



# WORK

**MINDANAO'S YOUTH CHOOSE**



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION:  
Megan Riordan and Lena Markley



## PROGRAM: ELSA

EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOOD SKILLS ALLIANCE

# VS. WAR

## CLASSROOMS AND CAREERS

BY CHRISTY MACY

**Alliance paves pathways to peaceful futures with knowledge and training** // Amat Handan dropped out of high school after his first year. He had no skills and seemingly just one career option. “My uncle is a commander in the separatist group,” says 17-year-old Amat. “He kept trying to recruit me in the armed struggle, but I didn’t want to join him. I didn’t want to be part of the violence.”

Amat lives on the impoverished island of Basilan in the Mindanao region of the Philippines. He is one of 250,000 young people who have dropped out of school in Mindanao, which has one of the country’s highest unemployment rates, often exceeding 45 percent. Those who stay in school are hardly rewarded—overcrowded classrooms, limited learning materials and dilapidated infrastructure are the norm, particularly in the Muslim-dominated areas.

The violence Amat refers to is the armed insurgency in his region, which has killed over 200,000 people since 1969. The disruption caused to

families exacerbates the education crisis, making it even more difficult for Muslim youth like Amat to gain meaningful employment. “Too many young people face a life of poverty, discrimination and alienation,” says Ray Dean Salvosa, Managing Director of the Consuelo Foundation, a leading Filipino non-governmental organization. “Many are too poor to go to school and feel they don’t have any future.”

Against all odds, Amat is turning his life around. He avoided his uncle’s destiny by learning a mechanical trade through an education, employment and life skills program. Now, for

the first time in his life, he is employed, by an auto repair shop in Basilan’s Isabella City.

The program that helped Amat resulted from the Education and Livelihood Skills Alliance (ELSA), a coalition of nonprofit organizations, government agencies and businesses co-founded by the International Youth Foundation. Since 2004, the Alliance has expanded educational and employment opportunities for young people in several Philippine provinces, thanks to a commitment from local businesses, the government and civil society organizations to pool their resources and coordinate activities.



**“The secret of our success is that we work with local implementers trusted by the community who know the culture and who have researched the needs in Mindanao.” — RAY DEAN SALVOSA**





**Top Left:** These trainees from Mahardika Institute of Technology in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, are among the 1,200 Filipino youth who have gained job-related skills through ELSA.

PHOTO: JAN MARISTELL

**Bottom Left:** ELSA has improved the educational and employment prospects for 150,000 young people in Mindanao, one of the most impoverished areas of the Philippines.

PHOTO: CHRISTY MACY

**Below:** US Ambassador to the Philippines, Kristie Kenney, visits the ELSA job skills training program in Sulu Province. The project will help prepare 5,000 youth for jobs in carpentry, welding, food processing and dressmaking. PHOTO: JAN MARISTELL

## Teamwork Moves Youth Forward

"We won't get there if we don't get there together," reads a framed quote from the Quran (3:103) hanging in the office of Dr. Eddie M. Alih, Chancellor of Mindanao State University in the Philippines. An outspoken civic leader, Alih is passionately committed to improving the lives and opportunities of Mindanao's youth. "Young people can be a force for peace and stability," he says. "We have no choice but to develop that potential."

Alih is keenly aware, however, that only a persistent and sustained effort from all sectors of society can mobilize the political will and resources necessary to reach such ambitious goals. ELSA fits the bill.

A US\$4.2 million grant from USAID to IYF and the ELSA program spurred the Department of Education, the government of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, national and local civic groups, parent associations and local government units to band together to improve the outlook for the region's most vulnerable youth.

Some of the largest and most respected civic and business organizations in the Philippines head up the Alliance, including the Ayala Foundation, Consuelo Foundation, Petron Foundation, Philippine Business for Social Progress and SEAMEO-INNOTECH—all of which have specific areas of expertise in delivering youth programming. Together, these leaders have identified challenges and started fulfilling a range of local needs, including renovating schools, offering reading



camps for slow learners and developing job-training programs for out-of-school youth.

One challenge of the broad-based approach, explains Mario Deriquito, Director of the Center for Social Development at the Ayala Foundation, is the need to generate concrete results. "Parents, donors and the business community need to see the impact on young people's prospects in life."

Dr. Thomas Kral, Senior Education Advisor, USAID/Philippines, believes ELSA is more than capable of demonstrating its progress. "This program fits perfectly with our goals to improve access to education and employment for Mindanao's underserved youth," he says. "I think we've made some real progress, particularly in the way this incredibly diverse and responsible group of partners has combined resources and expertise to benefit young people."

Kral is particularly pleased with ELSA's emphasis on connecting out-

of-school youth with job training or encouraging them to return to school. So far, more than 1,200 out-of-school youth have graduated or are attending integrated technical education courses. Some 215 of the first group of graduates have already found jobs or are self-employed.

## To Make It Work, Keep It Local

Given the widely diverse educational and training needs in the Mindanao region, Alliance members have increased ELSA's effectiveness by keeping it in the hands of local stakeholders. "The secret of our success is that we work with local implementers trusted by the community who know the culture and who have researched the needs in Mindanao," says Salvosa at the Consuelo Foundation.

Grassroots involvement supports the leveraging of additional resources from both ELSA's leading partners and the local community. Many local Parent Teacher and Community Associations, for instance, commit to paint and help renovate classrooms and provide security for construction sites. The Alliance also encourages the sharing and distribution of ELSA-generated materials with local schools and programs. Several regional and school division offices of the Departments of Education, local government agencies and private groups have offered their elementary schools to host alternative classes for out-of-school youth. In Basilan, one public official donated a 600-square-meter space to host a technical education course.

