



A New Generation of Champions for Peace: Redefining Youth Resilience to Build Societal Cohesion in the Philippines and Beyond

A Programme By:



In Partnership With:

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Executive Summary

"And maybe the number one role [for older generations] is to really... trust us. In other words, for them to be a supporting system for us... to really give us the chance to voice out what's inside our hearts."

- Young Filipino leader

Overview

With the number of young people in Southeast Asia expected to reach 220 million by 2038, the region has one of the largest youth populations in the world.¹

Living amid a diverse backdrop of ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, this large youth cohort has experienced rapid progress in recent years, yet continues to witness challenges stemming from tensions, marginalisation, and instability in some areas. At the same time, according to UNDP's report *Advancing Youth, Peace and Security in Southeast Asia*, youth across the region face persistent barriers to meaningful participation in governance and peacebuilding, often leading to their exclusion from political processes and decision-making.

Champions for Peace aims to bridge these gaps. By equipping young leaders with the skills, resources, and platforms they need, the Champions for Peace programme aims to address the root causes of conflict, foster mutual understanding, and build a more peaceful and inclusive Southeast Asia.

Champions for Peace is implemented by the Kofi Annan Foundation and KRIS for Peace Philippines, in partnership with Temasek Foundation, Nagulendran Philanthropy Alliance and the Diana Koh Fund, administered by Asia Community Foundation. From 2024-2027, the programme will be piloted in the Philippines, then in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

To inform the training module of the programme, a youth-led baseline study of young people in the Philippines was conducted to discover insights around youth resilience to social and environmental challenges and how this can foster social cohesion. This report documents key findings from the baseline study to set the stage for empowering young people as they address pressing issues in their communities and contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable future.

¹ ASEAN Secretariat. (2017). First ASEAN Youth Development Index. Author. Retrieved from <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/First-ASEAN-Youth-Development-Index.pdf>

Key Questions

- ▶ How do young people view resilience and social and environmental fragilities?
- ▶ How do they cope? How effective are these coping mechanisms in promoting youth resilience?
- ▶ What are the barriers and opportunities on building and sustaining youth resilience to social and environmental fragilities?
- ▶ How can this resilience be strengthened, especially with the view of promoting social cohesion?

Context

PHILIPPINES: IN A NUTSHELL	1st	20th	15th
	in the World Risk Index for 3 years straight due to high risk and vulnerability to disasters and conflict ²	in the 2025 Global Terrorism Index ³	out of 63 countries in terms of income inequality in 2022, one of the highest in East Asia ⁴
	119 million in total population in 2023 ⁵	28% of the population is considered young, with 30 million aged 10-24 years old in 2024 ⁶	15.5% poverty incidence rate in 2023, with the country classified as lower-middle-income ⁷

National resilience systems face complex challenges such as inequality, polarization and environmental disasters and crises. In this context, the resilience of a country's population, and particularly its youth, to withstand and address these challenges is essential.

Youth resilience refers to the ability of young individuals to cope, adapt, and thrive amid adversity. However, resilience is not built in isolation. It is shaped by the broader environment—families, communities, institutions, and sociocultural systems—which can either reinforce young people's capacities or deepen their vulnerabilities.

Experiencing multiple fragilities, Filipino youth are among the most affected by these challenges, yet they are also among the most capable of catalyzing social transformation.

While many young people in the Philippines actively organize, lead, and participate in peacebuilding, environment, and development initiatives, structural barriers such as exclusion from decision-making, lack of resources, and tokenistic involvement often undermine their potential.

