

September 2024



Message from the Resident Coordinator

Welcome to the latest edition of the UNited to Leave No One Behind, a newsletter illustrating the impact of recent work of the UN in the Philippines.

At the beginning of 2024, a new framework agreement between the UN and the Government came into force: the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF) 2024-2028. It is a landmark document, the first to fully capitalize on the innovations under the UN system reform. The SDCF outlines the UN's plan to support the country on its sustainable development path and accelerate local progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

We are bringing you 11 stories in this issue from 12 agencies of the UN system in the Philippines.

Agriculture remains a critical area of support for United Nations agencies. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) have been implementing programmes in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to help boost productivity and resilience in both agriculture and aquaculture.

Meanwhile, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has helped cacao farmers in Davao upgrade the local chocolate value chain through technical support to enhance agricultural processes and business practices.

The United Nations country team is also working with partner communities across the Philippines to safeguard fundamental rights and facilitate access to social services.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) continue to advocate for decent work and better conditions for migrant workers through collaborations with the migrants themselves, as well as adjacent communities, such as the youth.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has been working with youth-led groups, including for advocacy and awareness-raising on child marriage and the many forms of gender-based violence, particularly in Mindanao.

Similarly, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) have ongoing advocacy campaigns in Mindanao on child vaccination against measles.



Farmers practice soil testing and optimal fertilization techniques.
Photo © FAO Ph

The UN Development Programme (UNDP), meanwhile, has focused on providing youth and marginalized groups such as indigenous communities with Internet access by boosting Wi-Fi capacities in higher education institutions and geographically disadvantaged areas.

UNESCO and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have also been engaged in work on strengthening institutions, particularly within the field of law enforcement. Among other issues, the two organizations have been implementing programmes on jail decongestion and interacting with media to enhance freedom of expression in the country.

Finally, the United Nations Country Team, together with the Humanitarian Country has strengthened and reinvigorated its national and sub-national Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Networks to collectively address sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) within the aid community across development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding contexts. The PSEA Network is currently developing a long-term plan to systematically organize, strengthen and localize action on PSEA.

The stories included in this newsletter just barely scrap the surface of the portfolio of United Nations' portfolio in the Philippines. This good work will only multiply as the UN and the Philippine Government continue to strengthen cooperation through the SDCF to ensure that no one is left behind as the country strives to meet its development goals.

Thank you.

Gustavo Gonzalez



Farmers in BARMM enhance their skills in soil testing and optimal fertilization techniques for rice and corn cultivation.

Photo © FAO Philippines



FAO boosts agri sustainability in BARMM amid global fertilizer shortage

FAO

The ripple effects of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine cut across multiple sectors, from energy to food security. One of its less visible impacts is on global agriculture: Russia is the largest exporter of fertilizers in the world. The resulting global shortage has led to escalating prices, affecting countries like the Philippines, which are not directly reliant on Russian or Ukrainian fertilizers.

To help Filipino farmers weather through the shortage and rising costs, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provided chemical fertilizers and training on soil testing and efficient fertilizer utilization to rice- and corn-farming communities in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The project is boosting agricultural productivity and enhancing resilience amidst the global impacts of the war in Ukraine.

Over 1,300 rice farmers and nearly 6,800 corn farmers in the provinces of Maguindanao del Sur

and Lanao del Sur benefitted from the initiative, which is supported by the Government of Japan.

Nearly 100 municipal agricultural technicians were also trained in soil testing, nutrient management, and the Geographic Information System.

The project was completed in March 2024 and capped off with a workshop that provided a collaborative platform for key partners and stakeholders to exchange insights, distill valuable lessons, and formulate recommendations for future related projects.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Daud Lagasi, Director General for Agriculture Services of the BARMM Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform said, "Let us persist in our unwavering dedication to our work, aimed at enhancing the socio-economic well-being of our farmers in the Bangsamoro."



A 'sweet' undertaking: A woman's efforts to supply cacao and livelihood in Davao

IFAD

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is helping cacao farmers in Davao grow their agri-businesses from just harvesting and processing beans to making and selling chocolate products.

The Rural Agro-Enterprise Partnerships for Inclusive Development and Growth (RAPID Growth) Project – a joint initiative of IFAD and Department of Trade and Industry – provides goods and services needed to upgrade the chocolate value chain for cacao farmers. By improving access to capital, knowledge and technology, the project improves agricultural performance and helps reduce rural poverty and malnutrition in partner communities.

