



Young people queue to register at the Jobs Bridging of JP YEM graduates at TESDA ARMM Maguindanao on October 17, 2012 (© JLO/ W. San Pedro)

Alternatives to work migration **Promoting employment opportunities for youth in their home provinces**

By Wilbert San Pedro and Roche Angon

Shortly after graduating from the Los Arcos National High School in Agusan del Sur in 2009, Junrey Juanich made a decision to try his luck and apply for work in the big city.

He chose Manila for this purpose because he has relatives in the city with whom he could stay while looking for work. After a few futile searches, he was able to find a job as a helper in a glass company and was employed there for the next seven months.

Like many young people in the country, Junrey has resorted to migration to seek employment opportunities.

The son of farmers from Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur located in northeastern Mindanao, Junrey's alternative to migration was to help his parents cultivate rice in their small parcel of agricultural land. Given the nature of small-scale farming, income derived from the activity is unstable and just enough or even inadequate to meet basic necessities.

Junrey was well aware of this fact which is the reason why he took the chance to try it out in Manila despite the personal sacrifice and uncertainty that this venture entails.

In his seven-month job stint in Manila, however, Junrey came to realize that his financial situation in the city was not much different from his situation back home. Making ends meet on a minimum wage income, he had to budget his money for food and lodging, transportation expenses and incidentals. This left him very little in terms of savings.

At the end of seven months, Junrey decided to go back to his home province and focus his job search locally with the hope that he could make a decent living in his home province just as well as in Manila.

The Joint Programme on Youth Employment and Migration

The Spanish-funded *MDG Joint Programme on Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth* is a three-year programme designed to help youth like Junrey find decent employment at the local level.

Implemented from July 2009 to December 2012, the Joint Programme has the overall goal of promoting decent jobs and productive work for young people preferably without having to leave their home province and migrating for work in

urban areas or overseas. Among others, technical vocational and entrepreneurship training in labour market-responsive skills were provided by the Joint Programme to disadvantaged youth to respond to the goal.

Four pilot sites—which include Masbate, Antique, Maguindanao and Agusan del Sur—were targeted as recipients of a concerted effort to improve the employment situation of young people at the provincial level. The United Nations country team agencies of the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) collaborated with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Provincial Local Government Units, and other government agencies and civil society in delivering interventions to increase access of young people to employment opportunities in their home provinces. The ILO, TESDA, DOLE and TESDA-Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao collaborated to implement the entrepreneurship and technical vocational skills training programmes for the disadvantaged youth.

The situation of the youth in Masbate, Antique, Agusan del Sur and Maguindanao

Promoting youth employment is something that is steadily being addressed by the government in the past years. This segment, after all, has the potential for energizing development efforts through its openness to innovation and technology and also through its vigor and enthusiasm. The potential of rural youth to contribute to the development of their communities, however, is something that continues to languish, and guidance and support is needed to help rural-based youth realize their needs and potentials.

According to the ILO, an estimated 93 percent of the jobs available to young people in developing

countries are in the informal economy, where earnings are low, working conditions are unsafe, and there is little or no social protection. Lack of job prospects in rural areas force the youth to migrate to urban centers at home, or to move abroad in search of economic opportunities. Youth in rural areas of many developing countries are involved in a range of household-based and farm and off-farm activities, where they often face underemployment (*Rural Policy Briefs: Investing in Youth for Rural Transformation*, ILO: 2011).

The findings of a 2010 ILO-commissioned study on youth entrepreneurship in the four provinces are consistent with these trends. For instance, agriculture remains a significant employer of young workers in rural areas in the four provinces although the services sector in the fast urbanizing towns have also become a significant employer of the youth. Majority of jobs are to be found in the informal economy both in urban and rural settings. Lack of job opportunities in rural areas in the four provinces is the main driver of work migration to urban centers the most popular destinations being Manila, Cebu, Iloilo, Butuan and Davao.

Also, many young people are migrating to work overseas lured by high wages in contrast to the low incomes they would earn from employment in their home provinces. They usually find work abroad as domestic workers and service staff and in blue-collar occupations such as welding.

Helping disadvantaged youth land a job in their home province

To help disadvantaged youth like Junrey land a job in their home province, the technical vocational training component of the Joint Programme provided training grants in labor market-responsive skills in the local economy to 2,000 youth in the four provinces.

The technical vocational skills seen as responsive to the needs of local industries include welding, motorcycle mechanics, computer hardware servicing, food and beverage services including cooking and barista service, automotive mechanics, carpentry, masonry, driving, electrical installation and maintenance, and consumer electronics servicing.

Junrey was one of the youth given assistance by the Joint Programme. He trained in Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) at the Provincial Skills Training Center (PSTC) in Patin-ay, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur between June and July 2012 under TESDA. The training programme became a stepping stone for him to land a job in his own province.



20-year old Junrey Juanich (left) found work as a welder in his home province after undergoing training under the JP YEM (© ILO/ W. San Pedro)

By his own account, Junrey is today earning an average Php9,000 a month as a welder for Skaff Eximport and Services Inc, a local contractor of Philsaga Mining Corp located in Banahao, Rosario, Agusan del Sur. Junrey's case shows that there are alternatives to work migration and that one can earn just as well in one's home province.

Young women and work migration

Many young women from Masbate, Antique, Agusan del Sur and Maguindanao, especially those in the lower income bracket, have responded to the challenge of making a decent living by leaving home and working in the cities usually as domestic helpers, service staff and other non-technical personnel of informal enterprises or home-based small businesses.

