



The missed education of the Filipino people

► By **RENE R. RAYA***

IN October 2007, the Philippine Government released its Midterm Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Earlier in July 2007, the Department of Education (DepED) presented its preliminary report on the Mid-Decade Assessment of the Education for All (EFA). The reports presented the trends in basic education, admitting that progress has been slow and uneven, and that the key targets will most likely be missed. The target of achieving universal primary education by 2015 has now become the most threatened goal among the eight MDGs.

* Mr. Raya is a Co-convenor of Social Watch Philippines, member of the management collective, Action for Economic Reforms and Coordinator of the Education Finance Committee of the Education Network (E-Net)

Assessment of MDG Goal #2

	Baseline (1990)	Current Level (2005/2006)	Target by 2015	Average Rate of Progress (1990-2005/06)	Probability of Attaining the Targets
Participation Rate	85.1	84.44	100	-0.05	Low
Cohort Survival Rate	68.4	69.9	84.67	0.11	Low

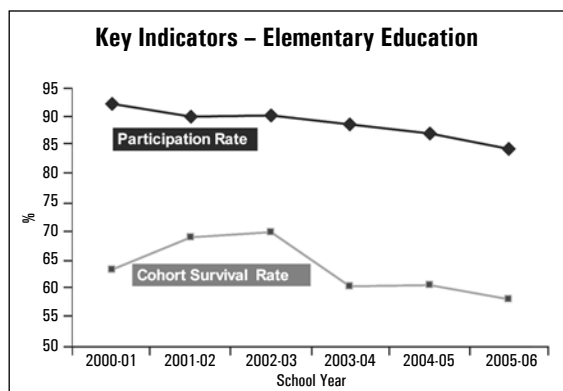
Source: NEDA, October 2007

The discussions in both documents were quite frank and extensive, but conveniently avoided going deeper into the key issues that account for the declining performance of the education sector. This article will attempt to pursue the discussion, analyze the key issues and present the challenges ahead. Included in this report is a presentation of the EFA Development Index (EDI) for Philippine provinces based on Unesco's annual global monitoring of the progress in achieving the EFA goals.

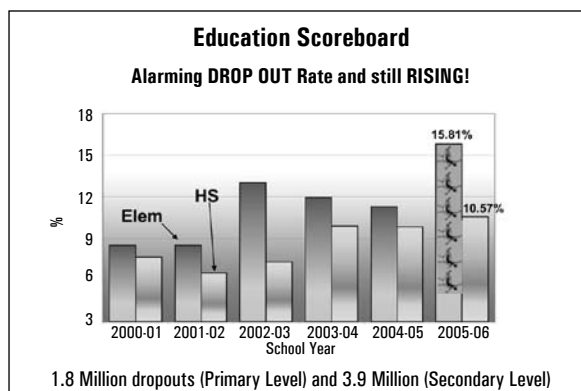
Trends in basic education and literacy¹

The midterm reports on the MDG and the EFA indicate that enrollment rate in basic education has been growing at a fairly consistent rate of 2.5 percent per year over the past two decades. By 2007, an estimated 20 million students were enrolled in some 53,000 schools around the country. About 13.5 million were enrolled in primary schools, and 6.5 million were in secondary schools.

The government admitted that while enrolment figures have risen over the years, key performance indicators have been declining consistently since 2001, falling way short of the EFA targets for the corresponding years. Net enrolment, cohort survival and completion rates for both elementary and secondary levels were all down. In SY 2005-2006, participation rate in elementary education went down to 84.41 percent from 90.10 percent recorded in SY 2001-2002. Meanwhile, dropout rates posted record levels in both elementary (10.57 percent) and secondary schools (15.81). 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. The Department of Education also noted the low participation of children in early childhood education (ECE), with only 34 percent of the 3-5 age group attending preschool and 60 percent of entrants in the first grade having ECE background.



Source: DepEd. Fact Sheet, Basic Education Statistics (as of August 31, 2006). [http://www.deped.gov.ph/cpanel/uploads/issuancelm/factsheet2006\(Mar28\).pdf](http://www.deped.gov.ph/cpanel/uploads/issuancelm/factsheet2006(Mar28).pdf)



1.8 Million dropouts (Primary Level) and 3.9 Million (Secondary Level)

¹ Data for this section were drawn from the following sources: 1) Midterm Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), NEDA, October 2007; 2) Draft Report on the Mid-Decade Assessment of the Education for All (EFA), Department of Education, July 2007; 3) DepEd Factsheet, February 2007; and 4) Functional Literacy Education and Mass Media Survey 2003, National Statistics Office.

