

What is INVESTS?

INvestments in **V**ocational, **E**lementary, **S**econdary and **T**ertiary Studies (INVESTS), is a scholarship project being implemented by USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program. INVESTS is a new initiative that provides financial support to selected young people from conflict-affected areas of Mindanao (CAAM). Unlike most scholarship programs operating in the country and the region, INVESTS does not target specific types or specific groups of students. Nor does it target specific fields of study.

INVESTS focuses on students from CAAM, who are interested in pursuing non-traditional, high-demand careers. It also works with organizations that award scholarships to young people from CAAM that are willing to share the cost of scholarships with GEM. Working with partner organizations allows GEM to forge stronger ties with both traditional and new partners and these stronger relationships—such as those established with Business Support Organizations—can in turn enhance the productivity of GEM's work in other sectors.

INVESTS will provide financial support to up to 150 young people per year.

Who are the current beneficiaries of INVESTS?

Recent examples of the types of young people provided with support from INVESTS, and the types of organizations with which INVESTS has established partnerships, are presented below.

- Mining Engineering is but one example of a high-demand, non-traditional occupation that offers the opportunity for secure employment. It is a field in which Mindanao graduates from the CAAM and particularly women from these areas are woefully under-represented. INVESTS is providing full scholarship support to 15 students—two

of them women—from Mindanao who expressed strong interest in pursuing the five-year BS in Mining Engineering degree. GEM worked with four Mindanao universities to identify high potential engineering students interested in transferring into a Mining Engineering curriculum, and worked closely with three universities identified by GEM—in Cebu, Palawan and Manila to facilitate the admission of these students.

- The Mahardika Institute of Technology, in Bongao Tawi-Tawi specializes in technical and vocational training. Officials at that institution perceived a need to upgrade the skills of TESDA-

certified trainers to ensure that the training the trainers provide to young students would meet the skill demands of the local industry. The institute however, lacked sufficient funds to provide this training and proposed a partnership with GEM. Using the INVESTS Project, the institute and GEM are supporting the training of vocational/technical instructors.

- Through its CLIC and EASE projects, GEM began working closely with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) throughout Mindanao. CLIC provides computers and high-speed internet connections to selected schools in CAAM, while EASE provides Education Matching Grants to match funds raised by PTAs to improve education programs and/or facilities at specific schools. These relationships have yielded additional opportunities to identify promising students—many of whose families have been displaced by local conflicts—who lack the means to continue their educations. Three PTAs from conflict-affected areas have identified such students, and requested that GEM share with them the cost of financial support, which is being provided to eleven secondary school students.

What's next?

GEM staff continuously search for emerging opportunities to provide financial support to students across the entire spectrum of education. These opportunities are identified through multiple sources, including GEM's partners, GEM staff working in the field, and ongoing analyses of labor market trends.

Opportunities currently being analyzed include the following:

- Support to students interested in pursuing opportunities in the field of Computer Animation—an emerging field of employment in the Philippines, that annually creates approximately 20,000 jobs;
- Identification and support to students with a talent and interest in high level, object-related programming—for example the software utilized by cell phone manufacturers for which there is an immediate demand for approximately 25,000 employees;
- Underwater welding is an emerging high-demand field which is estimated to create approximately 15,000 new jobs due to the planned expansion of shipbuilding enterprises in the country.

Want to know more?

Additional information about INVESTS and about the GEM Program is available on our website www.mindanao.org and through the INVESTS link embedded in the website.

