



Learning from life – Learning for life

By Lalita Ramdas, Community educator and peace activist

My name is Lalita Ramdas. I am 75 years young. I live in a small village across the harbour from the busy metropolis of Mumbai, India. I have been exploring alternatives in education, literacy, peace, and conflict for over four decades – as a woman, a parent, a teacher, an activist, a citizen – not just of the country of my birth, India, but in many ways, as a citizen of this planet earth.

It seems appropriate that I am putting together this ‘cover’ story for ASPBAE’s Ed-lines, while preparing to board the Peace Boat to be a part of the Global University as a “Guest Navigator”. It makes for a good segue into the suggested theme for this cover story – namely to highlight “the current discourse on education and conflict in the Asia Pacific region”. A huge and challenging canvas to cover in 700 words!

I am not qualified to comment either on the state of conflict or violence in

the region, nor can one even begin to “explain” the types of conflict in this vast and disparate region, nor indeed what might be the systemic and root causes.

My own experience through many decades of work with formal schooling, urban slums, and rural areas in India, with a special focus on women and girls, minorities, peace and conflict, and environmental activism has taught me that we need to do much much more to counter the dominant cultures and forces which replicate through the classroom the kind of world vision they typically want to hand down to the new generations. Education continues to be the best instrument - be it of domestication or transformation.

The work that ASPBAE has done in these past fifty years in prioritising



Our region is increasingly one where violence and conflict, war, and poverty are the order of the day. In such an era, uncertainty over the future is common.

education, literacy, lifelong learning, and continuing education at multiple policy levels and fora has been an extraordinary demonstration. We have seen a committed focus on knowledge creation in order to bring freedom and empowerment whilst addressing the lack of access to schooling, especially for girls and minorities.

Notwithstanding all of this, and the clear and powerful articulation of the renewed goals and outcomes as summarised in the five main points of the Yogyakarta declaration [Dec 2014], we have still failed to achieve universal literacy and access to schooling in many parts

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The work that ASPBAE has done in prioritising education, literacy, and lifelong learning has been an example of committed focus on knowledge creation to bring freedom and empowerment, especially for girls and minorities.

of this region. More critically, societies and educators have failed to build a culture of peace, tolerance, and understanding. The power dynamics, be they in terms of economic indicators, gender, or every conceivable social indicator, are hopelessly unequal. In many countries and in most regions too, the gap between wealth and poverty is growing. And the link to global capitalism and the Military Industrial Complex is now too stark to ignore. All of the above conditions put together create ideal conditions for violence and conflict.

If we wish to seriously challenge this, it clearly calls for a total redefinition of schooling and education

itself – a (positive and constructive) radicalisation of teacher and student mindsets that will boldly go beyond the current goal of schooling seen as a tool for employment and domestication. Our programmes and institutions, be they ASPBAE or other civil society-led groups, need to be exciting places where teacher and taught will together explore the many pathways to building a different world, and so become the voices which will challenge the dominant discourse who set the agendas today.

As Robert Scott, President, Adelphi University (New York, U.S.A), argues, *“I do not think of ours as the ‘information age,’ but rather as the ‘imagination age.’ We live in a time that requires creative approaches to solving problems. In this context, the three most important aspects of learning are history, imagination, and compassion.”* Alas, we are living in a world where the commercial and technological imperatives in education have increasingly overtaken the world of history,

imagination, and compassion.

The challenge before us today is in the famous words of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that, *“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”*

Our region, indeed the world, is increasingly one where violence and conflict, natural disasters, global warming, war, poverty, and creeping despotism and crushing of dissent and diversity is the order of the day. In such an era full of adversities and crises, apprehension and uncertainty over the future is common. Leaders who can rise to these challenges are needed more than ever. I urge us all to become navigators who can *“empower young leaders to use knowledge as a weapon, take into account the voices of those directly exposed to these issues, and become leaders who can build solutions to global problems with empathy and passion”*.



Empower the youth to use knowledge as a weapon, and become leaders who can build solutions to global problems with empathy and passion.