The continued dropping out of children from the school system explains the low survival and completion rates and indicates the weak holding capacity of the public school system. Elementary cohort survival in SY 2005-2006 went down to 58.36 percent while completion rate declined further to 56.76 percent. The corresponding figures for secondary education are 59.10 percent and 54.14 percent, respectively. Wide disparities in cohort survival and completion rates were observed among regions across the country.

The poor quality of education is clearly shown by the erratic and consistently low scores obtained by pupils in achievement tests administered by the Department of Education over the years. The increases in test results show only marginal improvement and the scores fell far short of the desirable level. The low quality of education delivered by the public school system can also be gleaned from the poor performance of teachers in assessment tests, with some of them scoring no better than the students they teach.

School enrolment and performance indicators tell only half of the story of the current state of basic education in the Philippines. The other half tells about the continuing problem of illiteracy and the increasing number of children missing an education. The Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) conducted in 2003 shows some positive results. Around 93 percent of Filipinos 10 years and above were found to be basically literate. The same survey also noted that 84.1 percent of Filipinos 6 to 64 year old were functionally literate.

The statistical reports, however, also revealed certain alarming findings about the literacy and educational status of Filipinos. Notwithstanding the high level of school participation among Filipino children, literacy levels did not improve at all in the 10 years since the last survey was taken in 1994. The FLEMMS 1994 showed that simple literacy was slightly higher at 94 percent while functional literacy was basically the same at 84 percent. These figures show the poor outcome of basic education in the Philippines, with children failing to be functionally literate even after several years of schooling.

Over half (51 percent) of Filipinos have had at most only elementary education while some 9 percent have not attended school at all. Only 34.7 percent of



Filipinos had completed high school or had achieved higher educational levels.

A significant number of Filipino children are outside the school system. Based on the FLEMMS 2003, 11.6 million children and youth aged 6 to 24 years old were not attending school. About half of them or 5.6 million belong to the age group 15-21 years old. Poverty and related factors were the main reasons cited for not attending school. Some 30.5 percent cited employment as the reason for not attending school. One of every five (20 percent) cited the high cost of education as the reason for not attending school; while another 11.8 percent cited housekeeping work.

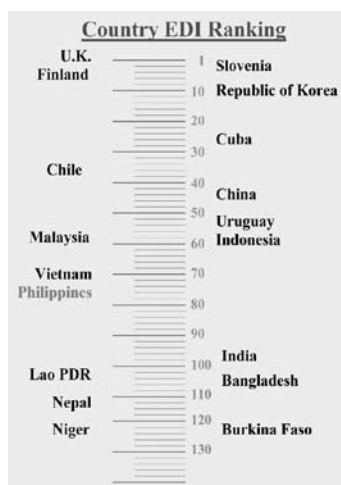
The global comparison

There was a time when the Philippines, along with Sri Lanka, Thailand and South Korea, used to be the top education performers in Asia. Today, the country is among the lowest performers in Asia and the rest of the developing world.

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), net enrollment ratio has deteriorated over the past two decades while survival hardly improved. The report noted that "For many years, the Philippines has had higher enrollment rates at all levels of education than those of other countries with comparable or even higher levels of income. Recently, however, several countries in the region, notably Malaysia and Vietnam, have gained an edge over the Philippines even in basic education achievement." The report further revealed that the out-of-school ratio for primary school-age children in the Philippines was worse than in Indonesia and Vietnam.²

² Dumlao, Doris. "More RP children dropping out of school, says ADB." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 16, 2006, Page A1.

Unesco's Global Monitoring Report for 2007 generated the EFA Development Index or EDI for 125 countries. The index is used to gauge the overall accomplishment of countries in terms of meeting the EFA goals. It is a composite measure based on enrollment ratio, adult literacy rate, EFA gender-specific index and survival rate up to grade 5. Of those surveyed, 47 countries had high EDI marks (.95-1.00); 49 countries including the Philippines had medium EDI (.80-.95); and 29 countries had low EDI.



