

CASE STORY

Young, stay-at-home mom learns agribusiness online

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“Para po sa kagaya kong out-of-school youth, mahirap po talaga na makahanap ng trabaho o makapagsimula ng kahit maliit lang na pagkakakitaan. Hindi po talaga namin alam kung paano magsisimula,” recalls 20-year-old Rosselle Amancio, who is a stay-at-home mom.

(For us out-of-school youth, it is difficult to look for a job or even start a small business. We really don't know how to begin.)

When COVID-19 hit the Philippines, the vulnerable youth was disproportionately affected. Their access to education and training was discontinued as communities went into lockdowns and quarantines, worsening their already vulnerable conditions.

In response to this, the “Youth Access to TESDA Online Programs” was launched in select cities across the Philippines, including Zamboanga City. The project is an offshoot of Opportunity 2.0, a collaborative youth development program of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with local stakeholders including the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Through this project, out-of-school youth (OSY) are enjoined into the TESDA Online Program (TOPs), provided free online tech-voc and work readiness trainings as well as loaned tablets and community-based facilitators to support their training process.

The local Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council) disseminated information about this initiative in local barangays (villages) and Rosselle quickly signed up, taking up Basic Urban Gardening in TOPs.

The farmer population in Zamboanga is aging, and with the unceasing COVID-19 pandemic, the number of out-of-school youth is also growing since more students are leaving school for work. For most of them, poverty has become an even bigger obstacle as they needed to leave school to help with expenses, but finding jobs also proved to be difficult.

The Youth Development Alliance, led by the City government, along with the barangay and youth councils, have identified that agriculture courses are most in-demand among TOPs learners. So, in addition to their online classes with TESDA, the City Agriculturist Office added a hands-on training component for the OSY, through Kids Who Farm, a local food production and education initiative.



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"We have the potential to sustain agricultural development given the vast farmlands and other resources, and we want the youth to be more involved," says City Agriculturist Arben Magdugo. "USAID Opportunity 2.0 has helped us in motivating and encouraging the youth to really appreciate agriculture. This partnership helped us to reach out to more youth, and have them take part more in the agri-fishery sector."



Kids Who Farm have established community gardens and promotes urban gardening in barangays within Zamboanga City.

Youth who complete TOPs will receive certifications from the City Agriculturist Office and, following TESDA's assessment, can also receive national certificates, which will better their chances for employment or entrepreneurship after the training.

As of May 2021, a total of 40 OSY have signed up for TOPs in Zamboanga, half of them are currently learning about soft skills needed in the world of work and the basics of starting your own business. Work exposure and immersion as well as peer coaching, are also part and an added value of Opportunity 2.0 to TOPs.

"Noong nakapasok po ako sa TOPs, natutunan ko po na ito ang makakatulong sa akin upang makahanap ako ng pagkakakitaan para sa aming pangangailangan araw-araw, kaya hanggang ngayon palagi pa rin po akong sumasali sa aming klase," Rosselle says. (When I joined TOPs, I learned that this program could really help me find a source of income that could help finance our daily needs, so I make sure to continue learning and join all classes.)

"What we're trying to instill in them is not for them to be a worker in any of our established farms here (in Zamboanga City), but for them to start their own. The reason why we are equipping them technically, why they are really exposed to hands-on training, is for them to gain that experience," Mr. Magdugo says. The City has already anticipated the youth's limited access to capital after they finish training, and in response, they have already readied loan options to help jumpstart their own projects, with the help of the local Department of Agriculture.

"Malaking tulong po talaga [ito] sa akin dahil dati po wala po akong alam kung paano magsimula ng sarili kong garden. Pero ngayon po, mas nagustuhan ko na ang pagtanim at kung mabibigyan po ng pagkakataon, gusto ko pong magsimula ng maliit na garden dito sa bahay naming," says Roselle. (This helps a lot because back then, I did not have any idea how to start my own garden. Now, I have grown to like gardening more and if given the chance, I would also like to start my own Hydroponics garden at home.)

Opportunity 2.0 is a five-year (2020-2025) program that will improve the learning and earning outcomes of out-of-school Filipino youth by working with key stakeholders from government, industry and academia to strengthen the education, training and employment systems at the national and local level. These include DepEd's enhanced Alternative Learning Systems program, TESDA's skills training programs, and local government programs for youth.