

Crossroads:

Marginalization versus achieving universal primary education by 2015

► By RENE RAYA, CECILIA SORIANO, REGINALDO GUILLEN and LUZ ANIGAN

“The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.”

— 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines

“Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling”
— Millennium Development Goal 2

Summary

In the ten years of the MDGs, the government has failed to arrest, much less reverse, the continuing decline of Philippine education. It is failing in both quantitative and qualitative indicators and the probability of achieving the minimum targets are below expectations. Such failure means another generation of poorly educated Filipinos. The Philippine government has been spending much less on education compared to its Asian neighbors. It now ranks amongst the lowest spenders in the world.



While many see this as an education in crisis, the official report¹ could only admit to poor performance. The report's assessment is so restrained it fails to convey the magnitude and depth of the problem. Today, we face a critical juncture – a crossroads – that will determine if the country can get back on its feet or become the worst case education scenario in the Asian region. This alternative report will discuss key points that are missing in the official report. It will argue that the problem is far more serious than what the government is prepared to admit and conclude by suggesting urgent measures deemed necessary to address the education crisis.

Highlights of the Official Report on MDG 2

The Philippines Fourth Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) states that the MDG “target of universal access to elementary education by 2015 is in great risk of not being achieved.” This is based on the current rate of progress, indicating that the key education targets will most likely be missed in 2015. The report estimated a “low” probability of achieving the targets on elementary net and gross enrolment rates. While improving in recent years, elementary cohort survival and completion rates have only “medium” probability of meeting the targets (see Table 1).

Table 1. Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling		
Elementary education net enrolment rate	0.00	LOW
Elementary education cohort survival rate	0.63	MEDIUM
Elementary education completion rate	0.54	MEDIUM

¹ “Philippines Fourth Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).” Third Draft, July 2010 (n.p.).

² The number of children of official primary school age who are enrolled in primary education as a percentage of the total children of the official school age population.

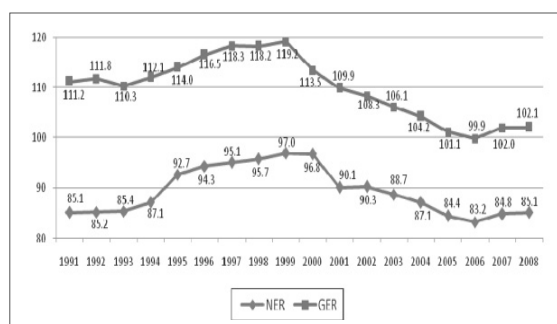
³ This is defined as the number of pupils (of any age) who are enrolled in primary education as a percentage of the total children of official school age population. GER can be over 100% due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged pupils/students because of early or late entrants, and grade repetition.

⁴ Percentage of Grade 1 pupils who reach Grade 6.

⁵ Grade 1 pupils who were able to complete the elementary cycle.

The net enrolment rate (NER²) in elementary education declined sharply from 96.8 percent in SY 2000-2001 to 90.1 percent in SY 2001-2002. The sharp decline is partly explained by the change in the official school age from 7-12 years old to 6-11 years old as many parents still opted to send their children to school at age 7 or older. Enrolment rate continued its downward trend until SY 2006-2007 before moving up marginally to 85.1 percent in SY 2008-2009. The gross enrolment rate (GER³) generally followed the same downward trend – declining from a high of 119.2 percent in SY 1999-2000 to 102.1 percent in SY 2008-2009 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Elementary education NER and GER (%), SY 1991-1992 to SY 2008-2009 (public and private)

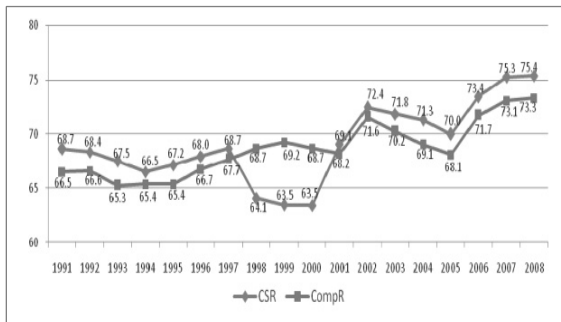


Source of basic data: Department of Education

Note: The years 1991 to 2008 in the horizontal axis represent start of school year (i.e., 1991 corresponds to school year 1991-1992)

