



Meeting the Potential of Out-of-School Youth in the Philippines: The Experience of Opportunity 2.0



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LEARNING AND EVALUATION

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CASE STUDY FOCUS	Opportunity 2.0
FUNDER	USAID/Philippines
LEAD COUNTRY STAKEHOLDERS	Philippines Department of Education; Philippines Technical Education and Skills Development Authority; and 15 city and local government units (LGU) in Metro Manila, Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao island groupings
LEAD IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	Education Development Center
YEARS	2020-2025, with USAID education and youth activities from 2004
SCALE	National education system reform with a focus on school-to-work transitions for out-of-school youth (OSY) with aims to: reach 180,000 OSY with education and employability services, train 2,000 teachers, and strengthen the capacity of 2,200 employers.
KEY REFORMS Look out for these key reforms throughout the case study	<p>Reforms sustained by multiple levels of the Government of the Philippines include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Bureau for Alternative Education to address the needs of out-of-school youth (OSY) more comprehensively through the Alternative Learning System (ALS). • Integration of life skills into the ALS. • Creation of Youth Development Alliances (YDAs) as multi-stakeholder platforms at the city level to increase, coordinate, and improve learning and earning opportunities for OSY. • Upgrading of the ALS to include senior high school level.

A note about this case study

This case study is one of three case studies developed as part of the USAID-funded research study: Better Youth Workforce Development Outcomes through Sustainable Systems Reform. This research aims to contribute to the evidence base on how systems approaches can support improved, scaled, and more sustainable youth workforce development (YWFD) outcomes in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Using systems-aware methodologies, each case study describes and analyzes an initiative which took a systems approach to improving YWFD outcomes sustainably and at scale. In addition to the case studies, this research also produced a synthesis report summarizing findings across all the initiatives and providing recommendations for how to design and implement more effective and sustainable YWFD Activities.

For more information on the methodology and cross-country findings and recommendations, please see the Synthesis Report and other case studies.



Photo credit: YouthPower2: Learning and Evaluation

Key Stakeholder and Initiative Acronyms

ALS	Alternative Learning System
ALS SHS	Alternative Learning System Senior High School
BAE	Bureau for Alternative Education
DepEd	Department of Education
HERO	Higher-level Education or Training Readiness Orientation
LGU	Local Government Unit
O2	Opportunity 2.0
OSY	Out-of-school Youth
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
YDA	Youth Development Alliance



OVERVIEW

The Opportunity 2.0 Program (O2), funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), supports large-scale strengthening of systems for out-of-school youth (OSY) to gain access to education, employment, and livelihood opportunities in the Philippines (2020-2025).¹ An ambitious multi-stakeholder activity, O2 was co-designed with two governmental agencies: the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), in partnership with employment-oriented governmental agencies.² The multi-level initiative links the work of national government entities with local government units (LGUs) in 15 cities. **This coupling of national and place-based strategies has enabled a dramatic scaling and extension of support to OSY** as they navigate return to school, or transition from school to employment or entrepreneurship.

Building on lessons learned from three previous USAID education and youth activities³ on the conflict-affected island of Mindanao, **O2 was designed to provide implementation support for priorities already established by the Government of the Philippines.** One of these priorities was the creation of a governmental bureau within the DepEd (the Bureau of Alternative Education) dedicated to the specific needs of the OSY youth population. This newly established governmental bureau would lead the reform initiative known as the ALS 2.0, an upgrade to the existing Alternative Learning System (ALS). The ALS, in conjunction with city-level public-private partnership platforms, called Youth Development Alliances (YDAs), share the responsibility of re-engaging and skilling young people who have dropped out of the education system and preparing them to transition to the labor market or further education.

Alternative Learning System

In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) is “a parallel learning system...that provides opportunities for out-of-school children in special cases, youth, and adults to develop basic and functional literacy skills and access pathways to complete basic education despite economic, geographic, political, cultural or social barriers.”⁴ The current ALS system includes:

1. Basic Literacy Program: reading, writing, numeracy;
2. Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program: nationally-administered test designed to measure the competencies and life skills of those who have never attended or finished elementary or secondary education;
3. Life Skills for Work Readiness and Civic Engagement Program;
4. Academic-Focused Bridging Program: continuing learning opportunities to the A&E Test secondary-level passers to transition to tertiary-level education or post-secondary vocational training.⁵

This case study demonstrates the importance of linking two reform processes: one that is a “vertical reform” (cascading government service delivery systems) to another that is a “horizontal reform” (multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration).

The vertical reforms include curricular and pedagogical improvements to alternative formal education services for OSY through the DepEd system. The horizontal reform involves the creation of local multi-stakeholder partnerships platforms (YDAs) that catalyze an array of social services, employment, and civic engagement opportunities for OSY in their cities. O2 has been instrumental in helping to link these two reform processes by leveraging new Philippines policy and legal frameworks that enable incentives, resources, and sustainability for large-scale systems change, as well as providing targeted capacity development efforts by O2 international partners.