² Bosano, R. (2024, November 20). Philippines is "world's riskiest country" for 3rd straight year | ABS-CBN News. ABS-CBN. Retrieved from <https://www.abs-cbn.com>

³ Vision Of Humanity. (2025, March 4). Global Terrorism Index | Countries most impacted by terrorism. Retrieved from <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>

⁴ Mangaluz, J. (2022, November 25). PH ranks 15th in World Bank's income inequality report | Inquirer News. Retrieved from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1697382/fwd-world-bank-ph-ranks-15th-among-63-countries-for-income-inequality>

⁵ World Population Dashboard -Philippines | United Nations Population Fund. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/PH>

⁶ Empowering Filipino youth for a resilient future. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/philippines/press-releases/empowering-filipino-youth-resilient-future>

⁷ Poverty Statistics from the Philippine Statistics Authority (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/poverty>

The Baseline Study



This baseline study for Champions for Peace underscores the young population's perspectives and experiences, as well as the critical importance of integrating youth voices into strategies addressing social and environmental fragilities. Strengthening youth resilience requires a holistic, participatory, and culturally responsive approach—one that not only acknowledges the challenges young people face but also builds on their capacity to lead meaningful change.

Resilience among youth is dynamic and context-specific, influenced by personal attributes, family conditions, and societal structures. Evidence from previous initiatives, including KRIS for Peace's work on youth and violent extremism, underscores both the promise and the challenges of youth engagement in fragile settings. There is a growing call—reinforced by frameworks like the UN Security Council Resolution 2250—to recognize and amplify youth contributions to peace and resilience-building efforts.

To meaningfully bring young people's voices to the fore, the baseline study was established with a youth-to-youth approach focusing on eight (8) communities in the Philippines experiencing social and environmental fragilities. In these communities, youth researchers worked directly with peers in organizing focus group discussions (FGDs) with fellow youth. Insights from the FGDs were then validated through key informant interviews with representatives of the government, civil society, academe, and religious sector.

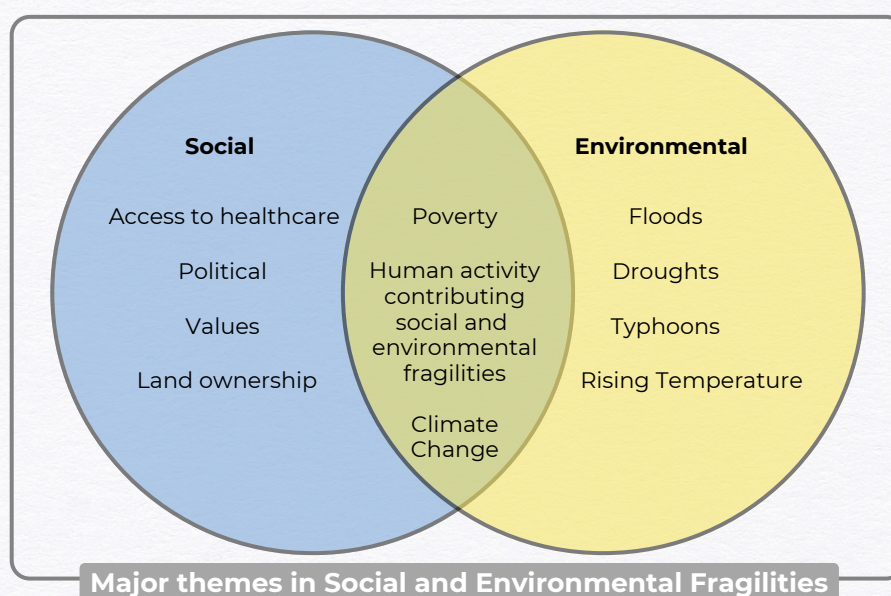
8	81	7
youth researchers leading the study in 8 areas affected by social and environmental fragilities	youth aged 15-29 years old participated in community-based focus group discussions	key informant interviews with members of the government, civil society, academe, and religious sector



Findings

► How do young people view resilience and social and environmental fragilities?

Youth in the Philippines have a clear view of social and environmental fragilities. **They see fragility as situations that make environments and people vulnerable. At the same time, they recognize fragility as a call to action, which encourages them to seek solutions.** The youth often observe a close relationship between social and environmental fragilities.



Environmental fragilities, most notably climate change, are a major concern for Filipino youth. They connect climate change to tangible environmental challenges like water scarcity, more frequent typhoons, floods, droughts, and the destruction of coral reefs. Social fragilities include issues like poverty, inequality, and political instability.

