

EDUCATION



RIGHT PHOTO

Elementary students in South Cotabato enhance their reading and comprehension skills through books developed by USAID's Basa Pilipinas project. USAID helps develop new readers to unlock children's creativity and potential, setting them on a path toward limitless opportunities.



Teacher coordinators in Sto. Niño Central Elementary School were trained, with support from USAID, to nurture the curiosity of students.

06

EDUCATING WITH PRIDE AND PASSION

■ *“We observed a big change. Our classes became pupil-centered. This approach encouraged students to participate. They became competitive in mathematics and science contests and even won in national competitions.”*
— Yolenia Hare
teacher, Santo Niño Central Elementary School, South Cotabato

Jinny Biñas and Yolenia Hare, mathematics teachers at Santo Niño Central Elementary School in South Cotabato in southern Philippines, remember the days when they could only dream of their students winning school competitions. Before 2008, the school did not have enough resources for instructional materials, and teachers only had basic skills to teach different subjects.

“We wanted to provide quality education for our students, but it was hard, given our school’s limitations,” said Hare, who teaches 50 pupils in her mathematics class.

Better Access to Quality Education

To improve access to quality education in South Cotabato and other provinces in Mindanao, during 2004-11, USAID carried out the Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills project. The project targeted conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, where literacy was particularly poor. It partnered with the Department of Education, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority and business and non-governmental organizations.

Together, USAID and its partners improved the teachers’ mastery of English, mathematics and science and bolstered teaching techniques at the elementary level. They also helped educators develop a deeper understanding of the students’ learning process.

The project provided students with mathematics and science kits, along with activity sheets, interactive toys and tools for experiments, to help them learn concepts and apply their skills. English books encouraged storytelling and raised reading skills.

“We observed a big change. Our classes became pupil-centered. This approach encouraged students to participate. They became competitive in mathematics and science contests and even won in national competitions,” said Hare.

Developing Outstanding Teachers and Students

Jannie Sampani is a student who benefited from the teacher training. She was in fourth grade at Santo Niño Central Elementary School in 2010; Jinny Biñas was her mathematics teacher.

“We adopted the strategy of the four “As” (activity, analysis, abstraction and application) in mathematics. Our school piloted the strategy to promote higher-order thinking skills; we are now adopting the same approach in science and other subjects,” Biñas said.

This new style of teaching and learning sparked Sampani’s interest in her school subjects. “Because I did them myself, the lessons were etched in my mind, and I became more confident with what I learned,” she said. In 2012, she won awards in mathematics contests and quiz bees, and went on to graduate with honors.

The core team of teachers who trained under USAID’s Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills project mentored fellow teachers and even school heads. “Mentoring helped our school build a good reputation. In fact, three [members] of our teaching staff became outstanding teachers of South Cotabato,” said Biñas.

Aside from providing coaching opportunities, the project trained school administrators to formulate goals and plans. They learned to monitor teacher and student achievements, work in teams and mobilize resources.

With the help of volunteers from the community, the project also improved the teachers' working and learning environment by building and repairing classrooms. It organized courses for out-of-school youth in basic education and workforce development, preparing them either to return to school or heighten their employment potential.

By September 30, 2009, USAID, through the project, had trained more than 19,000 teachers. It had also built 45 classrooms, repaired 188 rooms and refurbished 235 community learning centers for out-of-school youth.

Improving Reading Skills

USAID has continued to improve the quality of basic education in the Philippines through Basa Pilipinas (or Read, Philippines). Launched in 2013 and implemented in partnership with the Department of Education, the project supports the Philippine government's early-grade language and literacy program by strengthening reading skills among students in the first, second and third grades in the Ilocos and Central Visayas regions.

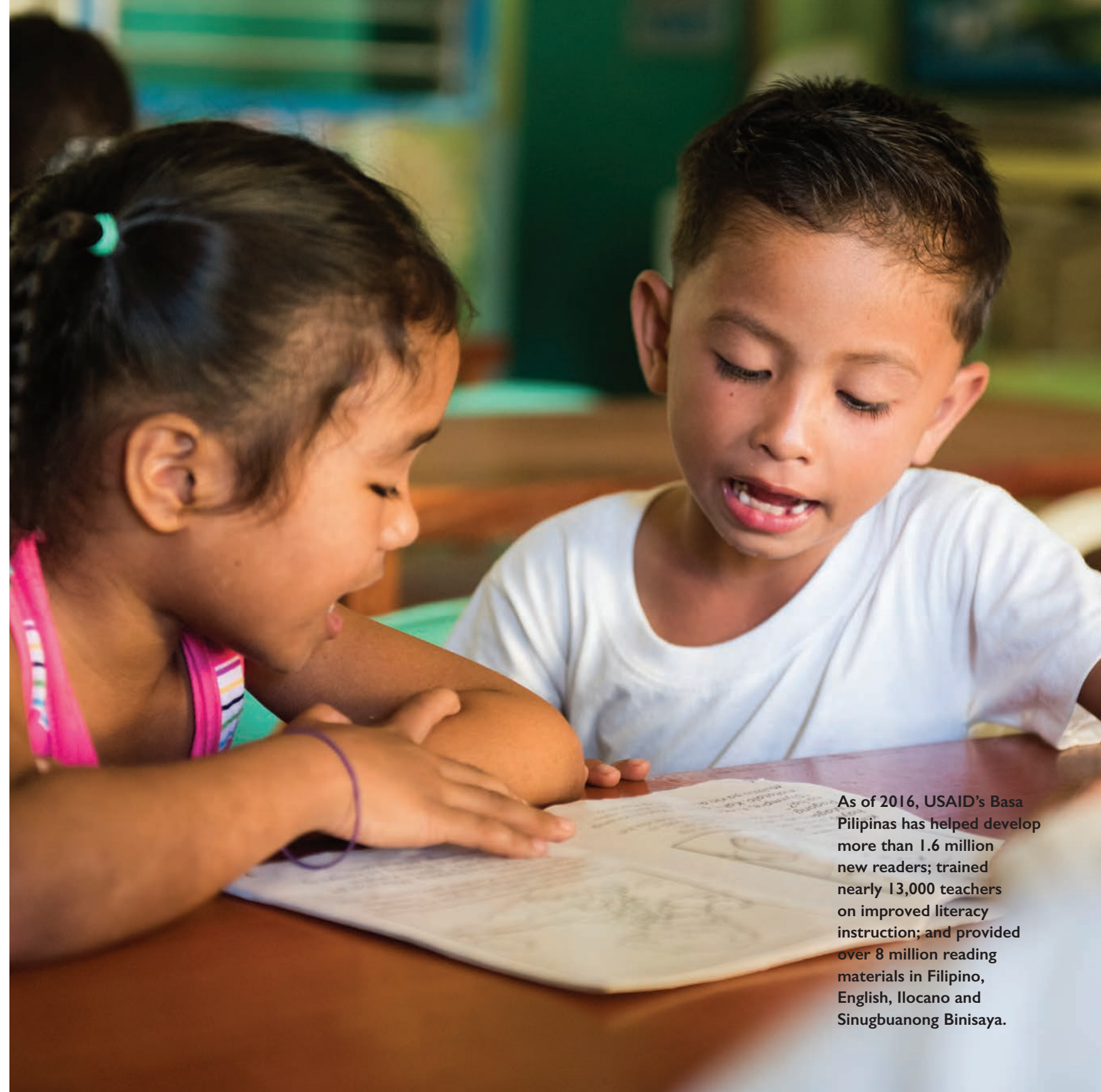
As of 2016, USAID's Basa Pilipinas has reached more than 1.6 million early-grade students, providing reading materials in Filipino, English and two mother tongues (Ilocano and Sinugbuanong Binisaya), and teacher training on improved literacy instruction. It had trained nearly 13,000 teachers and more than 2,000 school heads and furnished more than 8 million early grade teaching and learning materials to nearly 3,000 public elementary schools for use in classrooms.

Due in part to these achievements, the Department of Education scaled up Basa Pilipinas' approach, expanding its reach to improve early grade reading for more than 1.8 million early-grade students nationwide. ■



As her teachers improved the quality of their teaching, Jannie Sampani became more interested in studying. She graduated with honors from Sto. Niño Central Elementary School in 2012.