VERTICAL

Cascading government service delivery systems

Single-sector, line ministry work to improve services

HORIZONTAL

Multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration

Linking of diverse, multi-sectoral stakeholders for cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration



Photo credit: Clare Ignatowski



The Context for Reform: Enabling Factors and Rising Expectations

Understanding the OSY challenge. The Philippines has struggled for many years with a large number of OSY and unemployed youth. As of 2020, almost 17 percent of the youth population (age 15-24) was not in education, employment, or training,⁶ and school dropout rates were increasing. The ALS⁷ had served as the main second-chance education system for out-of-school children, youth, and adults since the 1990's. However, it was under-resourced and reached a relatively small number of learners who could not attend regular schooling. Filipino education and private sector leaders became interested in supporting reform efforts after they realized the skills of their young labor force were not keeping pace with the needs of the global, regional, and national labor markets.⁸

Forming a new vision. Political and technical leaders also understood the need to shift the ALS from its previous focus on functional literacy for low-skill workers to a lifelong learning system that is both flexible and learner-centered. In 2019, a comprehensive ALS reform agenda (known as ALS 2.0) was established by the DepEd to strengthen the quality, accessibility, relevance, and governance of the ALS as a parallel learning

system to formal schooling. This system would anticipate and facilitate a wide variety of pathways for young people of diverse backgrounds and different education and employment aspirations. To ensure that youth complete secondary education—widely considered a prerequisite to the upper-middle-income country status, to which the Philippines aspires⁹—was best achieved by utilizing multiple on-and off-ramps for learning experiences of varying length and focus.

Shifting mindsets. Three evolving mindset shifts have underpinned this reform effort. First was the belief that OSY youth are not “disposable,” but instead could contribute to the economy if properly prepared. The second major shift was to intentionally focus resources on the specific needs of OSY, taking into account their unique life conditions. The third mindset shift was the growing awareness that traditional education delivery systems alone were not equipped to adequately prepare youth for employment and that new collaboration models at the local level were needed. These mindset shifts fueled the reform process and are outlined in more detail in the following section.



Evolution of the Reform Process

How did these enabling factors and rising expectations facilitate youth workforce development system change in the Philippines? This system reform story involves the interaction between the vertical reform process of cascading government service delivery systems like the ALS with the horizontal reform process of the multi-stakeholder collaboration of the YDAs. Together, these processes share the responsibility of re-engaging and skilling young people who have dropped out of the education system and preparing them to transition to the labor market—a notably complex function.

Moving from vision to strategy. Although non-formal education had existed in the Philippines since 1948,¹⁰ and was renamed the ALS in 2004, it was relatively stagnant until 2016 when government leaders called for the Philippines to catch up to the economic progress of its Southeast Asian neighbors. The Philippines Secretary of Education at that time, Leonor

Briones, was committed to upgrading the ALS and brought on G.H. Ambat¹¹ as Assistant Secretary within the Department of Education focused on overseeing the revitalization of the ALS. After conducting key studies on the Philippines' ALS and labor market skills,¹² the World Bank provided technical assistance to develop the ALS 2.0 Strategic Roadmap (2019-2024) in coordination with regional partner SEAMEO INNOTECH.¹³ The Roadmap had three pillars: increasing access, improving quality and relevance, and strengthening management and governance. These strategic system-strengthening components enabled work at the curricular development and programmatic levels; including improving various modalities for student access to learning (blended learning, ICT-, audio-, radio-assisted delivery), expanding the number of learning competencies in the ALS, and increasing the number of teachers from hundreds to thousands.



Photo credit: O2/EDC

Passing a new law. Building on the shifts in government strategic plans, in December 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic when youth access to education was at risk, the President signed into law the Alternative Learning System Act. The law authorized the creation of a new Bureau of Alternative Education (BAE) within the DepEd and brought the ALS under BAE's control. The signing of the law marked an important moment when the DepEd formally recognized the specialized needs of out-of-school learners and opened the door to thinking and working differently to meet those needs. The BAE strengthened the alternative learning teaching labor force by creating teaching positions aligned to the civil service salary grade scale, supporting the creation of pre- and in-service professional development, and providing access to teaching materials tailored to the needs of rural and other marginalized populations, including learners who are Indigenous and/or living with disabilities. The law also outlined the need for expanded

Key Reform: In 2020 the law authorized the creation of a new Bureau of Alternative Education (BAE) within the DepEd that formally recognizes the specialized needs of out-of-school learners.

