



Antique's disadvantaged youth shows that entrepreneurship *is* an option

Early trials and life lessons have led 22-year old Ian Lester Diana to an emotional maturity not common for his age. Ian Lester hails from a fishing village in Anini-y, the southernmost town of Antique province in the central Philippine island of Panay.

The second of four children, Ian Lester's parents are separated and his mother worked in nearby Iloilo City. He was only able to reach Grade 5 of the elementary level in 2010 but this did not stop him from striving to help his family. He started to work when he was 13 to augment the family income and feed his siblings.

He tried many informal activities such as selling fish and vegetable produce. It is in selling balut (duck eggs), however, that he found his niche.

Balut is the duck embryo still in its shell and is considered as a Philippine delicacy. It is popularly eaten with a dash of salt and vinegar with chili. Ian Lester sources his balut from local producers and earns Php300 a day.

With his meager earnings, Ian Lester helps in the household expenses and pays for the school fees of two of his siblings in high school.

Resourceful Mykel

For 23-year old Mykel Salona, meanwhile, life was never a bed of roses. At an early age, he has learned to fend for himself. As a child, he helped his father hawk fish in the neighbourhood of his fishing village which is also situated in Anini-y. He has carried this business orientation with him up to his teen years and as a student, he sold school supplies for pocket money. The youngest of seven children, Mykel was not able to proceed to college after getting his high school diploma for financial reasons.

Teenage mother with business sense

Also from Anini-y, Jauna Marie Osorio is 20 years old and was not able to complete her high school education. She reached the third year high school level in 2008 but got married at 16. Already a mother at the tender age of 17, Jauna Marie faced challenges that girls elsewhere would only encounter in their twenties and thirties when starting their families.

Jauna Marie is the third of five children. As a child, she had entrepreneurial experience as a vendor hawking fish freshly caught by fisherfolks in her neighbourhood. She also worked as a domestic helper in nearby Iloilo City for which she was paid Php2,000 a month, roughly equivalent to US\$48. Because of limited education, Jauna Marie can only find unskilled work in the unregulated economy.

Young woman with a dream

From the nearby town of Hamtic, Donnavilla Rumbines helps her family in the daily struggle to keep ahead of life's challenges. As a child, Donnavilla was exposed to entrepreneurial activities through selling rice cakes and street food. She later worked as a domestic helper in Iloilo City at PhP2,000 a month or roughly US\$48.

The 22-year old is the sixth of seven children and has graduated from high school in the village of Caridad in Hamtic town. Currently enrolled in a local college, Donnavilla's greatest trial at present is to sustain the financial requirements of going to school.

Poverty hinders education and drives migration

In a country where the magnitude of the poor population is pegged at 23 million people (NSCB, 2009), many young people drop out from school mainly due to financial reasons and opt instead to work for a living. The situation is not different in Antique where 12.0 per cent of all families as of 2009 were living on the brink of subsistence, according to the National Statistics Office.

Many youth have sought work outside of their villages to help support their families and themselves. The most common example of this phenomenon is the seasonal throng of sacadas from central Antique who make the annual trek to the sugar plantations of Negros and Iloilo.

Also, work migration is increasing with many Antique youth pursuing jobs as domestic helpers, security guards, factory workers, and sales clerks in Manila, Iloilo and overseas.



Ian Lester Diana is shown here with a honker on top of the eggs in the basket. The honker is used to attract clients as he makes his round of the surrounding villages in search of customers
(Photo by ILO/Roche Angon)

Innovative programme that promotes entrepreneurship as an option

Disadvantaged youth like Ian Lester, Mykel, Jauna Marie and Donnavilla have been given the opportunity to train in entrepreneurship and engage in their own microenterprise through a pilot programme that seeks to mitigate youth unemployment.

This innovative scheme was spearheaded by the Spanish-funded *MDG Joint Programme on Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth* which was launched in July 2009 with the objective of increasing young people's chances of gainful employment outside of wage jobs through entrepreneurship training and provision of support services, among others.

A total of 119 disadvantaged youth from Antique were given training in entrepreneurship using the International Labour Organization's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) entrepreneurship training programme.

Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB)

In coordination with local stakeholders which include the Department of Labor and Employment Region VI, DOLE Antique Provincial Office, DOLE Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns and the Provincial Government of Antique, a strategy adopted by the Joint Programme to multiply its efforts is by training a corps of trainers to facilitate entrepreneurship development at the local level.

The Training of Trainers (ToT) guarantees that even beyond the scope of the Joint Programme, a local pool of trainers will be present to replicate entrepreneurship trainings in schools, grassroots communities and other venues. Trainers do not only serve as training providers but as managers and implementers of entrepreneurship training programmes in their respective organizations.

At the centre of this training programme is the use of the ILO's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) which have stood the test of time since its conceptualization and introduction in the 1970s. The SIYB today continues to be popular as an entrepreneurship training manual and resource guide and has been in use in varied countries.

SIYB can be tailored fit or customized to the training needs of disadvantaged youth. In Antique, the SIYB—particularly the Generate Your Business Idea (GYB) and Start Your Business (SYB) components—proved to be a hit among the disadvantaged youth sector who liked its down-to-earth approach and simplicity.

