

IMPACT STORIES

Breaking the barriers

Young women in non-traditional technical vocational careers

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The role of women as co-equal partners in development has gained much ground in the Philippines. To fully mainstream gender equality in a society that bears traces of a stereotypically macho culture requires further advocacy and attitude change especially among people in culturally segregated and rural communities.

One field where gender equality needs improvement is in the world of work. Data from the government's Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) reveals that men dominate enrolment in existing technical vocational courses particularly in welding, electronics, automotive, refrigeration and air conditioning (RAC), carpentry and masonry. In most cases, only around 10 per cent of enrolment in these courses constitutes young women. At times, there are no women takers at all.

Many young women, perhaps due to a lack of information on the merits of these labour market-responsive skills, have confined their choices to traditional technical vocational courses for women such as baking and household services. There are limiting factors—such as poor working environment and staying power to endure physical work—that tend to discourage young women from entering careers in automotive and welding, for instance. The situation is changing, however, with more women breaking the barriers especially in rural areas.

The Joint Programme on Youth Employment and Migration

The Spanish-funded *MDG Joint Programme on Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth* launched in July 2009 with the overarching goal of promoting decent and productive work for young people underscores gender equality in all aspects of its interventions in the four pilot provinces of Masbate, Antique,



A young female trainee in Shielded Metal Arc Welding operates a metal cutting saw at the RMDC TESDA in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao (© ILO/W. San Pedro)

Maguindanao and Agusan del Sur. It supports the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 3 which promotes gender equality and empowerment of women.

The Joint Programme is implemented by UN country team agencies including the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as well as local stakeholders including the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), TESDA, Provincial Local Government Units of pilot provinces, other government agencies and civil society.

One component of the Joint Programme involves the provision of technical vocational skills training to the disadvantaged young women and men through ILO and TESDA. To date, 2,000 young people had already been trained in skills considered to be in demand at the local level in the four provinces.

Promoting gender equality in the choice of technical vocational careers

Tradition and value systems impact on career choice. Most young women especially those who come from rural communities with well-entrenched norms on the role of women in society, opted to train in baking, pastry production, dressmaking, food and beverage services, and housekeeping. Nonetheless, young women are slowly gaining an inroad on careers traditionally occupied by men with many of them motivated by the promise of a well-paying job either locally or abroad.

The Joint Programme in partnership with TESDA offered technical vocational training courses based on local industry requirements and

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the technical vocational skills and training needs of the disadvantaged youth. Many of these courses are in demand driven skills that tend to attract young men primarily because of the societal expectation that they will be the primary income earner in their family or would-be family.

Within this purview, the Joint Programme encouraged young women to participate in training even in those areas which are stereotypically seen as careers for men. There is roughly an average gender distribution in the ratio of 60-40 in the composition of trainees supported by the Joint Programme with young men having the upper hand. In the process of awarding training slots or on-the-job training opportunities under the Joint Programme, however, TESDA ensured that there was no intrinsic bias against young women. The composition is in fact a reasonable ratio and may simply reflect the traditional role of men as family breadwinners which is the reason why more of them seek training and employment opportunities.

As a further commitment to mainstreaming gender issues, the integration of a three-day gender sensitivity training (GST) in all training courses under the Joint Programme was made possible by the support of UNFPA. The DOLE had also provided gender sensitivity training to its field personnel with support from the Joint Programme and gender sensitive technical vocational curriculum and training materials under TESDA had been finalized. Furthermore, trainers and focal persons on Gender and Development (GAD) were trained on the use of the gender sensitive curriculum in preparation for its roll-out.

What follows are the stories of young women who—through choice or circumstance—left the fixed path chosen for them by society and walked into male-dominated occupations in search of decent work at the local level.

Young woman motivated by dreams of a better life

Iquilyn Namoc is a young woman of 22 who hails from the mining town of Rosario in the province of Agusan del Sur located in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Like many young people in the country, Iquilyn is accustomed to a life of making ends meet with whatever limited resources are available. Her father is a labourer and her mother a homemaker. She did not pursue tertiary education after finishing her high school degree due to financial reasons.