EDITORIAL

Education in Emergencies: a priority in Asia

By David Skinner, Director, Save the Children's Education Global Initiative

Education is a fundamental right, for all children in all situations. Yet, of the 59 million primary school-aged children out of school today, at least 28.5 million live in conflict and crisis-affected areas. Put quite simply, our failure to address this challenge adequately is one of the key reasons that Millennium Development Goal 2 on education will not be achieved by the end of 2015.

The forthcoming post-2015 goals are set to affirm an impressively ambitious target for education by 2030 - to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. As the Incheon Declaration at the World Education Forum (WEF) earlier this year pointed out, this is going to require governments, donors, and NGOs to step up their game considerably. The status quo simply is not good enough, and neither is empty rhetoric on equity and inclusion. We need serious political will, backed up with resources and action, which ensure all children in emergencies are able to learn from a quality basic education. In other words, we need governments and donors to start walking the talk.

In Asia, the Nepal earthquake is a recent example of the devastating impact disasters have on education. Over 35,000 classrooms were partly or totally damaged, leaving more than a million children lacking access to a safe, permanent place to learn. Children themselves are the first ones to ask for the timely resumption of education in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. In Nepal, Save the Children and partner agencies organised, in May, a consultation with more than 1800 children living in the districts most affected by the earthquake. Education emerged as the second highest priority after shelter.

In Asia, we also need to keep in mind that it is not only the major disasters (like the Nepal earthquake or typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines) that have an impact on education. The small disasters, which happen very frequently in Asia, have a huge, and most of the time, undocumented, cumulative impact on children's education.

As Save the Children, we have made Education in Emergencies one of our priorities. Education in Emergencies is the provision of uninterrupted, high quality learning opportunities for children affected by humanitarian crises. It involves providing safe learning spaces and opportunities, helping children have the means and security to access those spaces and opportunities, and ensure that the education they are provided is of a high quality and addresses children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional needs

We believe that Education in Emergencies must be a priority in Asia

We are facing a future where both the incidence and impact of crises are increasing. Children are usually the most affected by crisis, comprising 50-60% of affected populations. In the Asia Pacific region, the most disaster prone region in the world, around 200 million children per year will be impacted by disaster in the coming decades. Many will lose weeks and

months of education if we are not able to provide them with education in emergencies.

What needs to happen to make the provision of education in emergencies a reality?

- **Invest to build resilient education systems**, by ensuring that - education facilities comply with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF); education plans have disaster/emergency contingency plans and there is financing to support this; and schools and educational facilities are protected through the endorsement and implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use.

In Asia, Save the Children will launch, in October 2015, a new initiative, "Education Safe from Disasters". Through this initiative, we would like to see much more investment in making the education system more resilient to disasters and systematic and timely provision of education to children affected by disasters.

- **Prioritise at least 4% of humanitarian budgets for education** - Between 2010 and 2014, the amount of humanitarian aid going to education decreased by 28%, from an already miniscule 2.3% to 1.65% in 2014. Not only are the percentages of aid allocated to education decreasing, but, critically, the sector only receives on average 30-40% of what it requests. In 2013, for example, only 38% of the 8.97 million beneficiaries the education sector was hoping to reach could be provided with education support due to the funding shortfall. In global terms, this means that only 12% of the estimated 28.5 million children out of school due to conflict and chronic emergencies were reached in 2013. The Nepal earthquake response is also an example of this trend. Less than half of the funds required for education have been pledged so far. We are failing to help, with huge consequences for the Nepalese children.

I would like to conclude with the quote of a 13 year old boy from the Democratic Republic of Congo - *"With education I think I will have a future that won't have to involve guns and fighting. This is my dream that I can look into my future and see that I have options and choices. Without school you have no choices in life, you are just trying to survive."*¹

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children the right to education in all situations. Twenty five years after its adoption in 1990, it is really time to make this a reality.



David Skinner



Of the 59 million primary school-aged children out of school today, at least 28.5 million live in conflict and crisis-affected areas.

