

# In the Margins of Learning

## The Imperative of Claiming the Right to Education

■ BY CECILIA SORIANO

### From MDG 2 to EFA

**T**HE IMPLEMENTATION of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was assessed this year to gauge how the country fared in meeting its goals. Of utmost concern for MDG 2 is Universal Primary Education.

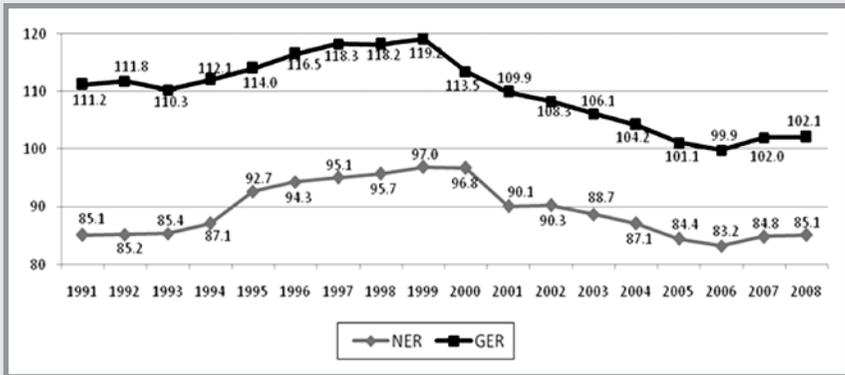
MDG 2 promises to “ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.” According to the report of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), this goal is in great risk of not being achieved. MDG 2 basically looked into access to education by measuring indicators such as the net enrolment ratio (NER) which is the enrolment of school-age children ( 6-11 years old) in school, gross enrolment ratio (GER) which is the total enrolment including those who are beyond elementary age, cohort survival rate (CSR) which is the number of children who entered grade 1 and who reach grade 6 and lastly, completion rate (CR) which is the number of children who entered grade 1 and completed grade 6. The report also analyzed the inequality in access

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to education across regions and as it relates to gender.

Both the net enrolment ratio (NER) and the gross enrolment ratio (GER) follow the same general downward trend:

**Figure 1. Elementary NER and GER (%), SY 1991-1992 to SY 2008-2009 (Public and Private)**



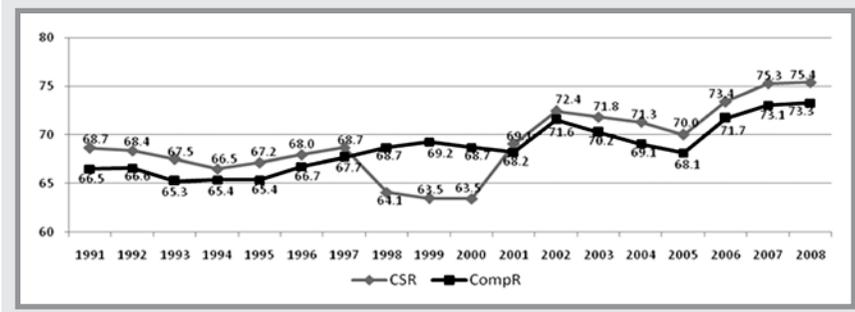
Source of basic data: Department of Education  
Quoted from NEDA's MDG 2010 Report

NEDA argues in the report that parents prefer to send their children at the age of 7 or 8 instead of the required entry level at 6 years old. However, a look into the cohort survival and completion rate shows that low participation is not caused by delayed entry of children in school. Indeed, the fluctuating CSR and CR indicate that students are trying hard to remain in school.



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**Figure 2. Elementary education CSR and CompR (%), SY 1991-1992 to SY 2008-2009 (Public and Private)**



Source of basic data: Department of Education

It is surprising that the decreasing NER and GER started in 2000, the year when the Philippines, together with other countries, launched the second Education for All (EFA) initiative in Dakar, Senegal. EFA is a set of commitments to education comprised of six goals, namely:

- 1) comprehensive early childhood care and development
- 2) universal primary education
- 3) appropriate learning programs for youth and adults
- 4) halving the adult literacy rate
- 5) gender parity and equality in education and
- 6) quality education with concrete outcomes.