One community that has benefitted from the initiative is the Biao Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative (BARBCO) who has been collaborating with IFAD to increase productivity and maintain its supply chain within the cacao industry.

The RAPID Growth project identified interventions and investments for the cooperative's detailed investment plans and helped bridge the supply gaps by providing investments, matching grants, and business development support.

BARBCO has since become one of the biggest cacao bean players in the Davao Region. To date, the cooperative has given jobs to 147 cacao farmers, including the Bagobo Klata indigenous people of Davao and surrounding provinces. Around 87% of its workforce in cacao processing facilities is also composed of women workers.

Guadalupe 'Aging' Ocial, who has managed BARBCO for 20 years, collaborates with IFAD to strategize, collaborate and network with partners and enablers. The cooperative's success under her leadership comes after a period of legal hurdles and financial struggles that were resolved with the help of the project. Her main goal now is to support the farmers she works with.

"I'm no longer preoccupied with monetary gains. Whatever I will need, God will provide. What is important is to help others," Aging said. This mindset also inspires Aging to continuously work with the RAPID Growth Project for the sustainability of the cooperative's operations.



Guadalupe 'Aging' Ocial, who has managed BARBCO for 20 years, works on her cacao produce. Photo © IFAD Philippines

Safeguarding Migrant Rights



Workshop participants play an interactive board game which provides occupational safety and health knowledge.

Photo © ILO Philippines

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



Ship to shore: Working with Filipino migrant fishers on info materials to help safeguard their rights

ILO

Egmedio Patenio, a migrant fisherman of over 20 years, is no stranger to the dark side of the fishing industry. As one of just over 4,300 workers who leave the country annually to commercially fish aboard foreign flag vessels, he has faced a range of problems – from poor sleeping arrangements and food quality to maltreatment at the hands of other nationalities.

The number of Filipino migrant fishers is small compared to over half a million Filipino seafarers manning the world's maritime vessels, but they are much more prone to abuses, forced labour, and human trafficking.

Patenio wants to ensure that the next generation of migrant fishers won't have to experience the perils he has encountered. He is one of a group of migrant fishers working with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia (Ship to Shore), a multi-country initiative that aims to promote regular and safe labour migration and decent work for all migrant workers in the region's fishing and seafood processing sectors.

The ILO organized consultations with migrant fishers and community leaders to develop a

comprehensive orientation and information package that would provide prospective migrant fishers with critical information on their rights and the policies that safeguard them. The resulting material could then form part of the government-mandated pre-departure orientation seminar (PDOS).

"I believe that my long years of experience being a migrant fisher will greatly help in contributing ideas to the young migrant fishers now and to the next generation," Patenio said.

Complementing the pre-departure package, an innovative board game was also produced to equip workers with sector-specific occupational safety and health knowledge. The game provides realistic scenarios on risks, hazards and challenges, including best practices for a safe work environment. It has reached over 200 migrant fishers since its launch in November 2023.

The Ship to Shore project is a joint initiative of the European Union and the United Nations, implemented by the ILO in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Development Programme.



Global Migration Media Academy builds young journalists' capacities for humanized migration reporting

IOM

Recognizing the critical role media plays in shaping public understanding of migration and migrants, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has equipped young, aspiring journalists with the skills needed for ethical and accurate reporting on migration.

The Global Migration Media Academy (GMMA) organized with Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan is part of IOM's broader advocacy to humanize public discourse on migration.