From 1991 to 2008, learning efficiency as measured by the cohort survival rate (CSR⁴), showed erratic fluctuation, indicating the poor holding capacity of the school system. However, from its lowest level of 63.5 percent in SY 1999-2000, the CSR gradually improved, reaching its highest level at 75.4 percent in SY 2008-2009. During the same period, the completion rate⁵ likewise improved, reaching its highest level at 73.3 percent in SY 2008-2009 (see Figure 2). These improvements need to become consistent and significant in terms of the holding power of schools if the MDG target is to be met, as the drop-out rate remains alarmingly high at an average of 6.0% in SY 2008-2009.

Figure 2. Elementary education CSR and CompR (%), SY 1991-1992 to SY 2008-2009 (public and private)



Source of basic data: Department of Education
 Note: The years 1991 to 2008 in the horizontal axis represent start of school year (i.e., 1991 corresponds to school year 1991-1992)

The report noted wide disparities in the key education indicators across regions, between rural and urban areas, and by gender, with girls out-performing the boys in terms of enrolment, survival and completion in elementary education from 2000 to 2008. It identified the key bottlenecks in the education sector, specifically the continuing shortages in classrooms and teachers in many areas across the country as a result of poor targeting of resources. The report argued that poverty, poor health, peace and order problems in some areas, and the prevalence of child labor are factors that keep children from attending school. It noted the high incidence of drop-out rates particularly among children in the first three years of elementary education. This was attributed mainly to the weak pedagogical skills of teachers which aggravate the inability of children to cope with school work.

While the report admitted the poor performance and failings of the education sector, the analysis and arguments presented appear to be restrained. It fails to capture the magnitude and depth of the problem confronting the education system. There has been a continuing and historic decline of education in the Philippines in the past ten years ever since the Millennium Summit of 2000. Today, we face a critical juncture – a crossroads that will determine if the country can get back on its feet or become the worst case education scenario in the Asian region. Urgent measures are needed to reverse the education crisis.

This alternative report will discuss key points that are missing in the official report. It will argue that the problem is far more serious than what the government is prepared to admit; that stagnation and reversals in education are leaving the marginalized further behind,

thus, exacerbating inequality even more; that the country has long been under investing in education; and that poor governance has failed to transform the education sector.

Premises v. promises

In setting the premises on which this report shall base its analysis, it is best to look into several areas of concern where education is the central goal. First, it is explicitly enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, that education is a basic right of every Filipino citizen.

Second, the Philippines is signatory to a succession of international agreements – from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to the more recent 2000 Dakar Framework for Action and the 2000 Millennium Declaration – all of which recognize education not only as a development goal but a fundamental human right.

Third, as a signatory to the Education for All (EFA) Goals set forth in the 2000 Dakar Framework of Action, the country commits itself to the fulfillment of six education goals:

- Expanded early childhood care and education
- Universal completion of basic education
- Learning and life skills for young people and adults
- Increase in adult literacy by 50 percent
- Gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015
- Improved quality of education

Two of these goals - universal primary education and gender parity in education – have been adopted as part of the MDG 2.

Rising enrolment, falling performance

Enrolment in both public and private schools has increased annually with 2008–2009 registering an increase of 1.75 percent reaching an actual number of 21.62 million students. On June 15, 2010, both public and private schools formally opened with an unprecedented increase in the number of enrollees. There were a total of 23.04 million students, 87 percent of whom enrolled in public schools (or an equivalent of 19.97 million pupils) while 13 percent are in private schools (or an equivalent of 3.07 million pupils (see Table 2), Continuous increases in enrollment are also

seen in both public and private pre-schools, with pupils enrolled in private pre-schools comprising more than half of the total number of those enrolled in public pre-schools.

