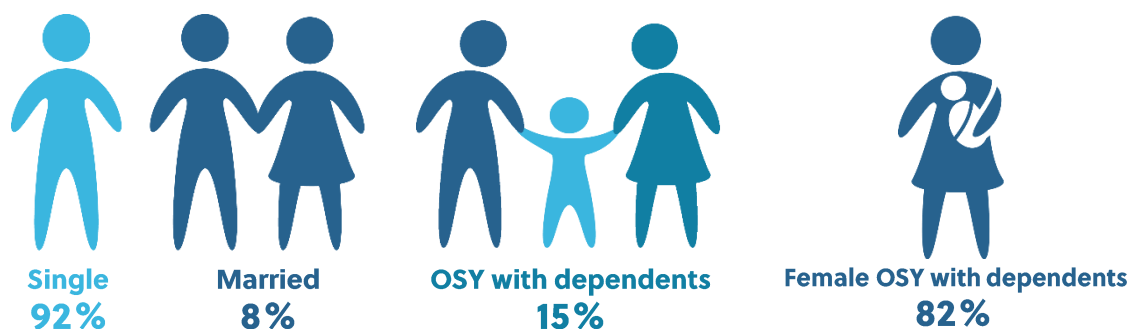


**Figure 2. Age Distribution of OSY Respondents**



**Figure 3. Age Distribution of OSY Respondents according to Sex**

**Civil Status.** Of the 72 youth respondents, 66 are single. The 6 youth who are married are 20 years old and above. Furthermore, 11 of the youth respondents have child dependents, typically 1 to 2 children. These participants are mostly female and are aged 18 to 24 years old. They include both single (6) and married (5) youth.



**Ethnicity.** Of the 72 respondents, 58 reported not belonging to any ethnic and indigenous people groups. Of the 14 youth who belong to ethnic groups, five are Maguindanaon, four are Tausug, two are mixed Maguindanaon/Iranon/Maranao, two are Samal and one is Yakan. All youth belonging to these tribes are from Cotabato and Isabela cities.

## Youth Participants' Socio-Emotional and Economic Situation

### 1. Changes in Participants' Situation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Youth participants described their situation before COVID-19, the biggest changes that they experienced as a result of COVID-19, and their feelings about these changes. From their descriptions, a focus on two themes emerge: their studies and trainings, as well as their employment & livelihoods.

#### 1.1 Studies and Trainings.

The Youth Profiles indicate a variance in the respondents' educational attainment, with most at or above the junior high school level (see Figure 4 for a breakdown). The forms suggest that most respondents had attended government/public schools prior to their ALS or TESDA program, though some attended formal schools.

The Profile Forms also show that the participants in the study commonly left school for financial reasons, mainly limited financial resources or a need to help their family earn an income. Youth who were in ongoing courses at the start of the pandemic referenced COVID-19 as a reason for leaving school. Others mentioned lack of interest, early marriages/pregnancy, family conflicts, and displacement (see Figure 6 for breakdown). The majority of respondents who stopped schooling because they wanted to help their families earn income or because they lacked interest were male. Notably too, early marriage remains a reason for leaving school among female youth (see Figure 5).

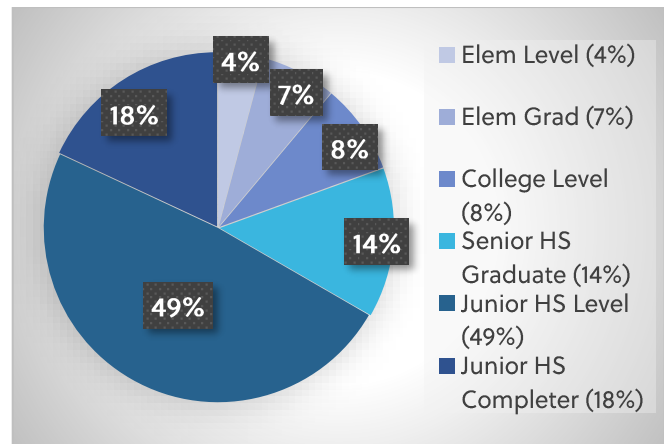


Figure 4. Figure 4. Highest Educational Attainment before OSY Respondents joined TESDA/ALS

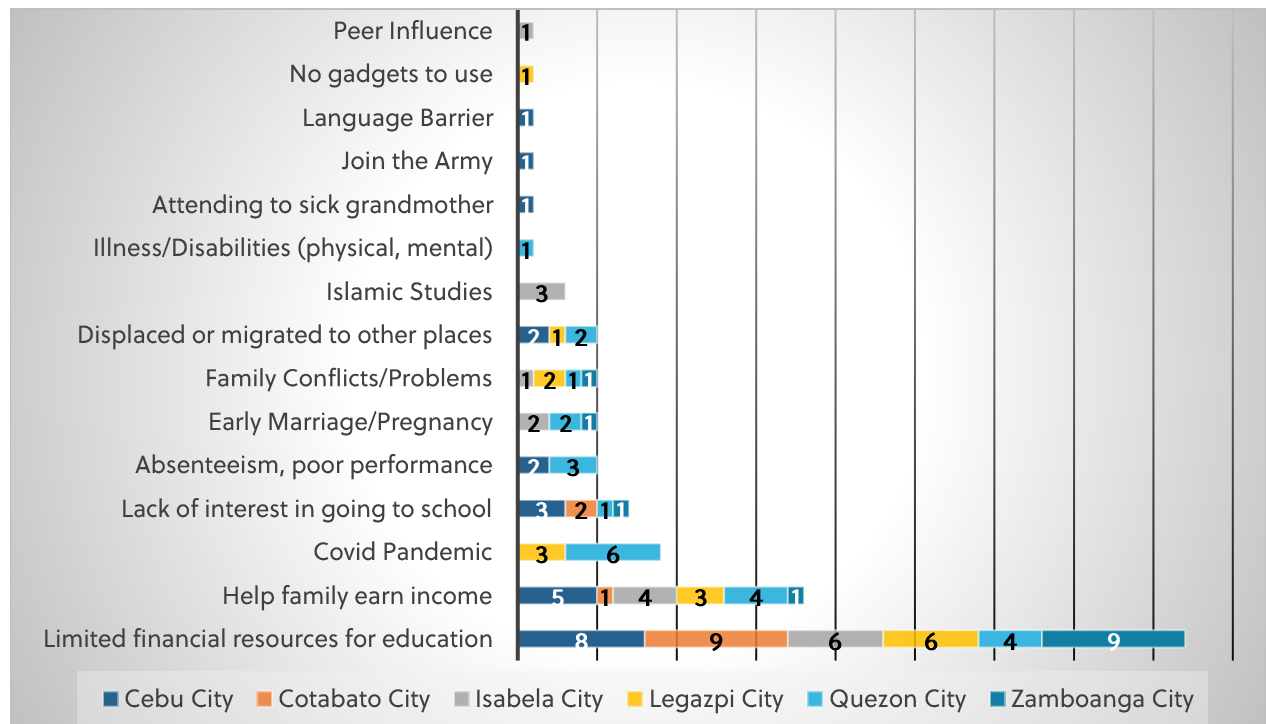
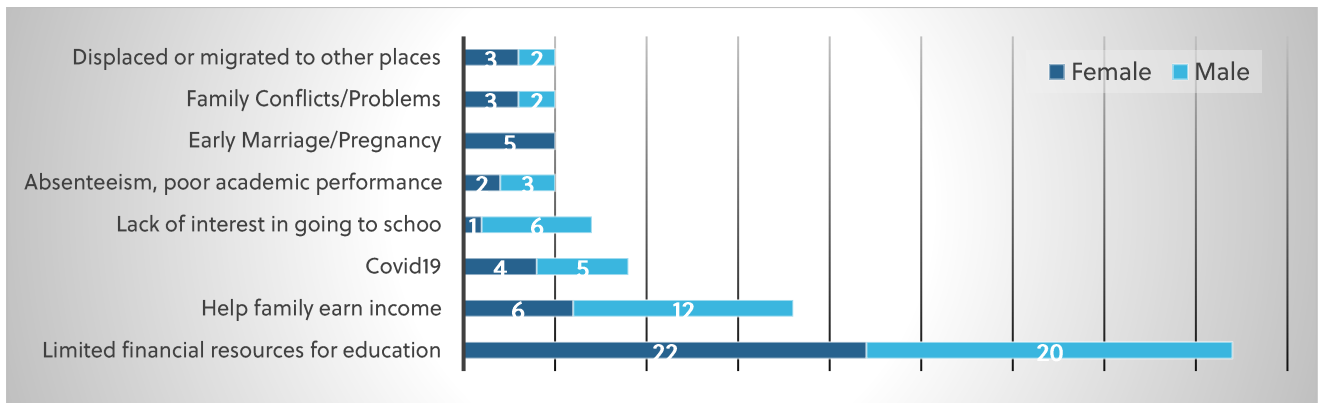


Figure 5. OSY Respondents' Top Reasons for Leaving School



**Figure 6. OSY Respondents' Top Reasons for Leaving School, by Gender**

The interviews show that the respondents who are enrolled in either a DepEd ALS or TESDA skills training program were at different phases of their training when the pandemic hit. Many ALS and TESDA respondents were attending their training programs prior to the lockdown, and some ALS respondents were even reviewing for their A&E test. Respondents who were TESDA scholarship recipients and enrolled in private technical-vocational schools/centers were also in ongoing training when quarantine was imposed. Other respondents had enrolled in training programs but were not able to start their trainings because of the unexpected lockdown.