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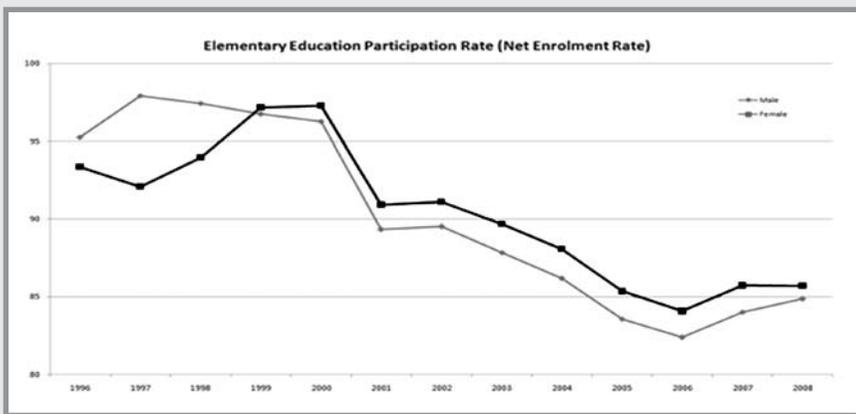
Instead of riding on the second wind for EFA, the country has failed to take stock of the past challenges in education and act on them swiftly and boldly to arrest the deterioration of public education. What is even more alarming is that the country is failing in its MDG 2 target, though this goal is grossly minimal compared to those under the Philippine EFA Plan 2015.

### Gender Parity in Education

The MDG Report hailed the success of the Philippines in MDG 3 which is that on gender equality and women’s empowerment. In education,

while there are more girls than boys in school and are performing better than boys, the celebration might be too soon. Indeed, a scrutiny of the situation of girls and boys access to education and the situation of women requires a deeper analysis of MDG 3.

**Figure 7: Participation Rate or NER by sex, 1996-2008**



Source: Department of Education

A study by Dr. Agnes Quisumbing<sup>1</sup> on “Intrahousehold Resource Allocation” (2001) suggests that in Filipino rural communities, parents and grandparents who co-reside with the nuclear family prefer to bestow more education to the girls and more land to the boys. The bestowal of land to the boys is based on the perception that rice farming requires intensive male labor and that boys provide the necessary assistance to farm work at an earlier age. On the other hand, girls are perceived more to succeed in school—having been socialized to be responsible and loyal to their families, and more likely to remit incomes to their families once they migrate. Filipino parents and co-residing grandparents have adopted diverse forms of risk-taking (more education for girls and more land for the boys) depending on perceived gains and returns from sex-based investments.<sup>2</sup> Such decision-making is not unexpected given that women are finding work abroad as domestic workers, care givers, entertainers and service

crews. In fact, the MDG 2010 Report said that more than half of the 1.23 million overseas Filipino workers in 2008 were women.

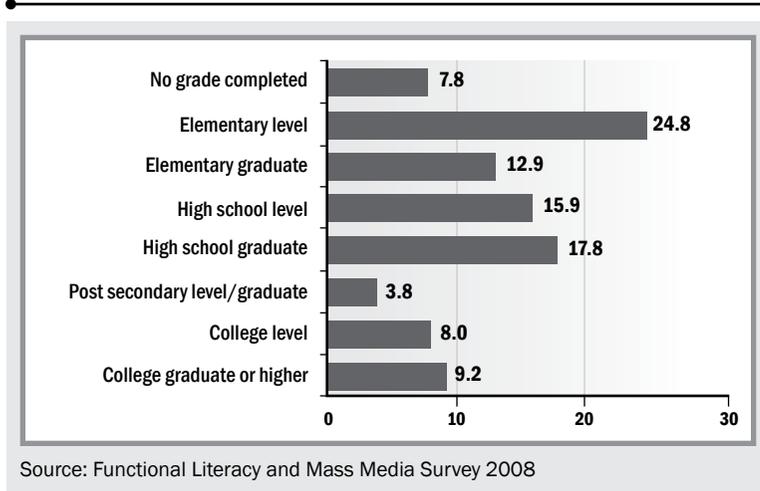
## Who are Marginalized from Education?

When he completed his certificate course on governance and development, Rep. Emmanuel Pacquiao recalled his years as an elementary student. He narrated how he had to sell goods before going to school so he can save money for school supplies and “baon.” Pacquiao is a Grade 3 dropout who escaped poverty through a career in boxing. After his success, he pursued high school by attending the Alternative Learning System program of the Department of Education and received his diploma in 2006.

Pacquiao’s story of education deprivation is shared by countless Filipinos. In the Philippines, an estimated 45% of the population six years old and over have either not attended school or have only reached or finished the elementary level, according to the 2008 Functional Literacy Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS). Another 34% of Filipinos either reached or finished high school.