The Philippines ranked 75th, falling behind most Asian countries such as China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. In terms of education quality, using survival rate as proxy indicator, the Philippines ranked 101st of 125 countries. At this level, it fared no better than some of the poorest countries in Asia and Africa such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Myanmar.³

The deteriorating state of Philippine education may also be seen in its poor rating in international competitive tests. The 2003 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) participated in by 45 countries ranked the Philippines 41st in mathematics and 42nd in science. The country trails the Asian countries that participated in the 2003 TIMMS, including Malaysia and Indonesia.

Regional and provincial trends

The midterm report on the MDG presents the regional education statistics, showing the uneven progress and wide disparities in performance across the different regions. The report noted that only the National Capital Region, Central Luzon and Calabarzon have a good chance of meeting the education targets. The rest of the country lags behind, particularly the poor regions of Mindanao and the Visayas.⁴ The table below is culled

from the government's midterm report. It presents the probability of meeting the MDG targets related to education (Goals 2 and 3).

Region	Elementary participation rate	Elementary cohort survival rate	Ratio of girls to 100 boys in elementary	Ratio of girls to 100 boys in secondary
CAR	Incomplete data	Low	Low	No data
I	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
II	Low	Low	Low	No data
III	Low	Medium	No data	No data
IV-A	Low	Medium	Low	High
IV-B	No data	High	No data	No data
V	Low	Medium	High	No data
VI	Low	Low	No data	No data
VII	Low	Low	No data	High
VIII	High	Low	Low	Low
IX	Medium	Medium	No data	No data
X	Low	Low	Low	Low
XI	No data	High	No Baseline	No Baseline
XII	No Baseline	No Baseline	No baseline	No Baseline
CARAGA	Low	Low	No data	No data
ARMM	High	Low	No data	No data
NCR	High	High	No data	No data

Mid Term MDG Report. NEDA, August 2007.

Regional disparity in terms of school participation as measured by NER is quite modest, compared to the wide disparity recorded in terms of survival and completion rates. Cohort survival rate shows greater variation across provinces, ranging from a high of 86.83 percent (Region 1) to a low of 36.2 percent (ARMM). The regional disparity in terms of completion rate was also wide, ranging from a high of 85.48 percent (Region 1) to a low of 34.76 percent (ARMM).

The regional performance figures are consistent when one looks at the overall accomplishment in EFA by provinces. For this report, AER applied and generated the corresponding provincial EFA Development Index or EDI as presented in the table below. The index is based on the same indicators used by Unesco in computing the country EDI.

The table below presents the 15 provinces with the highest and lowest EDI values. As expected, Central Luzon, Calabarzon and Ilocos Norte dominated the top-performing provinces as measured by

³ UNESCO. Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education (Global Monitoring Report 2007). Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2007.

⁴ National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). Philippines Midterm Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals. October, 2007.

EFA Development Index (EDI) by Province

(These figures are still subject to integrity and validation checks)

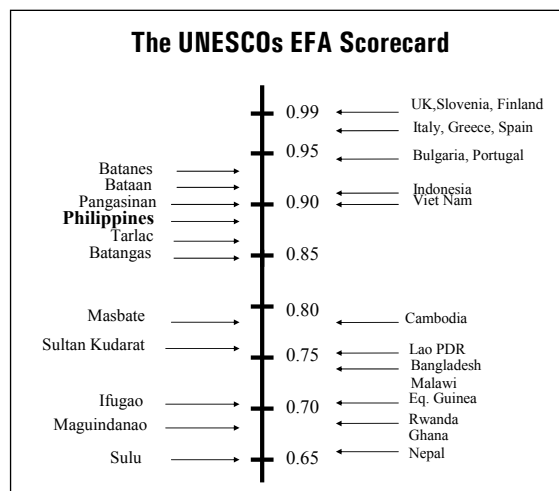
Top Provinces		
Rank	Province	EDI
1	Batanes	0.922
2	Bataan	0.903
3	Pangasinan	0.897
4	Siquijor	0.878
5	Ilocos Norte	0.874
6	Tarlac	0.871
7	Zambales	0.871
8	Ilocos Sur	0.869
9	Rizal	0.866
10	Abra	0.862
11	Nueva Ecija	0.862
12	Guimaras	0.861
13	Pampanga	0.859
14	Batangas	0.854
15	La Union	0.854
Bottom Provinces		
Rank	Province	EDI
61	Zamboanga del Sur	0.776
62	Kalinga	0.776
63	Agusan del Sur	0.774
64	Negros Occidental	0.773
65	Basilan	0.772
66	Negros Oriental	0.767
67	Bukidnon	0.761
68	Sultan Kudarat	0.761
69	Western Samar	0.755
70	Sarangani	0.751
71	Davao del Sur	0.718
72	Lanao del Norte	0.714
73	Ifugao	0.712
74	Maguindanao	0.698
75	Sulu	0.654