Almost all respondents related that their studies and training were completely discontinued during the lockdown. There were no sessions, no bring-home activities, no follow-up online activities, and no contact with teachers or trainers while the youth were staying in their homes during the lockdown.

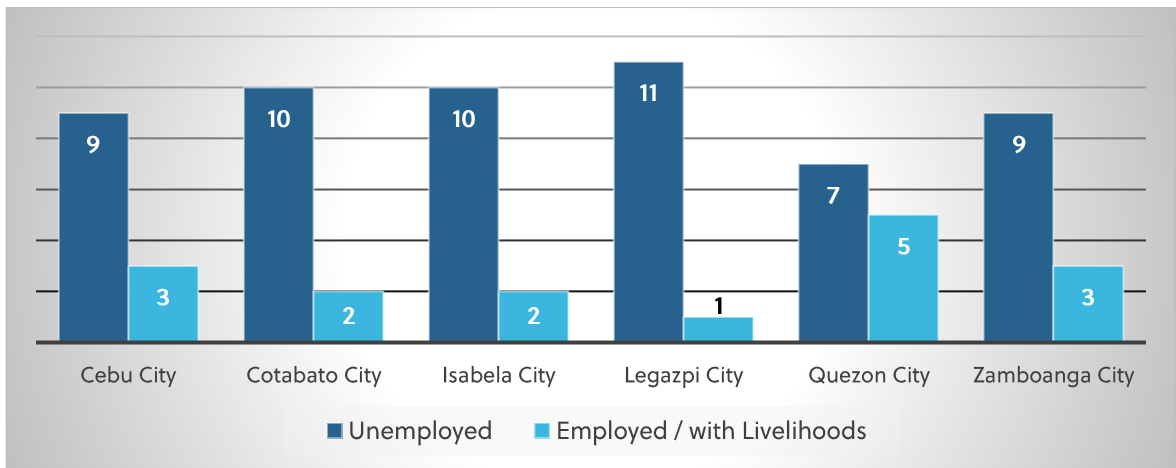
The interviews suggest, however, that remote supports from trainers and teachers could support students in continuing their learning. Some of the youth respondents who were enrolled in ALS or TESDA skills training reported continuing their online trainings at home. Of these respondents, TESDA trainees were assisted by trainers in reviewing their training manuals in their homes in preparation for their assessments for national certification and ALS learners received the support of their ALS mobile teachers, who called them from time to time to check on the progress of their individual reviews.

Only  
**7%**  
of the respondents  
were able to continue  
their learning online

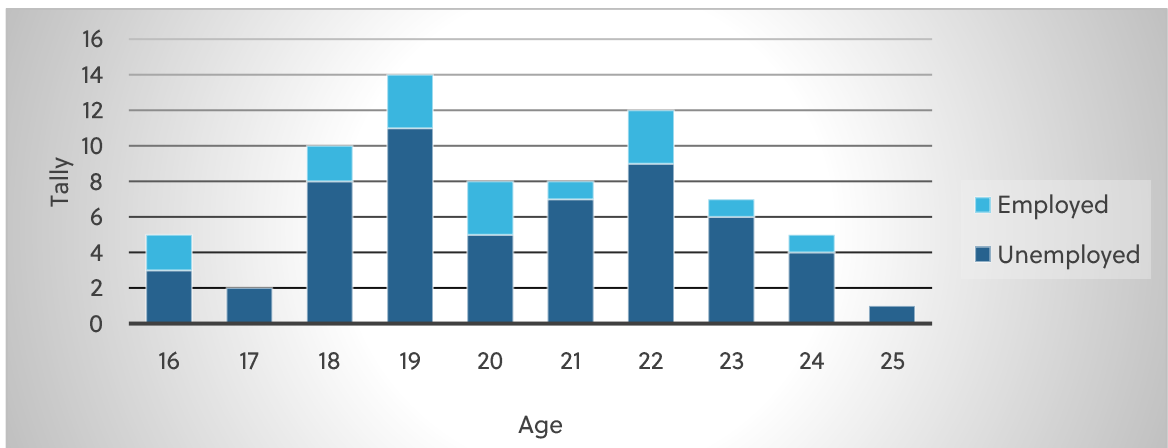
## 1.2 Youth Employment & Livelihoods.

The Profile Forms show that, before the pandemic, 78% of the 72 respondents were unemployed, observed in all locations and across all ages. Thirty of the 56 unemployed youth are females. Of the 16 working respondents, 11 were males and 5 were females.

Among the 16 youth respondents who were employed prior to the pandemic, 12 were working with employers that include their family or a company or business, while the rest were self-employed or managing their own business.



**Figure 7. Employment status of OSY respondents by location**



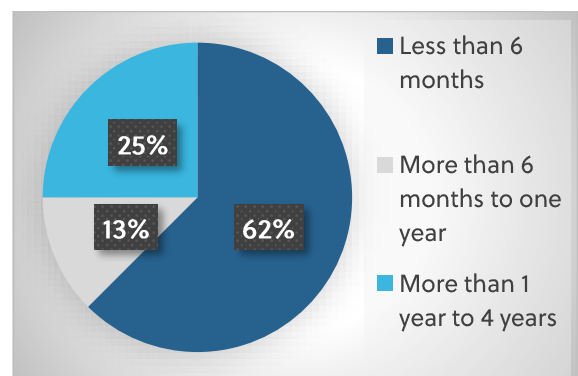
**Figure 8. Employment status of OSY respondents by age**

Of the 16 employed respondents, 10 had been engaged in work for less than 6 months, 4 had worked for six months to one year, and the remaining 2 had been working for more than one year.

Eleven of the 16 employed youth responded that they will likely continue with their current employment/livelihood over the next 6 months, while the rest of the employed will no longer be engaged with their work in the coming months.

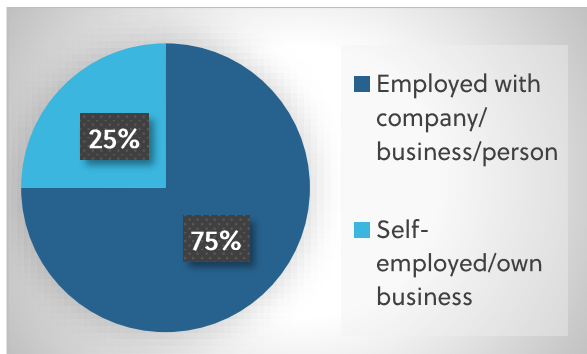
Youth respondents elaborated that “working” also meant that they were involved in various livelihood activities with their families but were not actually paid for these activities. Examples of these activities are helping their parents in selling food, assisting their fathers in carpentry work, farming, or driving tricycle. This employment situation was common among respondents across all locations.

Four of those who were employed also elaborated during interviews that they worked as tricycle drivers, delivery van helpers, domestic helpers, store/bakery helpers, construction workers, or farm laborers.



**Figure 9. Length of OSY respondents' work engagement**





**Figure 10. OSY respondents' types of employment**

The interviews indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the respondents economically, with participants referencing loss of jobs and income as the most difficult situation that their families have experienced during the lockdown. Respondents who were employed prior to COVID-19 cited lost jobs, unpaid bills, and even a lack of food during the lockdown. Since most participants' family members were unable to work due to the lockdown, they have become reliant on government assistance. Some of the youth respondents mentioned that the government food ration and the Social


Amelioration Program have relieved them from hunger during these times. Some youth respondents learned the value of saving food rations to hold over their family before the next batch of rations was made available.

## 2. Changes in Participants' Family Relations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Youth participants described their relationship with their families before the COVID-19 lockdowns. Their narratives illustrate close-knit families on the one hand, who worked together or took care of household chores, but, on the other, families who were busy, with little time for communication.

The interviews highlight that participants' family members have become closer during the lockdown period. Respondents mentioned that the lockdown has improved their family members' communication, causing them to grow closer. Youth respondents report becoming more involved in helping their parents with household chores and livelihood activities (e.g., rag-making, cooking, online business, etc.) during the pandemic, as there was little else to do since they could not go out for studies/trainings or spend time with their friends outside their homes.

While these responses suggest that the physical lockdown in homes may have strengthened family ties, youth respondents also mentioned challenges for their families. These include changes to their family's social life. Participants stated that the lockdown prevented their families from doing their usual activities, like praying together in church or mosque, going to the beach, visiting relatives, going to the malls, or watching movies. Additionally, respondents reiterated the fact that their families are facing economic challenges due to the pandemic.



## Comments from youth about their family relations before COVID-19

*"Yung sa financial po, Ma'am, malaking problema po. Kasi, nawalan po ng trabaho 'yong kapatid ko tsaka si Mama po nawalan ngayon kasi po yung mga gulay nagbaba 'yong presyo. Hindi na kami lumalabas para magbenta. Ganoon po ang nangyari dito sa amin po."*

Our biggest problem is financial, Ma'am. My sibling lost their job, and my mother is also at a loss because vegetable prices dropped. We can no longer go out to sell. That is what happened to us here.

*"Kaya mahirap, mahirap talaga ang buhay namin. Wala kaming pinagkakakitaan ng buhay ngayon."*

Our lives are so, so hard. We have no means of livelihood right now.