Table 2. Enrollment Statistics, SY 2010-2011

	Pre-School	Elementary	Secondary
PUBLIC	0.88 Million	13.44 Million	5.65 Million
PRIVATE	0.45 Million	1.17 Million	1.45 Million
TOTAL	1.33 Million	14.61 Million	7.10 Million

Source: DepEd Statistics 2010

The annual increase in the enrollees in public school is not surprising since there had been an upward trend in enrolment rate over the past five years estimated at around 2 percent on annual basis. This is also in line with the Philippine population growth rate of 2.04 percent in the 2007 census. The government admitted that while enrolment figures have been increasing over the years, the key performance indicators, especially the participation rate and the dropout rate, have been deteriorating consistently since 2001, falling way short of the EFA targets for the corresponding years.

The Department of Education reported that more learners drop out from the system particularly in the lower grade levels even before functional literacy is acquired. It also noted the low participation of children in early childhood education (ECE) with only 34% of the 3-5 year age group attending preschool and only 60 percent of entrants in the first grade having an ECE background. Dropout at the elementary level remained alarmingly high at 6.0% to 7.4% during the school years 2004-05 to 2008-09 (see Table 3).

About a quarter of the students who enter Grade 1 drop out before reaching Grade 6. Every year, at least half a million students drop out from elementary and secondary school, with a significant percentage per-

manently staying out of school. For 2007, UNESCO⁶ estimated that 1.003 million Filipino children, 6 to 11 years old, were not attending school. This is similar to the estimate of the Action for Economic Reforms which placed the number of out-of-school children 6-15 years old at 2.2 million, 1.2 million of whom were between 6 to 11 years old. Apart from the 2.2 million school leavers, another 2.8 million youth (16 to 21 years old) were not attending school and had not completed their basic education.⁷ UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report (2010) noted that the Philippines, along with Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, are countries facing the greatest challenge in the number of out-of-school children.

An earlier survey conducted in 2003,⁸ noted that poor children are nearly three times more likely to drop out of school, compared with non-poor children. The same survey further reported a high incidence of out-of-school children and youth in the depressed regions of Mindanao and the Visayas.

The main reason⁹ children drop out of school has been cited as poverty and the need to work to help with the family's livelihood. Other reasons poor children are excluded from the school system are because of poor health, malnutrition and disability. A significant number are forced to quit because of the high cost of school-related expenses. Others could not cope with the school work or lost interest in schooling.

Widening disparities

Marginalization is strongly associated with poverty and geographical location. Education performance in terms of access, survival and completion varies greatly across regions and economic status. Children in poor, remote, or conflict-affected regions of the country showed much lower levels of education performance compared to the richer and urbanized regions. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)

Table 3. Dropout Rate (School Leavers Rate) SY 2004-05 to SY 2008-09

Drop Out Rate	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Elementary	6.98%	7.33%	6.37%	5.99%	6.02%

Source: DepEd Factsheet as of September 2009

⁶ UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report 2010.

⁷ Raya, 2010.

⁸ the 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS).

⁹ All reasons cited are based on official surveys and assessments of education trends in the Philippines.

Table 4. Median Years of Schooling Household Population 6 Years Old and Above, 2008

Location	Male	Female	Wealth Quintile	Male	Female
Urban	8.7	9.1	Lowest	3.7	4.2
Rural	5.4	5.7	Second	5.4	5.7
Selected Regions			Middle	6.9	7.3
NCR	9.2	9.3	Fourth	9.1	8.2
CALABARZON	8.4	9.0	Highest	9.9	9.9
CARAGA	5.5	6.1			
ARMM	3.2	3.8	Total	6.4	7.4

Source: National Demographic and Health Survey 2008 (National Statistics Office and ORC Macro 2009).

and other poorer regions in Mindanao are consistently falling behind the rest of the country in nearly all key education indicators.

The 2008 National Health and Demographic Survey showed that the median schooling duration of Filipinos aged 6 years and over is 6.4 years for males and 7.4 years for females. The corresponding figures for rural areas indicate much lower years of schooling compared to those in urban areas (see Table 4). In the more developed regions of the National Capital Region (NCR) and CALABARZON, median schooling duration ranged from 8 to 9 years. In comparison, residents of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) have only 3.5 years of schooling. Compared with the richest quintile, with 9.9 years of schooling, those belonging to the poorest quintile have an average of only 3.7 years for males and 4.2 years for females. These findings are consistent with earlier health and demographic surveys conducted in 1998 and 2003. This means that over the past 10 years, the disparity in education access and attainment has persisted.