Increases in financial resources are equally as common. When the original ELSA funding for a new school building did not cover actual costs, the Petron Foundation and Philippine Business for Social Progress generously paid the difference.

To date, Alliance members have raised nearly US\$4.8 million in funding and in-kind contributions to support projects on the ground—more than matching the original US\$4.2 million USAID grant. “This program’s remarkable track record of unlocking local resources and community support shows we’re really making a difference in the lives of these young people and their families,” says Jack Boyson, Project Director of ELSA at the International Youth Foundation.

## Keeping Kids in School: Inspiring Them to Learn

“I like my science and math classes now because the videos are really helpful,” says Mark Barilla, a 6th-grade student at Libis Elementary School in Quezon City. “When we see the videos, the lessons become very real. We go to many places and see many things. I’m now inspired to be a doctor so I can help cure sick children.”

Mark recently passed the highly competitive entrance test of the Philippine

Science High School, one of the top schools in the country. He credits his success to *text2teach*, a multi-media interactive educational program that enables teachers to download content-rich videos into science, math and English classes and provides teacher training.

Though *text2teach* existed before ELSA, the Alliance has expanded the program’s reach to benefit 100,000 students and 760 teachers and school heads in 122 elementary schools across Mindanao.

The dramatic expansion of this and similar programs represents the potential not only to take successful ELSA pilots to scale, but also to influence current education policy at the highest levels. “We hope *text2teach* is one of those stories that schools and teachers want to emulate. It should be in every school,” says Dr. Erlinda Pefianco, Director of SEAMEO-INNOTECH, an organization representing education ministers across Southeast Asia.

Meanwhile, responding to the urgent need to expand basic access to education, ELSA’s renovation and new construction projects are creating environments for scholastic success. “I didn’t come to school when it rained because the roof leaked. And there were no bathrooms,” says Namieza Ahamad, 12, a 4th-grade student at Yunos Jum dai

Elementary School in Tawi Tawi, one of the poorest provinces in the country. Now Yunos has a new classroom that stays dry, has modern bathroom facilities and is filled with new books. “I come to school every day,” Namieza says proudly.

She’s not alone. The new school, built through ELSA with broad community support, has improved student attendance and increased enrollment from 200 students to 380. Overall, ELSA has renovated, repainted or constructed 320 classrooms across Mindanao and distributed more than 59,600 books and learning aids.

The quality of teaching is also improving. More than 700 teachers and school administrators have participated in ELSA-supported professional development activities, with a focus on strengthening teaching strategies and content in science, math and English classes. Another 630 teachers have received assistance in preparing for their licensure exams.

## 150,000 and Counting

ELSA has touched the lives of some 150,000 youth across Mindanao in just two and a half years. The Alliance is clearly making its mark by giving youth greater incentives to stay in school and the training to secure a job. Perhaps more important in this violence-prone region, the youth of Mindanao are making positive, sometimes even life-saving, changes for themselves.

“Now I have a job, and I’ve learned I can contribute to peace,” says Amat Handan of his ELSA experience. “My uncle still tries to recruit me, but now I’m more determined not to go with him.”

“The young people here want to get jobs—they are willing to work hard,” says Espie Hupida, Program Director at Nagdilaab Foundation in Basilan. “They want to be part of the solution, not the violence. All they need is a chance. And that’s what ELSA strives to provide.” **Y**

Christy Macy is IYF’s Director of Publications. She made her third trip to the Philippines in January 2007 to report on IYF activities.



**Below:** According to a recent study, students participating in the *text2teach* program improved their scores in English and science classes by more than 20 points. Mark Barilla, (seen here) credits the program for his acceptance at one of the most prestigious science high schools in the Philippines. PHOTO: ESTHER BENJAMIN





# ELSA

## the formula for change

TOTAL INVESTMENT: **US\$8.4 million**

TOTAL BENEFICIARIES:

**150,000 Filipino children and youth**

PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS BY CATEGORY:

### Education

- **108,000** 5th and 6th graders in **122** schools improved performance in math, science and English through *text2teach*
- More than **7,300** out-of-school youth gained new knowledge and skills through alternative learning programs
- **348** former out-of-school youth reintegrated into formal schooling
- **3,130** students participated in reading camps
- **630** provisional teachers prepared for professional licensing exam
- **720** teachers gained knowledge and skill in instruction
- **259** classrooms repaired or renovated, 61 new ones built
- **14,890** books distributed to **45** schools
- **22** schools equipped with science laboratory equipment
- **35** Parent Teacher Community Associations (858 participants) trained in managing education programs
- **490** lesson plans in math, science and English for grades 5 and 6 developed and produced
- **7,600** scholarships awarded

### Youth Leadership

- **200** youth participated in youth leadership training
- **90** youth engaged in interfaith dialogues on peace and conflict resolution issues
- **2,220** out-of-school youth trained or participated in civic engagement projects

### Employment

- **1,230** out-of-school youth attended job training courses
- **500** graduates are either employed or self-employed

## A Catalyst for Collaboration

The International Youth Foundation spearheaded efforts in 2004 to establish ELSA with support from USAID. IYF continues to play a key coordinating and planning role in the Alliance, with a special focus on capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, and life skills education.

Along with IYF, founding ELSA members include the Ayala Foundation, the Consuelo Foundation, the Petron Foundation, Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO-INNOTECH).

ELSA is one of the public-private alliances implementing programs under USAID's Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS) project. Planning is currently underway for Phase II of ELSA to expand its reach and deepen its impact.