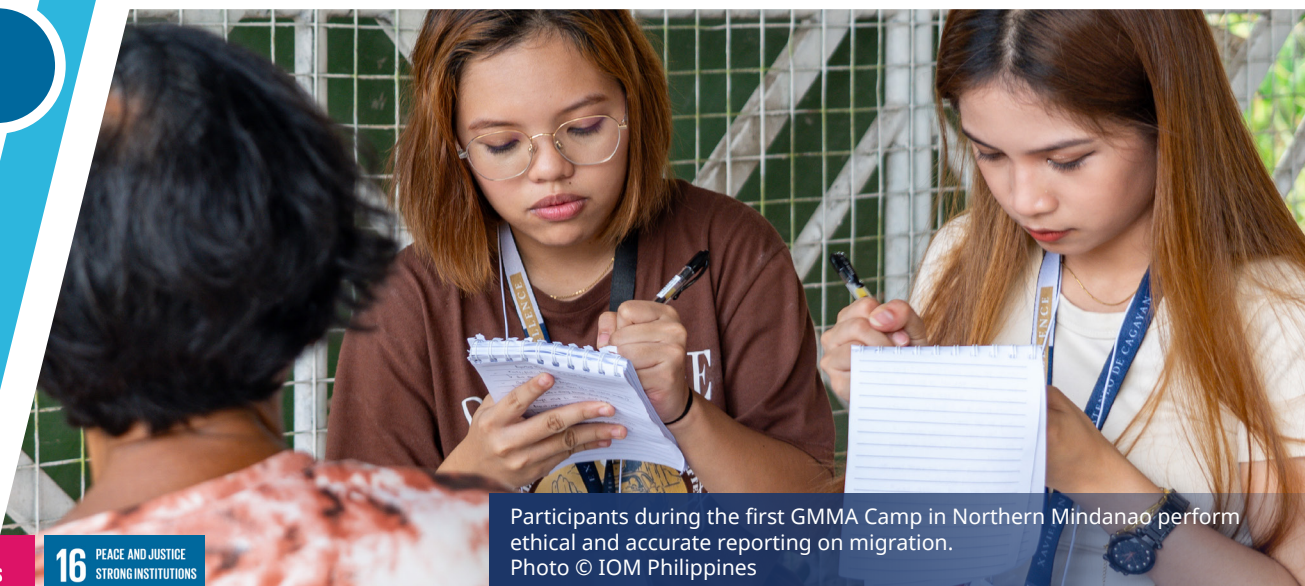
In 2023, 20 journalism and development communication students took part in a three-day Youth Camp, where local journalists, media professors, GMMA alumni and IOM experts shared their expertise and experiences.

Students were also given the opportunity for a practical exercise of their newfound knowledge through a field visit to Xavier Ecoville, the first university-led resettlement project in the world. Residents of the community were displaced by Typhoon Washi in 2011 – largely a result of sudden onset climate change. Interacting with and interviewing the Xavier Ecoville residents introduced the GMMA learners to the delicate conduct of gathering stories with empathy and respect.

The GMMA Youth Camp provided students the opportunity to both learn from experienced journalists and produce their own migration stories. Graduates from the GMMA Summer School mentored the students and assisted them in refining their stories following their lessons on journalistic values and do-no-harm principles. The students' final outputs are expected to be published on the GMMA website, serving as a platform for these migrant-centred stories to reach a larger audience.

“What really struck me the most was realising how hard it is to report on these kinds of [migration] issues with the impact they give, not only to the affected communities but to us storytellers,” said development communication student Val Mathew Gabutan. “This has inspired me to do better as a journalist, to uphold these values and do my work more effectively.”

The GMMA is an initiative co-funded by the IOM Development Fund and Irish Aid, and works to end misinformation on human mobility and develop a healthy discourse on migrant populations.



Participants during the first GMMA Camp in Northern Mindanao perform ethical and accurate reporting on migration. Photo © IOM Philippines

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



16 PEACE AND JUSTICE STRONG INSTITUTIONS





UN Staff alongside PSEA campaign materials at UN House Manila.
Photo © UNIC / Hintay, Gaylord

Strengthening reporting and response mechanisms on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

UN System

The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in the Philippines and 45 development organizations in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) are jointly spearheading efforts for the prevention of and response to all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) perpetrated by aid workers. While Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) (PSEA) reporting and response mechanisms have long been in place, the UNCT-HCT PSEA Network is formulating a Philippines PSEA Strategy Plan that will define key priorities until 2028 to organize, strengthen, and localize action on PSEA systematically.

There has been a relatively low number of SEA reports in the Philippines, which suggests a lack of community awareness of interventions and reporting channels, which may not have been widely disseminated or made accessible to communities, or suffer from a lack of public trust in the efficacy of these mechanisms.

In pursuit of a system-wide PSEA campaign and promotion of a “speak-up” culture encouraged by the Secretary-General, the UNCT is working with the government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and donors to set up inter-agency SEA referral procedures, establish a communications strategy

for community outreach, and support agencies in implementing the minimum operating standards on PSEA.