*"Kasi ngayon po, Ma'am, puro ang isip po namin, kung paano makaka-ahon sa kahirapan tsaka sa pagkain po sa pang araw-araw."*

Right now, Ma'am, our thoughts are filled of how to get out of poverty and how to find our daily meals.



## Comments from youth about their family relations before COVID-19

*"Maganda ang relasyon ko sa pamilya ko. Every Sunday nagsisimba kami tapos kumakain kami sa labas. Anim kami sa pamilya pero lumaki ako na wala akong papa. Hindi ko sinisisi ang mama ko na broken family kami. Maganda ang pagsasama namin ng pamilya ko."*

I have good relations with my family. We go to church every Sunday, then we eat out. We are six in the family, but I grew up without a father. I don't blame my mother that we are a broken family. We get well along together in the family.

*"Gumigising sa umaga, nag-aasikaso sa mga kapatid. Magpapahinga din kasi may pasok ng hapon. Nag-aaral ng HRS sa TESDA, Hospitality and Restaurant Services."*

I am up early to take care of my siblings. Then I take a rest and get ready for my afternoon class. I attend a TESDA course on Hospitality and Restaurant Services.

*"May anak man ako, sir. Hinahatid ko sa siya sa school tapos pagka Martes, papasok kami sa ALS."*

I have a child, sir. I take them to school. Then on Tuesdays, we attend my ALS class.

*"Parang wala masyadong communication, sir. Wala masyado. Hindi kami masyado nagkakausap dahil yung mga kapatid ko busy rin kasi naghahanap-buhay. Ganun din ako nagraraket-raket. Feeling ko po is dati noong wala pang COVID, yung family namin ay wala masyadong communication, sir."*

We don't communicate much, sir. We don't usually talk much since my sibling is busy working. I, too, do jobs on the side. I feel like, even before COVID, my family don't communicate much.





## Comments of youth on their family relationships during COVID-19

*Parang naging open na, sir. Kasi, madalas nagkakausap na kami. Naiintindihan na namin kung ano yung problema ng bawat isa. Naging malapit na kami. Kumbaga nagtutulungan na ngayon dahil sa pandemic.*

It seems that (our relationship) is now open because we now talk more often. We now understand each other's problems. We became closer. We are now helping each other because of the pandemic.

*Ang malaki pong naranasan kong pagbabago, noong wala pa pong COVID, minsan wala ka pong oras sa pamilya mo. Ngayon po meron na po. Araw-araw nakatuon lang ang oras mo sa kanila kasi nga quarantine po. Kahit na mahirap po maghanap-buhay sa quarantine, kaya naman po.*

The biggest change that I experienced is that, before COVID, we did not have time for the family. Now, we already have time and all of it is focused on the family because of the quarantine. Even if it is challenging to work during the quarantine, we are somehow able to get by.



### 3. Changes in Participants' Relationships with Friends

Youth participants also described their relationships with their peers, the activities they do with friends, and their relationships with their friends both before and during COVID-19.

The youth study participants commonly expressed that, before the pandemic, they often hung out with friends, either physically or online. For these youth, physical activities include group studies, going to school with friends, strolling, playing sports, chitchatting, etc., while online activities with friends include playing video games or chatting through social media (Facebook Messenger, etc.). Respondents most commonly used the following words to describe their relationships with their friends: “bonding,” “masaya” (happy), “enjoy,” “close,” and, “parang family” (like being with family). Only a few respondents said that they do not hang out with friends, mainly because of work and family responsibilities.

The youth respondents commonly indicated that, during the pandemic, they are still communicating with their friends virtually, through social media and online games. Some participants indicated that they are no longer connecting with their friends, neither physically nor online or through calls. In some instances, this is because of limited money to buy load for calling or texting friends. Though few, some respondents – mostly older youth – reported still going out with friends during lockdown, mostly to do voluntary service as front-liners or as youth leaders in the community, though some married youth respondents said they retrieve their food or relief assistance from the government alongside friends.



## Comments of youth on their relationship with peers before COVID-19

*"Blessing po na naging kaibigan ko sila kasi mababait po sila sa akin. At kung ano yung trato nila sa akin, yung din po ang trato ko sa kanila."*

It's a blessing that I have them as friends because they are kind to me. And, I also treat them in the same way that they treat me.

*"Mahilig kami mag mobile games. Hindi ako masyado close sa kanila pero nag tutulungan kami. Pag may kailangan ang isa, tinutulungan namin. If I need help tinutulungan nila ako."*

We like to play mobile games. I am not very close to my friends, but we help each other out. If someone in the group needs help, we help them. If I need help, they also help me.

*"I don't have time for my friends because I am focused on my work and family."*



## Comments of youth on their relationships with friends during COVID-19

*"Nag-uusap lang po online. 'Yong biruan po namin online din lang po. Nagbago, medyo hindi na kami nakakapag-usap na tulad nang may pasok halos araw-araw."*

We just talk online. Our jokes are just online too. It's changed. We don't talk as much as before when when we had classes almost everyday.

*"Sanay ako sa hirap. Nakakapag-adjust pa rin ako kasi nga naghahanap din ako ng way. Minsan pumupunta kami ng baryo, naghahanap kami ng puwedeng pagkakitaan. 'Yong mga libre sa baryo na mga prutas at gulay. Kumukuha kami nun tapos iniimbak namin para kahit papano hindi na masyadong makagastos."*

I'm used to hardship. I can adjust because I find a way. Sometimes, we go to the village looking for ways to earn money. There are some fruits and vegetables that we can get for free. We take them and just store them to lessen our expenses.

*"My friends are also SK officers and we are front-liners."*



#### 4. Youth Participants' Coping Mechanisms

Youth participants described how they are coping with the COVID-19 crisis, covering how they think or feel, as well as the actions they are taking to overcome challenges during the pandemic.

Youth respondents commonly mentioned feelings of sadness, difficulties adjusting, and confusion. Difficulties in adjusting refer to youth's feelings of not being able to deal with new regulations that restrict their movement, such as not being able to go anywhere freely or hang out with friends. Males in the study often expressed feelings of fear of getting infected, boredom, hopelessness, and anger and impatience. Female participants often expressed their struggle for food or money, their frustrations, and their anxieties or worries. Many of the respondents shared that they assume other youth like them are also experiencing the same feelings.

The youth respondents commonly referenced their families as their source of inspiration and support to cope with the situation. In their narratives, participants describe being at home with their family, helping each other, obeying parents, and talking to each other. The participants' narratives illustrate their strong drive to help their families. Both male and female youth expressed a belief that family is their stronghold in these times of crisis. This response is consistent with the participants sharing that their relationship with their family members has become stronger during the COVID-19 crisis.

Although youth participants expressed difficulties in adjusting to the new norms, some common reflections were that staying at home and following protocols such as social distancing, using facemasks, and washing hands are important factors in their coping with the situation. Notably, few youth seemed to connect taking care of one's self by exercising or maintaining one's health as part of the health protocol against COVID-19.

Some other common responses were that thinking positively and doing positive things can help respondents cope with the situation. This includes praying, reflecting and meditating, not thinking too much, focusing on good things and their dreams, and being good and doing good for others.

Respondents also commonly expressed that talking to someone and learning new skills and hobbies, such as cooking, helped them cope while staying at home. Food and cash assistance from the government also helped the participants' families cope. While some participants mentioned turning to social media to connect with friends, they elaborated that they had challenges with Internet connection and could not afford to buy load to use social media. Their low-cost gadgets also kept them from using advanced online social media platforms.



## Youth feelings about the COVID-19 situation

*"Medyo nakakalungkot, nakakasakit ng damdamin, pero tinitii lang namin kasi ito 'yong alam namin na paraan para sa ikakabuti ng lahat. Stay at home kumabaga kay 'yon lang lang talaga yung paraan para maging mabuti yung lahat."*

*It's a bit sad, hurts my feelings, but we just look at it as necessary for everyone's safety. Stay at home because this is the only way that is best for everyone.*

*"Nakakalungkot na parang nakakadismaya. Nagkaroon ako ng opportunity makapag-aral kaso nga lang naging hindrance po 'tong pandemic na 'to para ma-achieve ko yung pinapangarap ko. Tsaka, inisip ko rin po kung pano matutugunan yung mga kailangan namin sa pang araw-araw."*

*I feel sad and dismay. I had an opportunity to study, but this pandemic became a hindrance, keeping me from achieving my dream. And now, I also have to think about our daily needs.*

*"I cannot accept that I don't have savings. I just started working. I felt I lost the opportunity to participate in the ALS exam. I feel so depressed. I never expected the lockdown to take this long. I can't provide something for my child."*

*"Natatakot ako sa pagiging ano ba yan, mahawaan kami tapos especially naapektuhan talaga 'yong pakikisalamuha namin o pakikigsalamuha ko sa mga tao."*

*I am afraid of getting infected, and this really affected how I, and my family, interact with people.*





## Comments from youth on how they are coping with the COVID-19 situation

*"Para di ma lonely, nakatulong ang pamilya ko at mga kapatid para maka cope ako. Meron silang work so sila nagbibigay sa akin ng financial support. Worried sila sa akin kasi mag- isa lang ako. Wala akong pera kaya nagpapadala sila ng pambili ng supplies at pagkain."*

My family and siblings have helped me cope. They are working and giving me financial support. They are concerned about me because I am alone. I have no money so they give me some for my food and supplies.

*"Tinatupad lang din po yung law. Tapos mag pray lang lagi kay God."*

I just follow the law. And I always pray to God.