By 2016, a full 76 percent of third-grade students in USAID-assisted sites had met the Philippines' benchmarks for reading fluency and comprehension, compared to only 20 percent in 2013.



As of 2016, USAID's Basa Pilipinas has helped develop more than 1.6 million new readers; trained nearly 13,000 teachers on improved literacy instruction; and provided over 8 million reading materials in Filipino, English, Ilocano and Sinugbuanong Binisaya.

USAID's STRIDE project strengthens the link between academia and industry by increasing the number of tertiary programs with curricula revised with private and/or public sector employers' input or on the basis of market research. (Photo: TIP Career Center).



07 PAVING MULTIPLE AVENUES FOR HIGHER LEARNING

■ *“What science and technology students need most is early interaction with employers and industry players, and this is what our career center provides.”*
— **Dr. Frank Alejandrino**
director, *Technological Institute of the Philippines Career Center*

Jason Torres, a 26-year-old civil engineer, dreamed of one day managing his family's construction business. To better prepare himself for this career, Torres enrolled in the Technological Institute of the Philippines under the Professional Science Master's degree program in construction management.

“The program integrates the business side of engineering and construction management in the curriculum,” said Torres, who just completed his first year in the program.

“Marketing was one of the first courses I registered for,” he recalled. This specialized degree — the first of its kind in the country — is part of USAID's five-year Science, Technology, Research and Innovation for Development project, also known as STRIDE.

Strengthening Links Between Academia and Industry

Launched in 2013, STRIDE has been enabling academic institutions and industries to produce research, develop graduates and forge partnerships that strengthen the Philippines' capacity for innovation-led inclusive growth.

Through the project, USAID supports innovation workshops, during which members of academia and representatives from the government and small-to-large businesses converge to define innovative solutions and technical needs. These discussions often result in collaborative research activities or ventures aligned with industry demands.

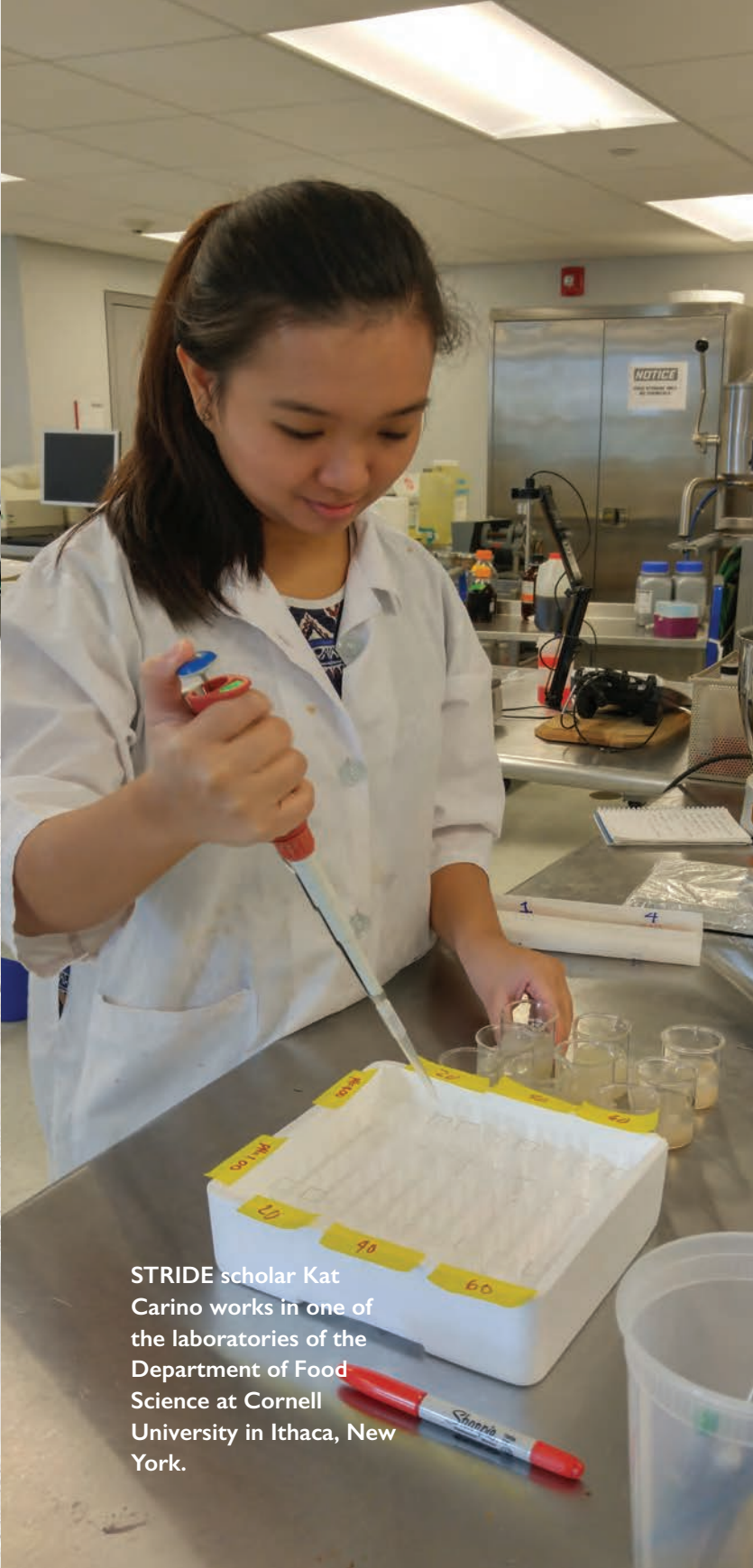
USAID's STRIDE project organizes faculty exchanges between American and local universities to enhance collaborative industry-university research projects. The project also grants scholarships for scientifically minded students who aspire to pursue Professional Science Master's degrees or carry out dissertation research, or post-doctoral research in a U.S. university. To support this, USAID conducts exchange visits involving career consultants and heads of mentored career centers. These help universities improve their students' and faculty's knowledge and skills in science, technology and innovation, and strengthen the linkage between academia and industry.

Professional Science Master's Degree

Through its STRIDE project, USAID has since introduced the Professional Science Master's degree in five schools — the Technological Institute of the Philippines, Mariano Marcos University, Saint Louis University, University of the Cordilleras and Angeles University Foundation. The specialized degree program, developed with inputs from employers and with evidence from market research, covers a variety of key, high-demand fields, including construction management, renewable energy engineering, manufacturing engineering and management, information technology, and data science. The program includes a mandatory internship component.



STRIDE scholar and Failure Analysis Engineer Janella Salamina works in a laboratory as part of her graduate degree in Materials Science and Engineering at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.



STRIDE scholar Kat Carino works in one of the laboratories of the Department of Food Science at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Students develop business cases and harness their science and business competencies as part of their capstone project. “This two-year degree allows students to understand financial statements, handle cost estimates, do project and contract management, and use the latest software and advanced methodologies,” said Technological Institute of the Philippines president, Dr. Elizabeth Lahoz.

Through interventions directed at science, technology and innovation, Torres’ dream of managing his family-owned construction company will soon be realized.

Developing Career Centers

Advanced degrees can boost the productivity of developing countries, according to the Economic Policy Institute think tank. Toward that end, USAID assists universities, such as the Technological Institute of the Philippines, to set up career centers that offer opportunities for student development, career advising and job placement programs. Trainers from Florida State University and the William Davidson Institute of the University of Michigan visited career centers in 2015 to mentor counselors on how to help students network for opportunities and link them with industry partners for internships and jobs.

“Our career center provides students the opportunity for early interaction with employers and industry players,” said Dr. Frank Alejandrino, director of the Career Center at the Technological Institute of the Philippines. As of 2015, USAID’s STRIDE project had mentored staff from six universities to develop their own career centers. These are the University of Iloilo, Mindanao University of Science and Technology, Palawan State University, Western Philippine University, University of Santo Tomas and the Technological Institute of the Philippines.