The National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) came out with a separate set of indicators called the Child Development Index (CDI). The CDI is a composite index which measures the overall state of child development in terms of education, health and quantity of life (i.e. income) as measured through the Child Health Index (CHI), Child Education Index (CEI), and Quantity of Life Index (QOLI), respectively.¹⁰

According to the Child Education Index, the Regions with the lowest CEI and ranking are regions 10, 11, and 12; all of them in Mindanao (see Table 5). Over the last six years, there has been a notable

Table 5. Education Index per Region

Region	Education Index (EI)					
	Index			Rank		
	2000	2003	2006	2000	2003	2006
Philippines	0.790	0.739	0.607			
NCR	0.921	0.860	0.644			
REGION IV-A	0.832	0.817	0.654	3	1	1
Region I	0.857	0.784	0.646	1	3	2
Region III	0.806	0.807	0.643	4	2	3
Region IV – B	0.792	0.735	0.641	6	5	4
Region V	0.799	0.721	0.635	5	7	5
Region II	0.769	0.726	0.601	8	6	6
Region VIII	0.737	0.664	0.595	9	14	7
Region VI	0.840	0.703	0.584	2	9	8
Region IX	0.713	0.670	0.583	13	13	9
CARAGA	0.695	0.639	0.582	14	15	10
ARMM	0.559	0.569	0.567	16	16	11
Region VII	0.773	0.14	0.566	7	8	12
CAR	0.521	0.744	0.561	11.5	4	13
Region XII	0.691	0.673	0.559	15	12	14.5
Region X	0.721	0.702	0.559	11.5	10	14.5
REGION XI	0.729	0.683	0.545	10	11	16

Source: NSCB – Child Development Index www.nscb.gov.ph

decrease in the number of regions with a high Child Education Index. The findings affirm what has been already been stated that across regions, the disparity in terms of education inequality is high especially for the poorest regions.

The marginalized and disadvantaged groups are unable to catch up as they continue to be ignored and neglected. Good practices and programs that have been successfully piloted and highlighted in the official report, have also been marginalized by under-funding

¹⁰ NSCB – Child Development Index. www.nscb.gov.ph

and therefore, limited coverage. The funding for the Alternative Learning System that is supposed to cater to the out-of-school youth and marginalized groups has remained grossly inadequate to make an impact. Programs and funding, including the school feeding program and the conditional cash transfer, are focused mainly on the formal school system. Those outside the formal school system or at risk of being excluded from the system have to live with peripheral programs that are more cosmetic than real. Only a simple accounting of funds and actual extension of programs for the marginalized groups can tell the story of continuing neglect and deprivation (see Box 2, Financing Gap section).

Box 1. Education in emergency situation

Emergency situations as a result of armed conflict causing the displacement of families, affects most especially the children as school and community life is disrupted. In Central and Muslim Mindanao, hundreds of thousands of families, coming mostly from Muslim and IP (Indigenous Peoples) communities, have been displaced by the ongoing conflict between government forces and rebel groups. The prevailing emergency situation, compounded by widespread poverty and long standing neglect, are major constraints to the achievement of the Education for All goals.

Since 2007, the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines), in partnership with Oxfam Great Britain (OGB), Balay Rehabilitation Center, Inc. (BALAY) and Community of Learners Foundation (COLF), supported education and peace-building initiatives in the conflict-affected municipalities of Columbio in Sultan Kudarat, Datu Paglas and Paglat in Maguindanao and Tulunan in North Cotabato. These areas are located in the poorest and lowest performing provinces of the Philippines. About half of the population are Muslims and almost a quarter are IPs.

A survey conducted in 2008 covering the four municipalities revealed serious education gaps that reflect the continuing deprivation and marginalization of communities in large parts of Mindanao. Participation rate at the elementary level was 75.7% while the corresponding figure for high school was 24.1%. A large majority of the 12 to 15 year old children were still in elementary schools when they should have

The global comparison: The Philippines is left behind

Based on the UNESCO's EFA Development Index (EDI) which measures overall EFA achievement, the Philippines ranked 85th out of 128 countries in 2007, falling behind most Asian countries such as China, Malaysia and Indonesia. What is worse is that the EDI score of the Philippines has been decreasing since 2003 when it ranked at 75th out of 125 countries (see Table 6).