partnerships between the DepEd and LGU, other national government agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations, and removed legal barriers to greater integration of services for youth. Furthermore, the law allowed Special Education Funds,¹⁴ both controlled and generated by the LGUs, to be spent for ALS services. Overall, from the 2016-2017 to the 2021-2022 school year, the ALS 2.0 reform effort reached 4.2 million learners. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ALS had a 95 percent higher annual rate of enrollment than over the 2005-2015 period.¹⁵

ALS Enrollment

ALS 2.0
2016-2022



4.2m

learners reached

The ALS 2.0 had a 95% higher annual rate of enrollment compared to the 2005-2015 period



95%



From Policy to Action: Making Systems Reforms Work for Youth

New laws, policies, regulations, and bureaucratic structures laid an essential foundation for systems reform to gain momentum as more resources and partners became interested and available to implement reforms at different levels. This foundation enabled the government, with the support of USAID and other actors, to develop critical improvements to curriculum, pedagogy, and educational service delivery for all youth, as well as partnerships with entities beyond the basic education system to support these reforms.

Evolving toward inclusion of OSY and valuing of life skills through a proof of concept to be scaled throughout the Philippines. Life skills were increasingly recognized by system actors as critical throughout the past decade of ALS and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) curricular and pedagogical reform. As elsewhere in the world, employers in the Philippines expressed that young people did not possess the 21st century life skills businesses need, such as communication, teamwork, and self-initiative. This was attributed to a gap between the skills employers called for and those provided by the formal or non-formal education system. The DepEd benefited from investments made by USAID on the island of Mindanao that began in 2004 under a progressive series of USAID-funded activities—EQuALLS, EQuALLS2, and MYDev—fostering an ecosystem that utilizes the resources and partners available. These projects played a valuable role in research and development, exploring innovations in youth development and piloting them in the Philippines context. While a primary purpose of these activities was to stem conflict on the island of Mindanao by preventing youth radicalization, lead implementers¹⁶ developed several innovations with wider value: life skills learning materials and methods, an approach to local partnership

development, and, perhaps most importantly, a new mindset about inclusion and the value of re-engaging disconnected youth. The curriculum and partnership modalities in Mindanao served as a proof-of-concept for strengthening alternative learning for marginalized youth throughout the Philippines.

Introducing a holistic youth development lens. During this exploratory phase, one source of inspiration came from the US-based Search Institute. Its Developmental Assets Profile (DAP), which was pilot-tested with Mindanaoan OSY under the EQuALLS2 activity, introduced a holistic youth development framework that emphasized cultivating youth assets within a supportive school and community environment. Part of strengthening the quality of the ALS curriculum meant integrating the basic education curriculum, which focused on functional literacy, with life skills—the foundational cognitive, behavioral, and social skills youth needed for productive livelihoods and transition to adult life in their communities. The concepts reflected in the DAP have much in common with USAID's Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework.¹⁷ By 2023, in partnership with DepEd and the Department of Trade and Industry, O2 had scaled two work-readiness trainings: Work-Based Learning and Be Your Own Boss. Beginning with 15 cities, the scale-up involved training 3,196 ALS teachers and has since reached 122 cities and school division offices nationwide.

Part of strengthening the quality of the ALS curriculum meant integrating the basic education curriculum with life skills—the foundational cognitive, behavioral, and social skills youth needed for productive livelihoods and transition to adult life in their communities.

Training Focus: Work-Based Learning and Be Your Own Boss



122

Cities and school divisions reached



3,196

Teachers trained

Creating education services for OSY to reach higher-skilled jobs.

Among the most significant shifts in ALS reform was raising the bar from functional literacy and numeracy for OSY and adults to a closer alignment with the curriculum of the formal school system. No longer assuming OSY were destined for lower-skilled employment or self-employment, the new system opened pathways to higher-skilled employment and greater opportunities for tertiary education. This shift enabled OSY to complete basic education with a recognized credential and also laid the foundation for building academic bridging and career guidance services to support transitions to tertiary education and mid-level vocational training. In 2022, the Asian Development Bank provided technical assistance to BAE to develop an ALS Senior High School (SHS) “contextualized curriculum.”¹⁸ That same year, DepEd began limited pilots of an ALS SHS

program with rapid expansion, so that by 2023 over 600 ALS SHS programs were operational. O2 supported capacity-building workshops for ALS trainers on the contextualized ALS SHS curriculum and provided ongoing policy support for the new ALS SHS program. For example, the DepEd BAE received technical assistance from O2 to create the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the 2020 ALS Law (Republic Act 11510) and policy issuances to operationalize the ALS Law provisions in areas such as ALS Senior High School, portfolio assessment, teaching aids and transportation allowances for ALS teachers, and recognition of the non-DepEd ALS implementing partners.

Building pathways to higher education for OSY.