Addressing Jobs-Skills Mismatch

While various industries in the Philippines have a high demand for workers, many college graduates do not have the skills required to obtain employment. To help address

RIGHT PHOTO

STRIDE scholar Melanie Salinas and several students in the Computer and Information Sciences program work with third and fourth graders at the Elbert-Palmer Elementary School in Delaware to familiarize the students with fundamentals of computer programming. (Photo: Evan Krape / University of Delaware)

this, USAID, through its Higher Education and Productivity project, sought to help align industry needs with graduates' abilities and increase industry-academia partnerships. Together with the Philippine Business for Education and the Commission on Higher Education, USAID organized summits that brought together hundreds of officials from universities, colleges, school associations and businesses, to help forge collaboration between academia and industries to improve the quality of higher education and produce graduates with skills that match the needs of various industries.

"If the higher education sector speaks as one, it will be in a better position to develop and advocate for proactive reforms in Philippine education," said Dr. Jose Paulo Campos, president of the Philippine Association of Private Schools, Colleges and Universities, during a 2013 gathering.

The first summit in 2013 led to the birth of the National Industry-Academe Council. In the words of Fr. Jose Ramon T. Villarin, president of the Ateneo de Manila University, "The Council will serve as a bridge that will connect our education system to industry and connect our nation to the needs and opportunities of an ever rapidly changing world."

The following year, USAID's higher education project convened 500 of the country's top leaders from industry, academia and government to develop a national roadmap to improve the competitiveness of the country's human resource base. Indeed, collaboration is crucial to improve the quality of higher education in the Philippines. ■



As of 2017, USAID, through STRIDE, awarded 65 grants, valued at over \$5 million, to Philippine universities for research in collaboration with U.S. universities and Philippine industries. Additionally, 56 scholarships were granted to Philippine scholars to study in the United States.

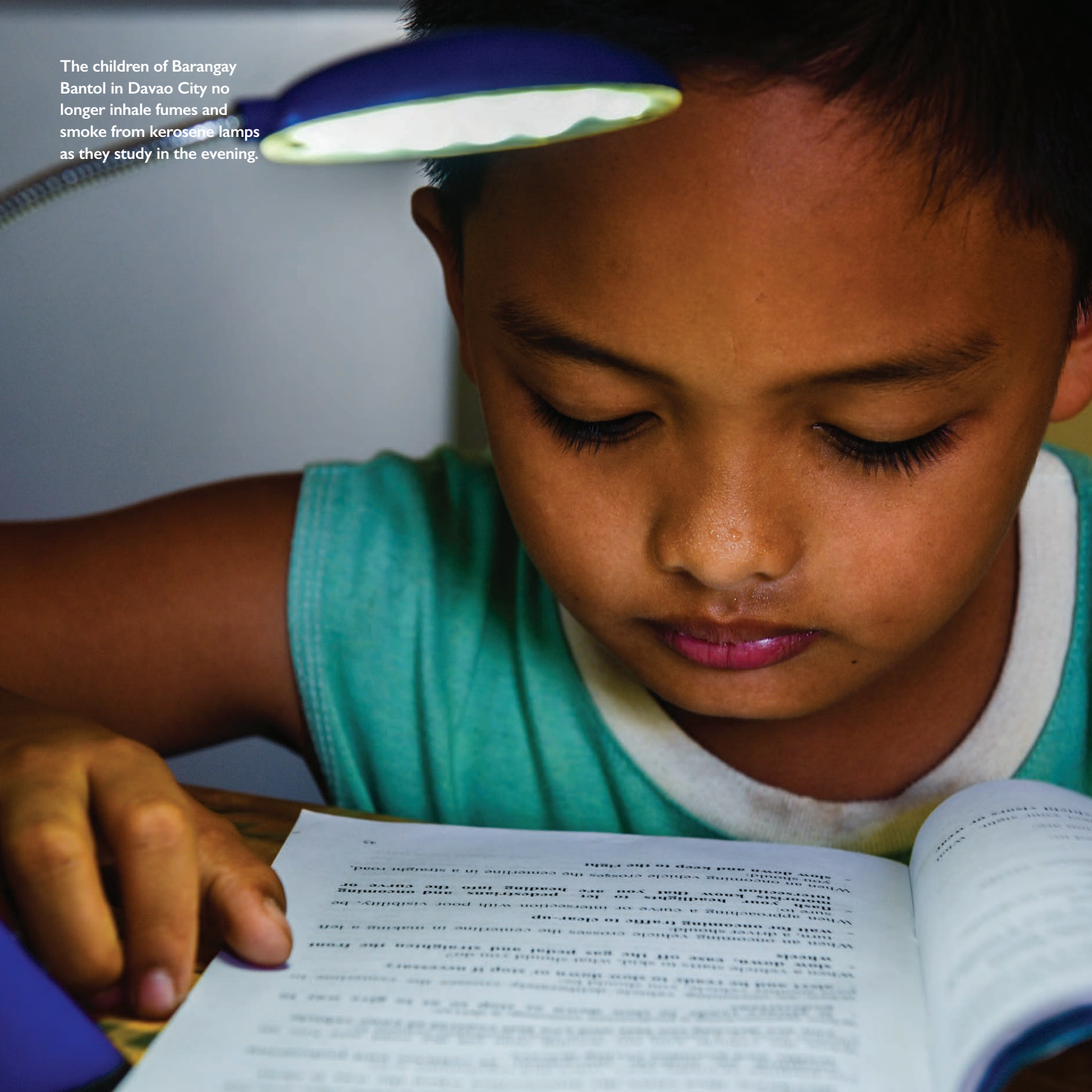
ENVIRONMENT



RIGHT PHOTO

Datu Malunay, an elder of the Talaandig tribe and a USAID-trained volunteer guard in the Mount Kitanglad Range Natural Park (an ASEAN Heritage site), uses a tablet to patrol the forest. Some 15 million indigenous people in the Philippines depend on forests for their livelihood. In partnership with the national and local governments, USAID improves natural resource management, promotes water and energy security, and reduces vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters.

The children of Barangay Bantol in Davao City no longer inhale fumes and smoke from kerosene lamps as they study in the evening.



08

SOLAR PANELS TAKE HOMES OUT OF THE DARK

■ *“Our lives have improved now that our children can study well in the evening. Job opportunities also opened up for both men and women as solar panel technicians.”*

— **Enecita Fiel**
treasurer, *Barangay Renewable Energy Community Development Association*

Edwin Fiel lives in Barangay Bantol on the fringes of Davao City in the southern province of Davao del Sur. Like most residents here who have relied on kerosene lamps to light their homes at night, he used to spend a precious money each month to buy kerosene for their night lamps.

This money could have been spent for other family necessities, such as food or added capital for their businesses. Instead, they used it to pay for kerosene’s dim, flickering light. The kerosene smoke discouraged children from finishing their studies, the women from continuing with their mat-weaving and the fishermen from going out to fish for fear of getting lost at sea.

Many of these areas in Davao del Sur had limited access to basic services especially access to reliable and affordable electricity. As a result, remote rural communities in Mindanao that could not connect to the national or regional electricity

grid were unable to grow their businesses and increase their income. Further, they also faced challenges related to peace and order, such as military-rebel conflicts, clan wars, resource-use conflicts and political clashes. Residents in communities yearned to be more productive and empowered, and to experience the benefits of the peace process.

In 2004, USAID brought rural electrification to the community through its Alliance for Mindanao Off-grid Renewable Energy project (2002-2013) by installing small 30-watt solar panels on rooftops. This initiative improved the lives of Filipinos in the community and helped promote peace, especially in conflict-affected villages in Mindanao, including the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which were not connected to power grids. The project also installed streetlights, resulting in community members feeling more secure and well-lit community centers that became safe places for productive, civic activities.

Residents reported that the lighting helped them in their farm activities like working extra hours during harvest time; husking corn; and milling rice, corn and other produce. Livestock raisers engaged in poultry and swine-raising found it easier to take care of their animals in the evening. Villagers said that they were no longer afraid to go out at night, and they could now hold social activities in the evening.

