Philippines

E-Net Philippines

ENet Philippines youth constituency mobilising for higher budget for education

Civil Society Spotlight Report on the SDG 4 Implementation Status in the Philippines

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES	
TOTAL POPULATION:	104.918 million (UNESCO, 2017)
POPULATION AGED 14 YEARS AND YOUNGER:	33.275 million (31.7%) (UNESCO, 2017)
GNI PER CAPITA:	US$ 3,660 (World Bank, 2017)
INCOME GROUP:	Lower Middle Income Status (World Bank, 2018)
HDI VALUE AND RANK:	0.699, 113 out of 189 (UNDP, 2017)
POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATIO AT NATIONAL POVERTY LINES (% OF POPULATION):	21.6% (World Bank, 2015)
OUT OF SCHOOL:	3.6 million OSCY 83.1% 16 to 24 years old 11.2% 12 to 15 years old 5.7% 6 to 11 years old Females 63.3% Males 36.7% (Philippine Statistics Authority, Annual Poverty Survey Index, 2017)
Literacy Rate (15-24 years):	98.11%; Female 98.82%; Male 97.43% (UNESCO, 2013)
Literacy Rate (15 years and older):	96.4%; Female 96.79%; Male 96.01% (UNESCO, 2013)
EDUCATION EXPENDITURE:	3.17% of the GDP (PSA, 2018); 14.67% of total budget (General Appropriations Act, 2018)

Introduction

In September 2015, the Philippine Government, along with other Member States of the United Nations, pledged to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the hope of realising the promise of leaving no one behind in all aspects of development.

Because education is critical for sustainable development, the aim of ensuring equitable, inclusive quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning is kept high in the country's development agenda. SDG 4 and five other goals will be reviewed by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2019. For the second time, the Philippines has volunteered to be reviewed and will submit its Voluntary National Review (VNR).

E-Net Philippines produced a Spotlight Report to present the perspectives of civil society and the marginalised sectors on SDG 4. The report also aims to contribute and feed into the Philippine VNR. This civil society analytical paper on the SDG 4 implementation status in the country was developed through desk review and numerous consultations among coalition members and partners. The report was endorsed by the National Advocacy Council and the National Executive Board of E-Net Philippines.

Country and Education Context

The Philippines experienced robust economic growth over the past decade with its latest GDP increasing to 5.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2019.[1] The education system in the country caters to a huge number of students and learners. However, inequalities persist. Access to education has improved significantly since 2015, but challenges remain in delivering quality education, especially to the poor and marginalised groups. The current poverty rate is at 21 per cent.[2] The country also faces multiple challenges, such as political unrest, internal insurgency, disasters, and creeping inflation, among others. It is ranked 3rd with the highest disaster risk[3] and continue to confront the issues of poverty, gender-based violence, water, and food security.

Government's Rollout and Implementation of the SDGs and SDG 4

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is the overall agency that spearheads the national implementation of the SDGs, as well as the monitoring and follow-up processes. NEDA also aligns the SDGs with the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) and develops the national priority indicators. It also looks into the synergies of the SDG indicator framework in relation to the monitoring of the medium- and long-term development plans. In support of the monitoring of the SDGs, relevant government agencies have coordinated to provide the necessary data support.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) serves as the official repository of SDG indicators. From October 2015 to May 2017, the Philippine Government, through PSA, conducted several technical, multi-sectoral workshops with SDG-related data producers and compilers, including representatives from civil society. However, the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) is limited, while PSA faced constraints due to technical issues in data collection methodologies. PSA has also conducted bilateral meetings with various data producers where 103 SDG global indicators, 28 proxy and

25 supplementary indicators were identified. In May 2017, the PSA Board approved the list of 156 preliminary National SDG Tier 1 indicators. Subsequently, the PSA compiled data on these indicators from pertinent data sources. These data compilations were made available in an information portal called the SDG Watch.

During the 2017 Education Summit, three agencies, namely the Department of Education (DepEd), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and Commission on Higher Education (CHED), together with other education stakeholders from the private sector and civil society, adopted the Sustainable Development Goal 4 as one of the guideposts for operationalising the commitment to ensuring inclusive and quality education, as well as the stronger link of education and economic development. The three national education agencies ensure that their policies and programmes are aligned with the SDG 4 targets. Led by DepEd, the education community has established the Multi-Sectoral Committee on SDG 4 to coordinate its localisation in the country. This committee, which includes CSOs, is still in its early stages of development and has yet to firm up the terms of references and memberships. E-Net Philippines and other CSOs play an active role in this committee.