¹ Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council (2014), "Hear it from the children: why education in emergencies is critical"

Educating women an asset for the future of Afghanistan

By Abdul Bashir Khaliqi, Afghan National Association for Adult Education (ANAFAE)

None of the Afghan governments have been able to establish a country-wide education system comparable to its neighbouring countries, and the education of women and girls traditionally had a low priority.

Afghanistan is in a critical period of its history now. International military forces leave, peace negotiations with Taliban are without progress. At the same time, opposition forces, including new IS groups, have massively intensified their attacks in many provinces. The development of the education system and, most important, the future prospects of the young generation, is suffering.

The development of education in Afghanistan over time has reflected social, religious, and cultural traditions as well as multi-ethnic dimensions. The expansion of education in the 1950s and 1970s showed that, under conditions of peace, a modern education system with equal access and opportunities for all could be

developed in the context of national values and heritage. By 1970, there were only 92,500 female students in about 460 schools throughout Afghanistan. Student enrolment increased to 1,037,800 in 1978, female enrolment to 167,120, and enrolment in higher education to about 16,000 students. This was comparable to the development of education in several Asian countries.¹

Armed conflict and civil war dramatically stopped the development of the education system. The policy of the Mujahedeen in the 1990s with regard to the education of girls and women was restrictive compared to other Muslim countries. This had a strong impact on the education of girls, particularly in rural communities. The number of children going to school declined dramatically in the 1990s because of civil war and destruction of educational infrastructure. The education of several “lost generations” of 8 or 8 million Afghans, more than half aged 12-25, was interrupted or



Armed conflict and civil war dramatically stopped the development of the education system in Afghanistan. The policy of the Mujahedeen in the 1990s with regard to the education of girls and women was restrictive, never begun². The war turned half the population into internally displaced persons and refugees, including 6 million outside the country.

In 1995, the Taliban closed girls’ schools in areas under their control. At the end of the Taliban in 2001, enrolment in primary education barely reached the level of 1978.

The main phase of the new development of the education system started in 2004. According to Islamic guidance, education is compulsory for all males and females. This is reflected in Article 43 of the Afghan Constitution and Article 4 of the Education Law. The Ministry of Education is obliged to provide free education for all children and youth. Now the dimension of the education system has completely changed. In 2015, approximately 10 million students enrolled in schools, of which 35% were girls.

Despite this huge progress, threats remain and much more can be destroyed now than in previous times. Still, the Taliban tries to close down schools. Several hundred schools have been closed down in the last few years. The development of the education sector, especially in the Southern and Eastern provinces, has been severely affected by years of armed conflict.

Another big threat is that the present government has no resources to keep up the progress of the last few years as nearly 75% of the national budget depends on international aid. In all important documents and strategies, such as the Afghan National



When ANAFAE started its work in 2005, common projects with the ‘Afghan Women Network’ were organised to strengthen capacity building among women’s groups in communities.

¹ Saif R. Samady, *Education and Afghan Society in the twentieth century*, UNESCO 2001

² Wolfgang Schur, *AFGHANISTAN SUPPORT TO ADULT EDUCATION – ACTUAL AND FUTURE POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT*, Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, Bonn 2001

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Development Strategy, education is a high priority but when it comes to practice and budgetary support, the opposite is the case. Education in Afghanistan suffers from insufficient investment.

The provision of quality education is challenging where there is no security, but it is very crucial as it provides a future and hope. In addition, education provides the knowledge and skills to survive, and for conflict resolution. It also enables individuals and groups to recognise the importance of peace and to contribute to its building process.

Despite huge progress and international support during the last 13 years, the Afghan education system continues to be amongst the least developed in the world. Still, a large segment of the population (now 30 million) - children, young people, and adults - has no access to basic education and training. Well over 30% of children of school-going age are not enrolled, and the quality of education is low. In addition, Afghanistan is a world-wide hotspot of illiteracy.

Not only girls and young women, but the whole young generation is suffering from this situation. The country has one of the youngest populations - more than 63% under 25 years old. Insecurity, low economic development, and the quality of the education system do not provide future perspectives, resulting in many young people leaving the country.

