Increasing Youth NEET Participation in Technical-Vocational Training Programs

KEY FINDINGS
An estimated 1 in 5 Filipino youth are not in employment, education, and training (NEET). In interviews with Youth NEET and students, IDinsight and YouthWorks PH found that:
• Youth respondents most highly valued salary, fit with skillset and interests, and stability of jobs as job characteristics.
• Youth respondents needed to determine that technical-vocational (tech-voc) training programs were better than alternatives before deciding to participate. Respondents suggested they would participate in training programs only if expected employment outcomes outweighed the opportunity cost of forgoing immediate job opportunities, the training fees and daily expenses, and the negative impact on family responsibilities.
• Youth respondents preferred to receive communication about opportunities for jobs and training from authority figures and through in-person interactions. They viewed these authority figures (program staff, barangay hall staff, or other leaders) as credible. While many respondents also got information from social media, they perceived social media, particularly Facebook, as less credible.

RECOMMENDATIONS
To encourage participation in training programs and address information barriers, stakeholders working with youth NEET in the tech-voc sector should:
• Highlight positive characteristics of technical-vocational jobs and the benefits to attending training
• Tap credible authority figures that can personally interact with youth

BACKGROUND
In April 2019, an estimated 19% of youth (15-24 years old) in the Philippines were not in employment, education, and training (NEET). YouthWorks PH aims to help youth NEET lead more productive lives by providing them with work-based technical-vocational (tech-voc) training. The trainings range from 2 to 6 months, and include life skills training, classes at educational institutions, and on-the-job training. They prepare youth for jobs in construction, electric installation and maintenance, welding, and hospitality and food service, among others.

To help YouthWorks more effectively engage with youth NEET communities, IDinsight conducted research to understand: 1) the perceptions and experiences of youth NEET and students on jobs and tech-voc training; 2) the channels youth NEET and students use to access information about jobs and training opportunities.

The resulting insights on perceptions of youth served to inform YouthWorks’ recruitment strategy. We share these findings broadly now, so that other stakeholders in the workforce development, education, and labor sectors may leverage them to improve employment opportunities for youth NEET.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW
METHODOLOGY:
IDinsight conducted 41 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with youth NEET and grade 12 students in cities in the Philippines. We selected respondents to ensure we received a diversity of views between genders, and across age. Respondents were mostly from low-income families. Interviews were transcribed, and “coded” to describe, interpret, and contextualize the perspectives shared.

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD:
Jan – Feb 2020

LOCATION:
Zamboanga City, Metro Manila, Cebu City and General Santos City
FINDINGS

Interviewed youth prioritized three characteristics when looking for a job: level of salary, alignment with skillset or interests, and job stability.

Respondents wanted jobs with a decent salary, with youth NEET respondents defining a decent salary around minimum wage and student respondents defining as above minimum wage. The difference can be partly attributed to the types of jobs they wanted to pursue—youth NEET sought blue-collar, low-skilled jobs, while students aspired to land professional jobs. Respondents also preferred jobs that suited their skillsets or interests, and formal jobs with benefits and job security.

Respondents had mixed views on the appeal of jobs in the tech-voc sector.

Respondents often stated their interest in a tech-voc job would depend on the job’s specific employer, sector, and match to their own preferences. Their general impression of tech-voc jobs differed. Some felt that tech-voc jobs were practical and that building specialized skills for such jobs helped one’s employment prospects. Others perceived that tech-voc jobs were largely temporary, paid inadequately, and had poor working conditions. While tech-voc jobs do offer opportunities for upward mobility, respondents rarely thought so. Some tech-voc jobs, particularly in construction, were viewed as physically demanding; some respondents felt that women were not suited to do these jobs.

Youth weighed the costs of participating in tech-voc training programs against anticipated benefits, alternative options, and existing commitments.

Youth valued training programs that would provide guarantees for employment or unique access to employment opportunities after training completion. This link to employment was important to youth because they anticipated that they would have to forgo immediate income-generating activities in order to participate. The perceived opportunity cost was high—even informal and low-paying jobs would help their families immediately, while earning after training had a lag and was uncertain. Other key barriers to participating in training programs were tuition costs, expected food and transportation costs, and being unable to fulfill family duties.