Young people also highlighted the gendered dimensions of fragility. Female participants, for example, expressed concerns about harassment in public spaces and their safety when alone. They also raised issues about inadequate hygiene, sanitation, and privacy in evacuation centers, which disproportionately affect women.

In terms of the **young population's perspectives on resilience, they described the concept as a mix of mindset and skill developed over time through life experiences which involved transforming weakness into sources of motivation.** Based on their experiences within themselves, their family, and their community, they were shaped to be resilient, and extend their resiliency to their family members and colleagues at the same time.

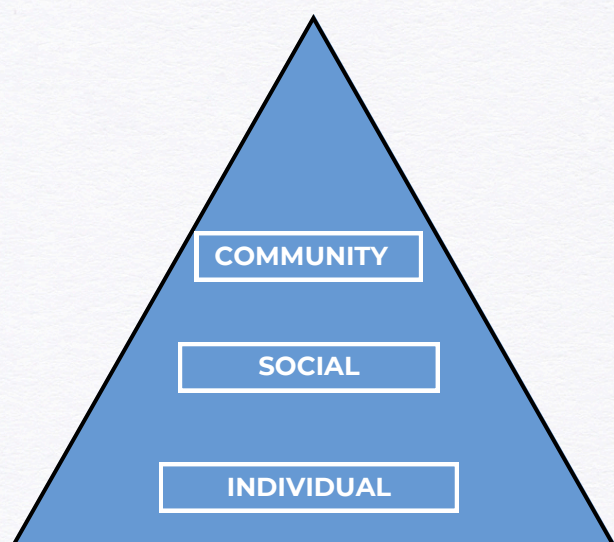
Multiple nuanced meanings have floated reflecting the diversified culture and background of the youth participants but these all boiled down to the fact that at an early age, they are already familiar not just with the conceptual but also the practical notion of resilience. This demonstrates the young population's awareness within and outside themselves, as well as their capacity to be mindful of their environment and how they can respond to be of help.

The critical role of social support networks, particularly families, friends, and community organizations, in fostering resilience is also a key finding. These networks provide crucial emotional, social, and practical support, enabling young people to cope with adversity and build stronger connections within their communities. However, youth resilience is in constant threat due to various factors which intersect and reinforce one another.

Findings



► How do they cope? How effective are these coping mechanisms in promoting youth resilience?



Filipino youth employ a variety of adaptive coping mechanisms which can be broadly categorized into individual strategies, social support networks, and community-rooted strategies.

Individual coping strategies often involve self-management techniques such as self-reflection, using tools like journaling to process their experiences. They also focus on challenging negative attitudes and strengthening their self-belief and confidence. Technology plays a dual role, providing access to information and support while also being used to create distance from stressful situations.

Social support networks are crucial for youth resilience. Family, friends, and organizational teammates provide emotional, practical, and informational support. Youth collaborate on community activities, seek guidance from teachers and spiritual leaders, and build relationships with organizations that offer capacity-building opportunities.

Community-rooted strategies involve collective action and resource sharing. In response to disasters like flooding, youth engage in coordinating evacuation efforts, sharing resources, and providing shelter. They also participate in policy lobbying to address issues like environmental degradation and advocate for community development.

The effectiveness of these coping mechanisms in promoting youth resilience is multifaceted. Individual strategies help youth manage stress, build self-efficacy, and develop a sense of control. Social support networks provide a buffer against adversity, fostering a sense of belonging and connection. Community-rooted strategies empower youth to be active agents of change, addressing the root causes of fragility and building collective resilience.

However, the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms is influenced by various factors. Access to resources, including financial, social, and institutional support, plays a crucial role. Systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to opportunities can limit the effectiveness of individual and community-based efforts.

Furthermore, personal barriers such as mental and emotional struggles can hinder youth resilience. Stigma surrounding mental health issues can prevent youth from seeking help, limiting their ability to develop effective coping strategies.

