

Empowering Youth not in Education, Employment, or Training through TVET Development

Love Basillote, PBEEd

Good afternoon, everyone!

It is a pleasure to greet you all, especially the authors and Presenter/s of the two studies:

- Dr. Aniceto C. Orbeta, Jr., PIDS President
- John Paul P. Corpus
- Nina Araos

My fellow panelists:

- ED Rosalina Constantino (TESDA Planning Office)
- Ms. Paulette Liu (President, Primary Structures Educational Foundation, Inc.)

I'd also like to thank USAID, TESDA, and our private sector partners, for their support in the implementation of YouthWorks PH, our private sector-driven youth training and employability project. Without them, we would not have been able to, in turn, support such meaningful research.

Doctor Babes, John, and Nina, thank you for sharing such important work with all of us today. On behalf of PBEEd, I'd like to express our appreciation for the work that you have put into these two research partnerships. Maraming salamat. Can we give them a round of applause?

I want to anchor my remarks today on the three reasons why I think these two pieces of research are important in the overall systemic reform of workforce development and youth empowerment in the country.

First: I am really happy to have systematic data on youth NEET. There is a common management adage that I subscribe to which says, "You cannot manage what you cannot measure." In this case, the data presented to us today give us relevant data on who and where the youth are, what constraints they face, and what interventions/training programs are in place, so that we can properly manage the system.

I won't run through all of the results of the two studies, but let me just share, as a human capital development specialist, which data points jumped at me:

1. The youth excluded from education, training, and employment opportunities are youth who identify as women, they live in rural areas, they come from poorer backgrounds, they are married with children, and they don't get past lower secondary.
2. There are many programs that exist (albeit needs upgrading), but the youth are not accessing them because of financial reasons – specific to what we call in

workforce development wrap-around costs like transportation, allowance while training – lack of information, and home caring responsibilities.

3. The number of out of school and training, and unemployed youth might be overstated because government agencies have different definitions.

Second: Given what we know, we now have better guidance as to what we can and should do to truly empower the youth to invest in themselves and lead productive lives. Rather than despairing over the seemingly mountain of constraints and problems preventing us from empowering the youth, I instead see opportunities, especially as we are trying to continue learning and human capital investment in the midst of a still raging pandemic. This is cause for hope!

Let me share what these opportunities are using entrepreneurship's Principles of Effectuation, which is a logic of thinking to help one start a business, and a framework to guide action in an unpredictable future.

- Bird in hand – starting with our means
- Affordable loss – focusing on the downside risks
- Lemonade – leveraging contingencies
- Patchwork Quilt – forming partnerships
- Pilot in the plane – focusing on what we can predict

Given the information and the programs at hand (bird in hand), we can start by asking ourselves working in this field, are our interventions reaching those who need them the most? We can focus our interventions and redefine existing ones to really target the youth in poor and rural communities, who are women with home care responsibilities. We saw similar data in the course of implementation of Youthworks. And so what we are doing in Youthworks now is to provide wrap around services like transportation allowance, dormitory allowance through our strategic partners to encourage more young women to train in construction jobs, which are high demand even during the pandemic.

We know that training is directly and indirectly expensive. Our estimates in Youthworks across professions in construction, ICT, tourism, and manufacturing show that a youth trainee needs a median of about 15K pesos for a 2-3 month for the wrap around costs to training. We see this as an opportunity to pivot our interventions so that they fill the emerging gaps that spell the difference between attrition and completion.

We also know that there is an over estimation of the number of youth NEET. One question that policy and decision makers should probably ask is, should our training scholarship programs go wide or deep? Unpopular, but maybe we can afford to limit the number of scholarship programs, but increase the support to ensure completion and employment. A short note on lemonade, patchwork quilt, and pilot in the plane: mobility restrictions can be used to increase the use of technology, like VR or AR training, for dangerous, dirty, dead-end, difficult professions that are also high demand and high paying, to increase partnerships with the private sector, and to create programs that are demanded by industry.

Third, and last reason why I am truly thankful for this research is the dose of humility it is giving all of us. For us to truly empower the youth, we need to rethink our existing biases, go back to the drawing board and improve our programs, YouthWorks included, and I hope government programs too. We are so focused on credentials when data shows that employers don't look for a diploma. They'd rather hire someone who knows how to do the job and can professionally work with other people than someone with a national certificate. What's stopping us from rethinking the NCs to facilitate transition from training to employment? Scholarships and training programs are developed without taking into consideration the context in which our youth beneficiaries are in. Rather than thinking of training in a vacuum, we need to focus our attention to their needs – those wrap around costs (e.g., transportation, home care)– and informing them of the training and the benefits of training. Should we pivot towards programs that truly prepare the youth who need them the most (depth) and away from our spray and pray programs? We know that partnerships work, we should perhaps double down on building these partnerships to be of better service to future generations.

I'll stop here for now. Happy to answer questions during the open forum.