Enabling Communities to Manage Renewable Energy Systems

Bantol was one of the 474 off-grid communities that gained access to electricity using renewable energy. The village had four technicians, two of whom were women, who were given the opportunity to do work normally attributed to men. Together with other 596 technicians, including 94 women from various beneficiary communities in Mindanao, they were specially trained to service the solar-powered systems in the Barangay Renewable Energy Community Development Associations (BRECDAs) and schools. This was the first of its kind in the Philippines.

“I think the job should not only be known by men. I was challenged, and I decided to apply for the training session. If

I complete it, then I can be of help to my community and personally attend to my installed package," said one of the women technicians.

USAID organized local leaders, improved their technical skills and helped form BRECDAs to sustain the rural electrification system. The process enabled members to manage their renewable energy systems and generate funds for the associations.

USAID also partnered with private organizations such as independent power producer Mirant Philippines and Sunpower Foundation, the Philippine Department of Energy, and local governments and NGOs in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. About 20,000 households in the autonomous region and in western, central and southern Mindanao received reliable solar energy systems, which included portable lanterns, solar panels and micro, hydro-power lighting systems. These solar energy systems helped mitigate annual carbon emissions from kerosene lamps and helped improve the health of families, as they no longer inhaled fumes and smoke from kerosene lamps.

Teaching and Learning Enhancement

Maribelle Labojo, a teacher at Bantol Elementary School, said that after the rural electrification activity, more students started attending school. The solar energy systems have powered 300 schools and enabled students to watch audiovisual materials and improve their learning skills.

"Our students are much more enthusiastic, because they can now watch lessons from multimedia facility. There is less absenteeism as compared to the past," said Labojo. "Students perform better, since they can study at night with the aid of solar lamps. Teachers also benefited, as they spend less time in preparing their visual aids," she added.

Brighter Future After USAID Project

Truly, the future is brighter for communities that have been provided with clean energy systems. Community members are now more optimistic about achieving peace, improving

From 2002-2013, public-private partnerships under USAID's AMORE project electrified 20,000 households with renewable energy lighting systems. These included houses connected to micro-hydro mini-grid systems, solar home lighting systems and portable solar lanterns.

literacy and enhancing opportunities for their respective families.

After solar panels were installed on their rooftop, Fiel said his family was able to save a significant amount, paying only PHP25 (\$0.50) for the unit's monthly maintenance, a full 95 percent less than what they previously had to spend to bring energy to their home.

"Our lives have now improved since our children can study well in the evening. Job opportunities also opened up for both men and women as solar panel technicians," said Fiel's wife, Enecita. She sits as treasurer of the BRECDA's project in Bantol, which manages the community's solar panels under another USAID project. She is one of many who benefited not only from the project's solar panels, but also from jobs created for the community.

For the Fiel family, the solar panels on the rooftops of homes in their remote village meant more than just bringing light. They also beckoned hope for everyone in the village. ■




From its solar panel enterprise, the Barangay Renewable Energy Community Development Association has earned PHP500,000 (\$9,980), which it will use to further grow the business.

USAID installed solar energy systems to power 174 rural schools from 2009 to 2013 in Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao Region, SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani, General Santos) and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.



School electrification reduced the time for teachers to prepare visual aids, increased class attendance and encouraged more active student participation.



An aerial shot of Danajon reef in Bohol, showing the extent of municipal waters that the community needs to vigilantly protect for the next generation. In 2008, there was an increase in catch rates of up to 350 percent in project areas and a significant improvement in fish biodiversity in Danajon Bank.

09

FISHERMEN TURN AGAINST DESTRUCTIVE FISHING

■ *“There was a time when we thought the fish had disappeared. We eventually realized that for the sea to take care of us, we must also take care of the sea.”*

— **Rodrigo Evardo**
*founding president of a local fishers’
organization in Talibon, Bohol*

With more than 7,000 islands and over 36,000 kilometers of coastline in the Philippines, the fisheries industry plays an important role in providing food and livelihood for people across the country. Fish and fish-based products account for 80 percent of the protein requirements of Filipinos. Unfortunately, environmental degradation and harmful fishing practices have led to declining catches in many traditional fishing grounds. Overfishing has caused the Philippines’ fish population to decrease by approximately 90 percent in the last five decades.

Rodrigo Evardo is one of the many fishers who have seen the effects of neglecting the ocean. A native of Talibon, a coastal municipality in the northern part of Bohol province, Evardo has fished its waters for decades. Coastal

communities in the area are heavily dependent for food and livelihood on the nearby Danajon Bank, one of only six double barrier coral reefs in the world and a rare geological formation known for its rich marine biodiversity. Evardo said that, unlike before, fish catch is no longer plentiful.

Fishing in Decline

“Now, our catch is so little even if we spend more time fishing. No matter how hard we work, sometimes we catch nothing,” Evardo said. He blames the decreasing fish catch on illegal fishing practices in Talibon and nearby municipalities that damage the coral reefs and endanger fishermen’s lives.

Rachel Sayson, Talibon’s tourism officer, remembers seeing fewer fish in the market as she grew older, but said nobody explained why this was happening. She has also observed this in nearby Tubigon municipality, where illegal fishers who use compressors are damaging the coral reefs and endangering fishers’ lives.

Evardo, who served for nine years as *barangay* (village) head, assembled other local leaders and police officers to convince illegal fishers to change their ways. He said fishermen engaged in illegal fishing practices were put off by the vigilant patrolling of the local government staff, police and community volunteers.

Partnerships Forged Through Sustainable Fisheries

Help came when USAID’s Fisheries Improved for Sustainable Harvest project was implemented in Danajon Bank from 2003 to 2010. Through the project, USAID improved fisheries management capacities of local government, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources staff, and fisherfolk communities. The project covered 709 kilometers of shoreline in 18 municipalities of Bohol, Cebu, Leyte and Southern Leyte, which spanned the Danajon Bank ecosystem. It also assisted local communities in fisheries and coastal resource management planning, law enforcement, and information and education activities.

USAID's partnership with 60 local governments has resulted in improved management of 550,000 hectares of marine waters — nearly the size of the state of Alaska. USAID also supports sustainable management of coastal fisheries for over 1.5 million Filipinos.

Geoffrey Villamil, Talibon Municipality's focal person for marine enforcement, said that their local fish wardens learned about fishery laws and local ordinances through seminars organized by USAID. "We realized things could change for the better. We were also given tools such as binoculars, life jackets, pump boats and global positioning systems to help us become more effective enforcers. We now train other fish wardens to help patrol our area 24/7," said Villamil.

USAID paved the way for other fisheries management actions, such as closed seasons during fish spawning season and regulation of mesh sizes of fishing nets to reduce the number of juvenile fish getting caught. Additionally, USAID, through the project, helped establish marine protected areas and mobilized fisherfolk communities to assist local governments, police and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in advocacy, monitoring and enforcement activities.

Enforcers of *Oplan Sandagat* (a multi-agency coastal law enforcement action against illegal fishing in Danajon Bank) patrol the waters to ensure that operating boats are registered, warn potential violators and issue fines.





Nurturing Marine Protection Advocates

Now in his 50s, Evardo is also a *Bantay Dagat* (sea patrol) volunteer. He was deputized by the Bureau as a fish warden after completing a training course to help safeguard their fishing grounds. Villamil, on the other hand, conducts learning sessions on fishery law enforcement for fisherfolk.

Evardo said that their vision is to bring back the abundance of fish stocks through community commitment to protect the sea. “USAID’s assistance was a big help to us. Fisherfolk here are happy because their income has increased as a result of the improvement in fish catch. More than that, we learned that we have a faithful partner in taking care of the marine sanctuaries,” he said.

To help community volunteers, Talibon Municipality Government and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources provide livelihood assistance to the *Bantay Dagat* members who have shown their commitments as marine protection advocates. Rolando Caba, Sr., who heads a fisherfolk group in nearby Tubigon Municipality, said that the local government is working to develop a mangrove

TOP PHOTO

Bantay Dagat volunteer Geoffrey Villamil, focal person for marine enforcement in Talibon, Bohol, educates island and coastal municipalities about fishery ordinances, livelihood options and the benefits of protecting the ocean.

rehabilitation project as an ecotourism destination. “We are hopeful that this will give us extra income and showcase how the community benefits from taking care of the environment,” he said.