The high illiteracy rate, estimated at 66%, and the poor education system are barriers for a huge part of the population to participate and contribute to economical and civil development. The quality of the human resource of a nation is easily judged by the number of literate people living in it. Women in rural areas are the most vulnerable groups. Afghan women have experienced tremendous burden throughout history, especially over the last few decades of conflict and insecurity.

Article 22 of the Constitution states that citizens - men and women - have equal rights and duties before the

law. This important principle of gender equality is the basis for government policies and civil society initiatives. Women's right to vote and representation in the National Assembly were strengthened with the new Constitution in 2004 which set seat quotas for women in parliament. Article 43, 44, 53, and 54 of the Constitution articulate the provision of education, healthcare, welfare, and employment services for women. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security also was applied. Civil society organisations are regularly monitoring its implementation and progress.

Despite the anchoring of education and women rights in the constitution and relevant laws, and progress made in the enrolment (about 40% of pupils are girls), the challenges remain enormous. About 100,000 teachers are still needed. In 2013, nearly 22,000 women began their studies at a teacher training college.

When the Afghan National Association for Adult Education (ANAF AE) started its work in 2005, with the support of DVV International, common projects with the 'Afghan Women Network' were organised to strengthen capacity building among women's groups in communities. During the years, more than 20,000 women took part in the literacy course of ANAF AE. Civic and health education and the development of economic initiatives were the essential focus of these literacy programmes.

In 2014, over 190,000 young learners (70% men, 30% women) participated in the education programmes of 22 Adult Education Centres and Community Learning Centres of ANAF AE and DVV International in 12 provinces. For 2015, ANAF AE is planning to increase the number of young women in its education



Special efforts have been taken to increase the number of trained female teachers at ANAF AE's Community Learning Centres.

programmes to 38%. Special efforts were taken to increase the number of trained female teachers in the Community Learning Centres. Education courses for young women in finance, accounting, and office work were conducted to improve their employability.

At present, international funding is decreasing. The latest national budget does not set milestones or perspectives for young people or for young women. The own income of the country is very weak. The transformation period till 2024, based on the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, includes policies and benchmarks for accountability on the progress of Afghan women but most of the international support is directed towards the security sector. The transformation period could have set much higher priorities on financial investment on youth and women and their education - they are the assets of the future and can contribute to economic and social development, stability, and sustainability of the country.

Several NGOs work in the education sector and focus on women's education, but there are limited common platforms to exchange experiences or for lobby work. There is need for a national education coalition in Afghanistan, especially now, when the Sustainable Development Goals will be agreed, and where national coalitions will have an important role to play.

Ensuring a just and robust education system in post-conflict Sri Lanka

By Premasiri Weliwita, Senior Advisor, Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka, and Former Director, Non-Formal Education, Ministry of Education

Sri Lanka has been a developing country for over seven decades since independence and is enjoying democracy with elected governments. It also has, to its credit, a wealth of tradition and wisdom where education is respected at all levels. Even prior to independence, Sri Lanka has been experiencing a multitude of approaches as agitation for political rights, demanding state intervention in socio-economic development for all areas and all communities. Sri Lanka has a tradition of mutual respect for each other among communities, language groups, religious sections, and regional divisions. Although a small country in size and in population, Sri Lanka also has diverse sub-sections in the country with diverse religious, racial, regional, and lingual identities.

Some of the notable advances have been, amongst others, the free education scheme with guaranteed equity and compulsory schooling; free health care and medicine; and the green revolution, including vast irrigation schemes and settlement programmes. Some of the major advances of Sri Lanka among its neighbours in the region and in the developing world were the comparatively high growth rate, high advances in the literacy rate, and infrastructure development, including urbanisation and village development. Grass roots participation in local governance and the country-wide distribution of civil and community organisations has provided opportunities for active participation and decision-making. The result has been progressive development in all sectors.