By 2023, O2 had initiated the scaling of HERO (Higher-level Education or Training Readiness Orientation), which was led by 44 higher education institutions (HEI) in 12 cities. Building on the ALS SHS curriculum, HERO serves as a transition support program for OSY. This two-day program is designed to provide orientation to ALS junior high completers, introducing them to the range of education and training programs available, along with information about financial and other supportive resources. This programming is made possible through strategic partnerships between the higher education institutions that had a goal of community extension and the YDAs, which, as local multisectoral platforms, had a mission of building pathways for continuing education, employment, and entrepreneurship for OSY.

What is YDA? Enabled by the ALS Act and the 2016 Sangguniang Kabataan (meaning “Youth Council”) Act, YDAs were established through local ordinances or formal memoranda of understanding. Youth representatives served on the YDA and actively contributed their perspectives and priorities as outlined in the law.

Mandate for new city-level multi-stakeholder partnership platforms.

Beginning in 2016, the MYDEV activity piloted a new partnership modality called the Youth Development Alliance (YDA) in eight sites in Mindanao to offer critical training and post-training support to OSYs. YDAs are usually led by the mayor’s office and the city Youth Development Office and involve city or regional representatives of national line agencies,¹⁹

chambers of commerce, and local government units.²⁰ These YDAs fostered partnerships with HEIs, the private sector, and other local stakeholders with the goal of re-engaging OSY in the community and supporting their transition to education, training, employment, and entrepreneurship.²¹ Early indicators of the positive impact of YDAs on facilitating youth employment in Mindanao contributed to the design of a follow-on activity, O2, in 2020. Enabled by the ALS Act and the 2016 *Sangguniang Kabataan* (meaning “Youth Council”) Act, YDAs were established through local ordinances or formal memoranda of understanding. Youth representatives served on the YDA and actively contributed their perspectives and priorities as outlined in the law. Additionally, barangays, local governance units at the village or neighborhood level, actively participated in the YDAs, reinforcing their recognition that youth are both contributors to

2022-2023

ALS SHS Programs Operational

↑ 600+

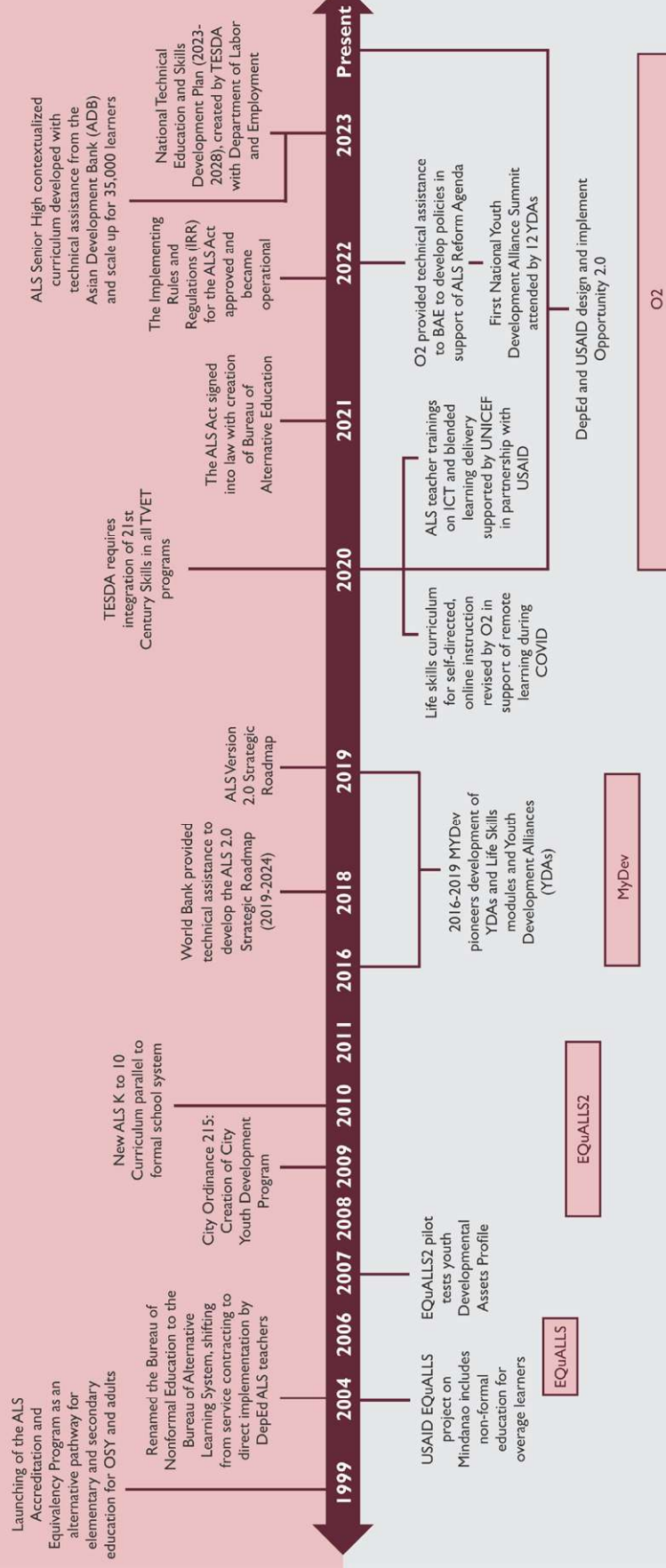
and beneficiaries of their community’s economic progress. O2 works to enhance understanding of optimal governance structures for YDAs through technical support that strengthens stakeholder collaboration. With the aim of expanding the reach of the YDAs nationwide, O2 has already supported the expansion of YDAs in 15 cities throughout the country.