This confirms the observation that the Philippines has been under-performing in education, with key indicators way below what might be expected of a middle-income country. As an example, the average

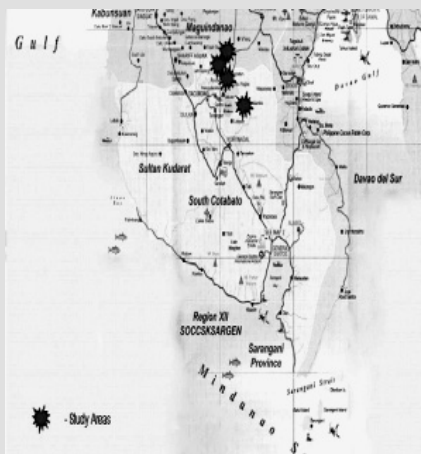
been in high school. This accounts for the low participation rate at the secondary level.

Among the residents the following average educational attainment levels were recorded: 17.3% had no formal education; 49.1% reached only elementary level education; 24.5% attended high school; and only 9% reached post-secondary vocational or college education. In rural areas, the percentage of residents with no formal education increased to 24.4%, almost double the percentage of those who lived in or near the town centers. The level of education is significantly lower compared to the national average¹¹ which showed that only 9% had no formal education while 19.1% have reached post secondary education, with 8% earning a college degree or higher.

Similarly, the average basic literacy rate among 10 years old and over is only 82.2% which again is much lower compared to the national literacy rate of 93.4%. The situation is even more serious for those in remote areas where the literacy rate was estimated at 74.0%. Among the areas covered by the survey, the municipality of Paglat had the lowest literacy rate of 67.7%.

Different from what has been a consistent national trend, females in the surveyed municipalities had a lower educational attainment than males. The disparity in education performance is further reflected in the lower literacy rate of females at 80.6% compared to males at 83.8%.

Various factors have caused disruptions of classes and affected school attendance. Among the most frequently cited factors were work or employment opportunities, armed conflict and natural disasters such as typhoons, floods, drought and earthquake. The survey revealed that 39.1% of the households have relo-



¹¹ FLEMMS 2003

Table 6. EFA Development Index Value and Rank, Philippines (2003-2007)

Philippines	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
EDI Value	0.898	0.897	0.893	0.888	0.895
Ranking		75 th	82 nd	86 th	85 th
Number of Countries		125	129	129	128

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)

income in the Philippines is four times that of the United Republic of Tanzania or Zambia, but it has a lower net enrolment ratio that has stagnated over time. In comparison, net enrolment ratios in the two African

countries have been steadily increasing.¹² The sad reality is that the Philippines is being left behind, while most other countries in the world are making significant strides towards universal primary education.

Financing gap

The low spending on education plays a large part in the poor and declining performance of the Philippine education. Preliminary data indicates that the expenditure level remained at 2.1 percent of GDP in 2010.

The Philippines has been under-spending on education, with the expenditure share declining in relation to the gross domestic product (GDP) and to total public expenditure. International benchmarks

cated or transferred residency, either temporarily or permanently. Some of those who have relocated indicated that they have done so several times, some as many as ten times. Most respondents cited the recurring armed conflict as the main reason for relocation.

Families moved to safer grounds but far from where the children were enrolled. Classes were suspended, sometimes indefinitely, to safeguard the security of teachers and students while some schools were used as evacuation centers. The poor conditions in evacuation centers make it virtually impossible to conduct emergency classes. Children and teachers were afraid to return to school and several experienced psychosocial trauma that affected the normal learning processes. Many affected schools could not resume operations, even long after the conflict ended, because rehabilitation work of destroyed school buildings and facilities was not prioritized.

Those who dropped out were asked about plans to return to school. Almost half (49.5%) said they definitely had no plans of going back to school while about a fifth were undecided (21.3%). Only 29% mentioned that they planned to resume schooling. While about half of the surveyed population were Muslims, only 8.7% attended Madrasah, mostly for Arabic literacy. Very few (4%) participated in training activities, mostly related to livelihood development.