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**Figure 3: Percent Distribution of Population 6 Years Old and Over by Highest Educational Attainment, Philippines, 2008**



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Photos by JIM VILLERO



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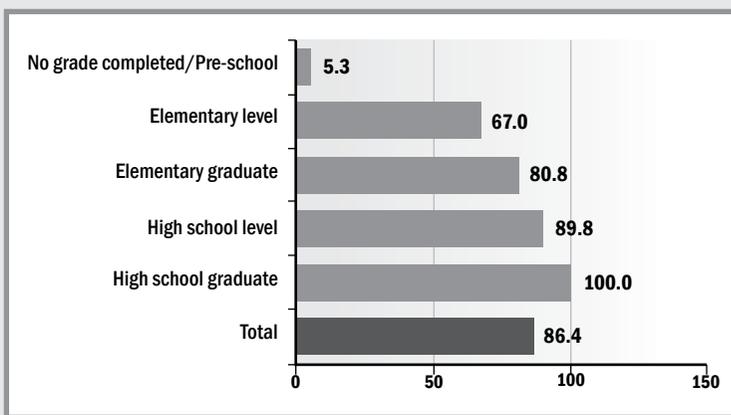
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FLEMMS also measured the basic literacy of the Filipinos aged 10-64 years old and compared it to the functional literacy rate. Basic literacy was measured by the ability to read and write and by numeracy skills. Functional literacy, on the other hand, was measured by having respondents answer the following questions:

1. Full name
2. Address
3. Complete date of birth
4. Highest educational attainment
5. If a kilo of rice costs P25.00, how much will two kilos cost?
6. If a kilo of sugar costs P38.00, how much will a half kilo cost?

To measure the comprehension ability, each respondent was also asked to read a paragraph and answer a set of questions. The FLEMMS showed that even with a number of years in school, a percentage remains not functionally literate, a reflection of poor quality of public education. An alarming finding is that even elementary graduates and those who had reached high school are functionally illiterate.

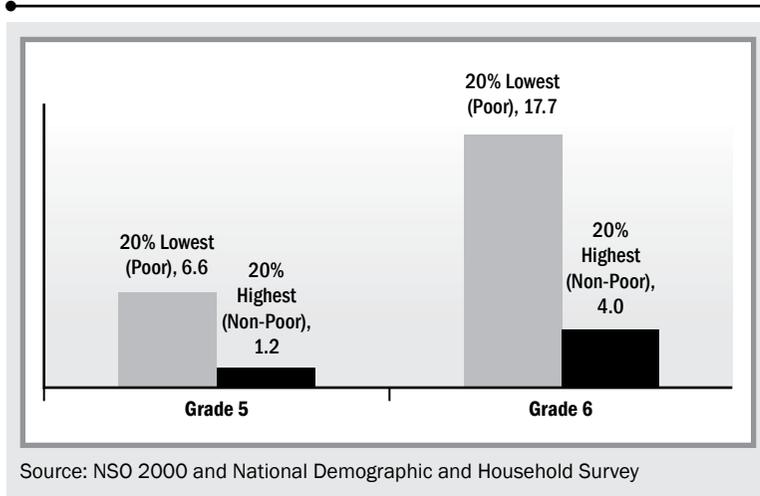
**Figure 4: Functional Literacy Rate of Population 10 to 64 Years Old, by Highest Educational Attainment, Philippines, 2008**



Source: FLEMMS 2008

The marginalized groups are those who are denied the right to education. Based on a survey conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2000, the poor are most likely to drop out from primary education (by a factor of one for every five poor students). Localized studies on education attest to this. In Central Mindanao, for example, education performance is twice as severe as the realities at the national level. The Education Watch in Armed Conflict Areas<sup>3</sup> reported that 44 per cent of school-age children and youth are out of school due to poverty and the continuing conflict in the region.