Photo credit: YouthPower2: Learning and Evaluation

Timeline

PHILIPPINES COUNTRY MILESTONES





Findings and Implications

Systems change efforts are multi-faceted; they involve the contribution of various system actors over time, working across diverse domains. To analyze these processes, this case study utilizes the categories of systems change described by the [Youth Systems FrameworkSM](#) (see the Synthesis Report for more detail). These categories include **domains** (fields in which change occurs) defined as **policy; services and practice; norms and mindsets; and resource flows**—as well as **enablers** (actions taken to nudge the system to change) defined as **stakeholder collaboration; vision and goals; system mapping; capacity development; and data, learning and evaluation**. Each finding below is marked with an icon designating the predominant domain or enabler from the Youth Systems Framework,SM with recognition that most involve other domains and enablers as well.



Vision and Goals

Building on national government priorities can further a shift in mindsets that aligns system actors at multiple levels and promotes meaningful collaboration. Government priorities evolved from the awareness that the skills of the young labor force did not match the needs of the labor markets. This was especially true for OSY who would benefit from a lifelong learning system that was flexible and learner-centered, rather than the prior system that focused primarily on functional literacy. The government worked across agencies and involved partners to meet the needs of the private sector and support targeted capacity development and coordination efforts for both vertical and horizontal reforms. As these structures gained momentum, additional partners noticed and bought into this vision, such as the World Bank's support of the ALS 2.0 Strategic Roadmap and the Asian Development Bank's support of the ALS SHS curriculum. Once O2 became involved, the activity built upon lessons learned from earlier USAID education and youth activities, which facilitated understanding and support of existing government priorities. With increased collaboration between government agencies, donor institutions, and local stakeholders, as well as technical support provided by O2, the foundation for enhancing the ALS and creating the BAE was established.



Implications

A clear vision across system actors is not only crucial for achieving workforce development targets, but also key to sustaining initiatives and bringing in partners to scale efforts. Ensuring that stakeholders at multiple levels see their potential role in the reform process can help foster a shared vision and sustainable collaboration.



Policy

Policy with accompanying regulation has been important for building stakeholder buy-in and ensuring sustainability across political administrations. There has been a continuous growth process in the DepEd ALS and TESDA reforms across four presidential administrations, due in part to the stability of policy. Both policy and regulation enable inter-agency collaboration, including for the YDAs through municipal or city ordinances, and have provided direction and focus for youth programming from different stakeholders; including donors, the private sector, academia, and civil society. For example, O2 provided technical assistance to operationalize ALS Law provisions to support teachers and non-DepEd ALS implementing partners. TESDA received technical assistance from O2 in crafting its 5-year roadmap known as the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan for 2023-2028. This plan outlines the strategic directions of TESDA as it fulfills its mandate to provide high-quality technical-vocational skills training. O2 discovered that the lengthy approval process for new policies within the governmental bureaucracy meant it needed to scale back the number of policy reforms it could support and focus more on organizational capacity and program development that did not require formal approval and fit better within the short-term activity horizon.



Implications

When supporting the reform process, balancing long-term policy goals with short-term technical assistance can promote policy development beyond activity cycles and across political administrations. Policy and strategy processes are important for long-term sustainability of improved OSY programming.



Capacity Development

Tailored, locally-driven capacity strengthening can support organizational reform of the public sector to keep pace with new policy on evolving workforce preparation needs. Full implementation of the ALS Act relied on the capacity of the newly formed Bureau to lead the reform by creating and overseeing standards. It was further supported by the political and technical actors who championed this reform and accompanying capacity strengthening support. In 2020, the newly formed BAE created by virtue of the ALS Act, received technical assistance from O2's international consortium partners.²² The organizational capacity strengthening strategies offered by O2 partners helped the Bureau staff identify critical organizational system gaps and priority capacity development needs and interventions. An adapted version of USAID's Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool²³ enabled the BAE to assess and monitor its own organizational development across seven dimensions. O2 provided executive coaching and mentoring for BAE senior and middle managers to support the change management process. O2 also supported BAE leadership on urgent management tasks, which included providing input into the design and administration of a national inventory of ALS Community Learning Centers needed for financing from the Government of the Philippines for necessary renovations and construction. Similarly, O2 supported TESDA administrators

and decision-makers in fostering forward thinking to guide the institution into the next decade and to craft a comprehensive 5-year strategic direction and plan. Capacity development was a system-wide endeavor that went beyond direct support to government ministries, including ALS and TESDA teacher professional development in new curricula in life skills, entrepreneurship, and work-based learning. The effort is ongoing: in 2024-25, O2 regional partner, SEAMEO INNOTECH, will develop and pilot an ALS teacher induction program through a blended delivery modality for 700 teachers each year as part of the BAE's enhanced teacher deployment strategy.