This situation calls for urgent action to reach out to disadvantaged children whose education and lives have been seriously affected by the recurring armed conflict. As an immediate step, the Philippine Government and the Department of Education (DepEd) should enforce the Minimum Standards in Education in Emergencies (MSEE) and ensure the integration of its relevant provisions in national and local policies.

The mapping of ongoing and high-risk emergency/con-



lict areas must be conducted whilst closely monitoring the rehabilitation efforts in post conflict areas for an appropriate and calibrated response to address the educational needs of children and adults. Along this line, the tracking of displaced children should become a part of the disaster management plan. An inter-agency coordinating group for education should also be made functional in all conflict-affected areas to ensure continuing education even in emergency and crisis situations.

Appropriate interventions must be institutionalized, including psychosocial debriefing for displaced and other affected children (i.e. children of communities hosting internally displaced persons (IDPs) whose schools have been converted to evacuation centers in times of emergencies). The capacity of teachers to provide psychosocial intervention must be harnessed and developed. Emergency situations will require more mobile teachers and expanded coverage of the Alternative Learning System to reach out to displaced and out-of-school children. Education must be given high priority in peace-building initiatives and advocacy, recognizing that education, literacy and cultural sensitivity are factors that contribute to social cohesion and peace.

Within the next 5 years, education disparities and deprivation must be seriously addressed throughout Mindanao as a priority agenda for lasting peace and the attainment of the MDGs by 2015.

Source: *Education Watch In Armed-Conflict Areas: Tracking children, youth and adults missing an education. Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines) and Partners in Education for Community Empowerment (PIECE), 2010.*

¹¹ UNESCO. 2009.

Table 7. Education Expenditure as a % of GDP

Country	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Brunei Darussalam	3.0	4.2	5.8	5.3	6.5	6.2	4.3	5.5
Cambodia	0.8	0.9	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.4
Indonesia	1.0	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.1	0.9	n.a.	n.a.
Lao PDR	0.5	0.1	1.0	1.6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Malaysia	5.5	4.8	5.6	7.0	7.7	7.0	5.4	5.2
Maldives	n.a.	4.6	7.4	6.7	7.8	8.2	7.8	8.9
Myanmar	2.6	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.6
Nepal	1.7	2.3	2.4	2.7	3.0	2.9	2.9	3.2
Philippines	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.0	2.6	2.4
Sri Lanka	3.0	2.9	2.5	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.7
Thailand	n.a.	2.5	3.5	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.0	n.a.
Vietnam	n.a.	2.8	2.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: ADB Statistical Data Base System – IMF Government Finance – January 2008 for Myanmar and Vietnam

endorsed by UNESCO set the desirable level of education expenditure at 6 percent of GDP and 20 percent of total public expenditure. While most countries in the region are increasing or maintaining education expenditure relative to GDP, the Philippines' total education expenditure level (including technical-vocational and tertiary education), shows a consistent decline from 3.5% of GDP in 2000 to only 2.4% of GDP in 2004 (see Table 7).

UNESCO's global monitoring report¹³ ranks the Philippines amongst the lowest spenders on education in Asia and the rest of the world. The country's spending level is below the East Asian regional average of 3.6% and South Asia's average of 3.8%. When countries were classified into four groups based on income, the spending level of the Philippines (a middle-income country) on education was even lower than the median (3.9 percent of GDP) expenditure of countries belonging to the lowest income group.

The share of basic education in the national budget of the Philippines has, likewise, been decreasing over the years. In 2000, 14.03 percent of the national budget went to basic education. This went down to 12.35 percent by 2005 and further down to 11.9 percent of the national budget by 2009. For 2010, DepEd received an allocation of Php175 billion (11.2% of the national budget), a further decrease of 0.7 percent from the previous year. Factoring in the inflation rate and the projected incre-

ment in student enrolment, per pupil expenditure for 2010 is expected to decline further. The study of Manasan (2007) showed that per pupil expenditure on basic education in real terms declined from Php 1,679 in 1997 to Php 1,222 in 2006, based on 2000 prices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

On access and affordability

Education must be inclusive and poor-sensitive, making sure that children from poor and disadvantaged groups stay in school or participate in alternative learning programs. In this regard, user fees and school contributions, whether mandatory or voluntary, must be abolished.