*"Minsan kase sir pag merong nagpapalaba. Minsan, kahit 60 (pesos) lang, okay na. Minsan yung iba nagbebenta na lang ng hotdog o isaw para lang maka adjust sa pandemic."*

Sometimes I get asked for laundry services. Even if it's just for 60 pesos (USD 1.23), I settle for it. Others sell hotdogs and grilled intestine street food just to adjust to the pandemic.

*"I learned how to cook and bake so I have bonded with my mother and nephews/nieces and I got to know them more. My sibling has also become closer with their kids and with us."*



## 5. Changes in Participants' Personal Goals

Youth also related their plans for the future and how these have changed as a result of the COVID crisis.

Most commonly, before the pandemic, participants aimed to immediately work after they completed their short-term TESDA training or ALS course, though some participants also expressed wanting to proceed to regular high school and college studies. According to the youth respondents, before the pandemic, they were very determined to complete their ALS studies and TESDA trainings. These expressions commonly appeared for both male and female participants.

Taking the pandemic into consideration, youth participants commonly expressed a determination to complete their ALS and TESDA courses, and thereafter work to help their families. Notably, this framing of participants' plans drew common responses, especially from male participants, that indicate an inclination to look for work as soon as the situation normalizes in order to respond to the economic challenges that their families are experiencing. There were not as many responses indicating a desire to proceed to high school or college once factoring in the pandemic.

Notwithstanding their shift in immediate plans toward work after completing ALS or skills training, common responses suggest that youth respondents recognize the value of education. When asked for their key messages to other youth like them, many responses encouraged other youth to pursue their studies, supported by those that advised youth to be hopeful and never give up on their dreams, follow health protocols, and be productive and find work.



## Comments of youth on their personal goals before COVID-19

*"Makapagtapos ng pag-aaral para makahanap ng magandang trabaho."*

Complete my studies so I can find a good job.

*"Plano ko sana tapusin ko 'yong makabalik sa ALS tapos pag nakakuha na po ako ng certificate, mag-aaral sana po ako. I plan to complete TESDA. Kukuha ako ng NC (National Certificate)."*

I plan to complete ALS, and after that, complete TESDA and get national certification.

*"Gusto ko po talaga makapagtapos ako, sir. 'Yan ang focus ko, kasi para makatulong na rin sa nanay ko."*

I really want to complete my studies. That's my focus so I can help my mother.





## Youth Personal Goals During COVID-19

*"As usual talaga sir pag-aaral kasi kung makapag tapos ka ng pag-aaral, ma-achieve mo yung goals mo makakapag-trabaho ka makakapass ka sa LET magkaroon ka na ng trabaho, dun mo makukuha yung hanap-buhay."*

As usual, studying, because if you complete your studies, you can achieve your goals. You can pass the LET (Licensure Exam for Teachers) and you will be able to find a good job.

*"Kung pwede na magtrabaho, maghanap na lang ng matinong trabaho para at least makatulong na rin sa pamilya nila. Sayang kasi ng oras, kapag hindi ka naghanap, mauunahan ka ng iba."*

If it was possible, I would rather look for a decent job so I can help the family. It would be a waste of time if I don't start looking for work now. Others will get it.

*"Nagbago plano. Mas gusto ko ngayon gumawa ng maliit na negosyo para may dagdag income sa bahay kasi hindi pa makabalik sa trabaho. So instead of work, negosyo at aral ngayon."*

Plans changed. I now prefer to start a small business for additional income because we can't go back to work yet. So instead of being employed, I prefer doing business and studying."



## 6. Youth Participants' Priority Needs

Participants expressed their expected needs once the quarantine would be lifted in order to best help themselves and their families.

Participants most commonly identified work and livelihoods as their priority need after lockdown, explaining that this meant assistance for them and their parents or families to have their own incomes either through provisions of jobs or capital assistance for their livelihoods. Work/livelihoods as a priority need aligns with the change in the participants' preference to complete their ALS course or TESDA skills training then work or to work once the situation normalizes to help with family income as a result of the COVID-19 situation.

Respondents also commonly identified support for education and technical trainings as their priority need. Based on their narratives, this includes provision of computers needed for online learning and support for acquiring school supplies.

Male participants commonly expressed a need to respond to the basic needs of their family in this time of crisis. These needs include food and cash while their parents and themselves are still jobless and have no other sources of income. Male respondents' emphasis on this may be related to the traditional role of males as main family income earners.

Some respondents also expressed the need to bolster their families' awareness and observation of health protocols in order to stay safe and protect themselves and others from COVID-19. Female youth participants commonly identified family support as a priority need, including counselling sessions to be oriented on the new normal and to learn how to address one's mental health considering the prolonged period of isolation and inactivity at home.

## Comments of youth on their priority needs to cope with the COVID-19 situation

*"Mag hanap ng trabaho, para makatulong sa bahay sa mga magulang ko, mahirap kasi ngayong lockdown gipit talaga. Isa lang nag tratabaho tapos madami kami sa bahay."*

Look for a job to help with the family income because we are so hard up during this time. Only one is working and there's many of us in the family.

*"Money can buy all; start business after COVID; need to look for work for food, pay bills, etc."*

*"Ano po, gadgets kasi online class na ngayon. 'Yon ang pinakabuhay ng mag-aaral kasi yun ang pinaka-kailangan sa online class. Syempre, hindi naman tayo mabubuhay na walang pagkain. Isa pa yun sa pinaka kelangan ng tao. Nakakahiya man pero kelangan ng pera."*

Gadgets, because classes are online now. Those are basic needs for online classes. Of course, food is just as important. It is somewhat embarrassing but we need money.

*"Una ang pagkain dahil kung wala kang makain para kang nababaliw. Source of energy natin ang pagkain. Food ang pinaka una tapos pangalawa ang work. Huli na ang pag-aaral."*

Food is our priority because you could lose your sanity if you're starving. Food is our source of energy. First, food; then, work; and last, studying.

*"There is a need for bonding in the family because I hear from the news that there are so many youth who commit suicide. Communication and bonding is really important."*



## Youth Participants' Perceptions of Learning and Training in the “New Normal”

Questions on ALS learning and TESDA skills training options were framed based on the existing general modalities at the time this study was undertaken, regardless of the site. Terms used and descriptions of the modalities were simplified. As an example, the ALS modular self-directed learning modality was termed “*flexible learning option*” to highlight the flexibility in the learning environment (in center vs. at home) and limited interaction with their ALS teacher. The questions were also premised with youth health and safety as a key consideration, emphasizing that no face-to-face interaction or instruction would take place unless government guidelines allow it.

### 1. Participants' Perceptions of ALS Learning Modalities

#### 1.1. Flexible Learning.

The study's interview facilitators described the flexible ALS modality to youth as one that allows them to learn at home on their own most of the time using their modules, without requiring their attendance at a Community Learning Center. They explained that youth could call their mobile teacher or chat with them through Messenger and other apps at any point during the week for help, and that their mobile teacher would call them at the end of each week to check their progress.

Participants' most common reflections on this learning modality were ones of openness, with many responses affirming that this learning mode made the participants feel safe and protected and that it can be an alternative way for them to pursue their studies in the COVID-19 context.

Participants did also share some of their expected challenges with this approach, commonly learning distractions at home, the lack of face-to-face interaction between teachers and learners, and technological problems with their phone, load, and connectivity.

#### 1.2. Learning through Radio.

The study's interview facilitators described the learning through radio modality to youth as one that allows them to listen to their lessons on the radio while having their printed modules on hand. They explained that youth could call the radio host or their mobile teacher with any questions, and that their mobile teacher would call them at the end of the week to check their progress.

The participants' responses show less openness to the radio-based modality, as the common responses show more apprehension. While common participant responses show that they like that they can study from home and that they can reach their teacher through phone or messaging apps, respondents commonly cited challenges like a limited ability to interact with their lecturer or teacher for questions, learning distractions at home, and even a lack of interest in learning by radio generally.

#### 1.3. Online Learning (eSKWELA).

The study's interview facilitators described the online learning (eSKWELA) modality as one that allows youth to access ALS online learning through computers at a learning center, where someone would be present to help with the technology or to answer questions.

The responses suggest that the study's participants would be very open to learning online in an e-learning center, citing the convenience of using technology for learning, face-to-face interaction, and their experience using computers and tablets as advantages of the modality. While this modality would involve in-person learning at an e-learning center, the ability to download modules to a flash drive for access at home appealed to participants as well.

Youth respondents did cite challenges to this modality, most commonly health and safety concerns related to in-person learning in the e-learning centers. Other responses included limited access to and perceived poor quality of the computers and Internet connectivity, as well as the costs of transportation to the e-learning centers.



## Youth's perceived challenges related to ALS flexible (modular) learning

*"Feeling ko, di ko alam kung masyadong effective kasi para sa akin, kung mag-aaral ako gusto ko may magtuturo talaga sa akin. Di ako sanay na magself-study na ganun lang. Minsan nagself study ako pero pang-advance reading lang yun para may alam lang ako pero di ko talaga siya magets pag di inexplain ng harap-harapan."*

I am not sure if this will be effective for me. When I study, I really would like to someone teaching me. I am not used to studying on my own. Sometimes I study on my own but that is just for advance reading so I know something but I actually don't fully understand the topic unless it is explained to me face-to-face.

*"Yung iba na may trabaho, baka makalimutan nila na may modules sila, tapos yung iba tinatamad. Parang nagadalawang isip ako dito."*

Those who are working might forget that there are modules to learn, while others may just be lazy. I am having second thoughts about this.



