Co-creating the #NewNormal for Children and Youth
A narrative report on the “new normal” as seen in the eyes of young Filipinos

OVERVIEW

COVID-19 is the first pandemic that millennials and GenZ have experienced. It has caused unprecedented disruptions in the patterns of living of young people. In this regard, there is a movement now geared towards approximating the closest picture of how the new normal would look and feel like. Adolescents and young people (aged 10–24) make up around 22 percent of the population in the Philippines. A youth profile of the Philippines emphasizes a “youth bulge” demographic.[1] Thus, it is only proper to get their perspectives and recommendations as we paint how the new normal looks and feels like.

This document is a narrative report on what young people think the new normal will or should look like. These findings are based on the second Online Post Dinner Chit Chat conducted by Positive Youth Development Network (PYDN).[2] Post-Dinner chit-chat is an informal, semi-structured online conversation on various topics with young people. This is PYDN’s strategy to create a safe digital space for the youth to voice out their thoughts and advance recommendations. The activity focused on getting the thematic areas of interests and intersectionality that define the picture of the “New Normal” in the eyes of young people. This report will focus mainly on the lived experiences, reflections, and recommendations of the participants.

Participants

The activity was conducted last May 12, 2020. The said activity was attended by (15) adolescents and youth from different provinces and organizations in the Philippines. The 15 participants were composed of adolescents who are staying inside their houses, youth development officers, young people working in non-governmental organizations, students, fresh college graduates, those who are working in and outside Metro Manila, SK council officers, and young people working for the government. The distribution as per location is shown on the map.

Method

The method utilized was a facilitated online-focused group discussion. Youth Facilitators from PYDN guided the participants during the discussion. The discussion focused on the following core questions: (a) For you what does the concept of new normal mean? (b) what is the thing or activity that you missed the most from the “normal” pre-COVID 19 crisis? and (c) for you, what are the three things that must be present in the new normal? PYDN utilized spheres or areas of interest and intersections to analyze responses.

Results

It was evident that the majority of the participants considered that the “new normal” is a vital turning point in the lives of young people. The disruption is tremendously affecting all aspects of their lives. They miss going outside, physical contact and activities with peers, and going to work and school. Furthermore, the pandemic exposed the cracks in the system that need fixing. However, some of the participants considered themselves as an ‘invisible party’ in the creation of the new normal.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of young people in unprecedented intensity. While they view the situation as a problem, young people also view this as a vital point in our history, a starting point to make things better, to co-create a better “new normal.” They want to make things right; they want to be heard and be considered. For them, treating young people as passive actors would only exacerbate the negative impact of the pandemic.

Discussion

The following spheres or areas of interest are advanced from the analysis and clustering of individual responses during the activity. Table 1 shows the frequency or the number of times the following spheres were invoked. For analysis, keywords, and phrases were used to tag specific spheres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere or area of interest</th>
<th>Keywords and phrases</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Health, medicine, hospital, may sakit, biological effects, death, life span, COVID-19, quarantine, database, mental health, accurate information</td>
<td>27 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and governance</td>
<td>Politika, election, mayor, LGU, barangay kapitan, Social Amelioration Program, ayuda, plano ng gobyerno</td>
<td>22 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Batas, laws and regulations, lawyers, ordinance,</td>
<td>16 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Work, office, work from home arrangement, salary, boss</td>
<td>12 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Parents, nanay, tatay, mga kasama sa bahay</td>
<td>10 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Community Affairs</td>
<td>Hindi makalabas, online engagement, party, travels, volunteering</td>
<td>8 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Simbahan, church, God, religious belief, spirituality</td>
<td>7 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>News, role of media, press</td>
<td>2 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discussion revealed that for the participants, the concept of the New Normal should consider the following areas: (a) healthcare; (b) politics and governance; (c) legal; (d) employment; (e) family; (f) social and community affairs; (g) religion; and (h) media.

This analysis confirms some of the findings of the online poll conducted by U-Report, Poll #2, 2020 Key Findings, Results as of April 23rd. In the said report, the respondents reported that despite being well informed about COVID-19, they are still worried. They are also aware of government efforts to address the crisis.[3]

Recommendations

The participants identified the following essential action steps in painting the New Normal.

1. Creation of a centralized and updated database starting from the Local Government Units. This database must contain adolescent and youth elements that are essential in designing and delivering programs in time of emergencies;

2. Concerning this, training on how to gather, interpret, update, and warehouse data from the barangay level is a must. For participants, faulty, archaic, and incomplete data lead to disastrous projects;

3. Capacity-building on how to use an online platform in the government and the private sector that will maintain unhampered delivery of information and services even in times of emergencies;

4. Incorporation of adolescent and youth sensitive programs in the emergency and continuity plan of LGUs and government agencies and instrumentalities;

5. Advocate for policies and programs that will serve the best interest of the youth during a time of emergency such as (peer to peer education, mental health and psychological support, volunteer programs, safe digital spaces, reproductive and sexual health programs, online training)

Recommendations to CSOs and children and youth-serving bodies and agencies

1. Create a localized, within the context of the Philippines, adolescent and youth needs assessment instrument that can be rolled out during emergencies. This instrument provides a scientific way to assess the perceived needs in key areas of the life of young people and the impact of a pandemic in their lives.

2. Focus on future efforts in strengthening local youth organizations that can serve young people during emergencies;

3. Provide more capacity-building training focused on organizational strengthening, impact assessment, and evidence-based decision making to further capacitate youth organizations. This is geared towards complementing the efforts of the government.

4. Create a platform or program to hone young people's leadership skills during times of emergencies and to cope with the ever-changing and volatile political landscape of the country.

[3] https://philippines.ureport.in/opinions/