Implications

In stable operating contexts, international donors should look for ways to support the improvement of public sector infrastructure so that new policies and programs can be more effectively and efficiently implemented by governments. This means increasing activity focus on capacity development as opposed to service delivery because an over-investment in service delivery can carry the risk of outrunning country capacity to sustain implementation once donor funding ends. Capacity development assessment tools, such as the OCA, can help local stakeholders—including governments—analyze their own capacity and identify gaps, needs, and priorities for areas of improvement or strengthening that support their goals.



Photo credit: O2/EDC



Services and Practice

The shared value attributed to life skills opened doors for collaboration to improve services for youth. There was broad consensus among stakeholders that 21st century life skills were critical for youth's success. ALS teachers were aware of the complex challenges that many of their students faced at home and in other facets of their lives and knew that life skills could help them cope and thrive. These insights were backed up by data from MyDev, which showed that youth who had gone through a life skills program before the ALS academic program had higher completion rates and better performance in the ALS. Employers also expressed that youth often lacked the critical life skills – such as communication, teamwork, and self-initiative – that they needed to be successful in the workplace, and young people themselves described life skills as central to helping them achieve their goals. As a result, the BAE's decision to integrate life skills into the ALS basic education curriculum served as a proof point for the BAE's responsiveness to stakeholder priorities and helped reinforce trust and momentum for further collaboration. USAID investments, primarily through O2 and in collaboration with UNICEF, provided critical, strategic technical assistance to put this initiative into action, including by supporting curriculum reform, teacher training, and the development of monitoring and evaluation tools for monitoring the quality of life skills instruction by ALS field implementers.



Implications

The global consensus around the importance of life skills among diverse system actors makes it a good entry point for bringing stakeholders together to work towards common goals. USAID and implementing partners can support these efforts by drawing on best practices and insights from the evidence-base and providing technical support. Collaborative relationships and positive experiences like this can build credibility and create a solid foundation for further collaboration.



Services and Practice

Supporting local stakeholders to build flexible learning and employment pathways and bridging services for youth is as important as improving the quality of curriculum.

Youth lives are complex; many need to balance work and learning and some may change direction several times as they navigate the school-to-work transition. Youth workforce development systems need to be built with the flexibility and responsiveness to meet youth needs. For this reason, the ALS has adopted the Learner Information System of the formal school system, which incorporates Learner Registration Numbers (LRN) so that youth can pick up where they left off should they re-engage with the ALS after a hiatus. The COVID-19 pandemic deepened awareness of the necessity to proactively engage OSY and provided fresh urgency to the use of technology for learning. In collaboration with DepEd, UNICEF (which developed a web-based portal) and O2 converted the face-to-face ALS life skills modules to self-directed learning formats and provided online training for the national ALS trainer corps. Regional partner, SEAMEO INNOTECH, contributed by developing mobile technology strategies for teaching and learning and oriented 4,000 ALS teachers to make this pandemic-era pivot. Strengthening ALS equivalency pathways that truly enabled youth to continue their formal education required O2's support of policy reform for a new pathway for ALS SHS. O2 ongoing support for the development of an Academic Bridging Program, HERO, aimed to improve the transition to higher levels of education.²⁴



Implications

Country stakeholders and international organizations should consider focusing their assessments of YWFD systems around not only the services that are (or could be) delivered to youth but also on the building of bridges and pathways that connect OSY to learning and earning opportunities. As done with O2, these approaches can often involve the use of technology, especially mobile technology. Youth trajectories around education and livelihoods are dynamic, so systems analyses leading to investment in YWFD services should begin by acknowledging this fluidity and prioritize linking existing services and opportunities. The focus on existing local assets also helps ensure that these new connections will be sustained after activity close.



Photo credit: O2/EDC



Stakeholder Collaboration

Local multi-stakeholder partnership platforms have been a pragmatic solution to the challenge of linking second-chance youth education to further education, social support, and employment. Many formal education systems are designed to deliver consistent education of a certain quality to an entire cohort of youth in a more or less top-down fashion (vertically oriented). This means they can lack the local orientation, flexibility, and human resources necessary to link students with employers, civic engagement experiences, and services beyond education (horizontal orientation). It comes as no surprise then that job placement of learners is a challenge. The sheer diversity of employers (by location, sector, and size) and the market-driven incentive structure contributes to the challenge of aligning educators and employers around youth employability. The establishment of YDAs serves as a pragmatic solution to addressing some of the gaps in bridging from the formal education system to employment and other critical services and supports.