The adoption of experiential games and interactive training methods further contributed to its utility as an entrepreneurship training programme that includes people possessing only basic literacy and numeracy or marginalized groups such as the disadvantaged youth.

Support for entrepreneurship: A boon to disadvantaged youth

The Joint Programme's support for entrepreneurship has for its aim the development of local economies and the stimulation of microenterprises which are able to provide jobs even if only in the unregulated economy, to which majority of disadvantaged youth belong.

Ian Lester, Jauna Marie, Mykel, and Donnavilla are four of the scores of disadvantaged youth from Antique trained in entrepreneurship, under the Joint Programme, who showed above average potential in entrepreneurship based on an ILO-developed personal assessment tool on entrepreneurship potentials.

Together with other potential youth entrepreneurs, they were provided with modest starter kits to launch their careers as entrepreneurs. As of June 2012, a total of 26 youth in Antique have received starter kits and are running their own microenterprises.

Ian Lester increases his earnings

The Joint Programme awarded Ian Lester a starter kit worth PhP8,000 (roughly US\$195) for balut production after completing the entrepreneurship training and submitting a feasible business plan with the guidance of the trainers. As a result, he now has resources to produce balut himself whereas before he only gets them from local producers. Since balut is

usually eaten as a snack in the evening hours, Ian Lester sells balut at night time and ice buko in the day time. Ice buko is a local ice lolly made from coconut.

According to Ian Lester, his daily net income increased as a result of the assistance from the Joint Programme and now averages between PhP500 to PhP650 (US\$12 to US\$16) from the usual PhP300. He is also a part-time fisherman for those times when business is slack.

As for his future plans, Ian Lester wants to go back to school. This has real possibility under a government programme that gives school dropouts a second chance to get their degrees. The Department of Education's Alternative Learning System (ALS) permits adult learners a flexible schedule to complete school work and pass equivalency requirements under the guidance of a teacher.

Mykel's resourcefulness pays off

Mykel's motto is to always make good use of his time. During intervals when work is unavailable, he makes it a point to keep some chicken running around in the backyard. They lay eggs which become chicks. These are a part-time source of small funds for Mykel.

His resourcefulness did not go unnoticed and he became a recipient of a starter kit from the Joint Programme worth PhP8,000 for a buy-and-sell business dealing in fish. According to him, he averages a daily net income of PhP500 up to PhP900 from the venture, a considerable amount in Antique



where the daily government-mandated minimum wage ranges between PhP193 to PhP235. With this steady stream of income, Mykel helps his parents in household expenses and has plans to expand the business.

An alumnus of the Anini-y Central School and Saint Andrew's High School, Mykel is today enrolled in the Alternative Learning System of the Department of Education (DepEd) taking up a computer course.

Extra cash for Jauna Marie

Jauna Marie's work experiences and exposure to entrepreneurship as a child provides her with a foundation as she embarks on a new career as an entrepreneur. After completing her five-day entrepreneurship training under the Joint Programme and submitting a feasible business plan, she received a starter kit worth PhP8,000 (roughly equivalent to US\$195) to start a small business selling barbecues.

Barbecued chicken, pork meat and entrails are cheap street foods indulged in especially by people from lower income classes. Her average daily net income of PhP200 (roughly US\$5) from selling barbecues is a big help in augmenting her husband's income as a part-time carpenter. Her net income from the microenterprise is set aside for household expenses. Jauna Marie also plans to go back school some time in the future.

Donnavilla earns while she learns

Meanwhile, the Joint Programme gave Donnavilla a grant in the form of starter merchandise worth PhP8,000 to get her small sari-sari or variety



20-year old Jauna Marie Osorio sells barbecue to augment her family's income (Photo by ILO/Roche Angon)

store rolling. This venture provides her with savings to help pay for part of her college education. She manages to average a daily net income of PhP200.

To take advantage of the increasing trend in her hometown's population, she plans to transfer her merchandise to a stall in front of her family's house which is near the entrance to the local public elementary school. This gives her direct access to more customers. She is also planning to sell native food delicacies to augment her retail business.

Donnavilla is a member of the Hamtic Multi-Purpose Cooperative which gives out loans at modest rates of interest to members. She has plans to save and borrow additional capital for her business venture.

Lessons learned

From these four entrepreneurs we gather some commonalities. These youth were exposed to entrepreneurial activities at a young age, they were unemployed after finishing high school or dropping out from school, they have difficulties in pursuing higher education due to financial reasons but plan to continue if given a chance, and they were provided with fund support. They proved to be productive when given access to employment opportunities and their skills are enhanced.

At this early stage, they have been tested by life and never found wanting. They went through their own private struggles but their families were always there to nurture them and love them. They did not give up the fight but stick to what they know and continue to struggle hoping that one day, Lady Luck will smile at them and that the odds will be in their favor. ☒ Wilbert San Pedro and Roche Angon

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22-year old Donnavilla Rumbines goes to school and operates a small sari-sari store (Photo by ILO/Roche Angon)