Young informants generally perceived their coping strategies as effective, attributing this success to their ability to tailor these strategies to diverse life circumstances. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is contingent on addressing systemic barriers and providing adequate support. Strengthening youth resilience requires a holistic approach that integrates individual, social, and community-level interventions, empowering youth to thrive in the face of adversity and contribute to building a more resilient society.

► What are the barriers and opportunities on building and sustaining youth resilience to social and environmental fragilities?

Several barriers hinder youth empowerment and resilience. Mental health challenges, often worsened by social comparison, stigma, and lack of accessible resources, prevent many from seeking help. Emotional struggles such as heartbreak, rejection, and pressure to maintain a strong public image lead to burnout and disengagement. Social relationships act as double-edged swords—while they can uplift, toxic dynamics like gossip and judgment create emotional isolation. Youth also face high societal expectations, pressure to perform, and the struggle to balance academics, social life, and advocacy work.

Across different regions, common challenges such as poverty, mental health, and environmental threats were shared, though localized experiences—like violent conflict in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and climate vulnerabilities in Salcedo, Eastern Samar—shaped unique insights. Other nuances can also be seen in the table below:

Key Nuances

Gender	Young women face challenges related to upholding cultural and traditional values or expectations such as staying at home, taking care of younger siblings, and for Muslim women, wearing the hijab. In youth projects, women have experiences related to exclusion or discrimination based on gender. Women face additional vulnerabilities in both crisis and non-crisis situations, such as feeling unsafe when alone in public and having unmet hygiene or privacy needs in evacuation or rescue contexts.
Socioeconomic Status	When youth and their families do not have enough to survive, resilience-building and community engagement will not be a priority. Young people often juggle multiple fragilities at home - including poverty, sicknesses in the family, and lack of education or livelihood opportunities. For those especially vulnerable, new fragilities coming from conflict or natural disasters can be fatal, with one youth saying that they experienced having no food following such a crisis.
Level of Urbanization	The impact of the pandemic was more acutely felt among urban youth, with some mentioning long-lasting effects of isolation preventing young people from socialization and community involvement. Urban areas with high concentrations of migrants coming from different locations, tribes, and backgrounds can suffer from lack of social cohesion - despite the close proximity of these migrants with one another. Youth acknowledge that civic engagement and opportunities are high in urban areas. However, youth from rural and isolated communities who are more in need of these are the ones who have little to no access.
Climate and Disaster Risk	Youth widely recognized the negative impact of these climate- and disaster-related risks and crises to their livelihood and income. Youth in areas highly vulnerable to natural disasters shared similar concerns about unfair practices post-disaster—such as the politicization of aid—and the lack of sustainable resilience measures in their communities. Youth who have seen multiple cycles of disasters and post-disaster actions in these areas share a feeling of disillusionment, even with civil society, with some actions seen as exploitation of these disasters and the people who suffer through them.
Conflict Risk	Youth from areas with high conflict risk shared experiences directly relating to traumatic events such as war and acts of violence, with the impact of these experiences - including stereotyping - still felt even after a decade or so. Familial ties played a big role in the conflict landscape, with many incidents of conflict stemming from “rido”⁸ and with family members roped together as extremists even when only one member of the family has been involved in an extremist activity. Youth can have nuanced perspectives on violence, with one saying that “rido” can be a community’s traditional way to heal a rift and with another sharing that violent extremism can be done out of the need for justice.

⁸ Rido is a type of conflict characterized by sporadic outbursts of retaliatory violence between families and kinship groups as well as between communities. It is characterized by recurring acts of violence aimed at avenging a perceived affront or injustice. Rido is a major source of conflict and instability in the region, particularly in areas with perceived lack of justice and security.

Several key informants mentioned programs that youth can already readily access (e.g. with the National Youth Commission), though youth themselves - especially in the communities targeted for this baseline - seemed not to be aware. **This highlights a gap between youth awareness and accessibility of programs designed for them, and the need to bring different stakeholders more closely together to streamline opportunities and resources that youth can avail.**

For opportunities, Filipino youth highlighted the following:

Focus on self-resilience and awareness:

Recognizing the importance of personal growth, self-awareness, and self-care in building resilience.