Sayson said that the Talibon Fisheries and Coastal Resource Management Interpretive Center, established in 2007, continues to teach guests how to protect Danajon Bank. The center hosts a three-dimensional map of the Danajon Bank double barrier reef. The map was developed with community participation and illustrates five decades of resource use. It functions not only as an exhibit material, but also as a management tool for local governments.



A young girl watches her mother sort and prepare fish for drying. Fish and fish-based products account for 80 percent of the protein requirements of Filipinos.



LEFT PHOTO

Community participants in the week-long, participatory, three-dimensional mapping workshop organized by the USAID Fisheries for Improved Sustainable Harvest project paint details on the map of Danajon Bank double barrier reef. The map is now housed at the Talibon Fisheries and Coastal Resource Management Information Center, attracts tourists and is used as a management tool. (Photo: Asuncion Sia)

By 2013, the Danajon Bank double barrier reef system hosted 120 marine protected areas in various stages of protection and management. The provincial governments of Cebu, Leyte, Bohol and Southern Leyte also formed an inter-local government unit alliance for the joint management of the bank.

“We will strive to continue what we have started with the help of USAID, the local government and NGOs. The impossible has become possible with their help and our community’s cooperation. That makes us proud,” said Sayson. ■



Water from the Tumaga River is diverted to this purification and filtration plant. Zamboanga City Water District coordinates with security forces to protect the treatment facility and the watershed.

10

SECURING THE CITY'S WATER SUPPLY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

■ *“Water security is not only about the provision of sufficient water... it is also about having healthy ecosystems and building resilience to water-related disasters, including storms, floods and droughts.”*

— *Senator Loren Legarda*

“You can live for days without food and electricity, but not without water. Water is life. That is why I am committed to my job of taking care of the watershed, which supplies water to the city,” said Archilles Braulio, manager of the Watershed and Environmental Management Division of the Zamboanga City Water District.

Braulio inspects the different stages of the city's water supply and distribution channels. He makes sure that water from the reservoir reaches the homes and businesses in the commercial centers. His is not an easy job, especially since the water district faces several challenges in servicing residents. The impacts of climate change, the city's expanding population and the aging infrastructure, as well as conflicts in certain service areas, have made it tough for the water district to ensure that clients from 44 barangays get consistent water supply.

Zamboanga City relies heavily on surface water, augmented by deep wells, for agricultural and industrial use. The U.S. Government built the city's water system in 1911 to serve the U.S. forces in the city, and the local government took over management of the water supply.

Aside from developing the needed infrastructure, the water district focuses on maintaining and conserving the watershed to improve the city's water supply. It works with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to protect the city's watershed, a critical source of potable water supply provided to about 511,785 customers as of 2014.

“When we take care of the watershed, we ensure that it can continue and improve its ability to capture, store and filter rainwater so that it can produce quality water for the city today and tomorrow,” said Braulio.

When water supply is low, the water district resorts to rationing. By 2025, Zamboanga City is expected to grow to a population of over one million people. With that growth comes the need to provide additional 13.5 million cubic meters of water per year to meet the increasing demand. Future water requirements may be satisfied if other sources, such as rivers and springs, are tapped to augment current water supply sources. The reservoir in the 17,000-hectare Pasonanca Watershed feeds the water district's main water source: the Tumaga River.

Securing Water Through Partnerships

USAID's Water Security for Resilient Economic Growth and Stability (Be Secure) project, which began in 2013, provided assistance to the Zamboanga City Water District as part of measures to improve water security to support resilient and stable economic growth in the country.

At the national level, USAID supported training on weather and climate forecasting for the Philippines' weather bureau,

PAGASA, and streamflow data management for the Department of Works and Highways personnel. USAID also worked with the World Bank to help the National Water Resources Board, Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the Local Water Utilities Administration develop *Listahang Tubig*, a registry for water service providers in the country that is used for improving access to water supply and the services of water utilities.

At the local level, USAID worked with cities like Zamboanga to increase access to water supply and sanitation and improve water security. USAID, through the project, helped the Zamboanga City Water District design a water treatment plant that can treat up to 20 million liters of water per day and to assess the feasibility of an impounding dam to meet the city's long-term water requirements. The project also helped the water district develop bidding documents and access national government financing, which are crucial for constructing a PHP 165-million (\$3.4 million) sewerage treatment plant in an area donated by the Zamboanga City government.


In the peak of an intense drought in early 2016, the project brought local government and water district partners to the United States to learn from the Seattle Public Utilities on practical ways of managing water demand through better demand forecasting and effective water conservation and efficiency programs. The project also partnered the water districts with the Florida Water and Climate Alliance to learn how to assess vulnerabilities to natural disasters and integrate these into business and emergency plans.

Through USAID's assistance, over 177,000 Zamboanga City residents benefited from improved access to clean drinking water. Zamboanga City Mayor Ma. Isabelle Climaco is grateful for the support of USAID to the city and expressed commitment to work with the water district to help provide better water security for the city's residents.

USAID's assistance helped over 177,000 Zamboanga City residents access clean drinking water. The project also helped 220,000 residents of Tacloban City and more than 450,000 residents of Iloilo City access better sanitation facilities.

USAID's support to improve access to water and sanitation has impacted other areas in the Philippines. In Tacloban City in 2016, a lime pit stabilization septage treatment facility was turned over to the local government. The pit was the first to be built in the region and the first to showcase this technology in the country, developed by USAID, UNICEF and Samaritan's Purse International Relief. The facility will provide access to improved sanitation to over 220,000 residents of Tacloban City.

In Iloilo City, Mayor Jed Patrick Mabilog established a technical working group charged with the city's water and sanitation initiatives. USAID is assisting the city to develop its septage management program, which will benefit over 450,000 people with improved access to sanitation services. ■

A photograph showing a man in a red shirt climbing a blue metal ladder against a large, weathered concrete dam wall. The ladder is positioned over two large, rectangular metal grates that serve as water intake or outlet structures. The water level is visible at the bottom of the frame, appearing somewhat murky. The dam wall shows signs of age and weathering, with some discoloration and peeling material.

A staff member of the Zamboanga City Water District measures the water level at the dam located at Pasonanca Natural Park.

HEALTH



RIGHT PHOTO

Aeta women and other villagers in Porac, Pampanga, learn about tuberculosis symptoms through USAID materials. USAID partners with the Department of Health to improve the health and productivity of families, including indigenous communities.

Midwives in Well-Family Midwife Clinics provide postnatal care, including immunization, in addition to other services such as pregnancy tests, prenatal care, delivery and family planning.



SAVING MOMS AND BABIES

■ *“At its heart, the birthing facilities empowered women to take charge of their health and take better care of their family by getting educated on the proper spacing between births.”*

— *Corazon Paras*
president, Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines

Carol Millan was one of the first midwives in the Philippines to receive assistance and participate in training sessions to establish a Well-Family Midwife Clinic through USAID’s Technical Assistance for the Conduct of Integrated Family Planning and Maternal Health Activities (TANGO). The project was implemented by Philippine non-governmental organizations from 1995 to 2004 and improved maternal health by expanding access to quality health services.

Millan applied for the training workshop when she returned from the Middle East, where she had worked as a midwife at a hospital. For her, it was a dream come true. She was able to open a clinic that offered Filipino mothers access to better birthing services in a city filled with congested public hospitals.

USAID, through the TANGO project, provided Millan with training on basic business management skills and PHP100,000–300,000 (\$2,000–6,200) worth of equipment

and basic business management skills, which helped her reach her dream. She opened a small clinic housed in a rented bungalow and then eventually opened the Cattleya Well-Family Midwife Clinic in Metro Manila’s business district of Makati.

More birthing facilities in the country — inspired by the model of the USAID-assisted facilities — have helped decongest government hospitals and, more importantly, prevent maternal and newborn deaths, especially among poor and marginalized populations.

