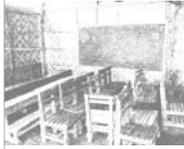


Failing our students

The state of our right to education



BY **MON MAPA**

“Fundamental education includes the elements of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability which are common to education in all its forms and at all levels.

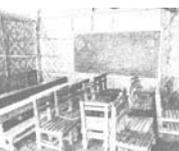
... the right to fundamental education is not confined to those “who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education.” The right to fundamental education extends to all those who have not yet satisfied their “basic learning needs.”

General comment 13 on the Right to Education
Art. 13 of the ICESCR

THE CONSTITUTION of the Philippines obliges the government to ensure free elementary and high school education. It further states that government will give the highest budget priority for education.

These constitutional guarantees, however, have not been translated into reality as indicated by the dismal performance of the education sector for the past several years.

- In 2003, NSO reported that more than 11.6 million of the country’s population aged 6-24 years old are out of school.
- Based on the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media



survey (FLEMMS) conducted in 2003, 1 of 10 Filipinos or 5.2 million cannot read and write; furthermore, 1 in 6 Filipinos or 9.6 million are functionally illiterate.

- The 2003 Family Income and Expenditure Survey found that 44.5% of household heads only had elementary level education at most.
- Department of Education (DepEd) data reveal that elementary participation rate dropped to 84.4% in SY 2005-2006, from 90.1 percent in SY 2001-2002. It can be deduced that the drop out rate remains high.
- The Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) placed the number of those not attending school in 2006 at 1.84 million for the 6 to 11-year old age group and another 3.94 million for the 12 to 15 age group.

Findings of a local education survey conducted in 2006-2007 by the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines), a network of organizations pushing for Education for All (EFA), further validated these national data.

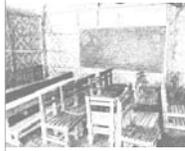
- A huge number of children were either out of school or were in levels not corresponding to their ages. In the Philippines, the officially prescribed school age is 6 to 11 years old for primary level and 12 to 15 for secondary level.
- A huge number of school-age children and youth do not attend school. Survey data (gathered from a sample population of 36,187 persons aged 6 to 24 years old) show that 27.7 % were not attending school.
- Attendance in school decreases with age. The same study found that 6.7% of children 6 to 11 years old were not attending school; 11.4% among the 12 to 15 years old were out of school; and 43.3% among the 16 to 19 years old were out of school.

- The average duration of schooling among those 6 years old and older was 7.3 years. Some 4.4% had not gone to school; 40.3% had at most elementary education; 36.0% reached high school; and 19.3% reached tertiary level.
- The children of indigenous peoples are disadvantaged, with lower educational attainment, lower enrolment rates and higher dropout rates.

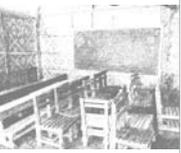
In the Citizens Report Card by the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) in 2008, education performance under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has declined. It noted, among others, the following:

- Sixty-six percent of pre-primary children are without access to education due to low investments for quality Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) teachers.
- Teachers remain underpaid and overworked due to the large class size that they have to handle.
- There remains a disparity in access and quality of education between urban and rural areas.
- Students in remote and conflict areas are deprived of quality and regular classes because teachers work in hazardous situations without the necessary support and incentives.

The report also underscored that it is imperative for government to implement comprehensive and quality education programs for the more than 11.6 million out-of-school children and youths as well as to actualize and give precedence to allocating a bigger budget for education.



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The myth of free education in a poverty-stricken nation

Despite the provisions in the Constitution that primary education is free, students are denied of their education due to various fees collected in various forms in public schools. Almost every school year, news on schools imposing “voluntary” contributions always comes to the fore.

Numerous studies have shown that these hidden costs put a stress on the family budget. Most often, these hidden costs prevent children from accessing, staying or finishing their schooling.

The table below indicates that education is a major expense for Filipino households even when children go to public schools.