## Youth perceptions on the challenges of radio-based learning

*"Siguro ang problema lang talaga ay yung paano po makipag-communicate sa teacher or announcer. Paano mo siya matatawagan kapag wala kang pang-access? 'Yon lang po talaga, 'yong wala kang wifi at 'yong pang-load para makatawag ka kay teacher."*

I think the only problem will be how to communicate with the teacher or announcer. How will you call if you don't have access? The only problem is if you don't have wi-fi and no money for mobile phone load to call the teacher.

*"Ang kahinaan lang din po d'on, lalo na 'yong mga mag-aaral hindi mahilig makinig sa radyo. Mas pipiliin nilang mag-online, mag-aral online kaysa makinig ng radyo."*

One weakness to that is that students are not keen on listening to the radio. They'd prefer to go online and study there than listen to the radio.

*"Makakapag-aral naman nang maayos siguro kung walang maingay. Kasi more on kinig lang. Eh hindi po kagaya sa bahay na may mga bata. Sa totoo lang, hindi ko mapigilan 'yong mga ingay ng bata. So, hindi siya advisable."*

I think I will be able to learn by radio if there are no distractions because it's more about listening. But there are kids at home. Actually, I can't keep them from making a lot of noise. So, it's not advisable.

*"Naisip ko kanina paano kaya nila i-divide per grade level? By channel kaya? may radio kami dito pero isa lang at apat kaming estudyante. Paano namin ibagay ang oras dito?"*

I am wondering how will they divide by grade level? By channel? We have a radio, but we are four students here. How can we adjust the time?



## **2. Participants' Perceptions of TESDA Skills Training Modalities**

### **2.1. Blended Learning.**

The study's interview facilitators described the blended learning modality as one that allows youth to learn online at home, with limited face-to-face training sessions and one-on-one coaching at an agreed upon schedule between the youth and trainer. The modality would be self-paced using a computer with Internet connection. Youth would be able to call their trainer at any time during an online session for help.

Common responses suggest that the study's participants would be very open to blended learning, citing face-to-face interactions, the ability to study at home, health and safety, and the ability to interact with trainers as positives of the modality. Some responses express apprehension, however, citing communications technology problems such as poor-quality phones and weak Internet connection, fewer hands-on demonstrations and interactions with trainers, and learning distractions in the home as possible challenges to this modality. These are valid concerns, considering that technical-vocational skills training programs are arguably best delivered face-to-face, as they are designed to be hands-on in a setting where all tools and facilities are guided physically by the trainers.

### **2.2. TESDA Online Programs (TOPs).**

The study's interview facilitators described the TOPs modality as one that allows youth to register through the e-TESDA website free of charge, thereby providing them access to choose from several training programs. The training programs would have easy-to-follow instructions and activities, would give youth the ability to post their questions online, and would provide a certificate upon successful completion of the course.

Common interview responses suggest that the study participants would be open to online skills training, citing the ability to study at home and protect their health and safety during COVID-19. Some responses suggest that an online program would help youth develop their self-discipline skills, since they would need to manage their time well.

Respondents did cite some possible disadvantages to the TOPs modality, including technology problems like poor-quality phones and Internet connectivity, limited hands-on demonstration due to less interaction with trainers, and learning distractions at home.



## Youth's perceived challenges related to eSKWELA

*"Mahirap din po yung kasi halimbawa kami bata pa. So, high-risk talaga kami. So mahirap po 'yon. Hindi po maganda. Sabi nga po ni President Duterte hanggang walang vaccine mahirap po talaga kapag face-to face... at makakatravel ka talaga kung halimbawa nandito ako at ang location ng teacher ko sa ibang lugar."*

It's a challenge for us who are still young and considered high-risk. It's difficult, not good. Like President Duterte said, as long as there is no vaccine, it will be hard to study face-to-face. You might have to travel to the learning center because I could be here in my village but my teacher is in another place.

## Youth perceptions on TESDA's blended learning approach

*"Maganda naman 'yon sir 'yong sabi mo na mag-online training. 'Yong suggest ko lang sir mas maganda sana kung sa loob (ng center) pero once or twice ganyan mag-face to face pati ng trainer para maintindihan talaga namin kung anong gagawin."*

I think online training is good. I suggest to still meet face-to-face once or twice with the trainer just to make sure we really understand what needs to be done.

*"Maiiwasan natin ang sakit. May mga panahon na hindi maiiwasan na mag usap-usap sa paaralan. Para sa akin okay ito kasi kung may mga tanong ka pwede mo tanungin ang trainer mo tapos sa bahay ka lang nag-aaral."*

This helps us avoid illness. There are times when it is unavoidable to have discussions in the center. For me, this is okay because you can still ask the trainer if you have questions, and then study the rest at home.



## Youth perceptions on the challenges of TESDA's blended learning approach

*"Kapag online Ma'am, medyo mahirap po kasi ang internet namin, kung malakas diyan dito mahina. Hindi naman araw-araw lumalakas ang internet dito sa amin."*

Learning online will be a challenge because of our internet connection. Unlike in other places where connection is good, we have poor internet connection. Connection improves only for a few days.

*"Okay naman pero wala akong computer at ang signal nawawala. Meron akong cellphone na magagamit pero ang signal nawawala pa rin."*

It's okay, but I have no computer and the signal here is intermittent. I have a cellphone but the signal is also unsteady.

*"Ang disadvantage po is hindi po siya actual. Like sa pag-aassess sa actual na computer, hindi natin siya magagawa kasi wala po tayong gamit. Kasi online lang. Kung meron kang hindi maintindihan, walang demo na actual kung paano gawin. Pero ang gawin ko nalang, talagang isa-isip ko yung ginagawa namin kahit hindi po palagi."*

The disadvantage is it's not actual. During assessment, in an actual computer, we can't do it because we have no equipment. If I don't understand, there is no actual demonstration on how to go about it. So I think, I just have to keep in mind the actual demonstration even if we don't do it regularly.



## Youth perceptions on the advantages of TOPs

*“At least meron akong magagawa at mapagpatuloy ko ang pag-aaral ako. Mas prefer ko ang TOPs kasi walang personal contact. Less ang risk na mahawa sa sakit. Kasi sa blended, nagta-travel ka pa para magkita kayo. Malaki ang risk na mahawa ng sakit.”*

At least, I can do something and I can continue my studies. I prefer TOPs because there is no personal contact and there's less risk of getting infected. In blended (learning), I have to travel to see each other. There's a big risk of getting infected.

*“Maganda po. Maganda po siya. Kasi nga po online, may pagkakataon kang mag-enroll through Messenger o Facebook. Kahit hindi ka na pumunta sa pag-aaplyan mo po. Para iwas po talaga sa COVID.”*

It's good because it's online and you can enroll through Messenger or Facebook. There's no need to go to a center to apply, avoiding the risk of COVID.

*“They would learn time management and also give them flexible time so kailan nila kayang kunin yung modules, and whenever they have any issues regarding it puede sila makausap, makausap nila yung trainer nila.”*

They would learn time management and also give them flexible time to study their modules, and whenever they have issues, they can talk to the trainer.



## Youth perceptions on challenges with TOPs

*"Minsan po pag walang signal, mahirap din 'yong sa aming barrio. Medyo malayo. Mahirap ang connection. Siguro 'yong problema sa connection talaga. Ang disadvantage naman po nun, mahirap po kasi mag-aral through online lang. Minsan talaga mahirap mag-catch up. So, mahihirapan kang humabol kapag sa lecture walang signal, hindi mo rin maintindihan kasi minsan napuputol."*

Sometimes, there's no signal and that's hard. We live in a remote village and (internet) connection is really a problem. It's difficult to study online. It will be a challenge catching up with the lessons when there's no signal, and it's hard to understand the lesson when you get disconnected.



## Youth Participants' Use of and Access to Information and Communication Technologies

The Youth Profiles and interview responses provide information on the participants' use of and access to communication and information technologies.

### 1. Access to Communications Equipment

Of the 72 respondents, 78% use smart phones. Common interview responses indicate that the study participants use their smart phones not only for calls and text messages, but also for social media, emails, photographs, and other tasks similar to a computer with Internet connectivity. Responses also suggest that the participants do not all own the smart phones that they are using. Some borrow phones from family members (e.g., spouses, parents, siblings) to communicate with others. Some responses indicate that some participants' smart phones are not "high-end," with limited features and capacities to view videos and other online applications.

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the youth participants do not have a computer, laptop, or tablet, indicating that mobile phones may be the only option they have for remote online learning. Twenty percent (20%) of the participants have experience using computers, whereas the rest have no or limited experience with computers.

### 2. Access to Email

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the study participants have email addresses, mostly using Google accounts. Notably, none of the youth participants from Zamboanga City use email, though this may not be representative of Zamboanga City's entire youth population.

### 3. Use of Social Media

All of the study participants are social media users, with Facebook being the most commonly used application among participants. Other popular platforms among the respondents were Instagram and WhatsApp. Common interview responses suggest that the participants use such sites to be informed, communicate informally with others, find people, and share similar interests.

