ACTIVITY BACKGROUND

USAID’s Mindanao Youth for Development (MYDev) activity, implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC) from 2013 to 2019, sought to address key constraints to peace and stability in the Mindanao region of the Philippines by strengthening governance, improving life skills, and increasing civic engagement and economic productivity of out-of-school youth. MYDev was implemented in eight conflict-affected areas of the Mindanao region, which has long struggled with ongoing conflict between the government and terrorist, rebel, and criminal groups in the area. In 2017, the city of Marawi (which was not an original MYDev target city) experienced a five-month long violent crisis, resulting in the displacement of thousands of citizens and considerable damage to infrastructure and private property.

The major components of MYDev were a) life skills instruction; b) technical skills training through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA); c) support for equitable access to basic education and high school equivalency courses through the Department of Education’s Alternative Learning System (ALS); and d) capacity building through the creation of local out-of-school youth development alliances (YDAs). The final year of the activity strengthened existing interventions and supported crisis recovery in Marawi through a resilience and recovery-focused scale-up that included three additional sites affected by the siege. The activity has reached more than 25,700 vulnerable youth and mobilized local government officials, local businesses and other key stakeholders into YDAs aiming to coordinate multi-stakeholder engagement to support job skills training and livelihood pathways.

KEY FINDINGS

DESIGN AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

SEL skills were conceptualized in the activity as life skills. MYDev defines life skills as 1) work readiness skills necessary for young people to be successful at work; and 2) civic engagement skills including values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills that enable young people to think critically and act creatively for personal, community, and national development. MYDev’s objectives, activities and outcomes were guided by the activity’s development hypothesis that conflict-affected communities will begin to benefit from the accretion of social capital that underpins local area stability, security and prosperity when the social contract between local government, communities and vulnerable out-of-school youth is strengthened through incremental gains in mutual trust. To this end, MYDev offered an intensive Life Skills Training to vulnerable youth learners and trainees enrolled in any of

BEST PRACTICES

- SEL was thoroughly integrated into MYDev through the intensive Life Skills curriculum, the additional resilience-focused modules, and the strong civic engagement component of the activity.
- Rigorous measurement and data collection provided evidence of activity success, facilitating the scale-up of MYDev’s approach in the country and its adoption by other youth activities in the Philippines and around the world.
- USAID support and existing goodwill built up over the years had positive impacts on the activity’s implementation.
- Adaptability to context and stakeholder buy-in at all levels throughout the activity ensured minimal disruption to programming despite regional conflict.
- YDAs were seen as instrumental to the successful engagement of youth in their communities.
- Involving youth and other local stakeholders from the beginning of the activity facilitated integration of Life Skills instruction into training materials still being used by the Department of Education today.
the activities through the Life Skills curriculum, which was developed based on EDC’s Work Ready Now Curriculum. The curriculum consisted of nine modules and culminated in community service projects that youth manage and plan as a way to apply learned skills and attitudes from the training. Particular SEL focused modules include interpersonal communication, personal development, work habits and conduct. MYDev also partnered with ALS to increase vulnerable youth’s access to education, as well as with TESDA to enhance their employability. Another central feature of the Life Skills Training was the civic engagement module, which was designed to inspire youth to be actively involved in their communities. Civic engagement activities allowed youth to apply their learning in meaningful ways and permitted them to foster connectedness with their communities. Over the life of the program, over 22,000 youth actively participated and conducted nearly 900 meaningful community service projects. In the program extension phase, youth organized a total of 304 resilience projects in their communities, mobilizing youth across all MYDev sites and contributing to increased social cohesion in their communities.

The MYDev team employed a thorough contextualization process taking into account local perspectives, values, and existing teaching and learning materials from ALS and TESDA, while also modifying the more widely employed Work Ready Now curriculum to the Philippines context. The activity was conceptualized in conjunction with key stakeholders such as ALS, TESDA, local government officials, and private sector representatives, all of whom reviewed and validated learning content and activities. In response to the Marawi crisis, EDC and local stakeholders developed two Foundations of Resilience modules to strengthen youth resilience to violence and violent extremism, which were noted to be particularly critical to the activity. The first training module was designed for youth to identify and strengthen positive coping skills, and the second provided youth with information and activities to better understand violent extremism in their communities, identify cause and effect of given actions, and recognize and strengthen their social support system.

Equity and inclusion of youth was a key consideration of the activity, particularly since the main target population comprised vulnerable and out-of-school youth. Youth with disabilities and youth in remote areas were also targeted for programming. One noted benefit of the activity was the way in which views and priorities of out-of-school youth were represented and given weight through the structure of YDAs.