Alternative PSEA reporting channels have been set up, including a dedicated mobile unit (+63 917 815 7375) and email address (psea.philippines@humanitarianresponse.info) to encourage victim-survivors or anyone with knowledge of SEA to report any incidents or suspicion of abuse. Such mechanisms facilitate the prompt referral of SEA allegations to concerned entities for appropriate and corrective actions, and to service providers for the provision of assistance to victim-survivors.

The UNCT is also building the capacities of PSEA focal points in UN agencies and partner organizations through refresher training and learning sessions, as well as the enhancement of the Inter-Agency PSEA Refresher Training Manual, so it can serve as a more effective training tool for integrating PSEA in each agency’s work and organizational culture.



Connecting the Unconnected: Empowering Indigenous Communities with Free Wi-Fi Access

UNDP

In the fast-paced digital age, internet connectivity has become an essential human need, opening vast opportunities for users worldwide. However, internet access remains an elusive privilege for indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples (ICCs/IPs) in the Philippines.

Poor or non-existent signal coverage, dead spots and inadequate infrastructure often plague the far-flung areas called home by these communities, which comprise 9% of the country's population. As a result, ICC/IPs, who are among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the Philippines, suffer from a connectivity gap that further contributes to their marginalization.

To make internet access more inclusive, particularly in public spaces, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Philippines are working together to install 2,500 Wi-Fi hotspots across the country.

Through the Capability, Connectivity, and Resilience through Free Wi-Fi for All (CoRe FW4A) project, DICT and UNDP are providing free internet access to at least a million Filipino users. In 2023, 1,000 Wi-Fi hotspots were installed in 220 higher education institutions and are now running on a managed internet service.

The CoRe FW4A Project – a part of DICT's broader Free Public Internet Access Program – will be expanded to 134 IP communities in 2024. The communities were identified based on critical need for internet connectivity infrastructure.

Working in close collaboration with National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the project intends to foster a sense of ownership and empowerment among IPs, enabling them to be well-informed about the benefits of the initiative.

"Addressing connectivity gaps through the free Wi-Fi opens an array of opportunities for our ICCs/IPs including knowledge access, real-time communication, and economic opportunities," said Rosanna Lingating, Director of NCIP's Office on Policy, Planning, and Research.

Bridging the digital divide for ICC/IPs will give rise to transformative change in the lives of these communities, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable society that benefits every Filipino and usher in a future where no one is left behind.



Indigenous youth benefit from Wi-Fi access at one of the 2,500 hotspots installed nationwide through the CoRe FW4A Project. Photo © UNDP Philippines



Promoting freedom of expression through dialogue between media and law enforcement

UNESCO

The United Nations in the Philippines, together with key partners, is working to improve the relationship between the media and the police by opening possible channels of dialogue.

In 2023, UNESCO, in cooperation with the Asia Pacific College, brought together eight journalists from different media organizations and 32 public information officials and spokespersons from seven law enforcement agencies for a discussion on improving communication and professional relations between the two groups.

“It’s the first time that I’ve attended this kind of interactive seminar,” said journalist Ruth Cabal. “Usually during the formal coverage of events, we don’t really talk in an informal way. So, this is a good venue to be able to exchange ideas and find a common goal through different paths, while at the same time trying to understand each other.”

Participants shared challenges and good practices on addressing mis- and disinformation online, threats and attacks faced by journalists, especially women media workers, and the responsible use of social media tools to reinforce the transparency and accountability of police agencies.

Role-play simulations of high-pressure situations, such as a public riot and a crime scene, were also staged to help develop an applied understanding of the functions and needs of both police officers and journalists.

“As part of the public information office of my unit, we often deal with the media. However, we have no defined rules and regulations regarding media relations and how we handle requests from journalists. This training gave us a clear pathway to setting rules on scenarios that involve the media,” said Mae Ann Cunanan, a Police Major in the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group of the Philippine National Police.

The training was organized in partnership with OHCHR, UNODC and the Commission on Human Rights.



Local journalists and media relations officers conduct simulations of riots and crime scenes to help understand functions of police officers and journalists. Photo © UNESCO



Maguindanao youth spearhead campaign against child marriage

UNFPA

Although the Philippines now has a law prohibiting and criminalizing child marriage or where at least one of the partners is below 18 years of age, there are still reports of adolescents being subjected to child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), especially in Mindanao.

One in 10 Filipino women aged 20 to 24 are married or are in a union before the age of 18, according to the 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey.

In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Mindanao, there are around 88,600 child brides as of 2021, according to a Bangsamoro Women Commission study.