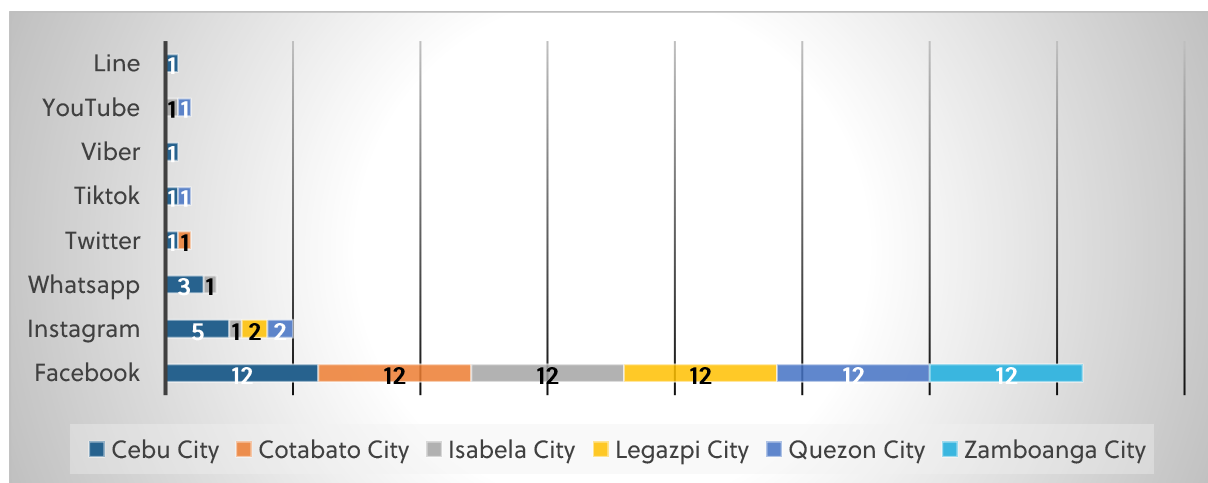


Figure 11. OSY respondents' social media platforms by location

### 4. Use of Web Conferencing Platforms

Seventy-two percent (72%) of the respondents indicated that they use web conferencing platforms, most commonly Facebook Messenger. Though few, some participants indicated that they use Google Meet, Skype, and Zoom. Notably, the participants from Cotabato, Legazpi, and Zamboanga cities



reported not using web-conferencing platforms, though this may not be representative of these cities' youth populations. The study participants reported using such platforms to connect with and 'see' other participants online.

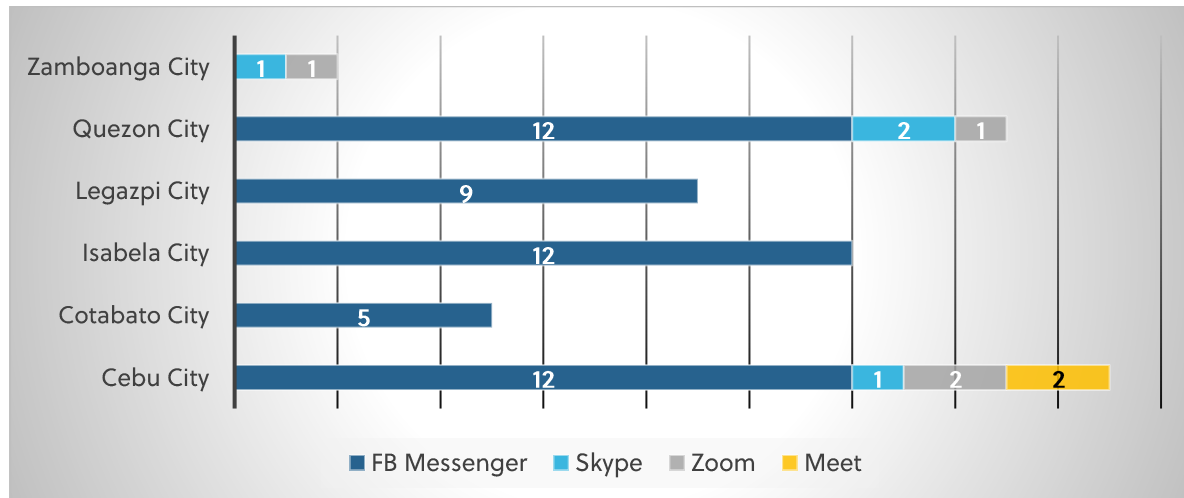


Figure 12. Web conferencing platforms used by OSY respondents

## 5. Internet Connectivity

Eighty-five percent (85%) of the study participants reported being able to connect to the Internet using their mobile data load. Some participants reported that they have WiFi at home (10%), while some use internet cafes outside of their homes (11%). Youth participants' assessments of their Internet connectivity is varied: Internet connection from mobile data load appears to be good, but inadequate, while WiFi at internet cafes appears to be strong and home WiFi can be anywhere from bad to excellent, suggesting that the strength of home WiFi is very relative.

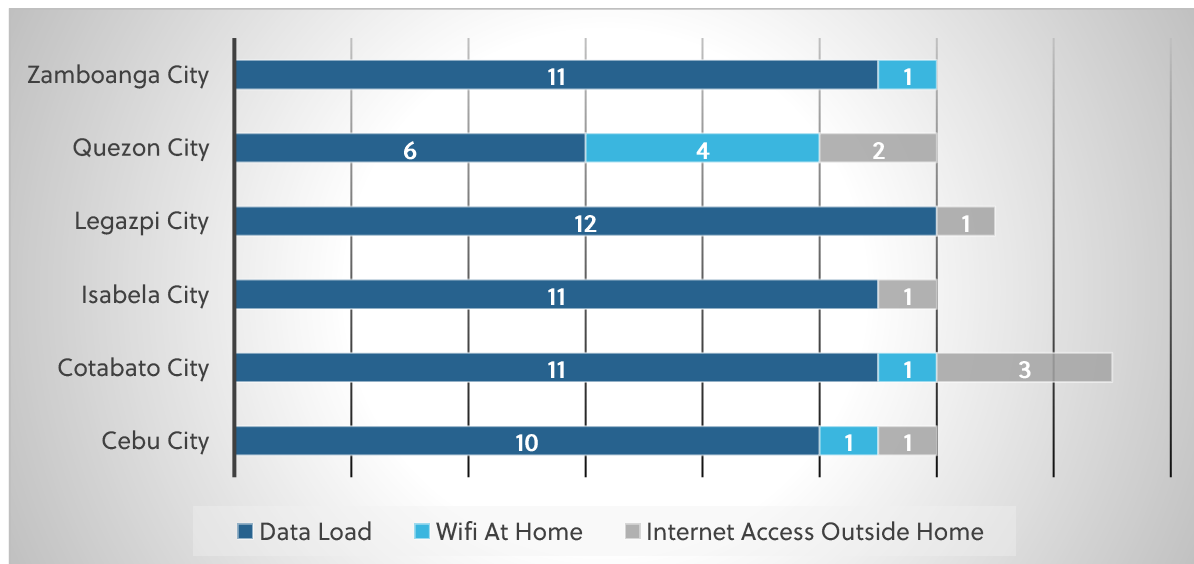


Figure 13. Type of Internet connection used by OSY respondents by location

# V. Key Takeaways and Implications for Youth Programming

## 1. The economic challenges brought on by COVID-19 have shifted the study participants' post-training plans toward a stronger focus on work.

The youth participants in this study identified continuity of both their education and training and their work and livelihoods as aspects of their lives most affected by the COVID crisis.

Interview responses indicate that these youth respondents value education, as their aspirations for themselves and other youth are to complete either an ALS or TESDA skills training. However, because of the economic challenges that most of their families have experienced during the COVID-19 crisis, the respondents have become more inclined to work following completion of their studies, rather than continuing on to the next higher education or training level. Accordingly, the youth participants identified support for their work and livelihoods and for their studies or training as their greatest need.

The interview participants indicate an emerging preference to work both during and after completing their ALS or TESDA skills training, highlighting the importance of strongly integrating work readiness modules into ALS and TESDA skills training curricula, both in terms of content and timing of delivery. Operationally, this may mean introducing transition-to-work curriculum for both wage employment and self-employment early in the ALS A&E curriculum to provide flexibility for youth to explore work-while-studying/training options. The emerging working-while-studying reality has programmatic implications, particularly for ALS, in terms of program design, scheduling, duration, contact hours, modes of learning, pace of learning, and need for flexibility of program study options.

The preference for a study-to-work pathway among the interview respondents also highlights the importance of providing every ALS learner with access to skills training as a component of their program, similar to DepEd's Alternative Learning System-Education Skills Training (ALS-EST) track, an integrated program for academic intervention and skills training. Implemented by DepEd in 2017/18, ALS-EST sought to catch target learners up with basic education and help them acquire technical competencies suitable for employment. USAID Opportunity 2.0 could consider options for an ALS-EST modality, even if only for a subset of learners as a component of the project's learning agenda.

Skills training offerings must be informed by a local labor market assessment that considers the impact of COVID-19 and reduced employment options in sectors like tourism, hotel and restaurant, and other related services. More importantly, preparation for wage employment must be strongly linked and responsive to the specific skills and competencies needed by employers, as already expressed by private sector representatives and employers in USAID Opportunity 2.0 sites, such as by the local chambers of commerce of Davao City, Cagayan de Oro City, and Zamboanga City.

In terms of self-employment, USAID Opportunity 2.0 should focus on building readiness for youth-appropriate, productive, home-based, COVID-responsive entrepreneurial activities, such as online business and agri-oriented marketing, and facilitate access to these opportunities. Equipping youth for self-employment raises the need for the integration of new competencies in the curriculum, such as in online marketing, e-payment, data privacy, cyber safety and protection, or digital citizenship, hence the importance of aligning training content and delivery, as well as Youth Development Alliance (YDA) support, to these emerging self-employment opportunities.