Through the commitment of the Philippine government, USAID and other partners, the percentage of women who completed four antenatal care visits rose from 52.1 percent to 70.4 percent between 1993 and 2003, while skilled birth attendance went up from 52.8 to 60 percent. Facility-based delivery improved from 28.2 to 38.6 percent over the same period. In 1993, the maternal mortality ratio was 209 per 100,000 live births. By educating parents and providing quality services, health workers trained through USAID’s projects have contributed to the Philippine government’s achievement in 2015 of more than 77 percent of deliveries with a skilled birth attendant.

Birthing Facilities Built, Quality Services Sustained

In addition to providing birthing services, the clinics also double as centers that offer services and raise awareness on family planning. Bohol-based Corazon Paras, president of the Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines, declared, “More mothers are now open to options to take care of themselves and their families through proper birth spacing using modern family planning methods.”

Building on the gains of TANGO to improve the quality of maternal and neonatal health services, USAID implemented the Community Maternal, Neonatal, Child Health, and Nutrition Scale-Up (CMSU) project from 2012 to 2015, through the Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines. CMSU expanded the reach of these services and strengthened the capacity of national and local midwives’

associations through peer mentoring and monitoring in both public and private birthing homes.

Through mentoring and monitoring midwives to build their skills in delivery of babies, antenatal and newborn care, family planning counseling and services, and child feeding and breastfeeding, members of the Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines were taught to manage the clinics and offer quality services in assisting deliveries. "Birthing facilities provide maternal and child care to patients while at the same time they develop the entrepreneurial side of midwives by generating local employment in the community," she said.

Paras recognized the critical need for better birthing facilities after working in overcrowded maternity wards and helplessly watching a newborn die as a result of a preventable umbilical cord infection.

"The sheer volume of patients causes heavy congestion in public hospitals. It is not unusual to see a hospital bed shared by three women who just gave birth, together with their babies," said Paras.

USAID's work to establish birthing facilities came at an opportune time when demands for these were widely unmet. Dr. Rey Moses Cabagnot, provincial health officer in Bohol, explained that USAID-assisted private birthing facilities complement the services provided in public hospitals and clinics. These private birthing facilities also partner with government-run clinics and public hospitals to identify complications and refer pregnant women who might require Caesarean sections or complex surgeries to deliver their babies.

More birthing facilities have meant expanded access to better services, clean places for women to rest after giving birth, and more quality time for mothers and newborns to physically bond during the first hour after birth.

USAID's TANGO transformed the role of midwives from ordinary health care providers to social entrepreneurs who provide affordable health services while generating more income, thereby enhancing their self-confidence and professional status.

"The benefits of birthing facilities go beyond providing an alternative place for giving birth. At their heart, the clinics have empowered women to take charge of their reproductive health and take better care of their family by learning about proper spacing between births and the use of family planning to support their desired family size," said Paras.

Promoting Responsible Parenthood

The Philippine government has worked to expand public access to information on family planning services since the late 1990s as a means to promote the health and well-being of families. Filipino women who want to space their pregnancies or have reached their desired family size are provided with comprehensive family planning information, counseling and services.

USAID's project cultivated a paying market for the clinics and provided an option for health care consumers from lower-income communities.



Nurse Reymund Lumantas checks on Jessa Mae – a baby he saved during birth after performing newborn resuscitation, a skill he learned from a USAID-sponsored course. USAID supports the Department of Health to scale up high-impact measures that reduce maternal and infant deaths and help meet family planning needs.



In 1993, the maternal mortality ratio was 209 per 100,000 live births. By 2015, the Philippines had reduced maternal mortality to 114 per 100,000 live births.

For Juvy Borja, 43, mother of two from Makati City, having the option to plan for a small family helped her pursue her life's goals. After giving birth to her youngest child in 2007, Borja told her husband that she wanted more information about how to prevent unplanned pregnancies.

Borja found a place to get advice on pregnancy and reproductive health at a small birthing facility near their home. "I learned that having a family size that I can manage is important to give quality time and better health care for my children, my partner and myself," she said. Looking back on the past nine years, Borja feels fortunate to have been introduced to a USAID-assisted birthing home. Her visits to this facility opened her eyes to life-changing choices that empowered her to exercise her full potential as a more responsible mother and wife. ■



In Mindanao, USAID has invested in the health sector by assisting facilities to obtain PhilHealth accreditation and training health service providers in competencies required by PhilHealth. This support has contributed to improved maternal and child health and family planning services.

12

IMPROVING HEALTH CARE ACCESS

■ *“USAID served as a bridge and catalyst to improve the national health insurance system of the country. Having served this institution for the past 39 years, I am very proud of the achievements of PhilHealth.”*

— *Melinda Mercado*
PhilHealth senior vice president

When Adela Floresta, 65, was hospitalized in 2015 for hypertension, she used her membership in the state-run Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) to pay for most of her medical bills.

“I am a senior citizen who makes ends meet for my children. If I get sick, I have no means to pay for my hospitalization. But thanks to PhilHealth, getting medical attention is no longer a problem,” said Floresta, whose livelihood is managing a small store at her home.

Juvy Borja, a mother of two, received quality services at a low-cost private birthing clinic in Makati City, Metro Manila. Just like her, many women benefit from PhilHealth’s maternity and newborn care packages. The packages include pre- and post-natal check-ups, safe delivery, newborn care,

and payments for doctors’ professional fees and room accommodations.

“I am glad I took advantage of the maternity package because I received high-quality and affordable care. With my PhilHealth membership, I paid only a fraction of the cost of what I paid at a private clinic during my first delivery,” said Borja.

Institutionalization of National Health Insurance

Republic Act No. 7875, also known as the National Health Insurance Act of 1995, paved the way for the creation of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation or PhilHealth. Through technical assistance provided by USAID’s Health Finance Development project from 1991 to 1996, the Department of Health and PhilHealth’s predecessor — the Philippine Medical Care Commission (Medicare) — spearheaded the passage of legislation that enabled a majority of Filipinos to access quality health care under the National Health Insurance Program. While the law has undergone several amendments, the basic mandate of PhilHealth — to provide health insurance coverage to all Filipinos — has not changed.

In its 20 years of existence, PhilHealth has provided coverage for existing and emerging health problems. USAID gives technical support to the Department of Health to help develop benefit packages and approaches that are responsive to clients’ needs.

Nearing Target

As of the end of June 2016, PhilHealth had more than 92 million members and dependents, comprising 90 percent of the country’s estimated population of more than 102 million. In contrast, Medicare covered only about 38 percent of the population in the 1990s. USAID also supported the accreditation of health facilities to extend access to maternity,



TOP PHOTO

PhilHealth and USAID collaborated on a media campaign to encourage Filipinos to learn more about the National Health Insurance Program. (Source: Screenshot from USAID Philippines’ “Philhealth Benefits”)

In 2016, PhilHealth provided health insurance coverage to 9 out of 10 Filipinos – a major step forward from the 1990s, when fewer than 4 out of 10 Filipinos had health insurance under Medicare.

RIGHT PHOTO

USAID supported PhilHealth by organizing group counseling for private practicing midwives. The sessions equipped them with skills and knowledge to respond to demand for family planning and maternal and child health services and products among couples.

newborn and TB packages for poor families enrolled in PhilHealth. PhilHealth utilization rates among targeted local governments rose from 49 percent in 2015 to 72 percent in 2016.

While the Philippines is still working toward universal health care, strong foundations have been established through PhilHealth’s policy and operations that continue to reach a growing percentage of the population. ■



Barangay health worker Virginia Tungol (right) learned better ways of testing patients for TB through USAID's training program. She visited TB patient Juanita Malong (left) at home to supervise her daily intake of anti-TB medicine during her six-month treatment.

The Department of Health was recognized by the World Health Organization for reaching the Philippine Millennium Development Goal of cutting in half TB mortality and prevalence between 1990 and 2015.

13

LIGHTENING THE TB BURDEN

■ *"We try to be holistic in our approach. We don't treat them as cases; we treat them as people, as human beings."*
— **Dr. Philip Patrick Co**
medical coordinator, San Juan City TB project

Juanita Malong was diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB) in 2015. She worried that she would not be able to get proper treatment because her income as a laundry woman would not be enough to pay for her medical expenses.

