

Delivering Comprehensive Sexuality  
Education for Out-of-school Young People

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# COUNTRY CASE STUDIES ON UNFPA'S GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CSE

## Philippines

## The Country Case studies series is developed by UNFPA based on outcomes of the Global Programme on Out-of-School Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

UNFPA has since 2019 led the programme “Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Out-of-school Young People: Reaching Those Most Left Behind”, with the aim of empowering adolescents and youth from specific groups left behind with the information and skills they need to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The programme is funded by the governments of Norway and Spain, and started its second phase in 2022. The programme implementation takes place in a total of 12 countries – Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Malawi, Moldova, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines and Tunisia.

Out-of-school CSE holds the promise of reaching those left behind. In each of the countries, locally adapted interventions consider the needs, life experiences and vulnerabilities of left-behind groups of young people. This includes young people who are vulnerable either because they cannot attend school, or because the sexuality education curriculum offered in school does not adequately address their identity, whether that be as a girl, a young person with a disability, a young person living with HIV, an LGBTQ+ young person, or a migrant or young person displaced by conflict or humanitarian crisis. The initiative reaches out to young people from left-behind populations using the specially developed *UN International Technical and Programmatic Guidance on Out-of-school Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. Youth engagement is an integral part of the programme, and young people are themselves meaningfully included and engaged in the design and implementation of the activities.

In this Country Case studies series we present the experiences and lessons learned from UNFPA’s work at the country level implementing CSE to meet the needs of young people most left behind.



Philippines

# BESHIE LEARNING GROUP SESSIONS FOR VULNERABLE ADOLESCENT GIRLS



**TARGET GROUP:**

Vulnerable adolescent girls aged 15-19



**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:**

Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO),  
Centre for Health Solutions and  
Innovations (CHSI)

UNFPA Philippines' current out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education initiative started in 2021, amid strict community lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNFPA Philippines supported its implementing partner, Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO), to implement a cash and voucher assistance programme to enable access to sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV services for adolescent girls from poor urban communities whose sexual behaviours – such as unprotected sex, having multiple sexual partners, engaging in transactional sex, or taking alcohol and using drugs – expose them to the risk of STIs or HIV. The programme was initiated with support from “Business Unusual” funds from UBRAF (UNAIDS' Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework).

ZOTO, a civil-society organization working to empower urban poor communities in the national capital region of the Philippines, developed a curriculum and organized on-line learning sessions on family planning, STIs and HIV, mental health and psychosocial support, human rights and prevention of gender-based violence. Volunteer coordinators at the *barangay* (village/community) level provided IT and logistics support to 50 adolescent girls aged 15-19 years, who were engaged by ZOTO from two communities each in Malabon City and Navotas City.

Sixteen weekly, three-hour sessions were facilitated by ZOTO's staff and volunteers over a period of four months. In these learning sessions the adolescent girls gained knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their

sexual and reproductive health. Participation was a condition for receiving cash assistance of approximately US\$15 per learning session attended.

A formative assessment at the end of 2021 showed increased knowledge about HIV, gender-based violence and family planning among the adolescent girls. All 50 participants voluntarily accessed STI and HIV services. They also formed an informal support group, whose leader has accompanied a number of members who experienced gender-based violence to report the violations to local government officials.

This pilot model for out-of-school CSE was refined in 2022 by the Centre for Health Solutions and Innovations (CHSI), which since 2018 has been UNFPA's implementing partner for in-school CSE. UNFPA supported CHSI to develop the curriculum and learning modules. While the overall programme model remained the same, work was done to align the curriculum with the International Technical and Programmatic Guidance on Out-of-School CSE, and to make the learning-group sessions, which have been in-person since 2022, more participatory and interactive. ZOTO continued to provide facilitators, about half of whom are young people, and sessions took place at ZOTO's facilities. The programme is now known as BESHIE Learning Group Sessions. BESHIE is an acronym which in Tagalog translates to “young person educated on sexual health”, while the word “*beshie*” also means “best friend” in the language of young people.