Program responses to COVID-19 should also take gender considerations into account. Male interview participants emphasized their role in providing for their family's financial needs. While these responses may not be representative of all male Opportunity 2.0 youth, they suggest that male youth

may benefit from a learning or training plan that enables income-generating activities early on. Some female interview participants identified early marriage and pregnancy as obstacles to continuing their education, suggesting that childcare options for ALS learners with young children could enable them to complete their course. Likewise, there may be a continuing need for program responses that emphasize responsible adult and youth reproductive health and sex education.

## **2. Incentives could be provided for second-chance and higher education and training.**

While the study participants indicated their interest in pursuing higher level education or training after their ALS or TESDA skills training, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more challenging for them to pursue that track. While the study participants are not necessarily representative of the entire Opportunity 2.0 population, these responses suggest that youth may need to be re-oriented on the long-term and better employment benefits and career advancement opportunities that come with pursuing higher-level education and training. Considering the study participants' financial constraints, monetary incentives for youth continuing to higher education could be provided, such as scholarship programs sponsored by local institutions including the local government. Given the current shift to online and blended learning, these scholarship programs may need to include access to ICT devices and Internet connectivity.

## **3. Awareness could be built among youth and their parents on the options for learning and training in the “new normal.”**

Interview responses suggest that the study participants prefer face-to-face interactions with friends and teachers in centers where they can have access to learning and training materials. Due to the risks associated with COVID-19, the participants expressed an openness to new ways of pursuing their ALS or TESDA skills training, but not without apprehension about the challenges related to the current options. Though the study respondents are not necessarily representative of the Opportunity 2.0 population, their responses suggest that, if left unaddressed, the perceived and real challenges may discourage youth from joining available programs.

As a result, there may be a need to make youth aware that alternative learning modalities can be both engaging and safe. ALS enrolment campaigns, for example, can be enhanced with clear, localized information dissemination on ALS delivery modalities that highlights the advantages or benefits of alternative modes of learning, while addressing perceptions and apprehensions that youth may have. For example, the study participants' positive perceptions about modular/flexible learning could be highlighted in these enrolment campaigns. Likewise, respondents' worries about the safety of Community Learning Center-based eSKWELA programs could be eased if they learn that the physical infrastructure of the centers meets physical distancing and other health and safety requirements. These campaigns could also include advice on how family members can support ALS or blended and online skills training at home to make the home environment more conducive to learning.

Discussions around learning and training options also highlight the importance of training ALS teachers in planning, developing, and using multi-modal instruction to build their capacity in using technology options for learning and assessment tools.

## **4. Youth may need both access to information and communication technology and connectivity and the skills required to use these tools for learning.**

The study's participants were familiar with social media, namely Facebook and Messenger, but had not explored other applications used for online learning. While the respondents may not be representative of the Opportunity 2.0 population, the interviews do suggest a need to address not only youth's limited access to computers and Internet connectivity, but also their lack of skills associated with using these tools for learning.

With universal access to mobile phones and high percentage use of Facebook Messenger and SMS among the study participants, it may be worthwhile to consider using these platforms as tools for learning delivery, learning support by teachers and peers, advocacy and information sharing, networking and peer-to-peer communication, and even learner-level participatory Monitoring and Evaluation. Opportunity 2.0 can pioneer some creative learning modalities using these tools and applications.

#### **5. Strengthening youth's social support systems could be considered as a critical component of programming.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created isolating social and learning environments that have elicited feelings of sadness, uncertainty, and confusion, as well as difficulties in adjusting to new norms among the study participants. Notwithstanding these feelings, the interviews suggest that the study's participants draw strength from their families and possess some basic coping skills that have enabled them to address social and mental health concerns throughout the pandemic. While the respondents are not representative of the entire Opportunity 2.0 population, their responses suggest that programs could consider building on the youth's strong family ties and strengthening their social support systems by exploring interventions that develop youth's emotional wellness and resilience as complements to education and livelihoods programming. A holistic program package will enable youth not only to be productive, but also to navigate and thrive in the world of the "new normal."



# Annex A: Youth Stories

## Listening to the Voices of Out-of-School Youth

Report on Out-of-School Youth Situation, Needs, and  
Continuity of Learning Under the COVID-19 Pandemic



## Basilan youth remains hopeful in the midst of the pandemic

Adzian Saylabi had been out-of-school for five years, and had just recently become a father. He was working his way to becoming self-sufficient when the Philippines ordered a lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 20 year old who lives in Malamawi Island, Basilan in Southern Mindanao, was running a food stall, teaching Islamic studies and was in the process of applying for a scholarship in Saudi Arabia. But the pandemic broke out and disrupted everything, including his plans and livelihood.

"I am upset that I am now unable to provide for my family and have to rely on my parents to support them," he said. Watching the news of the coronavirus raging across the world, Adzian has come to accept that he would have to patiently wait out for the pandemic to be over. But having a baby makes him apprehensive for his family's safety.

"I get scared every time I go to the city for our supplies. I'm afraid of picking the virus and unknowingly bringing it home to my family. When I see my friends while I'm out on errands, I just wave at them from a distance because these days, one can never be sure who's carrying the virus," said Adzian.

Spending time with his family, reading and studying the Quran helps keep his mind off his worries. Watching his daughter grow before his eyes also helps keep his spirits up.

Adzian has decided that when the movement restrictions are lifted, he will enrol in a baking class. His wife, on the other hand, plans to take up sewing. With these new skills, he says, their family will have better options to earn a living. "It seems unlikely that my application to study in Saudi Arabia will push thru anytime soon so I'm thinking that I might as well learn a new skill," he said.

The prospect of learning from home using digital device and the internet, however, worries Adzian. His island community has poor internet connection and experiences blackouts for days. He hopes the local government will do something to improve internet access and power supply in his community. "With Allah's help, I know I will find a way to work out these challenges for my family's future," said Adzian.



## Cotabato Youth's dream undeterred by COVID19



Bai Tara, 22, of Cotabato City in Mindanao had these goals in mind; to finish her studies and find a job. But her biggest dream is to bring her aging mother home from Saudi Arabia where she works as a cleaner in a hospital. Two years after dropping out of school, she availed a government scholarship to study for a diploma in Electronic Engineering Technology, supporting herself by selling plastic wares and beauty products. By all accounts, she was on track to meet her goals, but Bai Tara's life became upended when COVID-19 struck. Now, her education is not only put on hold, her side-hustle which she conducted through in-person transactions also suffered a huge blow.

"As much as I want to go around and find willing buyers, I've been scared to go out. I feel helpless but I have to think of the risks if I go out," she said. The situation was made worse when her siblings lost their jobs and moved back home. With her family in crisis, Bai Tara was forced to switch her focus from her long term goals to her family's daily survival.

In the midst of these challenges, however, she discovers hidden reserves of resourcefulness. "My siblings and I have been thinking of ways to earn money to sustain our daily needs. We've found a way by selling banana chips and an assortment of delicacies. It isn't much, just enough for us to get by. We've also planted vegetables so we don't need to buy them. We should be fine if we just work and stick together," she said.

This crisis, Bai Tara explained, may be one of the hardest that her family ever faced but she's confident that they will pull it through. They have been through a lot of difficulties growing up. When their parents separated and their mother had to leave and work abroad, Bai Tara and her siblings learned to hustle in order to survive.

Reading e-books and keeping a positive attitude, Bai Tara said, are also helping her cope with their situation. She's see no sense in dwelling in negativity, knowing it won't solve their problems. While the crisis is far from over and she's still on survival mode, Bai Tara has not lost sight of her goals of getting an education, finding a job and getting her mother home. She intends to continue with her studies when classes resume. The government's offering of a blended learning options, however, worries her.

"I think online classes is a safe option right now because of the coronavirus. But it will not work for me because I don't have a computer and can't afford to buy one. I might be able to buy a smartphone but I still won't have access to the internet because I live in a remote area. If I have internet access, online learning would be great, because I could study run a small business on the side. While still uncertain how to go about with her studies at this time, Bai Tara remains optimistic. "My goals remain the same even if they have become more difficult to achieve," she said.



## Military-bound Cebu youth persists with plans despite delays due to COVID-19

Daniel Presbitero, 23, of Cebu City, Philippines, was halfway through a four-week short course training in plumbing at the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) when schools were shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic. Daniel is military-bound and the training is a requirement for his application in the Philippine Army. Despite the hold-up in his application, he remains optimistic.

For Daniel, joining the army is not only the fulfillment of a childhood dream. It embodies a fresh start after getting involved with the wrong crowd and that led him to dabble in drugs. So the temporary delay in his application is no more than a small inconvenience. Things are also working well for Daniel who is spending the lockdown at a military camp where he is serving as a reservist. He shared that life inside the camp hardly feels isolating or boring.

"We have physical activities that keep us busy. We exercise daily and we plant trees. The only thing that I'm not happy with is that I am not able to visit my family because we are restricted from going out. I've only gone home once in the last four months," he said. He consoles himself by looking at the situation as part of his training. "Those serving in the military spend most of their time away from their family. So this experience is preparing me for that way of life," he said.