Next best alternative: finding a job

The next best alternative for young people who are not able to go on to higher education for one reason or another is to find jobs to sustain their

daily needs and to contribute to the family income. The value of family is strong in the Philippines and children are often expected to help their parents in meeting household expenses. Extending financial support to one's brothers and sisters through school is also a collective family effort and individuals often sacrifice personal luxury to be able to send their siblings to school.



Iquilyn Namoc, a JP YEM scholar, is currently employed as a welder at a local company in Rosario, Agusan del Sur (© ILO/W. San Pedro)

Technical vocational skills to aid young people in finding jobs

For Iquilyn, finding a job is a challenge. Armed with a high school education, the best that is available to her is short-term informal work as an assistant in family-owned businesses or small retail shops. Inspired by her brother who is a welder in oil-rich Qatar in the Middle East, Iquilyn aspired for a career as a welder, something that is not yet considered as a mainstream blue-collar occupation for women in the country.

Iquilyn learned of a training programme that provides training scholarships to disadvantaged young people that is being implemented by TESDA in partnership with the provincial government of Agusan del Sur under the Joint Programme. Like other trainees, Iquilyn went through a career profiling process to determine her occupational interest and aptitude. This facilitated her entry into the training in Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) conducted in June to July 2012.

From training to on-the-job training to a job

As part of the training on SMAW, Iquilyn spent her on-the-job training at Skaff Eximport and Services Inc, a local contractor of Philsaga Mining Corp located in Rosario, Agusan del Sur. Due to her work attitude, she was absorbed by the company as an employee and started as a welder in August 2012. She plans to apply for an overseas job in welding and join her brother overseas.

From the viewpoint of social protection, women welders overseas are in a more desirable

position since their work is within the public sphere in contrast to domestic workers who work in the private sphere and are not regulated by law.

At present, Iquilyn helps meet family expenses from her income of PhP260 (US\$6) per day. These wages are well above the government-mandated minimum floor for the CARAGA region. Part of her plans is help send her siblings to school once she is able to earn enough abroad.



Raquel Natural, a JP YEM graduate in welding, with her daughter Daryn Zoe (© ILO/ W. San Pedro)

Renewed hope for a single mother

As the fifth of a brood of seven children, Raquel Natural has to adjust since her early days to a life of hardship. She still lives with her parents and siblings in the town of Rosario in Agusan del Sur. Her father is a carpenter and her mother a homemaker. Due to financial constraints, her family could only afford to send her to a government high school from which she graduated in 2006. As a single mother, she also has to take care of her three-year old daughter, Daryn Zoe, who was born in 2009.

The additional responsibility of raising a young daughter by herself has made the necessity of finding a job of extreme importance. Raquel is well aware that the only jobs available that can support her and her child are those which require some form of technical or vocational preparation. This prompted her to visit the provincial office of TESDA in Agusan del Sur to explore possible training opportunities.

Raquel was just in time for a possible training grant from the Joint Programme. Since all the other training scholarships funded by the Joint Programme were already filled during Raquel's visit except for a few remaining slots in Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW), she had to make her choice there and then whether to embark on a career in welding. Weighing her options, Raquel decided to accept the training scholarship after her career profile shows that she has the aptitude and occupational interest for the trade. She braced herself for the rigorous training in welding that she must go through in the next few months.

With her daughter in tow (because there is nobody at home to look after her), Raquel diligently attended the training course at the provincial skills training centre in Patin-ay, around an hour's journey from her hometown. There were times when she did not have transportation money and had to borrow from friends and relatives to make sure she could complete the training, which ran from October 20 to December 1, 2011. As part of the training, she also had to go through the mandatory OJT at Skaff Eximport and Services Inc in her hometown of Rosario.