DepEd has been designated as the SDG 4 Coordinator and functions as the focal point person for SDG 4 coordination. To localise Goal 4, an annual Education Summit is being organised to serve as a platform for multi-stakeholders to discuss education issues and solutions. Challenges now lie in the data gaps that pose constraints in the country's capacity to monitor the progress towards leaving no one behind, and in the lack of spaces to maximise the participation of civil society in the SDG implementation.

CSOs' Role in the SDG Implementation and Review Process

Civil society organisations in the Philippines have remained vibrant as they pursue the advocacy from the MDGs to the SDGs. They are influential actors in policy development and monitoring, including the implementation and review of the SDGs. E-Net Philippines, a national coalition of education advocates, educators, youth groups and child-led groups, is one among the many organisations that actively engage in SDG and SDG 4 processes at local, national and international levels. It engages SDG 4 in two ways- by participating in the available platforms with the government and by creating their own spaces to push for the SDG 4 agenda. For instance, E-Net Philippines took part in the regional SDG processes, particularly in UNESCO's Annual Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED), and UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (UN ESCAP) Annual Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD).

At the national level, E-Net Philippines has contributed to the CSO National Spotlight Report in 2016, which fed into the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the Philippines for the 2016 High-Level Political Forum. The coalition has also convened several public forums and information campaigns on SDG 4/Education 2030. It has also collaborated closely with Social Watch Philippines which steers the civil society's SDG engagement at the national level. It has also contributed to the development of the SDG 4 indicators through its participation in consultations convened by the PSA. The coalition has also informed and mobilised its members in different parts of the country to participate in the localisation of the SDGs.

E-Net Philippines has exhibited a dynamic role in the localisation of SDG 4 and in awareness-building of CSOs, teachers, Local Government Units (LGUs), and schools. The coalition has continually raised issues of equity and inclusion, such as the marginalised, excluded, and vulnerable sectors' access to quality and inclusive education, during policy dialogues. In addition, it has supported its teacher's member organisations to advocate for the rights, welfare and professional development of the teacher sector. Capacity-building activities were conducted to enhance learning and quality through various trainings. The coalition has also campaigned regularly, monitored progress on the right to education and child rights, and conducted parallel reporting to UN human rights and treaty bodies.

E-Net Philippines, along with other CSOs, were able to engage in the VNR process particularly on the preparation of the report on SDG 4. They were given space to present their own analysis on the SDG 4 rollout and the key education issues that must be addressed to ensure that no one is left behind. However, there were only limited space and opportunities to engage in the indicator-targeting workshop in which the already-approved national priority indicators were simply reinforced rather than reviewed. Moreover, no consultations were convened by the relevant national agencies to discuss and review the progress made specifically on addressing early childhood care and education, technical-vocational education and training, child labour and social protection which impact on education. Nonetheless, CSOs conducted their own assessments and submitted their reports to the government and to CSO networks engaging in the HLPF.

SDG 4 Progress and Key Challenges

The Philippines has made modest progress towards ensuring equitable, inclusive, and quality education for all Filipinos and promoting lifelong learning. Although the rollout has been slow, concerned government agencies were able to converge in 2018 to move towards the creation of a Multi-Sectoral SDG 4 Committee led by the three education agencies- the DepEd for basic education, TESDA for Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and CHED for tertiary education.

DepED has developed multiple programmes and processes designed specifically to improve participation in basic education. These are the Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs), Open High School (OHS), and the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Each programme caters to the specific needs of learners. ALS, for instance, caters to out-of-school children and youth. It has expanded through increased coverage and fund allocation, the hiring of mobile teachers, and the alignment of the curriculum with the K-12 programme. For pre-primary education, DepEd has issued Department Order (DO) 47 in 2016 to operationalise the Kindergarten Education Act which states that children aged 5 years old are required to be enrolled in kindergarten. This sets the standards for an efficient and effective kindergarten education programme implementation for all schools nationwide.