Source: Action for Economic Reforms (AER). Basic Data culled from Unesco Global Monitoring Report 2007, DepEd Basic Education Information System and National Statistics Office Census 2000 and FLEMMS 2003

the EDI. It is also significant to note that the small island provinces of Batanes and Siquijor are doing exceptionally well. These findings are consistent with other indices, specifically AER's Quality of Life Index and the Human Development Index for Philippine provinces.

On the other hand, Mindanao provinces dominate the bottom performers—a group that also included some provinces in CAR, Eastern Visayas and the Negros provinces.

It is important to note that while our top provinces are ranked among the best in the world, the education



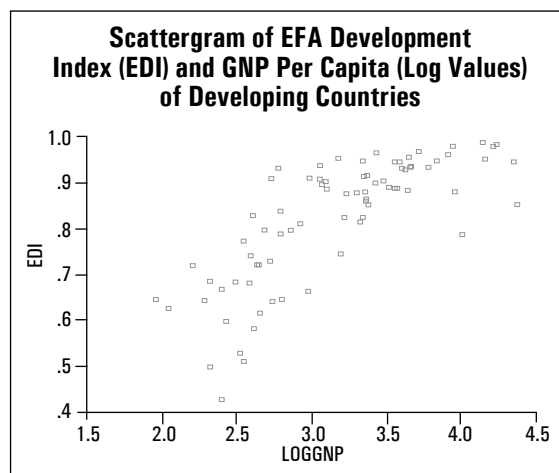
Source: Action for Economic Reforms (AER). Basic Data culled from Unesco Global Monitoring Report 2007, DepEd Basic Education Information System and National Statistics Office.

performance of provinces with the lowest EDI is comparable to some of the poorest developing countries.

Education and Poverty

Numerous studies have noted the strong link of income and poverty to education performance. The poor have less access to education, lower school life expectancy and are more likely to drop out of school. The lack of education, on the other hand, tends to perpetuate and regenerate poverty.

The graph below presents the GNP per Capita Income (in log values) and the EDI scores of developing countries, indicating a highly significant correlation



Source: Action for Economic Reforms (AER). Basic Data culled from Unesco Global Monitoring Report 2007.

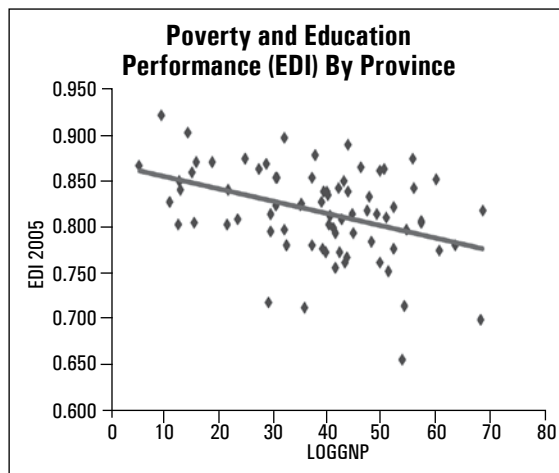
between income level and education performance. Thus, poor countries tend to have lower EDI scores while the rich tend to score high.

The same pattern is observed in the Philippines. The government's midterm report on the MDG "noted that participation rates in primary education by region correlate inversely with the incidence rates for food and overall poverty." The same report also noted that regions with low poverty incidence tend to have high cohort survival and completion rates and low dropout rates.

It is interesting to note that participation rates in primary education by region are inversely correlated with the incidence rates for food and overall poverty. The regions with highest participation rates showed the lowest poverty incidence rates, namely, the NCR, Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon and Calabarzon. Accordingly, these five regions had the highest cohort survival rates and lowest dropout rates. The observed correlations among these variables suggest that investment in primary education is promising for poverty reduction. The above correlations support the importance of adopting progressive approaches in fighting poverty and investing in primary education.