At one point in their young lives, 20-year old Jauna Marie Osorio of Anini-y and 22-year old Donnavilla Rumbines of Hamtic, both in Antique, 20-year old Emmecris Opillo of Datu Abdullah Sanki in Maguindanao, and 24-year old Merly Ybanez of Sibagat in Agusan del Sur have all experienced migrating for work in the cities in nearby provinces.

All four used to be domestic workers—Jauna Marie and Donnavilla in Iloilo City, Emmecris in Tacurong City, and Merly Ybanez in another nearby city. The average income they received from domestic work was Php1,500 a month.

The entrepreneurship training component of the Joint Programme trained at least a hundred youth from each of the pilot provinces in entrepreneurship using the ILO's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) entrepreneurship training. This was another intervention to assist rural youth find work through self employment in their home province. The five-day training programme includes a personal entrepreneurship potential assessment, environmental scanning of potential microenterprises, costing, pricing and preparing a business plan.

The trainees with the most feasible business plans to emerge from the training, which include Jauna Marie, Donnavilla, Emmecris and Merly, were provided with starter kits to launch them into entrepreneurship and help them apply the learning from the training.

With assistance from the Joint Programme, Jauna Marie opened a street food kiosk selling barbecues in her hometown of Anini-y while Donnavilla started a *sari-sari* (variety) store in her hometown of Hamtic, both in Antique. Emmecris's fish stall in her hometown of Datu Abdullah Sanki in Maguindanao has expanded to include fresh vegetables and fruits. Merly's buy-and-sell



20-year old Emmecris Opillo of Maguindanao migrated for work in a nearby province prior to setting up a microenterprise in her home province (© ILO/ R. Angon)

business of fruits and vegetables in Sibagat has also expanded to include a variety store and a cell phone loading station. Merly was able to get a loan from a local microfinance institution in Agusan del Sur and had already gone through several loan cycles.

Promoting youth employment opportunities at the local level

The success of the Joint Programme in widening young people's choice of work to include job opportunities at the local level can be attributed to several factors. One factor is the public-private partnerships fostered by TESDA between local businesses and technical vocational institutions. Through a memorandum of agreement (MOA), the local firms committed to provide on-the job training (OJT), job opportunities and other post training services to graduates of the Joint Programme in technical vocational skills and entrepreneurship.

Another is the strengthening of local employment services and the capacity building activities undertaken for the LGUs to create an enabling environment through local economic development (LED), such as the case in Antique wherein certain youth employment projects are integrated in the local development plans.

Strengthening local employment services

A pivotal intervention seen to facilitate the job search process of young people in four pilot provinces is in the area of local employment services or local employment facilitation. There is a growing consensus among policymakers and analysts that much of the unemployment we see around us is structural in nature which means to say that there are jobs available; only that the jobseekers do not have the requisite skills to meet the expectation the vacancies. There is also the

problem of limited access by jobseekers to labour market information (LMI).

The Public Employment Service Office (PESO) is seen as a critical entity at the local government level in providing labour market information and facilitating the matching of jobs with skills. For those with limited skills, it could also help in facilitating means to address the gap in skills.

The Joint Programme contributed to the on-going institutionalization process of many PESOs in the pilot provinces. In Antique, Provincial Ordinance No. 080-2012 provides the legal basis for the creation of the PESO for the province while at the same time establishing its staffing pattern and allocating funds for its operations. At the municipal level, two towns in Antique—San Jose and Pandan—have already institutionalized their local PESOs (Antique Accomplishments and Experiences: Provincial Government of Antique, 2012).

To inform local governments desiring to operate their own PESO facilities, the *PESO starter kit: Guide to understanding the Public Employment Service Office*, an advocacy material of DOLE to establish and institutionalize PESO across the country, was developed, published and circulated¹.

The PESO is also a partner at the local level in job bridging activities wherein jobseekers are provided pre-employment orientation seminars (PEOS) for local and overseas employment, among others.

Employment opportunities curb migration

As of October 31, 2012, TESDA has reported that 45 per cent of the 2,000 graduates in technical vocational courses sponsored by the Joint Programme in the four provinces have already found work. The majority of 92 per cent of the employed found work in their own home province. Also, some 7 per cent found work in other parts of the country while less than one per cent found work abroad. Meanwhile, more than 18 per cent of those who were able to find work in their home province were directly absorbed by the firm in which they completed their on-the-job training (TESDA Presentation: JP YEM Results Conference, November 2012).

On the overall, the showing of the JP YEM graduates indicates a hopeful picture. It is anticipated that within six months to a year, more of the graduates will eventually find work as they continue their job search. Also, the Joint



The Landungan Masbate Youth and Migrants Center in Masbate also houses the Masbate Provincial PESO (© ILO/W. San Pedro)

Programme through TESDA has conducted entrepreneurship training in November 2012 using ILO's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) for technical vocational skills training graduates who showed a potential for entrepreneurship. Graduates with feasible business plans will be provided with starter kits to launch them into self employment.

Lessons learned

Having work plays an essential role in the social integration of young people in their communities not merely as a source of income but as an individual's contribution to the social group. Migration for work is not always a choice but is oftentimes a necessity for many rural youth. This involves personal sacrifice and the temporary severing of bonds with family and friends. Although many rural youth continue to face poverty and marginalization, programmes such as those designed to provide alternatives to migration provide a ray of hope and can promote local employment for the youth. ☒

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¹The PESO starter kit can be accessed through http://www.ilo.org/manila/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_188006/lang-en/index.htm