Daniel is excited to resume his skills training and looks forward to learning virtually. "This is a good thing because I don't have to wait for the pandemic to be over to complete my training. We have computers and internet access inside the camp so online learning won't be a problem. I also have free time in the afternoon which I can devote to my class.

The workshops might be challenging though, because there won't be actual demonstration and interaction with the instructor," he said.

Despite the challenge, Daniel is determined to make the most of it and looks forwards to taking the qualifying exams of the Philippine Army in August.

## Alternative learning gives youth hope amidst pandemic

Living in Quezon City, a coronavirus hotspot in the country, is a harrowing experience. More so, for Mark James who has a high risk of contracting and succumbing to the virus. Even before the pandemic, Mark has been living with a weakened immune system.

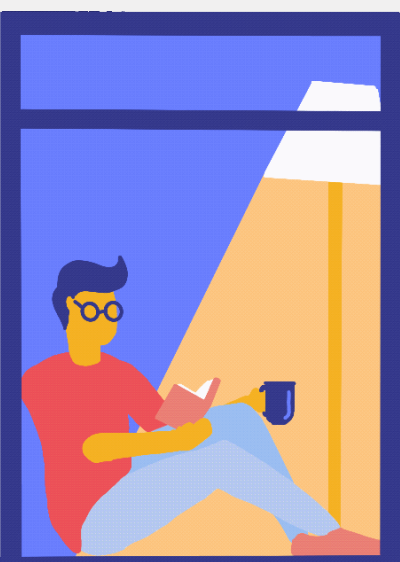
With the added threat of the virus, he has been taking serious precaution by going on a self-imposed isolation since the onset of the pandemic. "I haven't left the house since March and I intend to stay in especially that there are a number of infected individuals living in our community," said Mark.

For the 24 year-old, physical distancing isn't exactly something new. Even before the pandemic, Mark spent most of his time at home and only went out to bring his nieces to class. He didn't go to school due to his weakened condition. But the threat of the coronavirus has made him take social distancing to an extreme.

Watching TV, listening to music and doing house chores are helping him deal with his fears and isolation but, admits that sometimes, boredom hits him too. "I try to shake it off by adding something new to my routine. I try my hand at cooking which is something that I didn't do before. I've also volunteered to do our laundry. I do what I can to help myself. I also remind myself to be grateful for having sisters who have been supportive of my needs," he said.

There are days when he feels like losing hope because of the uncertainty of the future but Mark refuses to give in. "I realized that I need to set a goal for myself because time is short. At 24 years old, I feel the need to achieve something in life and that starts with completing Grade 7. So when I learned about the online classes being offered right now through the Alternative Learning System (ALS), I decided to enroll and take advantage of the chance to continue my studies in the safety of our home," he said.

While he has a smart phone and has access to the internet, Mark worries that it might be challenging to study at home, especially that he is living with young kids at home. But with his mindset on completing his studies, Mark said he will use his nieces' nap time in the afternoon to study. He looks forward for his classes to start in August.





## Cebu youth learns valuable lessons while volunteering during lockdown



When COVID-19 pandemic broke out and closed down schools across the world, John Carl, 16, a Junior High School level ALS learner of Cebu City, was among many young people who found himself stuck at home when his classes were suspended.

The isolation would have been a difficult time, but John decided to make himself productive and joined his community's fight against COVID-19. He volunteered at the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño de Cebu where he, along with other volunteers, make Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers. To date, they have made a total of 2,000 PPE suits and 20,000 face shields. He had practically camped out at the church since March and only went home a few times for safety reasons.

John has been volunteering at the church long before the COVID-19 pandemic. When he was in sixth grade his Boy Scout master invited him to join, and since then, he has been participating in feeding programs, relief work and medical missions. He loves being able to help and enjoys going to different places where they conducted their volunteer activities.

John, however, did not show the same kind of enthusiasm to his studies as he does with volunteer work. Up until the pandemic, he's been struggling to overcome his lack of interest in schooling that had affected his studies since 8th Grade.

"I was always absent because I was too lazy to get up in the morning. I slept in and played with computers the rest of the day," he said. He had to take 8th Grade twice and chose to take the 9th Grade through the Alternative Learning System (ALS) because of its more flexible schedule. But John have had a change of heart while volunteering during the pandemic, thanks to inspiring conversations he had with other volunteers.

"I realized that life is hard so I really need to be serious with my studies to have a better future and to be able to help my family," he said. But continuing his studies during this pandemic seems daunting for John, with classes shifting from face to face to online and radio-based learning.

Jo "I might have problems with online learning because I don't always have phone credit to access the internet. I will have the same problem with learning through the radio because I won't be able to call my teacher if I need to ask questions. I might also find it hard to study on my own," he said.

John favors going to a learning center where a teacher is at hand to provide support and there is free access to the internet. But recalling his friends' advice, John reflects that "all three options are actually good. How much I will learn now really depends on me, on how serious I will be with my studies."



## Isabela youth coping and learning amidst pandemic

When the coronavirus pandemic broke out and shut down schools, twenty year-old Nor-anie Abdullah of Isabela City, Basilan, went from having classes throughout the week to nothing. Before classes were cancelled, she was studying as a Junior High School through the Alternative Learning Systems and on weekends, she attended Islamic classes. The disruption in her routine, however, didn't affect her. Nor-anie, who describes herself as a homebody, is enjoying her free time at home while on lockdown.

"I've been learning to cook new recipes and I've been doing a lot of reading," she said. Having more time on her hands has also given her the opportunity to bond with her family and cousins. "We eat and do things together. We didn't get to do this before because we've been busy with our own schedules," she added.

Having more time at home also allowed her family to engage in serious conversations, something that they were not used to. "We were close as a family, but we were not as open as we are now. I think we have grown closer since the lockdown," she said. Connecting with her friends virtually and keeping a positive mindset also keep her spirit up. "I find it easier to cope by focusing on my relationship with my family and appreciating my time with them instead feeling bad with being stuck at home," she said.

Nor-anie also had the time to reflect on the things that she took for granted before the pandemic. "I realized that I can't take back time but I can make up for it by being productive when given another chance," she said. And Nor-anie intends to make the most of her time by going back to school when classes resume. She will, however, need to make adjustments when classes shift to radio and online learning as part of the government's plan to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"Both are safe and convenient options right now but I'm not sure if they will be effective for me. It would be challenging to study at home with all the distractions. I prefer face-to-face interaction with the teacher and my classmates because I learn more when we discuss and share our thoughts."

"I think, learning through the radio will be a better option than online learning because, though there is no actual interaction, I still get to hear my teacher's voice. It also helps knowing that others are learning at the same time with you," she said.

Nor-anie said she is most likely to attend classes at learning centers which offers a mix of both online and face to face classes. This option gives students access to modules online and learn at their own pace with the added benefit of having a teacher around to provide support when needed. Regardless of the option that she will eventually choose, Nor-anie said she looks forward to going back to school and finish Junior High.



## Legazpi youth stays productive to help family survive the pandemic

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to devastate lives and livelihoods across the world, families living without social safety nets, find their very survival at stake. Among those fighting to stay afloat is Myla Llorca's family in Legazpi City, Philippines.

Before the pandemic, 22 year-old Myla, a former out of school youth, was enrolled as a freshman in a Computer Servicing course. She juggled her time between her studies, her job as a student assistant and her duties as an elected youth leader in her community. Like most young people her age, she enjoyed hanging out with her friends, poring over school projects and planning community activities.

When the pandemic hit and movement restrictions were put in place, Myla's school and community activities abruptly came to a halt. Stuck at home, she didn't know what to do with herself. "I was missing school and my friends. I got so bored because I had nothing to entertain myself with and couldn't connect with my friends because I lost my phone," she said.

But her boredom quickly gave way to worry when pandemic brought her family into a financial crisis. Her family's vegetable farm started losing money and her brother became unemployed. With the looming threat of hunger over their heads, Myla decided to help her family. Since the lockdown in March, she has been taking part in the government's reforestation project in her community. The initiative, which went on even during the lockdown, provides employment for youth like her over the summer holidays.

"I work from seven in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon. With my daily earnings of P400, I am able to buy rice for my family," she said. For now, her family has managed to keep hunger at bay. "I decided to do something and help my family. I realized that we can't rely on others at this times because they are also affected by the pandemic. In the process, I learned to appreciate the value of hard work and learned to save," she said, adding that she had been able to save some amount from her earnings to buy a new phone in anticipation of doing online classes.

The job likewise helped Myla overcome her disappointment of having her summer plans cancelled. She was supposed to hold a feeding activity and a summer class for out of school youth in her community. She also found a way to reconnect with her friends by inviting them to work with her. "Before the pandemic, my friends and I spent so much time on our phones. The crisis forced us to step up to help our families and make better use of our time," she said.

While Myla have been focused on ensuring her family's survival, she have also been thinking about how she would continue with her studies. When presented with the distance learning options that the government plans to offer during the pandemic, she finds online classes to be the safest option. However, she expressed uncertainty how it will work for her.

"I think it's a good thing because we won't be exposed to the virus but the problem is, we have poor internet signal in my community. Also, I might not always have the money to pay for internet access," she said. She went on to share that when she recently took her final exams for her course, she had to stop halfway through because her phone ran out of internet credit.

"I'm not the type to give up easily when faced with a challenge. I'll find a way to make it work because I really want to finish my studies, find a job and help my family," she said.



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OCTOBER 2020



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## USAID OPPORTUNITY 2.0

*Second-Chance Opportunities for Out-of-School Youth*