Such an approach raises the likelihood of accelerating the realization of MDG targets.

This observation is validated when one compares the EDI scores and poverty incidence of provinces. The graph below shows the strong correlation between EDI scores and poverty incidence. That means the poor-performing provinces manifest higher incidence of poverty. On the other hand, provinces with higher EDI scores show lower incidence of poverty.



Source: Action for Economic Reforms (AER). Basic Data culled from Unesco Global Monitoring Report 2007, DepEd Basic Education Information System and National Statistics Office Census 2000 and FLEMMS 2003



The financing gap

The huge and increasing resource gap in basic education partly explains the low performance and deteriorating quality of education in the Philippines.

Enrollment in basic education had been growing at an average of over 2.5 percent annually, a rate that is higher than the country's population growth rate. The education budget, on the other hand, had been growing at a slower rate of about 2 percent annually in real terms. On a real per capita basis, therefore, the allocation per pupil has actually been declining since 1997. In fact, the current per pupil expenditure is roughly at the same level as it was some 25 years back.

Clearly, the Philippines has been underinvesting in basic education. In 1997, national expenditure on basic education was 3.2 percent of GDP. This went down to 2.5 percent by 2001 and further down to 2.1 percent by 2005. Similarly, per-capita expenditure on basic education in real terms declined from P374 in

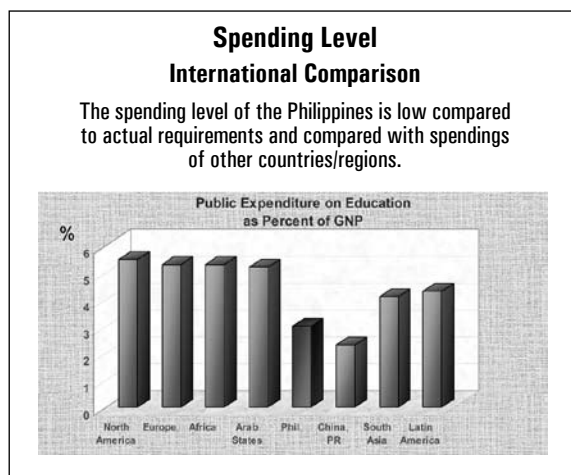
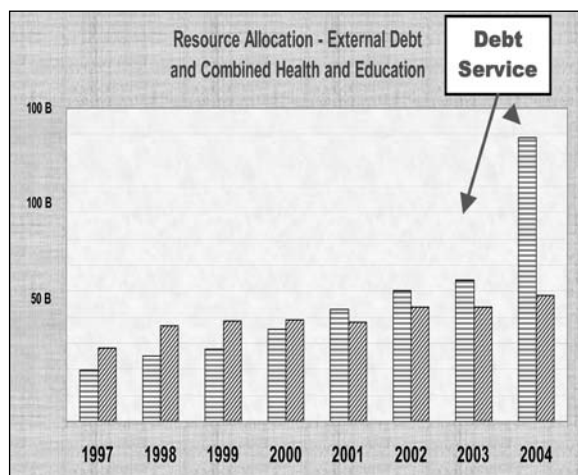
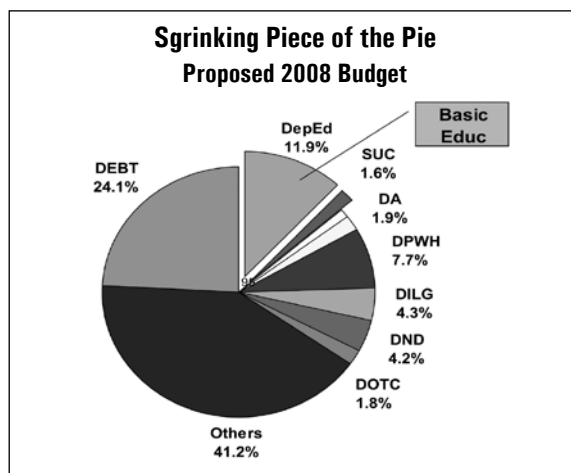
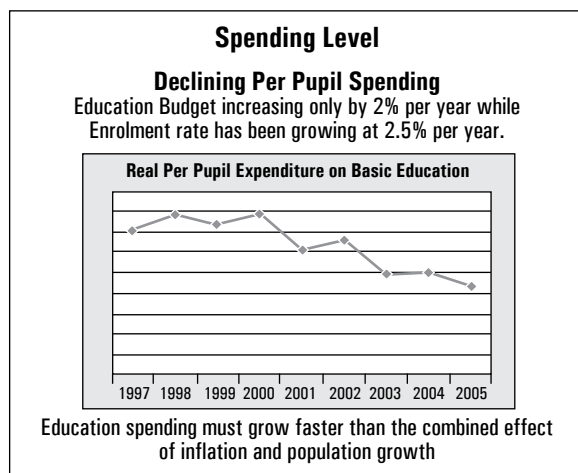
1997 to P339 in 2001, and to P282 by 2005 based on 1985 prices.⁵