Capacity development workshops:

These programs equip youth with knowledge and skills to address community issues and develop action plans.

Access to quality education and training:

Educational institutions play a vital role in fostering resilience through academic instruction, leadership programs, and skills development.

Presence of youth organizations:

These organizations provide platforms for talent development, networking, community involvement, and empowerment.

Alternative learning systems (ALS):

ALS and technical-vocational platforms provide opportunities for out-of-school youth, expanding access to education and skills training.

Youth-oriented platforms:

Local government consultations and other platforms create opportunities for youth to voice their concerns and contribute to solutions.

Community coordination and collaboration:

Collective action and resource sharing during crises demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based resilience.

► How can this resilience be strengthened, especially with the view of promoting social cohesion?

Based on their perspectives and experiences, youth participants shared their recommendations on how their resilience to social and environmental fragilities can be strengthened.

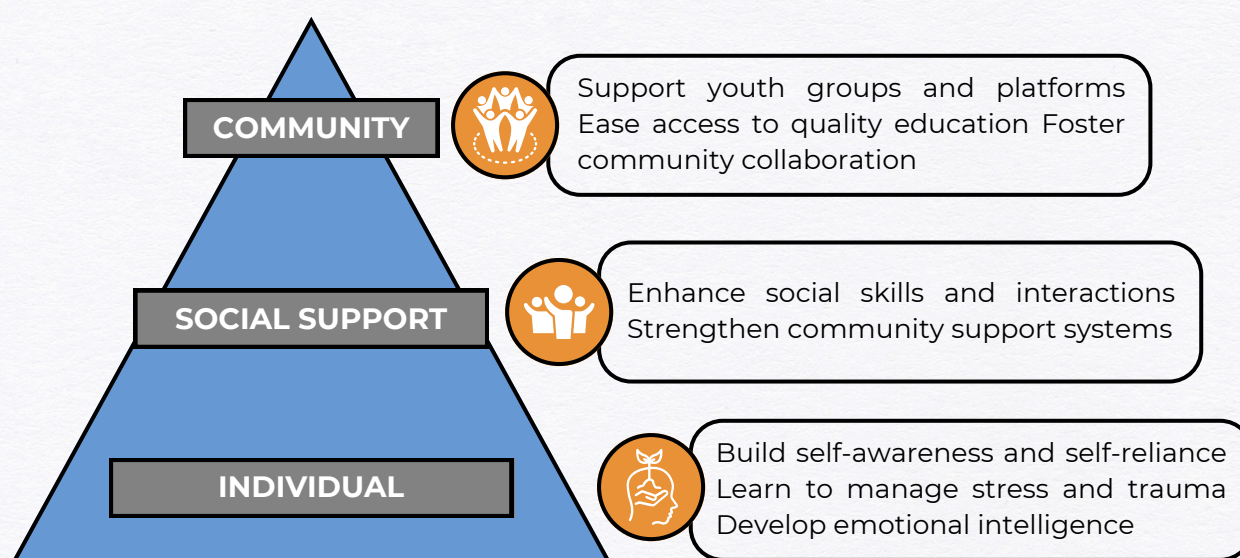
In hindsight, they emphasized that resilience begins at the personal level with developing self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and self-love. Many see inner strength as foundational to overcoming adversity and being able to support others. The youth also proposed innovative programs that support emotional regulation, communication, and social confidence — especially for introverts. They recommend experiential learning activities such as journaling, mindfulness, and workshops on mental health and stress management. These help cultivate resilience as both a skill and a process — one that involves action, reflection, and continuous growth.

Support systems — particularly empathetic teachers, peers, and family—play a crucial role in nurturing this growth. Exposure to inspiring youth leaders and volunteering also helps fuel motivation and purpose.

On the institutional level, participants called for schools, government, and civil society to create safe, inclusive, and supportive environments. They stressed the importance of balanced academic and extracurricular programs that include life skills, mental health support, and leadership development. Empathetic teacher-student relationships and access to counseling are seen as vital for emotional well-being.

