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Education Reforms On Track to Meet EFA Goals

The Philippines continues to implement education reforms as it remains on track in meeting its Education for All (EFA) goal by 2015, the deadline set by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The six EFA goals which the Philippines has committed itself include expanding early childhood care and education; providing free and compulsory education for all; providing learning and life skill to young people and adults; increasing adult literacy by 50% percent; achieving gender equality by 2015 and improving the quality of education.

The Philippines has been steadily making progress in education in the last few years contrary to perception that standards are dropping. After a temporary decline, the Philippines has posted a modest but consistent gains since 2006. This provided hope that the country can still meet its EFA targets by 2015.

In the past three years, DepEd continues to raise the proficiency level of those in school even as it mobilizes its resources in bringing school-aged children to school through innovative means.

The 2009 National Achievement Test given to public elementary and high school students showed a continuing upward result – from 55% mean percentage score in 2006 to 66% in 2009. Moreover, more students are moving towards mastery and there has been substantial drop in the number of students showing low subject mastery.

To increase enrolment and retention in school, President Arroyo has directed the education department to strictly adopt the “*no collection*” and “*no mandatory uniform policy*” which encouraged more parents to send their children to school.

This directive has resulted to an increase in participation rate of 85.12% in school year 2008, up by almost two percent compared to 2006.

Despite the economic constraints, children continued schooling as evidenced by the 6% drop out rate in elementary and 7% in secondary. Some of the measures taken to address drop-outs include Project Reach which enlists the help of local government units in finding the school children, reaching out to them and keeping them in school. Other schemes which provide learners with an array of alternative delivery modes of learning for them to complete elementary and high school are Drop-Out Reduction Program (DORP) MISOSA or Modified In-School and Off-School Approach and IMPACT or Instructional Management by Parents Community and Teachers.

Drawing from the experience of Brazil and Mexico, the President initiated the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) as a centerpiece of the government’s poverty reduction measure. This conditional cash grants are

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provided to extremely poor household to improve their health, nutrition and education.

Other programs currently being implemented by the government under its poverty reduction thrusts which have direct impact on health and education are the Food for School and Essential Health Care Package which was recently recognized internationally.

The government also institutionalizes the pre-school program to better prepare young learners. On the other hand, it continues to push for a decentralized school governance through the School-Based Management (SBM) program. To facilitate better learning among beginners, the government mandated the use of mother tongue as language of instruction.

To reach other learners who are otherwise unreachable and those who are unlikely to continue schooling in a formal setting, the government strengthens alternative learning system where learning facilitators comb rural areas to bring education to learners across all ages and economic status

Encouraged by improving education outcomes, the private sector continues to invest in the public school system by contributing some P12 billion as of end 2009 through the Adopt-a-School program.

We also continue to collaborate with development partners to bridge resource gaps and education disparity. Projects such as Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM), Strengthening the Implementation of Basic Education in the Visayas (STRIVE), Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS), Philippine Response to Indigenous and Muslim Education (PRIME) were designed to improve access to quality education in disadvantaged communities.

And while UNESCO came up with the 2010 Global Monitoring Report which suggests that the Philippines might miss its EFA targets, the government continues to push its education reform programs vigorously.

Last year, UNESCO had a 2009 Global EFA Mid-Decade Report but it turned out it used 2005-2006 statistics because other countries were not able to submit current data. DepEd Secretary Jesli A Lapus, a member of the UNESCO Executive Board, raised this during the UNESCO Board meeting last year in Paris and was well taken.

Apparently, the report used the same 2006 statistics in assessing Philippine performance in relation to its EFA 2015 targets which may not necessarily reflect the gains achieved so far by the country.

Meanwhile, DepEd considers the 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report a reminder of the challenges the Philippine education sector is facing. The government would also appreciate if the gains achieved are recognized and the reform initiatives being undertaken are acknowledge to inspire and energize the DepEd bureaucracy.

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