The share of basic education has also been shrinking. In 1995, the percentage share of basic education in the national budget was 12.17 percent. This peaked in 1998 at 15.96 percent of the national budget but has consistently declined since then. By 2007, the share of basic education in the national budget was down to only 11.9 percent. International benchmarks set the desirable level of education expenditure at 6 percent of GDP and 20 percent of total public expenditure.

A study on the financing requirements to meet the MDG targets computed the resource gap for basic education for 2007-15 at P357 billion or about P40 billion per year.⁶ The national budget for fiscal year 2007 shows that the country is nowhere near in closing

the resource gap for basic education. For 2007, the government allocated P135.5 billion for basic education, an amount that is less than half of what was allocated for debt service. As in previous years, debt service gets the biggest share of the national budget, taking up a third of the entire budget. The huge allocation for debt servicing effectively shifts much needed resources away from priority basic services.

Certainly, the current level of expenditure is low and falls short of the requirements for quality education. It places the Philippines among the lowest spenders on education in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world. While most Asian countries are taking concrete steps to increase real spending on education in comparison to the size of their economies, the Philippines is moving back and taking the other direction. Unless expenditure



⁵ Manasan, Rosario (2007) Financing the Millennium Development Goals: The Philippines, Final Report. <http://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/ris/dps/pidsdps0706.pdf>

⁶ The computation is based on a high cost and MTPDP GDP assumption.

on basic education is increased to more respectable levels, the country will surely miss its MDG targets on education.

Issues and Challenges

In summary, education indicators consistently point to the low and deteriorating performance of the education sector in terms of access, quality, literacy and equity. Dropout rates remain alarmingly high and access is not equitable; quality is poor and declining; resources are too little; and the system is badly managed.

Key Issues

1) **ACCESS** – The dramatic rise in school dropouts, the low survival and completion rates and the alarming increase of out-of-school children highlights the deteriorating state of education in the country today. This trend indicates a clear reversal in the increasing access to basic education achieved over the past two decades (1980s and 1990s).

2) **QUALITY** – The poor quality of education and its outcome are reflected in the low achievement levels of students, the poor quality of teaching and the perennial shortages in key inputs, specifically teachers, infrastructure and instructional materials.

3) **EQUITY** – The poor, malnourished and disadvantaged children are being bypassed and deprived of

quality education. They are constantly at risk of falling out of the school system.

4) **EFFICIENCY**- Poorly-designed programs, poor targeting and misplaced priorities are creating a lot of inefficiencies and wastage in the educational system.

Years of neglect, underinvestment and mismanagement have set back the education sector by at least a generation. Successive governments have failed to decisively address these problems and reverse the historic decline of education in the Philippines. The current administration under President Arroyo fares no better and has, in fact, done worse things which pushed the educational system deeper into crisis. It is apparent that the current administration has neither the competence nor the political will to carry out meaningful reforms in education. Basically, it operates on expediency, preferring quick-fix solutions, and is preoccupied with survival and legacy concerns.

Immediate action must be done to improve access, reach out to the unserved and improve the quality of education. Substantive reforms must be undertaken to decisively address the financing gap and to improve the governance of basic education. Institutions must be reformed to ensure transparency, participation and accountability. Finally, a clear and coherent framework for education must be set—a framework that is premised on education not simply as a development target, but as a fundamental right of all Filipinos. ■