Raquel was absorbed as a welder by the company and started work in February 2012. It was hard for her to adjust to her work environment at first. Exhaust heat and smoke generated by welding tend to irritate her and she is a minority in a male-dominated workplace. Still, Raquel persevered and was able to blend in. Today, with her daily salary of PhP260 (US\$6), she is able to afford milk and other necessities for her daughter. She also helps her parents in meeting household expenses.

More women welders

Three more young women scholars of the Joint Programme in Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) who were unemployed prior to joining the training programme are now gainfully employed after finishing their training.

20-year old Mischelle Jane Tindugan, 19-year old Julie May Pael and 19-year old Gemmalyn Otacan attended the SMAW training at the Agusan del Sur Provincial Skills Training Centre (PSTC) in Patin-ay from January to February 2012. All three trained on the job at a local iron works shop that eventually absorbed them as welders.



Ginalyn Bajade (left) together with fellow JP YEM graduates in computer hardware servicing course (© ILO/ W. San Pedro)

Young mom wants her own computer shop

24-year old Ginalyn Bajade has two children and a loving husband and they operate a small business as sidewalk vendors in San Francisco, the business district of the province of Agusan del Sur. San Francisco has the ambience of a booming

frontier town given its proximity to mountains which are sources of gold and precious minerals.

In this environment, there is a slew of opportunities to make money for people with an enterprising bent. Ginalyn together with her husband has been selling food and snack items in the streets of San Francisco, for which they are able to earn Php15,000 a month since 2009. The earnings are enough for food and necessities as well as expenses for their children but Ginalyn and her husband want something better.

She learned of a training grant in Computer Hardware Servicing being sponsored by the Joint Programme for young people and she applied. The Joint Programme, through TESDA, subsidized her training at a local training service provider from February to April 2012.

In this span of time, Ginalyn became adept in the inner workings of a computer's hardware system. A woman versatile in computer servicing is still scarce in the country and Ginalyn is treading a career path that offers lucrative reward especially with the increasing use of computers brought about by familiarization of young people on social networking sites and computer applications.

Ginalyn hopes to utilize her skills in servicing computer hardware facilities when she and her husband fulfill their dream of opening their own computer shop. The couple are saving small amounts from their current microenterprise to contribute to the realization of this dream as well as exploring formal credit mechanisms that could finance the venture.

Women overcoming stereotypes

At present, a system of certification of the skills possessed by technical vocational graduates after training ensures conformity to both local and international standards and gives assurance to potential employers of the quality of training. Based on the results, women graduates sponsored by the Joint Programme are at par with their male counterparts across technical vocational skills offered by TESDA under the Joint Programme.

Partnerships within the Joint Programme

As a mechanism to ensure the active participation of the private sector in further providing local employment to the youth including young women, the Joint Programme also conducted public-private partnership forums through TESDA and the provincial local governments wherein memorandums of agreement were forged with local companies. Basically, the MOA is an agreement encouraging and binding local firms to provide OJT and eventual employment to graduates of the Joint Programme. In Agusan del Sur, Philsaga Mining



Ginalyn Bajade demonstrates her skill in computer servicing (© ILO/ W. San Pedro)

Corp was one of the local companies which committed assistance to local disadvantaged youth.

Lessons learned

The mainstreaming of women and gender issues can be said to be moving forward at a manageable pace. This can be attributed to advocacy efforts on the part of international organizations and government agencies and changing attitudes among people brought about by exposure to positive humanistic values as against traditional authoritarian principles, among others. There is no foreseeable reason whatsoever for these gains to take a back seat since it has the backing of law and the growing consciousness among people of the innate potential of all humans irrespective of gender.

That said, the stories featured goes to show that women can be at par with men when embarking on technical vocational careers and that societal stereotypes and attitudes need not—should not—hinder people from fulfilling their full potential. There is no room, however, for complacency. Vestiges of prejudice and intolerance may exist to some degree and advocacy work and relevant interventions such as gender-sensitive technical vocational skills training can help correct these limitations. Safeguarding the gains can only lead to the full emancipation of women as co-equal partners in the quest for nation building ☒

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