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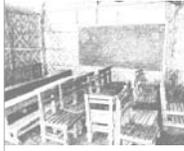
Education Watch Local Survey AVERAGE ANNUAL PER STUDENT COST OF EDUCATION by Level and Type of School

Cost Item	Pre-school		Elementary		High-School		College/Post-Grad	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Total Fees & Direct Cost (books, workbook, supplies, uniform, sports, others)	1,647	3,706	1,437	6,842	2,473	8,781	10,714	27,442
Incidental Cost (transportation, tutor, rentals other incidentals, except school meals)	603	1,020	1,013	2,225	2,773	3,487	6,936	9,070
TOTAL:	2,250	4,726	2,450	9,067	5,246	12,268	17,650	36,512
Public: Private Ratio	1:2.10		1:3.70		1:2.34		1:2.07	

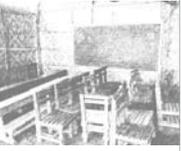
Table 1. Average Annual per Student Cost of Education, by Level and Type of School. Source: Asia South Pacific Education Watch. Philippines: Summary Report. Mapping Out Disadvantaged Groups in Education. Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines).



TRACY PABICO



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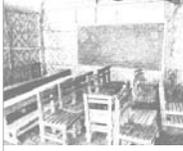
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Photos by TRACY PABICO



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In the survey conducted by E-Net Philippines, high cost of education is the major reason for not attending school.

Poverty forces children to leave and stay out of school to work,

Education Watch Local Survey

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL

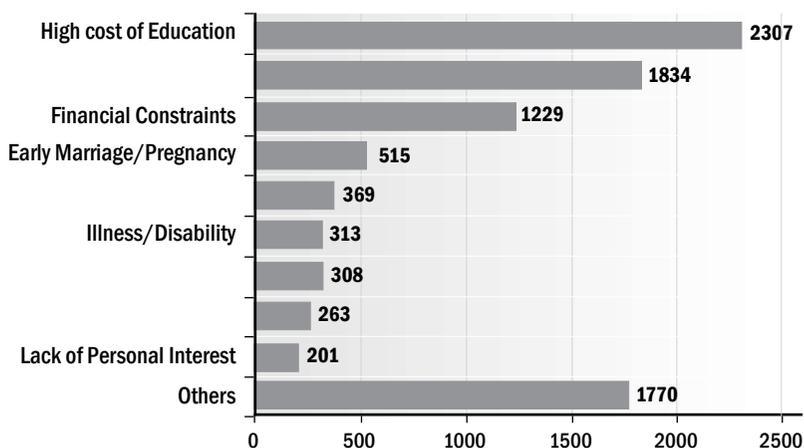


Table 2. Reasons for not Attending School. Source: Asia South Pacific Education Watch. Philippines: Summary Report. Mapping Out Disadvantaged Groups in Education. Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines).

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look for jobs and help in the family livelihood. The National Statistics Office revealed that in 2001, there were more than four million working children aged 5 to 17 years old.

The quality issue

The FLEMMS 2003 reported other alarming findings about the quality of education Filipino children get.

Nearly 6% of elementary graduates could not read and write; and only 81.6% among them were functionally literate or could read, write and compute. Even worse, less than half or 45.3% were fully literate.

For those who moved on and have had some high school education,

89.5% were functionally literate and only 57.6% of them were fully literate.

These figures show the poor performance and outcome of basic education in the Philippines: children either drop out before functional literacy is achieved or continue schooling without learning enough. The survey shows the absurdity of Philippine education – while Filipinos are getting more schooled, they have become less literate.

The right to education should not be reduced to the right to schooling, and access to education need not be equated with emphasis on constructing more school buildings and placing children inside the confines of these schools. The right to education is undermined and meaningless if teachers are under-trained, learning curricula and materials are irrelevant and learning environment is unsafe and not conducive.

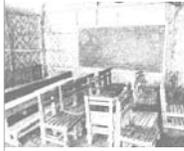
Underinvestment and neglect

E-Net Philippines believes that the Philippines' dismal education performance can be traced directly to years of neglect and underinvestment in the public education system.

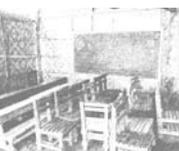
Government expenditure under the Arroyo administration has declined such that in 2007, the allocation for basic education was down to only 11.9% of the national budget – from a high of 16% in the late 1990s.

