



APFSD Youth Call to Action 2021: Philippines¹



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in significant disruptions of the provision of social services in the Philippines. As health systems are overwhelmed in pandemic response, services related to sexual and reproductive health and mental health are less prioritised. Even before the pandemic, young people already faced barriers in accessing these services which include uneven health service provision, particularly affecting geographically-isolated and disadvantaged areas, and requirements such as parental consent to avail such services if they are available. Meanwhile, inequality and access issues have also plagued the provision of basic and tertiary education in the country during the pandemic. The shift to remote and distance learning posed a threat to the quality of education and has become a challenge for Filipino youth, especially those that belong to poor and rural communities. The pandemic created further barriers such as the lack of access to stable internet connection, decreasing livable wages for teachers and professors, and lack of funding for institutions unable to cope with online learning requirements. Moreover, fresh graduates and young job-seekers are also struggling to find and keep decent jobs with livable wages as big companies downsize and micro, small and medium enterprises are being forced to shut down.

The Philippine government's pandemic response has been largely focused on instituting mobility restrictions, such as community quarantine and curfews, and military presence in communities to enforce these. Throughout the quarantine

period, government aid has mostly consisted of food packs, non-food items and the occasional monetary support. Provision of aid is also uneven in many areas and plagued with corruption issues at both local and national levels. Part of the problem is also the lack of credible sources of information for the public to access as fake news becomes more widespread. The combination of stay-at-home measures, economic closures and food scarcity has created tensions that have resulted in gender-based violence. While emerging data shows decreases in the reporting of cases, past experiences can validate that this only indicates significant barriers for women to report, not fewer instances of violence occurring. State violence also presents an alarming picture with the passage of the Anti-Terror Law, a regressive law that threatens human rights activists in the country. In the wake of the passage of the law, the nation has seen rampant red-tagging (or terrorist-tagging) of activists, journalists and killing of community leaders and activists, lawyers and opposition politicians. Amid all of these, Filipinos have also had to cope with the recent disasters, particularly the spate of strong typhoons that hit the country. Community quarantines slowed quick responses that resulted in several casualties affected by calamities and catastrophes. Despite many barriers to their well-being, Filipino youth were able to rise and initiate school strikes to demand quality education and to call for a declaration of national climate state emergency as environment and climate risks worsen.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure young people's meaningful and inclusive participation for mapping of the key issues concerning the youth and development of inclusive programmes and policies and invest in building their capacities.
- Fully implement a Universal Health Coverage law and Reproductive Health Law and include coverage for vaccines and mental health services as well as removal of parental consent requirements to access sexual and reproductive health services.
- Push for the enactment of progressive SRHR legislation, including Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill, Ending Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Decriminalization of Abortion, and a SOGIE bill, and ensure multi-stakeholder efforts (government, civil society, especially the media) to address social and cultural norms that hamper support for SRHR.
- Emphasise sexual rights and empowerment of the LGBTQIA community through comprehensive and strategic planning to mainstream SOGIE in policies.
- Address the digital divide in education, particularly for those in geographically isolated and depressed areas, and maximize the use of the internet and technology to facilitate access to markets of the agricultural sector.
- Create opportunities, via inter-linking and forging partnerships (government, private sector and CSOs), to ensure decent jobs for young people, provide technical-vocational training, provide business loans, funding for agriculture, and promote sustainable livelihood for the marginalised and minorities.
- Ensure livable wages and promote inclusive and non-discriminatory work-related policies for young people, indigenous people and persons with disabilities.
- Repeal the Anti-terror law and safeguard the political and civil rights of human rights activists, youth leaders and environmental defenders.
- Allow and empower local communities, especially rural and indigenous communities, to lead in their own environment rehabilitation, respect ancestral domains and introduce policies to divest from extractive industries.
- Prioritise the country's shift to renewable energy as alternatives for energy consumption, and ensure environment-led policies to hold corporations and global north countries accountable for producing the most carbon emissions, over-consumption of natural resources and destroying natural habitat through large-scale mining.
- Strengthen national environmental laws and strictly monitor the implementation of central and local policies to the local and grassroot communities and implement a total and absolute ban on single-use plastic and initiate circular eco-waste segregation, composting, and fertilizers.
- Embark on public education-information campaigns on climate degradation which integrate indigenous knowledge and partner with media houses in providing awareness among marginalised sectors through localisation of key messages in their native languages and dialects.
- Engage young people in policy-making and devising youth-led climate action agenda and highlight youth-led practices among local communities such as eco-bricking, information campaigns, formulation of environmental organisations, changing eating habits, usage of less packaging or plastic materials, tree-planting, biking, recycling, segregation of waste, and climate justice campaigning.

1. The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum on March 14-16, 2021. The Philippines drafting team consists of Alexis Sebote, Armand Budlao, Jonero Dacula, and Shiphrah Belonguel. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW team.