**Figure 5: Drop-Out Rate in Grades 5 and 6 by Quintile Index**

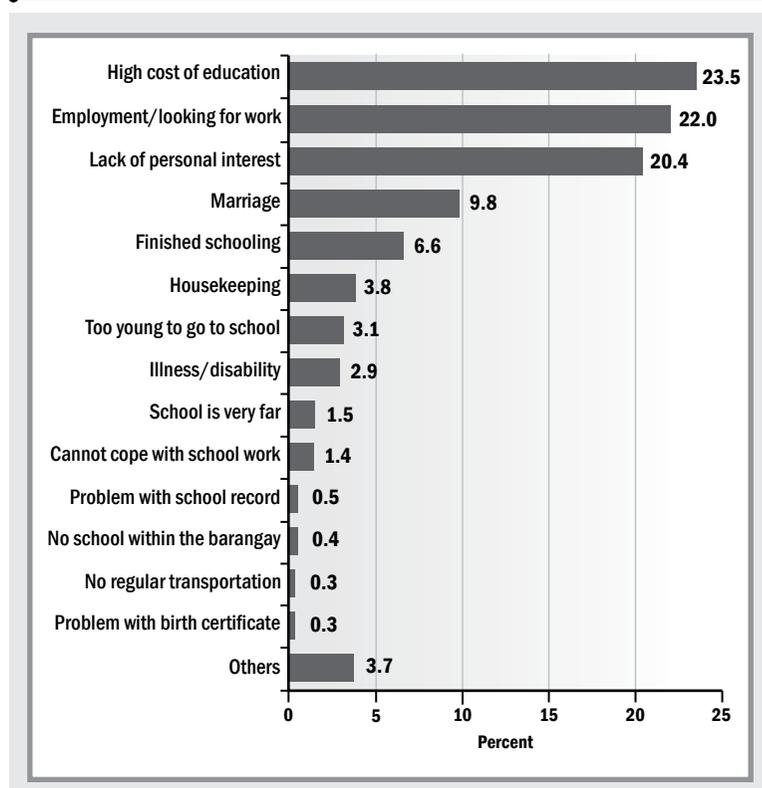


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Every year, at least half a million students drop out from elementary and secondary schools, with a significant percentage permanently staying out of school. For 2007, UNESCO<sup>4</sup> estimated that 1.003 million Filipino children, 6 to 11 years old, were not attending school. The Action for Economic Reforms, a member of E-Net Philippines, estimated that a total of 2.2 million school leavers and another 2.8 million youth (16 to 21 years old) were not attending school and had not completed basic education.<sup>5</sup> 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.

Among the out-of-school children and youth, the main reasons cited for not attending school were economic and poverty-related factors. FLEMMS 2008 reported that 23.5% of Filipinos age 6 – 24 years old were not in school because of the high cost of education, while 22.0% skipped school because they were working or looking for work. The third reason for not staying in school is the lack of personal interest reported by 20.4% of those surveyed by FLEMMS. Alarmingly, marriage (which did not figure much in the 2003 FLEMMS) came out as the fourth reason for dropping out in the 2008 survey. It is also significant to note that a higher percentage of those who mentioned housekeeping chores, difficulty in coping with school work and illness/disability belonged to the poorer section of the population.

**Figure 6: Percent Distribution of Population 6 to 24 Years Old Who are Not Attending School, by Reason for Not Attending, Philippines: 2008**



The Civil Society Network for Education Reforms also known as E-Net Philippines, a network of organizations working for EFA, attempted to understand the lack of interest factor by holding workshops with children and youth. It is worth noting that the lack of personal interest was the most frequently cited reason for children in the primary and secondary school age groups. For the older age groups, employment and financial considerations were the oft-cited reasons for not attending school.

The lack of interest among school children indicates a weakness on the part of the school system to make education interesting for the students. This may be due to poor teaching quality, inadequate facilities and supplies and poor infrastructure. Poverty, social exclusion, school distance and poor health are, likewise, factors that weigh heavily on children and dampen their interest to pursue schooling. The challenge, therefore, is how to make the school interesting and encouraging rather than intimidating; how to make it inclusive, non-discriminatory and sensitive to the marginalized rather than exclusive and elite-oriented; and how to make it accommodating rather than restricting. Finally, the education content, process and experience should be made more meaningful to the children's life experiences by ensuring appropriate, culture-sensitive and values-based interventions. The need to address curriculum content becomes even more pronounced for indigenous communities.

As the country nears the deadline for EFA 2015, the poor, excluded and vulnerable groups remain in the margins of the public education system which focuses mainly on school-based interventions. While almost a third of the school-age children and youth are denied full basic education, not to mention the adults who have remained non-literate, good practices and programs designed to reach out to disadvantaged groups remain marginalized as well. For one, the Alternative Learning System Program of the DepEd receives a meager 1% of the DepEd budget and will even be slashed by 25 million in 2011. Indeed, marginalized communities and advocates need to launch collective

advocacy and actions to claim the right to education. Otherwise, the education neglect will further the cycle of poverty and deepen disenfranchisement of the poor not only from education but more importantly in economic, social and political development of the country.

## NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Quisumbing, Agnes R. Discussion Paper No.23. Better Rich, or Better There? Grandparent Wealth, Co-residence and Intra-household Allocation. International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C. January 2007.
- <sup>2</sup> A comprehensive analysis on gender equality in education was produced by E-Net Philippines in 2008. Please see [www.e-netphil.org](http://www.e-netphil.org) to download paper.
- <sup>3</sup> The PIECE Education Watch in Armed Conflict Areas was conducted in 2008 by E-Net Philippines using the research and survey framework and instruments from the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE).
- <sup>4</sup> UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> Rene Raya, 2010.