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FILIPINO YOUTH WHO CAN'T FIND WORK START THEIR OWN

By Roche M Angon



Merly Ybanez dropped out of college in 2008 because her parents could no longer pay her school fees. Her father had fallen ill, and her mother had become the family breadwinner, buying and selling agricultural products. As the youngest of six children, Merly helped her parents with the daily household chores.

To keep herself busy, she volunteered at the local church in her hometown in **Agusan del Sur, in the southern Philippines**, but soon became bored and moved to a nearby city to work as a domestic worker so that she could save to finish her education.

"I may have reached a college level but I found it difficult to get a better job. I knew I was not qualified because the employers require college graduates," she said.

Merly is one of a booming generation of young Filipinos entering a labour market that does not have enough jobs for them. Some **1.46 million young people were unemployed** in 2010, half of them with secondary school educations and 40 % with college degrees.

Youth-led businesses

Merly's real ambition -- inspired by her mother's example -- was to start her own small business. Her fortunes changed when she learned through a community radio broadcast about a UN-supported entrepreneurship training course for out-of-school youth.

"I believed it is better to have a training first before getting into a business to ensure success," says Merly, one of eight young people from her hometown selected to take part in "Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB)", a training programme of the International Labor Organization financed by the MDG-Fund.

"I learned how to generate and prioritize business ideas based on the local resources of my community and how to take advantage of the opportunities present," says Merly, who drafted a business plan to buy and sell crops such as sweet potato, banana, coconut and vegetables that are abundant in Agusan del Sur. The programme gave her a starter kit to help her establish a microenterprise, and taught her how to get a loan from a local microfinance institution.

The entrepreneur training is part of an **MDG-F-supported joint programme** to improve education and work prospects for young people like Merly, and for the millions of Filipino youth in vulnerable employment working for low wages and no benefits. One of its main goals is to provide an alternative for the many young Filipinos who migrate abroad in search of decent work.



For Merly, who is expecting a baby, the training has proved invaluable. Now on a third cycle of her loan, Merly has expanded her enterprise to include a variety store and loading station.

"My small business will help me a lot especially now that I am pregnant. As a young mother, I need to focus on supporting my child," she says, adding: "I still aspire to go back to school."

Alternatives to Migration

The joint programme "**Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth**" involves four UN agencies (ILO, IOM, UNICEF and UNFPA) in supporting the Philippine government's vision of a productive and competitive youth.

Its aim is to increase access to decent work for disadvantaged young women and men in the country's poorest areas, and to improve policies on youth employment and migration by encouraging the participation of all stakeholders in the process.

The programme is part of the MDG-Fund's efforts to help governments achieve the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, including eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women, and developing a global partnership for development. The Joint Programmes focus particularly on improving life for the world's most marginalized people.

"Alternatives to Migration" is being implemented in four provinces with the highest incidences of out-of-school youth and poor youth, where the MDGs are least likely to be achieved – Masbate, Antique, Maguindanao and Agusan del Sur. Along with vocational and technical training, the programme has provided training and materials on life skills and safe migration to teachers, out-of-school youth, local partner organizations and thousands of secondary schools. Hundreds of at-risk high school students have been given educational subsidies to reduce drop-out rates in public schools.

Promoting jobs, protecting people



International
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PHILIPPINES: BOOSTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO EASE JOBS CRISIS

SIBAGAT, Philippines (ILO News) – Jayson Canete wanted to pursue a degree in engineering after he graduated from high school, but he had to quit school at 19 to help support his family. He took whatever job was available, working as a laboratory assistant and at a fast food restaurant. “I felt hopeless because I could not find regular work,” he said.

But he got another chance.

Together with another 30 young people, he took part in an ILO entrepreneurship training programme last year. Now he plans to start his own business, raising pigs.

“The programme helped me assess what kind of business would succeed. I decided to put up a small piggery because I won’t need to spend the whole day attending to the livestock and can do other work as well,” said Mr. Canete.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) will provide a start-up capital of 15,000 pesos (US\$353). Such programmes have a key role to play in a country where one third of the 95 million population live in poverty, and often cannot finish school or find a regular job.

And, like Mr. Canete, many young people need to work to help feed their families and send their younger siblings to school.

Stay home, start your own business

The entrepreneurship training Canete received is part of the **"Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth"** joint programme, which aims to encourage young people to take advantage of opportunities close to home rather than flocking to Manila or abroad. The project is implemented through the ILO, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and DOLE.

The Philippines ranks among the world’s top exporters of labour. In 2010, a total of 1.1 million Filipinos – not including seafarers – headed abroad for work, according to the **Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)**. That translates into about 3,000 people leaving every day. The ILO estimates that youth – in the 15 to 24 age group – make up more than a third of these migrant workers.



One third of the Philippines population live in poverty, and thousands head out every day to work abroad. The ILO is promoting entrepreneurship as an alternative to hard-to-get wage jobs and migration.

“As an alternative to wage employment, young Filipinos need to embrace and embark on entrepreneurship at an early age,” Labour Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz said recently.

Besides pig farming, other viable plans for small-scale entrepreneurship include convenience stores, fish vending and internet cafes.

Local instructors trained by the ILO will provide counselling, consultancy and mentoring services for the beneficiaries during the implementation of their projects.

The programme focuses on four of the Philippines’ poorest provinces – Masbate, Antique, Maguindanao and Agusan del Sur – where the incidence of out-of-school and poor youth is high and school enrolment rates are low. Ms. Baldoz called on private sector partners to promote entrepreneurship, support vocational training and adopt apprenticeships and on-the-job training programmes to address the issues of youth employment and migration.

Por Kara Santos, IPS Asia-Pacific reporter