"I was coughing a lot, and it made me miss some of my work days. Missing work means no income," said the 67-year-old Malong. She lives in Barangay West Crame, the most populous district in the city of San Juan, Metro Manila.

Malong is just one among hundreds of thousands of Filipinos suffering from TB. Based on the Global Tuberculosis Report (2016) of the World Health Organization, the Philippines ranked eighth among 30 countries with the highest TB burden, with an estimated 324,000 cases in 2015.

Reaching Communities

To help the Philippines combat the disease, USAID launched the Innovations and Multisectoral Partnerships to Achieve

Control of Tuberculosis, a five-year project that started in 2012 in partnership with the Philippine Department of Health. The project's TB testing stations, particularly in rural areas, allowed clients to get tested near their homes for easier access to diagnosis and treatment. The practice of using these stations has helped to diagnose and cure more people, thus reducing the spread of the disease.

Since 2012, USAID has installed 249 remote testing stations run by trained informal laboratory workers in 17 provinces. USAID, through the project, has also mobilized 3,700 community volunteers to promote TB awareness and education among 27,000 individuals. These outreach activities resulted in 78 percent of the people identified as TB presumptive cases in USAID's project sites to seek diagnosis and appropriate treatment in health centers.

USAID helped increase TB case-finding by engaging more than 365 private hospitals; 4,067 private pharmacies; and 177 jails and prisons, as well as workplaces, indigenous people and Muslim religious leaders. The program also helped improve TB cure rates by mobilizing nearly 3,500 health workers and 700 midwives to provide treatment and support for TB patients.

At the same time, USAID worked with hospitals to improve their ability to treat TB and engaged private workplaces to encourage them to establish TB prevention and treatment programs for their employees.

Reaping the Benefits

Malong is among the beneficiaries of USAID's investments in the fight against TB. After receiving advice from (district) health worker Virginia Tungol, she went to a USAID-assisted TB testing facility, where she was accurately diagnosed for TB. For the next six months, the facility provided her with free treatment, which included sputum testing and medication. Sputum, a thick fluid produced in the lungs and in the airways leading to the lungs, is tested for the presence of bacteria that can cause TB infection.

Tungol visited Malong daily at home to supervise her medicine intake. "She made sure that I took my medicine regularly," said Malong.

It is crucial for patients not to miss their medication so they do not develop drug resistance. Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) is, on average, 10 times more expensive to treat and can result in long-term or permanent side effects. In the Philippines, an estimated 17,000 TB cases were MDR-TB.

USAID's TB project trained Tungol on more efficient ways to test patients for TB. Her training modules also included the basic directly observed treatment, short course TB control strategy, and soft skills, such as interpersonal communication and counseling for patients. These skills helped Tungol improve her interactions with patients, giving comfort and building commitment and trust.

Joseph Acosta Mason, 62, is another beneficiary of the project. Like Malong, he received free TB treatment in Barangay West Crame, San Juan.

"After getting diagnosed, I went to a private doctor. Two months into the treatment, I did not see any improvement, so I went to the health center across the street from my store," said Mason.

"The treatment at the health center was free. It was even better than what I received from the private clinic. The health workers at the center knew how to treat TB patients effectively," Mason added.

Indeed, improved access to TB detection and treatment has helped combat the disease in San Juan and other parts of the Philippines. The World Health Organization recognized the Department of Health in 2015 for its extraordinary progress in TB diagnosis, treatment and care. The Philippines was also lauded for reaching the Philippine Millennium Development Goal of cutting TB mortality and prevalence in half between 1990 and 2015. ■



TOP PHOTO
Joseph Acosta Mason credits the local health center and its USAID-trained staff for his successful TB treatment.

Through the strong partnership between the Philippine and U.S. governments, the TB treatment success rate in the Philippines rose to 92 percent of new and relapse cases in 2014, up from 87 percent in 2004.

A cured TB patient, Estrellita Apale (right), is grateful for the support of her treatment partner, Jocelyn Canania, who made sure she attended her regular check-ups and took the daily medicines needed to recover from TB.



MINDANAO PEACE AND STABILITY



RIGHT PHOTO

Students of Taluksangay National High School in Zamboanga City participate in a USAID-supported activity during the 2013 Week of Peace celebrations in Mindanao. USAID's work accelerates and sustains inclusive growth to support a more prosperous and stable nation, including conflict-affected areas of Mindanao.

Former combatants — like these seaweed farmers — were given the opportunity to pursue productive livelihoods through USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao project. Farmers learned to improve production and packaging, which expanded market outreach and made them more competitive.



14

MAKING THE LAND OF PROMISE A REALITY

■ *“Between 2013-2014, Davao had the highest surge [of gross domestic product growth] in the country, at 9.4 percent. These gains were propelled by a mixture of industrial expansion, agricultural recovery and sustained contribution from the services sector.”*

— *Marifi S. Jara*
Mindanao bureau chief, *BusinessWorld*

Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago comprise one-third of the Philippine territory and one-quarter of the country's total population. Touted as the Land of Promise, Mindanao's potential for growth is affected by conflict, which limits investment and development and drains government resources.

For intrepid and enterprising individuals, however, Mindanao beckons with opportunities. USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao project, carried out from 1995 to 2013, accelerated economic growth in Mindanao and worked toward peace in the region.

Turning Over a New Leaf

“*Walay klaro!*” (Nothing is clear!) This is how Tengan Maranding describes his chaotic life as a rebel in his younger years. A native of South Cotabato, a province in Central Mindanao, he

recalled the days when he roamed the mountains aimlessly as a member of the Moro National Liberation Front. He did not need much persuasion to join the group, since “You were cool if you had a gun in your hands,” said Maranding.

Life with the group seemed like an adventure, as they were always on the run and had to stay alert. When they could set up camp, his bed was a pile of leaves or a hammock. Food was what was available, mostly sweet potatoes and bananas. He also managed to survive the occasional firefight with the army and armed civilians. At some point, he felt that his life was going nowhere, until the group broke apart. “My comrades parted ways, and that was why I left,” he said.

At 22, Maranding began a new journey. With the help of his father, he returned to rice farming and, in 1999, got married. “Our dream is to have a good and peaceful life, send our kids to school and be able to eat three times a day,” he said. He was then persuaded by his wife's family to transfer to General Santos City and never to return to the tumultuous life of a rebel. There he raised his family and started producing corn and vegetables.

USAID's project served as a catalyst for Maranding's dreams to come true. He landed a job at the farm of former *barangay* (village) captain Roger Pascual, who taught him corn seed production and asparagus farming. Pascual founded the Greenland Asparagus Multi-purpose Cooperative in 2008, and the group received technical assistance from USAID in 2011. They used it to improve the seed production of assorted vegetables and high-value crops such as asparagus.

USAID, through the GEM project, supported some 28,000 former Moro National Liberation Front combatants, providing them with agriculture and aquaculture inputs and technical training to help them produce corn, rice and seaweed. Among them, about 4,000 went on to produce and sell higher-value agricultural crops such as asparagus.

“USAID's assistance was a big boost to the cooperative. We increased our asparagus production from 300 kilograms per day to 1,500-2,000 kilograms per day. We have also

USAID provided the tools and training for more than 28,000 former combatants in Mindanao to pursue productive livelihoods and promote peace.

expanded our asparagus plantation from 10 hectares to 40 hectares,” said Pascual.

Today, fresh asparagus is one of the top leading exports from Central Mindanao Region, and the cooperative is now one of the major local suppliers. It also exports produce to Japan and Korea and has plans to expand to Singapore and Australia.

Building Enterprises and Transforming Lives

The opportunity to help enterprises and improve livelihoods came after progress was made in the government’s peace-building work after 1986. Mindanao, including General Santos City, became the focus of agro-industrial development during the 1990s.

Marfenio Y. Tan of San Agustin Fishing, Inc., has witnessed the dramatic growth of the fishing industry of General Santos City, located in Central Mindanao. His company, along with other fishing enterprises, benefited from the cooperation between the Philippine government and USAID, which was geared toward transforming the city to become the country’s “Tuna Capital.”