Religious and interfaith engagement also emerged as meaningful. Concepts like *khalifa* in Islam⁹ and *Laudato Si'* in Catholicism¹⁰ were cited as spiritually rooted pathways to resilience and care for others. According to young people, interfaith activities that promote understanding and shared values can foster unity and broaden perspectives.

The following figure highlights key recommendations from the study:



The locations covered during the study reflect the need to focus on locations with overlapping social and environmental fragilities, including communities deeply affected by recent traumatic incidents, in order to maximize the impact of the program. In the Philippines, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) comes to mind with its particular vulnerability to climate impact, high violence intensity, and high poverty index.

⁹ An Islamic concept encouraging stewardship of the earth

¹⁰ A publication of the Catholic Church to explore the importance of caring for the environment and other communities

In summary, in developing training materials for Champions for Peace and other programs aiming to build youth resilience, the following principles must be highlighted:

1 Context is key.

With nuanced perspectives on fragilities and resilience, a successful program in enhancing resilience must be anchored on the realities of specific target audiences. This demands the need to co-create and co-design initiatives with youth from the ground.

2 Start from “I”.

Though social cohesion is conceived as a community effort, there must still be emphasis in building individual resilience since this serves as the foundation for any notion of societal resilience. This involves dealing with both personal and community-level issues concerning mental health, trauma, and stresses.

3 Think in terms of systems.

Training modules must not be developed and run within a vacuum. These must allow participants to assess and strategize their actions in the context of their reality in terms of dynamics connected to their school or workplace, local communities, the economy, the government, their religious sector, and more.

4 Follow through.

With young people needing long-term support to navigate and lead collective action through continuing fragilities, capacity-building programmes must provide clear next steps that enable youth to take their ideas and learnings to the next stage (e.g. proposal development, seed grant funding) for years to come.

Champions for Peace: What's Next?

- ▶ Develop and kick off a training programme on building a peaceful and sustainable future for young leaders in the Philippines.
- ▶ Establish a regional platform for mutual learning, networking, and joint action among youth-led organizations in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, through online meetings and a regional gathering in Singapore.
- ▶ Equip young people from diverse backgrounds across the five countries to lead peacebuilding initiatives.
- ▶ To inspire further action, share lessons and recommendations resulting from this experience at regional and international levels.

Partners

The Champions for Peace program is led by KRIS for Peace and the Kofi Annan Foundation, in partnership with Temasek Foundation, the Diana Koh Fund (administered by Asia Community Foundation), and the Nagulendran Philanthropy Alliance.



The Kofi Annan Foundation

Founded in 2007 by the former UN Secretary-General and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Kofi Annan, is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting better global governance and strengthening capacities for a fairer, more peaceful world.

<https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/kofi-annan/>



The Kristyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS), Philippines

KRIS is a non-profit organization based in the Philippines that aims to promote peace and development through education and youth leadership by empowering young people to create ripples of positive change that start with themselves. The KRIS team is composed of passionate young leaders with a wealth of experience in peace and development, social work, education, and communication.

<https://www.krisforpeace.org/>

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Inspiring the next
generation of
peacemakers

The Nagulendran Philanthropy Alliance

Is a Swiss-based private philanthropic fund founded by Singaporeans Dorothy and John Nagulendran to promote a more peaceful world. Its mission is to harness the strategic value of private philanthropy by offering peacemakers a platform for creativity, personal growth, and empowerment. Nagulendran Philanthropy Alliance builds collaborative alliances and accompanies its partners to design and implement innovative projects to support the next generation of peacemakers.

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The Diana Koh Fund

Was established in memory of Ms Diana Koh Ming Ying, a highly successful professional in the field of accountancy who dedicated her whole estate to doing good for those less fortunate. Among its priorities, the Diana Koh Fund supports the empowerment of social impact organisations in Singapore and the region. The Diana Koh Fund is administered by Asia Community Foundation, a Singapore-based charity connecting donors and social impact partners in Asia to catalyse funding for greater impact.

<https://asiacf.org/>

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