Implications

USAID and other donors can support experimentation around various governance models for local multi-stakeholder platforms dedicated to increasing the attention to youth workforce development and coordinating opportunities tailored to local contexts.



Photo credit: YouthPower2: Learning and Evaluation

Portrait of a Youth Development Alliance: Cagayan de Oro City

Enjoying strong leadership and support from its local government unit, the Cagayan de Oro Out-of-School Youth Development Alliance (CDO-OSYDA) was built with sustainability in mind, through an executive order in 2020, an ordinance in 2022, and a provision in the annual budget subject to a 10% annual increase. In partnership with its youth-led counterpart, the Kagayanon Youth Network Alliance (KaYaNA), and the support of O2, 139 youth leaders have been trained and over 2,600 youth sponsored to participate in community improvement activities in financial literacy education, disaster risk reduction, food security, and environmental protection. CDO-OSYDA partners include the Public Employment Service Office, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Education, Technical Education and Skills Development Agency, the private sector, NGOs, higher education institutions and youth networks like KaYaNA. Together they created a database and referral system to improve OSY access to education, training, employment and livelihood opportunities.



Capacity Development

Effective partnerships require investment in organizational capacity development and mechanisms for sharing data and lessons learned. YDAs have required capacity development for effective collaboration among stakeholders committed to improved service delivery for OSY. With O2 support utilizing an adapted OCA tool, YDAs monitor their progress in developing vision, goals, operational structures, and partnership development. All YDAs have been involved in multi-stakeholder, participatory local labor market assessments (LLMA), a systematic process to inform youth employment services with labor market intelligence at the local level. O2 has supported the developmental process of 15 new YDAs and convenes annual summits that bring YDAs together for peer learning and networking and to celebrate successes. O2 is initiating efforts to partner with the National Youth Commission and the Department of the Interior and Local Government to support the scale-up of YDAs to other interested LGUs across the country.



Implications

Effective partnerships and collaborative learning are critical capacities for sustainable, equitable development, particularly for multi-sectoral fields such as youth development. As a result, donor-funded activities should consider shifting their focus from expecting international implementing partners to lead partnership development and instead support local systems actors in doing so. Local systems actors can create their own partnership mechanisms, supported by experiential learning methods such as coaching, learning by doing, and peer-to-peer sharing.



Data, Learning, and Evaluation

Practical challenges remain to create interoperable, large-scale data systems, at both national and local levels, even when stakeholders recognize the importance of data to planning service delivery and continuous improvement. One of the challenges of working with OSY is that they are outside of the formal education system, which makes them hard to identify and track.²⁵ Many OSY need to work during typical school hours, which has a complicated effect on measuring their school attendance, even within the highly flexible ALS. Definitional issues are compounded by different standards across government agencies. While both DepEd and TESDA have management information systems (MIS) in place for their respective needs, there is no unified and scaled data solution for understanding the status of OSY in the Philippines once they have left these formal education and training programs. Furthermore, due to data privacy requirements, the two MIS are not interoperable. DepEd's data on OSY represents accumulated daily enrollment in the ALS program, augmented by what ALS teachers collect during their annual barangay-level recruitment drive, but naturally, these data lack information on non-enrollees. Inserting questions relevant to OSY into the national annual poverty survey (APIS) has been challenging. Under Republic Act 10742, Youth

Development Offices (YDOs) are mandated to annually collect profile data on youth in their respective LGU, including OSY, but LGUs are still in the process of establishing YDOs to comply with the law. O2 is addressing the challenge of access to data by partnering with HEIs through a grant-making program (described in the following Stakeholder Collaboration finding).



Implications

More research is needed on effective data sharing systems for youth employment. As evidenced in the case study, the availability of real-time data is critical for decision-making and systems strengthening. Additional research can identify models that have worked in different contexts, along with the enabling factors that led to their success. Insights from instances where system actors have organically created data sharing systems are particularly important as they can help surface incentive structures for different types of stakeholders. A strong focus on sustainability and governance is critical as the data sharing systems can be complex and costly to implement.



Stakeholder Collaboration

Local partnerships show promise for localized OSY data collection and sharing. Since there is broad buy-in to the importance data plays in improving service delivery, O2 supported partnerships between YDAs and HEIs through grant-making to develop OSY monitoring and evaluation systems. For example, STI College General Santos, Inc. developed an online database management system that consolidates all data on youth in General Santos City, a city on the island of Mindanao with a population of nearly 600,000. Three YDAs in Metro Manila joined forces to create a youth database with accompanying tools and training that are used by barangay-level volunteers to collect data about youth. The University of Science and Technology of the Philippines in Cagayan de Oro developed an online portal where youth can create a profile and register for YDA-offered programs, thereby automating the YDA referral system for youth to enroll in training and education programs and access job placement and business services.



