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Meeting the Education for All (EFA) Targets

Improving Education via Better Governance

Increasing the budget for the Philippine education does not necessarily translate to expected results, according to the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) 2004-2010. The Department of Education (DepEd), however, is expected to continue to use resources within budget constraints, institutionalize cost-saving measures, and strengthen its overall accountability system.

While advances have been made in some areas such as more classrooms and more textbooks, these have not addressed other problems such as low attendance rates, high dropout rates, and poor performance in national and international tests.

In this regard, School-Based Management (SBM), as provided for by Republic Act (RA) 9155 or Governance of Basic Education Act, is being developed as a holistic management approach in basic education involving the schools, school heads, teachers, students, parents, local government units (LGUs) and the community-at-large. SBM will also serve as a main thrust of the ongoing reform package, the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA).

The MTPDP reports that the indicators used by the Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) shall be used to promote and evaluate the effectiveness of the SBM. The SBM Grant being implemented by the DepEd expects to accelerate improvements in learning outcomes, alongside student participation, completion and achievement.

Problems in Formal Basic Education

In 1999, the Philippines had an elementary net enrolment rate (NER) of 96.95 percent and a high school NER of about 65.43 percent. Achieving the 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education should have been easy; but instead, elementary NER has dropped to 83.22 percent while the high school NER sank to 58.59 percent in 2006. Retention and transition are also a problem: for every 100 Filipino kids entering Grade One, only 42 will proceed to and from high school.

National and international achievement test results are equally dismal. In the 2004 High School IV National Achievement Test, only 6.8 percent of senior high school students passed the English test, 12 percent passed Math, and 0.7 percent passed Science. In the 2003 Trends in Math and Science Survey (TIMSS), the Philippines placed 41st of 45 participating countries in the math test and 42nd in the science test. Meanwhile, the number of out-of-school youths ballooned to more than one million in 2007, while adult illiterates rose from two million in 1994 to nearly four million in 2003.



Several studies have established the link between inadequate education and poverty, and current trends have serious implications on national and local efforts to reduce poverty and sustain economic growth.

The Department of Education (DepEd) is well aware of these problems, and has responded by trying to address material shortages: building classrooms, hiring teachers and procuring books. According to former DepEd Undersecretary Miguel Luz in a research paper for the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), this focus on shortages in inputs instead of outcomes is the dilemma that the agency faces in balancing immediate demand for action versus the long lead times needed for outcomes to materialize.

Luz further noted that several programs only deal with the symptoms, not the causes, of underperformance in the educational system. The deeper issues have to do with governance, particularly the DepEd's highly centralized, top-down structure, he said.

In its 2007 paper *What is School-Based Management?*, the World Bank said that good education is not only about physical inputs like classrooms, teachers or textbooks, but also about the incentives that lead to better instruction and learning. As a service, the World Bank said that education is too complex to be efficiently provided in a centralized fashion, since education systems are extremely demanding of the managerial, technical and financial capacity of governments.

What is SBM?

School-Based Management (SBM) has been shown to improve education outcomes when it was introduced in Australia, Canada, and USA in the 1970s. Since then, it has been applied in several countries in Europe, South America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

SBM decentralizes education decision-making by increasing parental and community involvement in schools. Having the autonomy to decide on curriculum, resource allocation, and management enables schools to better respond to local needs,

and in turn, help improve students' academic performance. SBM also aims to increase poor people's participation in service delivery, strengthen incentives for schools to deliver effective services to the poor, and penalize those who fail to deliver.

As local people demand closer monitoring of school personnel, better student evaluations, a closer match between school needs and policies, and more efficient use of resources, SBM has helped improve student achievement and other outcomes. SBM can also reduce corruption through increased accountability and more transparent management, and can provide parents and stakeholders with opportunities to increase their skills in shared decision-making, interpersonal skills, and management skills.

Is SBM the answer?

Implementation of the SBM system first started in 1997 in 22 of the poorest provinces of the Philippines during the World Bank-funded Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP) for seven years. Although TEEP had a slow start in the first three years, participating schools began to experience improvements such as higher participation rates, lower dropout rates, narrower gaps in completion rates, and enhanced performance in National Achievement Tests, as central office bureaucracies accepted decentralized management, school divisions learned to manage resources and outputs, and schools learned to focus on outcomes.

However, externally-funded projects such as TEEP have limited lifetimes. Luz thus poses an important challenge: How can a limited program with positive results become a system-wide solution adopted by the widest range of stakeholders? Luz provides two examples that show how parent and community involvement can help improve schools and schooling environments: *Brigada Eskwela* and Textbook Count.

Glimmers of hope

Brigada Eskwela (National Schools Maintenance Week) was launched by the DepEd in 2003 to reverse the physical deterioration of many schools in the country. Inspired by *Gawad Kalinga* and *Habitats for Humanity*, *Brigada Eskwela* mobilized parents and community volunteers to repair their children's schools for one week in May three weeks before school opening.

In 2003, over 12,000 schools participated, generating an estimated value of PhP392 million in donated labor and materials. In 2006, more than 26,000 schools joined, raising over PhP2 billion in donated labor and materials. According to Luz, parents and community volunteers not only completed classrooms left unfinished by government contractors, but accomplished innovations "never imagined by central office planners." These included creating new classrooms by closing gaps between buildings, building canals and culverts to divert water away from the school into nearby streams, and repairing dilapidated toilets. *Brigada Eskwela* gave parents the chance to share in the cost of schooling their children, even if only in kind.

Community involvement alongside system reform was likewise the key ingredient in the Textbook Count Project launched by DepEd in 2002. The project initiated several reforms, including changes in the bidding process, planning and scheduling of textbook deliveries, and announcement of these deliveries in national and local media.

However, Luz said that the most critical reform was the mobilization of civil society organizations and community volunteers to monitor and inspect the numbers and quality of all textbook deliveries. In three years, the project brought down textbook prices, improved technical quality of books, and shortened the procurement cycle from 20-24 months to 10-12 months.

Luz stressed that the single most critical group of stakeholders are those directly involved in the schools. By participating in delivery of textbooks or other supplies and materials, communities of parents, teachers, students, and even local school boards can exert pressure on the national department and thus help shape the kinds of good governance behaviour needed by the public education system.

Working within realities

RA 9155, which was passed in 2001, decrees that schools are to be directly responsible for delivering quality education, while parents and local school boards would play a greater role in supporting schools. Central and regional offices are to focus on policy reform, standards-setting and monitoring, and resource generation, while school divisions are meant to take charge of instructional leadership, administrative and technical support to schools.

Putting SBM into practice involves ensuring that governments, schools, teachers and parents work together in a system of mutual dependence. However, the World Bank warns that the process of devolving power to the school level means changing the power dynamics within each school and within the entire educational system. Some stakeholders will gain power, while others will lose.

As school staff, parents and community members gain decision-making authority over budgets, personnel, curriculum, teaching practices and relations with governments and the local community, central and local government officials are most likely to lose the authority that comes with making budgetary decisions and with hiring and firing employees.

Also, as SBM requires teachers to play greater governance and management roles in their schools, that need more time and energy, thereby limiting their traditional freedom to do whatever they want inside the classroom.

With only five years to go before 2015, can the Philippine educational system still steer its way to improved performance? The experiences of several countries have shown that involving local stakeholders through school-based management is an effective way to improve governance, eventually leading to a more productive educational system. ■ *Jyasmin Calub*

Sources: Luz JM. *The challenge of governance in a large bureaucracy (Department of Education): Linking governance to performance in an under performing sector.* HDN DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES. PHDR ISSUE: 2008/2009 NO. 1

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