National expenditure on basic education in 2005 went down to 2.1% of GNP compared to 2.5% in 2001 and 3.2% in 1997. This figure is way below the recommended benchmark of the UNESCO-Delors Commission: that education expenditure should be at least 6% of GNP.

Despite the Constitutional provision that government will have the highest budget priority for education, the government is under-spending in education. Because of the government policy of automatic appropriation for debt payments, budgetary allocation



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for education is only a third of what is appropriated for debt payment.

A serious national burden

The quality of public education has deteriorated to such an alarming level that the country now ranks among the poorest performers in East Asia. Its cohort survival rate has fared no better than some of the poorest countries in Africa such as Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. The dismal state of education in public schools and the absence of programmatic and appropriate learning for disadvantaged adolescents and adults will result in grave social costs.

Without education, millions of children and youth face a very bleak future. Likewise, millions of adults are denied of their ability to develop their capabilities in full – a massive loss of human potential that could aid in eradicating poverty and in achieving sustainable development.

Understanding the right to education

As well as being a right in itself, the right to education is also an enabling right.

Education ‘creates the “voice” through which other rights can be claimed and protected.’ Without education, people lack the capacity ‘to achieve valuable functionings as part of the living.’

If people have access to education they can develop the skills, capacity and confidence to secure other rights. Education gives people the ability to access information detailing the range of rights that they hold, and government’s obligations. It enables people to develop the communication skills to demand these rights, the confidence to speak in a variety of forums, and the ability to negotiate with a wide range of community leaders, government officials and other persons in authority who wield power.

Our Constitution’s Bill of Rights provides that “No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law,

nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws.” Lack of education incapacitates individuals from asserting and protecting their rights.

The Right of Suffrage provides that no literacy requirements shall be imposed on the exercise of the right to vote. However, lack of education compromises a voter's position to exercise their right to vote wisely for their benefit and that of their country's.

Education is a powerful tool that can provide people, especially the poor and vulnerable groups, with the necessary knowledge, awareness, skills and competencies to transform their conditions. It has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labor and from sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and controlling population growth.

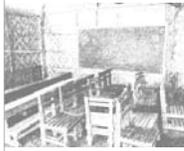
It is a tool for empowerment – a powerful means to overcome and defeat poverty.

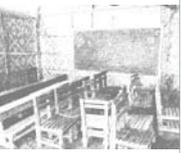
Unfortunately, these ideas, however explicit, remain poorly understood and internalized by our “educated” policy and decision makers in government.

Twisted priorities and distorted values – even outright corruption – have crept in such that construction of buildings, purchase of school facilities, task forces and even feeding programs have become the milking cow of those in certain higher echelons of government.

Learning interventions, alternative education programs and other support services to address shortcomings of the educational system will remain as that – stop-gap, isolated and spotty no matter how heroic, noble and outstanding the efforts of certain public servants and civil society sectors are – because a makeshift solution can be sustainable only to a certain extent and can never take the place of a mandate and a policy on education bolstered by a Constitutional guarantee which is still to be fully implemented.

Neither the call for Charter Change nor the lip service of those in





the business of education can bring about substantial change in the education system.

Enlightened sectors in public and civil society need support and encouragement to enable them to show the way and serve as models for the process of education. Various issues affecting local populace can be opportunities for people's organizations, community and area groups to galvanize and demand for their education needs and other rights. There has to be a consistent lobby for the state to deliver on its obligation on the right to education.

For so long as structural and material projects are given precedence in public investments by government to the detriment of education and other social development projects, the quality of education and, consequently, even our overall economy will remain poor and stunted.

SOURCES:

Asia South Pacific Education Watch. Philippines: Summary Report. Mapping Out Disadvantage Groups in Education. Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE), Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines)

Failing the Midterms: Half Measures Won't Do. An Asia Pacific Citizens Report Card. Rating Governments Efforts to Achieve Education for All. Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE). Global Campaign for Education (GCE)

Right to Education. Scope and Implementation. General Comment 13 on the Right to Education. UNESCO, ECOSOC

Mon Mapa is the Executive Director of People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD) based in Baguio City. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-NET Philippines).