With the prevalence of this practice in Mindanao, a dedicated group of young volunteers from the Maguindanao Youth Community Development (MYCD) has been helping raise awareness about the issue and the negative effects of child marriage and other forms of violence against women and girls.

MYCD was among the 20 youth-led groups across the country that were given start-up funds under Project BRAVE (Building COVID-safe Responses and Voices for Equity) to implement innovative strategies that raise awareness about mental health and gender-based violence.

The group's recent project, aptly named KATIYALINTAD, which means Katiyakap (protection) and Kalilintad (peace) in Maguindanao, involved educating young women in the community about gender-based violence, the practice of child marriage in the Muslim region, and their rights to legal

protection through a series of mentoring and learning sessions.

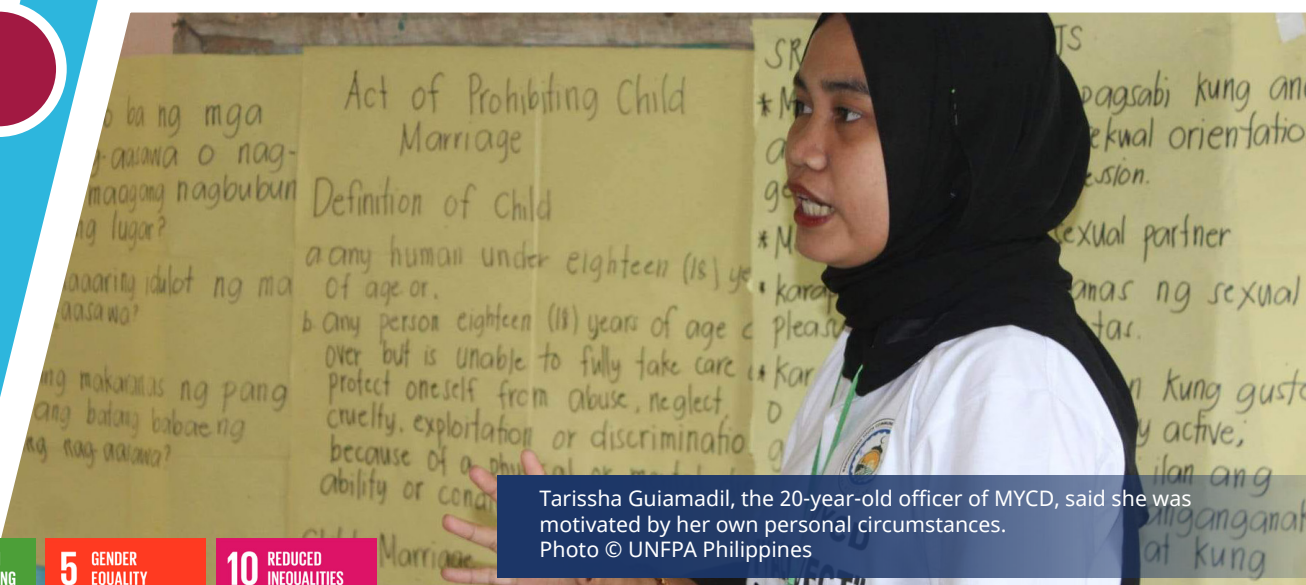
Among the biggest challenges that MYCD is facing now is convincing parents and community leaders to end the practice of child marriage.

To address this, MYCD held awareness raising sessions with parents and young people about human rights and gender-based violence, especially the new law banning child marriage.

"We tell them that their children will have a better future if they are allowed to finish their education," said Tarissha Guiamadil, one of MYCD's project officers. She said they also discuss the mental and physical repercussions of child marriage.