Implications

USAID and IPs can provide technical assistance and capacity development support to system actors investing in collecting and sharing data to strengthen youth employment outcomes. Given the complexity of implementing and sustaining data systems that have the breadth of data needed to be impactful, special focus should be paid to governance, how different stakeholders use and contribute to the systems, and financial sustainability.



Future Directions for Work with OSY in the Philippines

The work of Filipino youth, national and local system actors, and international partners has resulted in a significant reduction in stigma for many OSY. Youth reappropriated the OSY label as a symbol of a proud identity: a young person who has overcome challenges to achieve their goals—from “out-of-school youth” to “outstanding youth.” While it is difficult to discern exactly what conditions are resulting in this transformational mindset shift, it is certain that strengthening the second-chance education system, building education and employment pathways that meet specific youth needs, and establishing local partnerships that include youth perspectives are together having an effect. There is hope that the Filipino system actors will continue to develop and network municipal YDAs, build a comprehensive data management system for youth, and complete the process of building access to higher education and higher-skilled jobs for young people.



Photo credit: YouthPower2: Learning and Evaluation

1. The consortium of implementing partners led by the Education Development Center includes Accenture, Philippines Business for Education, Catholic Relief Services, Voluntary Service Overseas/Philippines, and SEAMEO INNOTECH.
2. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Labor and Employment, including its municipal Public Employment Service Offices.
3. Beginning in 2004, USAID-funded activities were: EQuALLS, EQuALLS2, and MYDev.
4. DepEd, 2022, ALS 2.0, p. 11
5. DepEd 2022, ALS 2.0 report, p 18-19.
6. Orbeta, Jr., Aniceto C., John Paul P. Corpus, and Nina Victoria V. Araos. 2021 (Aug). Who Are the Youth NEET in the Philippines Today? Philippine Institute for Development Studies. p. iv.
7. Philippines Statistics Authority. 2020. National Annual Poverty Indicator Survey.
8. Department of Education, ALS 2.0 Report
9. World Bank (May 2018). A Second Chance to Develop the Human Capital of Out-of-School Youth and Adults: The Philippines Alternative Learning System (Education Policy Note).
10. A 2017 World Bank report found that two-third of employers in the Philippines reported having difficulty finding workers with adequate work ethic or appropriate interpersonal and communication skills. Acosta, Pablo et al. (2017) Developing Socioemotional Skills for the Philippines' Labor Market. The World Bank, p. xiii.
11. GH Ambat has served as the driving force for the ALS 2.0, both as a leader and figurehead championing the ALS.
12. In addition to the 2010 and 2016 studies, World Bank (May 2018), Education Policy Note: A Second Chance to Develop the Human Capital of Out-of-School Youth and Adults: The Philippines Learning System.
13. SEAMEO INNOTECH (the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization), established in 1970 to help solve common education problems in the Region, focuses on innovative, technology-oriented learning services, research-based solutions, and knowledge management.
14. Special Education Fund (SEF) is an earmark. 1% of real property taxes collected must be spent on education. It used to be only for formal education, but with the law, local governments were authorized to spend this on the ALS as well.
15. Department of Education (Government of the Philippines), 2022, ALS 2.0: Transforming the Alternative Learning Systems into a Quality and Relevant Second Chance Basic Education Program, p. 21.
16. Creative Associates International implemented EQuALLs and Education Development Center implemented EQuALLS2 and MYDev.
17. USAID defines positive youth development (PYD) as an approach that engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their

full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

18. The full name is “Contextualized Most Essential Learning Competencies-Based ALS SHS Curriculum”. These competencies, which focused on 21st century skills, were identified during the COVID-19 pandemic as the most critical for the formal school system to focus on given the constraints of remote learning and were delivered as self-directed life skills modules. The ALS decided to use these even after the pandemic and to add guidance to help teachers adapt the curriculum to the unique needs of ALS learners in their local cultural contexts and to practice interdisciplinary teaching.
19. National line agencies involved in youth education, training and employment.
20. There is at least one YDA led by the Chamber of Commerce.
21. EDC (n.d.) Private Sector Partnership and Out-of-School Youth: The MYDev Experience.
22. In addition to USAID, Accenture, and SEAMEO INNOTECH, four other international development partners supported the BAE’s curricular reform and capacity development efforts: the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO (Jakarta).
23. USAID, “Organizational Capacity Assessment,” ([Learning Lab Resources 2016](#)).
24. Bridging programs will support multiple transitions: from ALS JHS to SHS, from Year 11 SHS to Year 12, and from ALS SHS to college.
25. For example, for education systems, when is a learner considered to have dropped out: after one month of non-attendance, three months, or six months?

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