## Successes

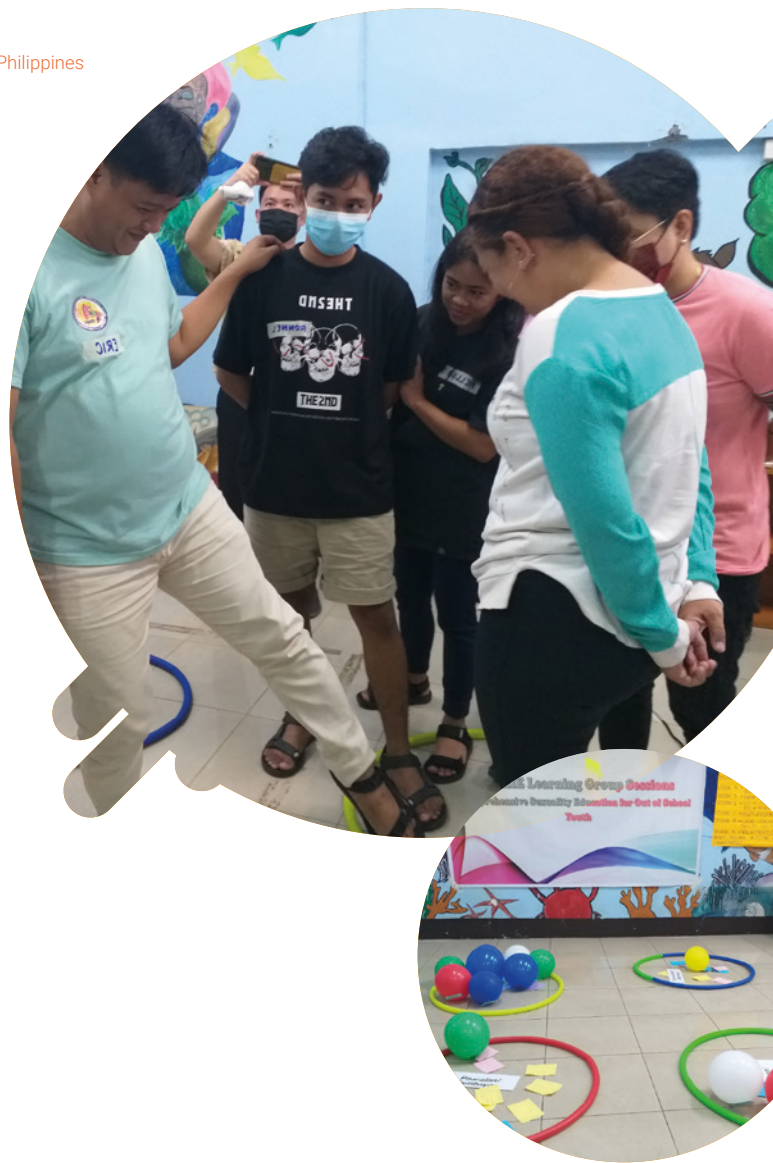
In 2021, ZOTO contacted 50 sexually exploited adolescent girls who were engaged in transactional sex to participate in the Learning Group Sessions. A total of 16 online sessions took place. In 2022, a further 60 adolescent girls, including 22 transgender adolescents, participated in 10 in-person Learning Group Sessions. These took place twice a week over a period of five weeks. Three adolescent girls who had participated in the 2021 learning sessions were trained to become facilitators for the 2022 implementation of the project. Once again, cash assistance was provided as an incentive to participate in the learning sessions and to access STI and HIV services.

Partnership with local government officials has been an essential component of implementation, and ZOTO has

formalized these partnerships with a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the participating *barangays*. In each *barangay*, officials ensure that the participating adolescents have access to health, education and protection services. Each *barangay* designates a focal person from the local government to support the project by coordinating activities, participating in meetings, and helping to strategize on project implementation. With two years' experience, UNFPA Philippines has developed a model for reaching vulnerable adolescents and empowering them with knowledge and skills to make informed choices and have better health outcomes.

## Challenges

One of the main challenges in implementing the BESHIE Learning Group Sessions is identifying and reaching potential participants. ZOTO mobilized its network of youth volunteers in *barangays* who personally knew vulnerable adolescent girls. The snowball method for identifying participants was also used, whereby an adolescent girl would refer others with the same behavioural and demographic characteristics to the programme. The challenge now is to scale up and replicate the model to reach a much wider circle of vulnerable adolescents. UNFPA will build on lessons learned to continue reaching and empowering the most vulnerable adolescent girls and transgender girls in 2023 and beyond.



## Context

The Philippines Department of Education is mandated by law to integrate age- and development-appropriate reproductive health education in formal and non-formal educational systems. The partnership between the Department of Education and UNFPA Philippines for implementing in-school CSE was formalized in 2018 through a memorandum of understanding, which was renewed in 2021. UNFPA and its implementing partner, CHSI, finalized a costed implementation plan for CSE with the department. The plan, approved in 2020, was used to advocate with the national government for a larger budget for CSE. Although not prioritized during the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan was used as a basis for budgeting in 2022-2023.

Educational reforms have included strengthening the gender and development components of school curricula, especially in relation to CSE and adolescent pregnancy. Standards and materials were developed in 2018-2019, and educational personnel were trained. Orientations to dispel misconceptions about CSE were held with regional supervisors, school heads, parent-teacher associations, guidance counsellors and student government bodies. Despite the pandemic restrictions, integration of CSE into the K-12 curriculum started in the school year 2020-2021. Now that the pandemic difficulties have eased, face-to-face in-service trainings on CSE need strengthening, and more teachers and stakeholders need to be reached so that more learners can receive high-quality CSE.



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