

## SUCCESS STORIES

# Young leader in QC uses her voice to let marginalized youth be heard



Out-of-school youth are often overlooked when local actors create intervention programs to help those needing upskilling, jobs, and assistance for schooling. When youth can bring their ideas to the table, these programs can be better tailored specific to local conditions. Through Youth Development Alliance (YDA) mechanisms, youth are empowered as they are involved in dialogues and decision-making for local youth programs.

"It's important to involve the youth when making decisions for them. They have the right to voice out their opinions and aspirations," said 24-year old Elena, a young mother and budding entrepreneur from Quezon City. Like many out-of-school youth, Elena is unable to participate in formal education as she needs to support her family.



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— Elena, 24  
Youth Leader, Quezon City



She joined USAID's Opportunity 2.0 program to access more work and business readiness training. As she underwent more sessions, she found herself enjoying collaborating with other out-of-school youth from her community. She was eventually, elected as a youth representative to the Youth Development Alliance in Quezon City.

The YDA is an organization of youth-serving actors composed of national and local government offices, youth organizations, private sector actors, and youth representatives. In 2016, Quezon City recorded at least 600,000 OSY. USAID trains OSY to be leaders in their community, serving as the bridge between the YDA and their fellow youth.

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"I didn't think much of the [YDA] meetings at first; then I noted how YDA members welcomed and listened to our advocacies." Elena took the opportunity to invite her peers to sign up for the program and receive training to advance their life skills to help them pursue higher education, employment, or start their own businesses.

Part of USAID's Opportunity 2.0 program is providing leadership training and volunteer opportunities to fulfill out-of-school youth's full potential. Here, they collaborate with communities on environmental advocacy activities, information dissemination on critical issues faced by the youth, and many more activities that develop their communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.



**I used to be so shy that I couldn't speak in front of so many people. With Opportunity 2.0, I gained confidence and a positive self-identity. As a youth leader, I wanted to give my fellow youth a voice and have them participate in trainings to build their skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem."**

— Elena, 24  
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Currently, Quezon City has 180 youth leaders who conduct community mapping surveys to help the YDA understand the youth's situation at the grassroots level. "As youth reps, we learn about these problems from our interactions with our fellow OSY. We then share our suggested solutions to the YDA. It's good because we know that our voices are heard somehow."

During these interactions, youth leaders like Elena learned youth in Quezon City is hindered by financial constraints. When schools switched to online classes during the pandemic, the demand for internet connection and gadgets that can accommodate distance learning software arose. This affected poor households and has prompted many youths to put their studies to a halt.

"When working with the youth, you really have to listen and understand their plight. The youth aren't just symbols of the country's hope and future. We are the primary agents of change and progress. It's important to have a Youth Development Alliance that could give programs that promote youth development and hope." With USAID support, the Quezon City YDA, together with youth leaders, continues to develop the local ecosystem so that more OSY are given the help they need for their chosen career paths and more businesses and organizations recognize their value in the workforce.

Opportunity 2.0 is a five-year (2020-2025) program that aims to improve the learning and earning outcomes of out-of-school Filipino youth by working with key stakeholders in government, industry and academia to strengthen education, training, and employment systems at national and local levels.