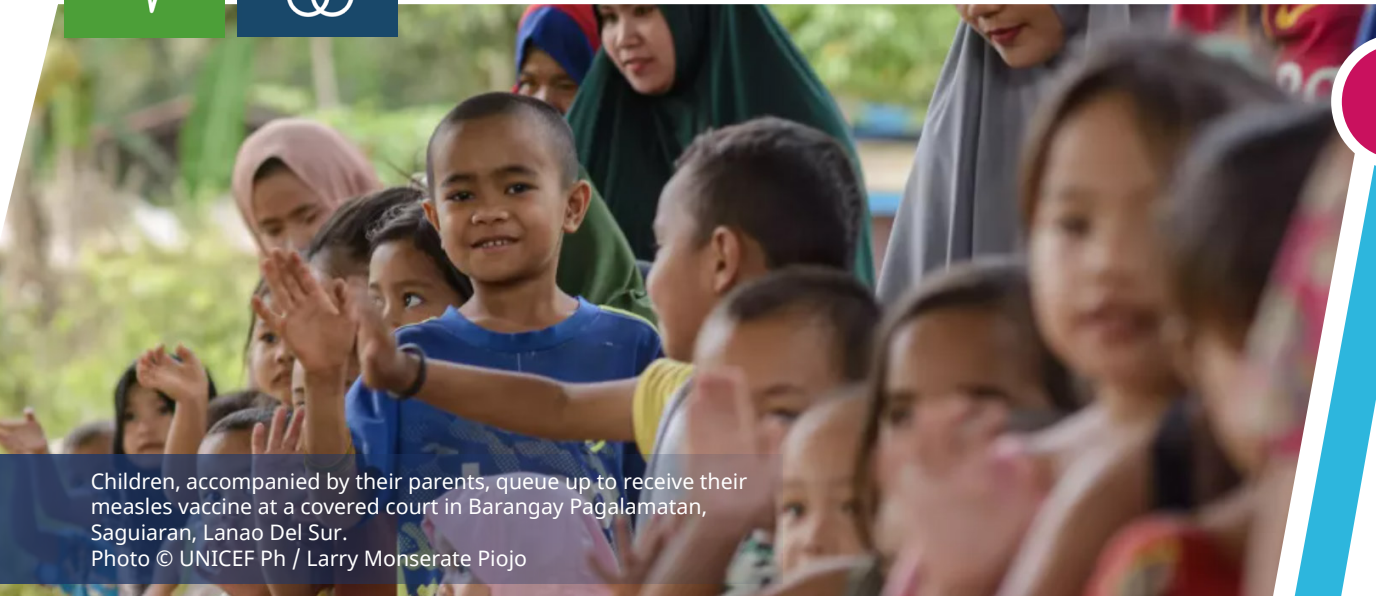
Project BRAVE was jointly implemented by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to mitigate the risks that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to the physical and mental well-being of vulnerable groups.

With the support of the Australian Government, the initiative helped Maguindanaoans like Myda and Tarrisha use their deep understanding of the local context and their genuine connection with the community to advocate for the rights of their fellow youth and women, and deliver a truly gender equal society.



Tarissha Guiamadil, the 20-year-old officer of MYCD, said she was motivated by her own personal circumstances. Photo © UNFPA Philippines





Children, accompanied by their parents, queue up to receive their measles vaccine at a covered court in Barangay Pagalamatan, Saguiaran, Lanao Del Sur.
Photo © UNICEF Ph / Larry Monserate Piojo

UN assistance boosts government vaccination efforts in BARMM amid measles outbreak

UNICEF / WHO

Since the start of the year, over 600 cases of measles have been reported in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The disease, which is transmitted via respiratory droplets, poses high risk to children and the unvaccinated, causing severe infections like lung and brain ailments, diarrhea, and blindness.

To help curb the spread of measles in the region, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) are supporting the country's health authorities to vaccinate children in vulnerable areas, particularly in the three priority provinces of Maguindanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur and Marawi City.

UNICEF is helping the government procure a total of two million doses of the measles vaccine, with the first million dedicated to responding to the outbreak in BARMM. The agency has deployed additional health staff, built cold chain capacity, and engaged with religious and community leaders to address hesitancy and misinformation, among other forms of support.

Meanwhile, WHO has provided the Department of Health with technical assistance based on global best practices for measles vaccination, including recommendations on vaccination strategies,

guidance on the target populations, disease surveillance, and health worker training.

"There is a critical need to reach and vaccinate the children missed during routine vaccinations. We have to make sure that no child is left behind in the BARMM. We have the support of many stakeholders, now it is up to us to lead in this fight against this deadly disease," said BARMM Deputy Minister for Health, Dr. Zul Qarneyn Abas.

Advocacy for vaccination has played an important part in joint efforts to counter the measles outbreak. Working with parents, the agencies raise public acceptance of the anti-measles vaccines, countering prevailing beliefs and misconceptions regarding vaccines.

Norsalam Sharief, a mother of four in Lanao del Sur, ensures her children are prioritized to receive measles vaccines as soon as they become available.