However, with limited local resources and marginal growth in technology, Sri Lanka has come to be a target of a new sort of politics motivated by Marxist and socialist ideologies. The breeding ground for disharmony began with free education initiatives and advances in infrastructure, where rural communities aspired to experience urban life, but without economic strength. The sad reality is the advent of a boisterous struggle in place of democratic lobbying for equal opportunities. Amidst steady growth factors, the presence of pockets of poverty, social exclusion, denial of benefits, and dissatisfaction among youth gained ground. The influence of international political situations and the growing



Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and landlessness following communal tensions in Sri Lanka has caused some to question the role of education. Spaces for further education, continuing education, and adult education have been neglected for years.

conflicts in the Middle East prompted communities to rise against the authorities and institutions, and not always in peaceful ways.

Communal tensions involving ethnic groups and regal divisions caused serious unrest in the country resulting in prolonged conflict between major communities. Nearly 75% of the population of Sri Lanka is Sinhalese, and less than 14% are Tamils. Tensions started brimming between the two communities as rival groups. The Sinhala majority occupied and controlled over 16 districts in southern and central Sri Lanka while the Tamil community concentrated in the northeast. The conflict matured to great heights and within less than a decade it took the shape of a civil war with several national, international, and governmental interventions probing, supporting, opposing, and even moderating the situation. In this conflict, several issues related to education came to the forefront, seeking long and short term solutions.

The state took measures to reorganise school and university education to be more inclusive and accessible, but continued underlying problems in the education system have resulted in inequalities in the provision of education. Poverty, illiteracy of certain sections of society, unemployment, and landlessness has caused deprived sections of society to question the role of education, which is otherwise easily accessible to more affluent households. Apart from this, spaces for further education, continuing education, and adult education have been neglected for years.

Some of the priorities for Sri Lanka in the scenario of conflict is to enable an environment of unity and social cohesion, establish a system of social justice, support housing and employment of displaced communities and vulnerable groups, and to ensure an inclusive, equitable, and robust education system.

State-led formal education is backed by a strong non-

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More initiatives are needed for Sri Lanka to meet the challenges of ensuring quality education in conflict and vulnerable areas. One demand is for vocational and professional training to be provided by industries and civil society organisations.

formal approach to achieving global education goals and targets in Sri Lanka. However, more initiatives are needed for Sri Lanka to meet the challenges of ensuring quality education in conflict and vulnerable areas. Some of the issues and demands include – (1) The provincial council system needs more support from the government to ensure the smooth running of state schools, especially in the

northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka; (2) Short-term programmes, led by NGOs, the local government, and civil society organisations need to be enriched and better coordinated; (3) Vocational training and professional training needs to be provided by industries and civil society organisations; (4) Relevant education is crucial for those migrating out of the country for work; (5) Language skills in Sinhalese, Tamil, and English should be mandatory for all youth and employment seekers; (6) Remedial and rehabilitation study programmes, with life skills activities, should promote self-help and entrepreneurship; (7) Everyone should be given the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills to exercise their political rights, and to play a larger role in democracy and governance; and (8) These and other initiatives should be enabled by updated ICT facilities and social media.

Organisations such as ASPBAE and the Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka, can provide the essential linkages and skills for an ideal education approach that works in the best interest of the diverse communities of Sri Lanka.

Education in armed conflict: The story of the Kadtabanga Foundation

*By Nashrudin Buisan, Board Member,
E-Net Philippines-KFPDAI*

Mindanao, the largest island of the Philippines, has experienced four decades of armed conflict between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and now, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), both rebel groups. The conflict was rooted with the oppression and injustices of the government over the minority Moro group in the south of the Philippines, which they claimed was destroyed by colonizers and government officials from Manila who ruled over Mindanao in the colonial times. The Moro people were fighting the government to regain their independence and freedom from oppression and injustice using armed struggle as a means to achieve their goal. However, damages were high. In 2000 alone, during the all-out war policy of

the government, the death toll was more than 100,000, including civilians, and caused the displacement of nearly a million people.

Internal conflict has a devastating impact on communities including physical harm, loss of life, and wide-reaching psycho-social harm. In Mindanao, this resulted in the damage or destruction of school facilities, disruption in learning, difficult access to schooling, and low quality of education. In particular, it left a tremendous negative impact on both teachers and students.