Mechanisms must be put in place to effectively reach out to the 'unreached', particularly the non-literates, the out-of-school, IP and Muslim children, and other vulnerable and socially excluded sectors. Coverage therefore needs to be expanded together with the improvement of quality and increased resources for the alternative learning system (ALS) to reach the out-of-school youth and other target learners.

To reduce exclusion, especially for the IPs and Muslims, affirmative action needs to be assured by putting in place an accessible and multi-cultural educational system to address their needs. Indigenous knowledge and learning systems need to be recognized as the foundation of education for indigenous communities,

¹³ UNESCO, 2007.

ensuring appropriate and relevant curriculum, learning modules, materials and approaches that are appropriate and relevant. The Mother Language education policy needs to be implemented through provisions for local research, training and development of indigenous learning materials.

The minimum standards in education in emergencies, needs to be institutionalized to make schools as zones of peace with adequate provisions for safety, emergency assistance and psychosocial support for at risk children.

Relevant education programs need to be developed to ensure that working children return to school, and also for the support of the eradication of child labor.

On quality teachers for quality education

The quality of public education should be improved through the continued professional development of teachers, to keep up to date with content and improved teaching pedagogy. There also needs to be a fair and sound system of promotion and career development, with better salaries and benefits that provide comprehensive welfare assistance, including full health coverage, housing support and provision for scholarships. Further recommendations include:

- Ensure reasonable work hours and teaching load of teachers in order to improve teaching quality in the classroom.
- Enhance the participation of teachers in the governance of public education and the improvement of education.
- Improve the school conditions that will support quality teaching such as smaller classroom size, provision of learning materials, classrooms and laboratories.
- Decisively address the perennial shortages in key education input:
 - 1:35/40 teacher and classroom to pupil ratio
 - 1:1 ratio for textbook and desk
 - Adequate sanitation and water facilities
 - Adequate library, science and computer laboratories

On gender-sensitive education

Schools should be a gender-sensitive environment. There needs to be:

- Adequate facilities for females

- Provisions of gender-sensitive textbooks and teaching materials.
- A system to ensure the right to education of young mothers by implementing a non-discriminatory policy against pregnant adolescents.
- An elimination of violence in school affecting most especially the girls.

On financing

There has to be a substantial increase in investment for education to fast track initiatives to achieve universal basic education and meet all the MDG and EFA Goals by 2015. This means a move closer to meeting the international benchmark of 6% of GDP as public expenditure for education and a reserve of at least 20% of the national budget for education, with an increased allocation for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) including teacher training. There should be a participatory and transparent budgeting process, and easy public access to all financial information and documents.

On governance

The governance of education should be improved by ensuring transparency and accountability, and by enhancing participation of all stakeholders, including parents, students, community representatives and NGOs. The representation and meaningful participation of stakeholders in policy bodies at national, local and school levels should be assured.

Mechanisms should be created for the participation of students and their organizations in formulating school policies, in curriculum development and in improving teaching methodologies.

Finally, institutions must be strengthened by making them accountable. The problems of the country's education sector are not new. They have long been identified and well-studied and appropriate solutions formulated and piloted. A comprehensive reform agenda had been adopted – the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda or BESRA. Commitments were made; and targets set and revised periodically. However, it was business-as-usual in the last 10 years amidst failures and reversals. Some serious accounting must be done to correct the failings of the institution and allow the education sector to move on.

Box 2. Education budget tracking (2008-2009)

The DepEd is the biggest government agency, employing over half a million teachers and non-teaching personnel and serving more than 20 million students. Every year, billions of pesos worth of inputs and services are procured such as textbooks, armchairs, teaching materials and food, and the construction of school buildings and even the hiring of consultants for various projects. Being a centralized bureaucracy faced with immense work, the DepEd has difficulty in ensuring efficient use of resources and quality of services. Inefficiencies and wastages were observed in the budget tracking initiative undertaken by E-Net Philippines jointly with Social Watch Philippines.

A case in point is in teacher hiring. While the government devotes funds for additional teachers to lower the pupil-teacher ratio, delays in the hiring of new teachers are usual. Based on the budget tracking, teachers were hired only towards the end of the year. The school administrators explained that this was due to the long 11-step process in hiring teachers. Sometimes, the delay in the hiring was done deliberately to generate savings from the unspent salaries of teachers yet to be hired. These savings could then be used to augment teachers' end-of-year bonuses.