"I set an example. When health workers arrive to administer routine vaccines, including for measles, I encourage my children not to fear the jab. We prioritize their safety by ensuring they receive vaccinations," she said.



Energy and water supply support spurs Tawi-Tawi seaweed industry

UNIDO

Residents of Sibutu and Sitangkai, two island municipalities in the province of Tawi-Tawi, have long struggled to grow the seaweed processing industry in their communities due to the unstable supply of electricity and water.

To help provide these valuable components to seaweed processing, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has installed two solar power plants in the municipalities as part of the “Renewable Energy Technology to Increase Value Added of Seaweeds in Tawi-Tawi (RETS)” project.

The initiative helped provide 24/7 electricity to the island communities, benefiting an estimated 3,000 households, most of which rely on seaweed farming for their livelihood.

The two solar power plants installed under the project deliver 1.65 MW to the mini grid to support the economic activities of seaweed producers and provide power for social services for families living in these geographically disadvantaged areas.

As part of the RETS project, two water supply feasibility studies were also conducted to help the Tawi-Tawi government and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) develop a reliable water

supply system for the province, which would also improve seaweed farmers’ capacity to process their products.

UNIDO also analyzed the value chain for Tawi-Tawi’s seaweed products to enhance the earning capacity of local seaweed farmers.

With funding support from the European Union and strong partnerships among government, academia and the private sector, this UNIDO-implemented project can serve as template for similar public-private partnerships in other communities that require clean, affordable and sustainable energy to power their lives and support livelihoods.

This project is implemented in cooperation with the BARMM government, the Provincial Government of Tawi-Tawi, Mindanao State University, TAWELCO, and the Mindanao Development Authority.



The solar hybrid energy systems support the power needs of 15,000 seaweed farmers and their communities in Tawi, Tawi
Photo © UNIDO Philippines



Books offer novel way to counter prison overcrowding in the Philippines

UNODC

Dave*, who is one month into a six-month sentence, spends up to eight hours a day in the library of the Iligan City Jail.

“I like reading, especially historical fiction,” he said. “Reading is a distraction; it helps to pass the time and takes my mind off my problems. It also gives me a sense of freedom I cannot get in the jail.”

Reading does not only provide Dave with a release from the monotony of daily life inside this facility, it will also help him to get a reduction in his jail time.

He is taking part in the Magbasa Tungo sa Paglaya or Read Your Way Out programme, supported by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). For every 60 hours that prisoners in this jail spend reading each month, they can secure a 15-day reduction in their sentence.

“This is a big advantage for me, as I love reading. The more I read, the shorter my sentence,” said Dave. Working as a library assistant, he is also what is known as a reading buddy. His role is to encourage other prisoners to read and to help them choose books from the library.

Between 10 and 20 prisoners borrow books on a daily basis and the hope is to increase that number to include other prisoners who are not generally attracted to reading.

The pilot project at Iligan City Jail was launched in April 2024 and is already making a difference, according to Jail Officer Reaine Sulit. “It was overwhelming when we received so many books. The prisoners were so happy,” she said. “I think reading brings a sense of calm to the jail.”

The jail, like many detention centres in the Philippines, is severely overcrowded. There are some 550 prisoners currently accommodated in a facility designed for just 270 people.

UNODC’s Rafael Bareto Souza, a Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, said the programme could help to reduce overcrowding in jails across the Philippines.

“The main objective is the decongestion of facilities, but it has the added benefit of increasing literacy rates and educational levels as well as helping the reintegration of prisoners back into society following their incarceration.”

Decongesting prisons has become a key priority for the Philippine government following a shift in policy towards a more humane approach to treating prisoners. Easing the overcrowding improves the conditions for prisoners and reduces the drain on services like healthcare.

*not his real name



A prisoner shelves books in the Iligan City Jail library. Photo © UN News / Daniel Dickinson





UNITED NATIONS
PHILIPPINES



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Investing in rural people



International
Labour
Organization



IOM
UN MIGRATION



International
Trade
Centre



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



UNAIDS



UNDSS



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

unicef
for every child



unierri
United Nations
Interregional Crime and Justice
Research Institute



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



OCHA
United Nations Office
for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs



UNOCT



UNODC
United Nations Office on
Drugs and Crime



UNOPS



United Nations Entity for
Gender Equality and the
Empowerment of Women



World Food
Programme



World Health
Organization

Representative Office
for the Philippines