Respondents primarily learned about job and training opportunities from interpersonal interactions and preferred to communicate with perceived authority figures.

The most common sources of job and training information were personal networks (friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances), websites, and social media. Respondents generally preferred to receive information about vocational training programs directly from authority figures such as program staff, teachers, or a barangay point person. This enabled them to verify program information and discuss questions through in-person connections and communication. Many respondents also mentioned online platforms and social media as important sources of information. However, these platforms, particularly Facebook, were seen as less credible, because of the prevalence of scams and fake news.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, IDinsight recommends stakeholders working with youth NEET in the tech-voc sector:

1. Address knowledge gaps and negative perceptions about the tech-voc sector.

To counter negative misconceptions, provide examples that highlight relatively good salaries and practices of employers offering tech-voc jobs. Provide examples of career paths within specific tech-voc jobs and illustrate the promotion and salary trajectory within these jobs. As youth NEET may not know the diversity of job opportunities available in the tech-voc sector, highlight the variety of jobs in the sector. For example, emphasize that skilled jobs in construction such as welding and electrical work are distinct from manual jobs, and do not necessarily require physical strength. Doing so could address the perception that women are not physically capable of doing these jobs.

2. Be explicit about potential returns from successful completion of training programs without overstating expectations.

Emphasize the likelihood of formal employment after training. In particular, provide an estimate of higher prospective and regular salaries after undergoing tech-voc training, in contrast to immediate opportunities for informal, daily wage work. Providing information on the returns to schooling or training has been effective at improving enrollment, years of education, and job-gain expectations or confidence. It can also shift perceptions of gender norms of different tech-voc jobs. Programs may also consider providing financial support or guidance on the application process to further reduce barriers to enrollment.

3. Prioritize in-person interactions with local authority figures, especially during recruitment.

In recruiting for training programs, tap individuals that youth viewed as credible, such as program staff or barangay hall personnel, and build personal relationships. Programs can also include contact information more prominently on informational materials and application forms, to make it easier for interested youth to connect with recruiters. While social media can be used to expand the reach of information campaigns, programs must also invest in building credibility and legitimacy in the community.

About USAID
USAID is the lead U.S. government agency for international development and disaster assistance. In the Philippines, USAID partners with the national government to build a more stable, prosperous, and well-governed nation. For more information, visit http://www.usaid.gov/philippines or email info.ph@usaid.gov.

About PBEd
A non-profit organization founded in 2006 by top CEOs in the country. PBEd is the business community’s response to the need for greater education and economy alignment. Its advocacies include teacher quality improvement and workforce development.

About YouthWorks PH
Launched in 2018, YouthWorks PH is PBEd’s five-year, P1.7-billion workforce development project in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development. It aims to make education and training more responsive to the needs of the economy by working with the government, industry and academe to provide opportunities to youth not in education, employment or training. YouthWorks PH has presence in Greater Manila Area, Cebu, Iloilo City, Cagayan de Oro City, Zamboanga City and Gen. Santos City.

About IDinsight
IDinsight helps leaders combat poverty worldwide by designing, deploying and promoting evidence-generating tools. We tailor the best methodologies to partner needs and constraints to fuse evidence with action. We serve governments, NGOs, foundations and social businesses across Africa and Asia in all major program areas including health, education, agriculture, livelihoods, finance, energy and governance.

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1 The study included Grade 12 students because some of these students could become Youth NEET after they graduate. While the youth NEET and 12th grade populations may not be directly comparable, the interviewed youth NEET and students shared some similar demographic characteristics: most were single and lived in large households with 4 to 9 other individuals. The majority of youth NEET interviewees also finished at least grade 10 or Alternative Learning System (the equivalent of high school), and so had slightly lower educational attainment to the grade 12 students.

2 Due to random sampling and the small sample size, respondents’ views cannot be applied to all youth NEET/students in the target population.

3 “Coding” is a method of analysis which draws out significant units of meaning from qualitative data. It is considered one of the most rigorous ways to conduct qualitative analysis. We based our approach to coding on the principles of Framework analysis, which enabled us to generate insights across a diverse range of topics of relevance to YouthWork PH’s recruitment strategy.