“One element that MYDev really put forward that we are using in other countries now is that we recognize that the existing youth voice groups were not representative of the marginalized out-of-school youth population. So, we worked with the local authorities, the communities, and the youth themselves to create youth development alliances where youth were elected and sat with different stakeholders including the private sector and municipality representatives in really troubleshooting and understanding the situation of out-of-school youth and how we can continue improving the different elements of the MYDev components. This was facilitated by youth development coordinators coming from the communities themselves.”— Director of the EDC Youth Team

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT

Continuous engagement and intentional capacity building with the government in all activity aspects allowed for curriculum scale-up beyond the initial target regions. Respondents and activity materials alike noted a great interest in activity offerings on the part of the government and local enterprises, acknowledging that MYDev was able to meet an important gap in services. The continuity of EDC activities in the region also lent itself to sustainability in terms of staffing and local ownership of activity components. One key informant noted how a year after the activity, a number of youth remained civically engaged and competitive in the job market. Further evidence of activity success is
noted in the fact that the Life Skills materials and approach developed by MYDevel are now being used in other areas of the Philippines and in other countries as part of youth development activities.

Key informants identified MYDevel’s strong relationship with USAID as a key ingredient of activity success. USAID’s focus on measuring success and translating findings was also seen as a key factor enabling scale-up in the Philippines and global recognition of the activity’s success. The USAID Mission played a very active and collaborative role in activity roll-out and throughout the life of MYDevel.

“Yeah, it’s very important because we are very lucky to have a very good education office of the USAID Philippines. So our Agreement Officer’s Representative is very hands on; he is very practical and his technical leadership is very timely. He is looking into the program not just from a standpoint of the mission, but from the standpoint of community members, because he’s also a local from Mindanao. And he was really able to successfully guide EDC and asked the implementing organization to adjust programming and do adaptive management because we are in conflict-affected areas. And he is very thorough in terms of assessment.” — Deputy Chief of Party

MYDevel’s measurement plan was rigorous and well-triangulated. In addition to regular dynamic monitoring and feedback given by Youth Development Coordinators, local institutions, and partners, MYDevel conducted several impact evaluations of its programming, using two tools—The Youth Employment Survey and the Youth Perceptions Survey—to help measure change against certain key indicators. The Youth Employment Survey was developed and validated in previous EDC activities, and then adapted for use in MYDevel. The survey’s aim was to gather information on youth’s life, work readiness, leadership skills, employment outcomes, as well as their perceptions of gender roles in the workplace. The Youth Perceptions Survey was developed specifically for the MYDevel context with the goal of measuring youth’s perceptions of their governments and their communities as well as youth perceptions toward violence and their personal resilience skills.

Findings from impact evaluations suggest that as a result of the activity, a significant proportion of MYDevel youth had moved towards supporting non-violent or peaceful conflict resolution over violent actions; demonstrated improved resilience skills and life skills, work readiness, or leadership skills; improved perceptions of their communities or government; and found new or better employment. Respondents noted the strong influence of the life skills trainers and their dedication to providing training to out-of-school youth in achieving these skills.

Along with the use of these surveys, in the final year of the activity, MYDevel conducted two special studies focusing specifically on youth resilience to violence. The first study, the Outcome Harvesting Evaluation, was developed in response to the absence of indicators on notable outcomes in existing monitoring and evaluation systems, and sought to identify the most significant outcomes achieved by youth in the area of improved resilience to violence and MYDevel’s contribution to these outcomes. One of the main findings from this study was that MYDevel youth learned to consider the consequences of their actions and better manage their anger and emotions, and many noted that the Foundations of Resilience trainings were one of the factors that contributed to this change. The other study, the Social Network Analysis, aimed to examine four aspects of the lives of out-of-school Mindanao youth. These include youth’s engagement with voluntary organizations, people youth identify as trusted contacts, youth’s acceptance of violence, and youth’s resilience. The study found that out-of-school youth are largely disengaged from voluntary organizations and institutional support systems, but also identified a relationship between youth with deep connections to trusted contacts and higher personal resilience skills, emphasizing the importance of a support system to youth’s beliefs and resilience.
LIMITATIONS

The Marawi conflict interrupted steady implementation of programming, but trainers and youth remained very committed to its success. Continuing MYDev trainings and other activities was especially challenging due to the displacement of youth participants and trainers, and ensuring the safety and security of MYDev youth, staff, and partners was a constant concern. It was also noted that youth in remote activity areas experienced additional challenges due to a scarcity of dedicated and well-equipped learning venues.

While the measurement tools used to assess MYDev were seen as being very useful in gathering rich information, respondents noted that the current measurement system could have been improved to capture a greater range of SEL-related outcomes. Suggested changes included conducting a measure of knowledge, attitudes, and skills to better identify the true impact of life skills at various points of the program, or creating a more decentralized activity management monitoring system to gather information of on-the-ground effects of the Marawi siege on youth employment that were not being captured through The Youth Employment Survey.