USAID’s assistance to Greenland Asparagus Multi-purpose Cooperative improved its production to 1,500-2,000 kilograms of asparagus per day. It is now one of the top suppliers of asparagus in the country.





“Fishing has always been a contributor to the city’s economy, but, at first, tuna was mostly for the local market,” said Tan. From the 1950s up until the 1970s, tuna catch was simply offloaded along the beach in Barangay Bula in General Santos City, where fishing boat operators lived.

In 1972, fishing operators saw the potential for growth when tuna traders chanced upon the massive tuna supply in the city. Export companies — such as Zamboanga City’s Sikatuna Fishing, Ricsan, Del Monte and Dole Philippines — soon set up buying stations. The need for adequate infrastructure and services, however, hindered the group from fully tapping the tuna export market.

Tan credits the Department of Agriculture for taking the lead in building critical infrastructure, such as the ice plant, fish port and roads. USAID stepped in and partnered with national and local agencies to fast-track the city’s growth.

TOP PHOTO

General Santos City is the country’s largest producer of sashimi-grade tuna. Direct export of tuna from farms in nearby provinces was made possible through a new airport that opened in 1996 through USAID support.

These projects built peace and reduced poverty following the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front in 1996.

Mindanao Becomes a Gateway

USAID initially funded half of the \$213-million General Santos Development Zone project to accelerate agro-industrial development and attract private sector investment.

The project linked rural communities in South Cotabato and Sarangani to General Santos City with 158 kilometers of roads, constructed from 1991 to 1994. In addition, USAID and the Philippine government jointly funded the construction of a new airport in General Santos City costing \$48.6 million.

The new airport further helped local businessmen and women secure the agricultural export market and enabled the old airport to service larger Boeing 737 and Airbus A300 planes. The 600-hectare airport, with its 3,200-meter runway, opened in July 1996. It became the first airport in Mindanao to accommodate wide-body aircraft for cargo handling. It also allowed direct export of *sashimi*-grade tuna and agricultural produce from farms in nearby provinces. General Santos became the gateway to the Central Mindanao region.

USAID also supported the feasibility study for the expansion of Makar Wharf, which was later tapped to be part of the shipping route to Bitung in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The wharf — located in General Santos — and Bitung were the designated ports for the cargo shipping service between Southern Philippines (Mindanao) and Indonesia in 1997, to support cross-border trade in the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area. These key infrastructure investments, along with the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority Fish Port Complex, propelled General Santos City into an agro-industrial hub. The infrastructure expansion in the tuna industry in General Santos City generated 5,000 jobs in processing and benefited 10,000 small-scale tuna fishermen.

“One of the significant benefits from USAID support was the strengthening of local business groups,” said Tan. USAID fisheries management specialists provided fishing associations, including the SOCSKSARGEN Federation Fishing Associations and Allied Industries (SFFAAll), with technical inputs and support. Eventually, the association was able to stand on its own merit.



TOP PHOTO

Marfenio Tan of San Agustin Fishing was among the entrepreneurs who benefited from USAID’s investment in Makar Wharf and the General Santos Airport.

Tan added that SFFAAll advocacy resulted in the country’s accession to the Western and Central Pacific Fishing Commission, as well as bilateral agreements with Indonesia, Palau and Papua New Guinea, which gave local fishing companies access to strategic fishing areas.

From humble beginnings in Mindanao, these local fishing-boat operators and combatants-turned-farmers have risen to become industry leaders and heads of enterprises that have contributed to local development and peace-building in areas once synonymous with armed conflict. ■

Harold Reyes is among the 19,000 young people who benefited from USAID's skills training program in Mindanao.



15

MINDANAO YOUTH BUILD SKILLS TO HELP REBUILD THE CITY

■ *“USAID was instrumental in equipping me with life skills to dream of a better future.”*

— **Harold Reyes**
*hairdresser, MYDev alumna
and president of a plumber's association*

Harold Reyes juggles two jobs — as a plumber at a construction site and as a hairdresser at a beauty salon. His routine allows him to harness his skills and earn a decent income despite not having a college degree.

Growing up in conflict-affected Zamboanga City and not being able to finish school, Reyes had limited income-earning opportunities. This was until he finished a 21-day certification course on plumbing and construction under USAID's Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev) project. MYDev contributes to peace and stability by expanding access to education and improving employability and life skills for out-of-school youth in eight conflict-affected areas in southern Philippines. The project promotes an environment that protects vulnerable youth against stereotyping, extremism and radicalization in their communities.

“I chose this course to challenge myself. I wanted to prove that I can do the job—regardless of my gender orientation,” said Reyes, who is also a member of the Professional Plumbers Association of the Philippines.

He shared that, in one construction project, he earned PHP3,000 (\$62), which he gave to his mother to help pay for their family expenses. Since then, he has worked on other projects, including churches, schools and a center for the elderly in Zamboanga City.

Massive Skills Training

Reyes is one of the young people who were trained under USAID's skills training project for the youth in Mindanao. The five-year project seeks to engage at least 19,000 out-of-school youth in workforce and community development.

USAID partnered with the Department of Education's Alternative Learning System, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and other training organizations in the region. Through this collaboration, out-of-school youth receive vocational training certification in various fields and find local employment with partner businesses. This is crucial, because most of the skilled graduates in the region still travel to the country's capital, Manila, or to other major cities, such as Cebu and Davao, in search of better-paying jobs.

Skills development provides opportunities for out-of-school youth to engage in income-generating activities, improving their families' economic condition, and allowing them to be productive members of the community.

USAID's emerging skills training project focuses on skills in business and entrepreneurship. The training courses on food processing, handicraft making, construction, agriculture and culinary skills were identified as the most popular, as they equip the trainees with skills that are in demand locally.

Local governments, as in Zamboanga City, invite newly trained youth to showcase their products during annual trade fairs.

RIGHT PHOTO

Trained as a plumber and hairdresser, Harold wants to raise the voice of marginalized out-of-school youth to take up opportunities such as vocational training.

In addition to skills development, USAID's MYDev project also conducts learning sessions that help young people think critically and act creatively. They are guided to demonstrate effective work habits, improve their communication skills and exercise discipline in the workplace.

Inspiring Excellence Among Out-of-School Youth

The project has established eight functional Out-of-School Youth Development Alliances and improves basic education competencies, life skills and employability for more than 19,000 out-of-school youth in conflict areas in Mindanao. Over 9,000 youth also received certification from nationally recognized vocational institutions, thereby improving their employment options.

This was demonstrated by Reyes, who became an active member of local professional networks after his certification. He was also elected president of the city plumbers' association. He sees his position as an opportunity to champion better understanding among his peers and represent mostly marginalized out-of-school youth. Other participants of the MYDev project have pursued tertiary education, with some earning scholarships from regional universities.

Reyes encourages other youth to take up vocational training. "There's a big change in my life. Now instead of being a burden to my family, I am able to support them and help them have a brighter future," said Reyes. ■

As of 2016, a full 70 percent of youth from USAID's MYDev program who returned to schools had measurably enhanced life skills, and 67 percent had improved perceptions of their governments and communities.



EPILOGUE



As we look back on the last 50-plus years of partnership between the Philippines and USAID, we are filled with hope and excitement for the future.

The strength and resilience of the Filipino spirit to triumph are undeniable. The stories in these pages reflect the will of all citizens to work together, overcome challenges, and achieve their dreams for their families and communities.

USAID is humbled and proud to have been part of this nation's journey of transformation. As one of the Philippines' partners in development, we are excited to take bold steps toward a brighter future.

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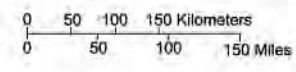
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Philippines



Students from Anahaway Elementary School in Leyte show their thanks to the U.S. Government after receiving newly constructed classrooms, classroom furniture and learning materials. Their school was heavily damaged by Typhoon Yolanda.



ABOUT THE COVER

Students of Palo I Central School in Leyte find a reason to smile again with the construction of new classrooms by USAID. The U.S. Government, through USAID, constructed more than 300 classrooms in Leyte and Samar Provinces following the destruction caused by Typhoon Yolanda in November 2013.



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