Similarly, the DepEd has been questioned in the past years for controversial procurements of textbooks. One alleged irregularity involved the purchase of erroneous textbooks for Filipino and Social Studies for grades 1-5, which was part of the 12 million textbooks purchased with funds from the World Bank.

The food for school program is another case of a wasted initiative that had a large fund allocation but was poorly conceptualized and badly implemented with many irregularities, thus, rendering the project ineffective. School nutritionists doubted the effectiveness of the program given the short duration of implementation, irregular rice delivery schedules and the limited quantity of rice distributed to the pupils. In several cases, rice deliveries occurred late in the school year when pupils had already dropped out of school. The impact of the program in terms of improving nutrition and pupil performance and in reducing drop-out rates is questionable particularly because of the absence of a monitoring system. These noted weaknesses of the program led the new administration to cancel the program, but only after wasting several billions in much needed resources.

The School Based Management (SBM) grant aims to support efforts of schools and divisions towards improvement as part of the decentralization efforts and school empowerment process. However, delays in the release of funds from the SBM grant amounting to a total of Php 500 million were also monitored by E-Net. For example, the SBM funds for 2007 were released only in the last week of December 2007. Considering the processes involved, paper requirements in government purchasing and the corresponding time needed in disbursing funds, all these made utilization of the SBM within the fiscal year very difficult. Problems in the management funds are threatening the implementation of the plan to empower schools.

These are but a few examples that reflect inefficiencies and the poor governance of the education in the country.

References

- ADB Statistical Data Base System & IMF Government Finance. January 2008.
- ASPBAE (Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education). 2007. Mapping Out Disadvantaged Groups in Education. Education Watch Reports, Philippines summary report.
- Dakar Framework for Action. 2000. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments. Adopted by the World Education Forum. Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April. <http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/en-conf/dakframeng.shtm>.
- Delors, J., In'am, A. M., Amagi, I., et al. 1996. Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century. Paris. www.unesco.org/delors/.
- DepEd (Department of Education). Factsheet, Basic Education Statistics (School Years 1990/1991 – 2007/2008).
- IDMC. October 2009. Cycle of conflict and neglect. Mindanao's displacement and protection crisis. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Norwegian Refugee Council. www.internal-displacement.org
- Manasan, R. G. 2007. Financing the Millennium Development Goals: The Philippines (Final Report). United Nations Development Programme.
- NSCB – Child Development Index www.nscb.gov.ph
- National Statistics Office and ORC Macro. 2004. National Demographic and Health Survey 2003. Calverton, Maryland.
- National Statistics Office and ICF Macro. 2009. National Demographic and Health Survey 2008. Calverton, Maryland.
- NSO, LCC, and DepEd. 2005. 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) Final Report. Manila.
- "Philippines Fourth Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)." Third Draft, July 2010 (n.p.)
- Raya, R. 2010. "Investing in the Out-of-School." Philippine Institutions: growth and Prosperity for All. Sta. Ana III, Filomeno (Ed.). Action for Economic Reforms. Quezon City.
- Republic of the Philippines. 2009. Republic Act No. 9524, General Appropriations Act Fiscal Year 2009. <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/index.php?pid=8&xid=28&id=989>.
- Republic of the Philippines. 2008. Republic Act No. 9498, General Appropriations Act Fiscal Year 2008. <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/index.php?pid=8&xid=28&id=461>
- Republic of the Philippines. 2007. Republic Act No. 9401, General Appropriations Act Fiscal Year 2007. <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/index.php?pid=8&xid=28&id=38&page=>
- Republic of the Philippines. 2005. Republic Act No. 9336, General Appropriations Act Fiscal Year 2005. <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/index.php?pid=8&xid=28&id=39&page=>
- UNESCO. 2007. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008. Education for All by 2015: Will We Make It? Paris.
- UNESCO. 2008. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009. Overcoming Inequality: Why Governance Matters. Paris.
- UNESCO. 2009. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized. Paris.
- UNESCO and UNICEF. 2005. Children Out of School, Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.