The EDWATCH, commissioned by E-Net Philippines in central Mindanao, entitled “Mapping of Children in Armed Conflict-Affected Areas” in 2009, showed



The conflict in Mindanao has resulted in the damage or destruction of school facilities, disruption in learning, difficult access to schooling, and low quality of education.

that 4 out of 10 children and youth were school dropouts, and children lagged behind 2 years in the schooling system due to regular disruption of classes. The effects of armed conflict were also determined in the survey. The biggest effects were school absences (36.3%), aborted schooling (32.2%), fear of going to school (17.7%), and physical and psychological shortcomings (15.8%).

The education sector faces great challenges during a disaster, yet most humanitarian responses give priority to food, shelter, health, and non-food
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Support to education is one of the key programmes of the Kadtabanga Foundation. This includes construction of school buildings, refurbishment of school facilities, provision of instructional materials, and trainings for teachers.

items over education services. The International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) argued that education intervention during disaster is considered life-saving and life-sustaining through education on survival and protection.

E-Net Philippines, together with its member organisations working in conflict-affected areas, is undertaking intensive advocacy for education in emergencies. Together they piloted innovative projects such as the “Learning and Livelihood Project” to provide both learning and livelihood opportunities that cater to the needs of out-of-school youth in armed conflict areas. E-Net Philippines was also part of the Mindanao Education Cluster together with DepEd-ARMM, UNICEF, and Save the Children to ensure continuing education services in case of conflict.

The Kadtabanga Foundation for Peace and Development Advocates, Inc. (KFPDAI), was among the active members of E-Net Philippines working in areas of armed conflict. Established in 2002, its founders were then Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) commanders and combatants who left the battlefield after the signing of Final Peace Agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF in 1996. From fighting injustices using arms, the Kadtabanga Foundation

is now working as a partner in the development of conflict affected areas in Mindanao.

Kadtabanga’s approach in delivering services to the community is participatory where community members themselves are empowered to lead different interventions through people’s organisations, cooperatives, and core groups. Community members are considered implementing partners and not just beneficiaries.

Support to education is one of the key programmes of the Kadtabanga Foundation. This includes construction of school buildings, refurbishment of school facilities, provision of instructional materials, and trainings for teachers, in partnership with different institutions. One of the good examples of the work of the Foundation is the repair of 12 dilapidated classrooms in Maitong Elementary School and Kabuntalan Central Elementary School in Maguindanao. The repair work included refurbishment of school facilities as part of the Early Recovery and Rehabilitation Project for Central Mindanao (ERRPCM), supported by the European Commission. These schools serve as evacuation and temporary learning centres during times of conflict in the area.

Recently, the Kadtabanga Foundation partnered with the government social agency for the implementation of the Modified Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for Families in Need of Special Protection and has targeted 3,000 parents. This is a poverty alleviation strategy of the government that includes Family Development Sessions (FDS), case management, and cash grants for the education and health of the family.

The FDS are activities designed to provide additional knowledge to beneficiaries on their responsibilities as parents, on child rights, and their role in community development. This is to strengthen the capacity of the households to be more responsive to



E-Net Philippines, together with its member organisations working in conflict-affected areas, are undertaking intensive advocacy for education in emergencies to ensure continuing education services in case of conflict.

the needs of the family, particularly on the educational development of young family members.

In 2010, with the support of the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Programme (PACAP) of AusAID, skills and livelihood training and development for women and youth was implemented in Taviran in the town of Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao. PACAP provided computers, printers, tables, and a photocopying machine to the community. It also provided tables, chairs, book shelves, and a budget for books. Conduits for Development, Inc., a development group working in Mindanao, volunteered its technical assistance on capacity building and networking with peoples organisations in the community.

Conduits for Development, Inc. facilitated the link to the Books across the Seas (BATS) Project of the Rotary Club of Makati and the Brother’s Brother Foundation of Pittsburgh, USA. Approximately 1500 various reference books and materials from elementary to high school, including teacher’s guides, were provided. In January 2011, a mini library was formally launched in a Community Resource and Learning Center in Taviran village. The mini library, or the community learning facility, is a symbol of hope and an example of how stakeholders can work together to help achieve a community’s dream.

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