Several programmes were maintained to reach the target of inclusion and ensure that no one is left behind. These include inclusive education programme for children with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples Education Programme, Madrasah Education Programme for the appropriate and culturally sensitive learning of Muslim learners. These programmes have to be strengthened to cover the target groups of learners who constitute the 5 per cent gap in the net enrolment rate at the elementary level. The full implementation of the K-12 Law (RA 10533) and the passage of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act in 2017 (RA 10931) signify progress in the provision of skills development and access to tertiary education for the youth. The K-12 programme offers Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) as one of the tracks for Senior High School (SHS) students. This track provides TVET which develops and strengthens skills for the labour market. Even if the public higher education institutions are free, it only serves richer households because

of the other costs in education. Only 12 per cent of the State's school populations are from poor families.[4]

Critical Education Issues

The complex challenges that the education sector in the country faces range from critical issues of equity and inclusion to financing and quality concerns. For instance, the expansion of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) programme may take a longer time to reach the out-of-school children and youth well beyond the 2030 SDG timeline. Data from the PSA shows that the number of out-of-school children and youth 6 to 24 years old remains high at 3.6 million. Access to education among the poor and other disadvantaged groups, particularly secondary education, remains to be a critical issue. Poverty is a major factor for dropping out of school with about 53 per cent of OSYs belonging to families whose income falls at the bottom 30 per cent based on their per capita income (PSA, 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey).

Children with disabilities also face great difficulties in accessing education. UNICEF in 2016 estimated that there were about 3.3 million children with disabilities in the country, and only less than 3 per cent have access to education.[5] The SPED programme has been removed from the priority budget items which will further marginalise the sector. Similarly, Muslim and IP learners have little access to schools. The lack of culturally-sensitive curricula and learning materials and the shortage of capable teachers remain serious challenges that impede Muslim and IP learners from claiming their right to education.

The low quality of education is manifested in the consistently low scores in the National Assessment Test. The narrow curriculum content that is weak on critical thinking, social awareness, and sustainable development concepts may have contributed to the students' low mastery of subjects. In addition, the competency of the teachers to educate students about Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the low morale and motivation among the teachers, excessive workload, and poor professional development are factors that impact on teaching and quality of education.

Another major issue is the high prevalence of violence against children. A study found that 80 per cent of the youth age 12 to 24 years old has experienced violence.[6] DepEd has also received a troubling number of child abuse cases in a school setting over the years, such as bullying, corporal punishment, and some gender-related violence due to norms and values reinforcing violent approach in disciplining children. It is worth pointing out that many schools do not have a trained guidance counsellor and a functional child protection committee to oversee and prevent cases like these.

All of the aforementioned issues are compounded by serious financing concerns and the persisting challenge of commercialised education. There is a need to review policies and strengthen the enforcement of laws and regulations covering private schools and private actors in education to address the privatisation and marketisation of education which discriminate against the poor and other disadvantaged group and engender segregation on the basis of socio-economic status, location and religious affiliation.

The budget allocation for basic education shows an upward trend, but the increases still fall short of the global education spending benchmark of 4 to 6 per cent of the GDP. The Philippines is behind its ASEAN neighbour countries, such as Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Viet Nam. The sources of financing remain limited given the relatively low tax base, compounded by poor tax administration and large scale tax evasion.

Concluding Statement

While there are efforts and initiatives underway to implement the SDGs and SDG 4 in the country, there is still a pressing need for the government to formulate a clear country architecture and coordination mechanism for the effective implementation of the SDGs with focus on carrying out concrete action plans, increasing the funding and resources, reforming relevant policies, as well as improving institutional coordination. To accelerate progress on the achievement of the SDGs, the government must commit to aligning investments, policies, and programmes with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is highly recognised that the youth, educators, and CSOs play significant roles in all stages of education. These actors can influence policy development and programme design, contribute to narrowing persistent gaps in educational outcomes, as well as transform the education system into one that is inclusive, equitable, and of good quality. Hence, it is crucial to open up broader spaces and start meaningful dialogue with young people, teachers and education personnel, and civil society.

The report then recommends to:
- Take the necessary measures to achieve all SDG 4 targets and not only what is being measured;
- Improve data collection and analysis to effectively monitor the progress on the SDGs, particularly SDG 4;
- Substantially increase the national education budgets to achieve the SDG 4 targets and locate additional funds, for example by expanding the tax base and ensuring corporations contribute their fair share of tax;
- Use a pro-poor approach and link education and training for decent work at the local level to relevant job opportunities;
- Strengthen the regulation of private schools to ensure non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, respect for the right to education, and compliance to national standards and obligations.
- Develop and strengthen programmes and pathways to learning opportunities for the marginalised, excluded, and vulnerable (MEV) groups, especially the rural youth, girls and women, children with disabilities, indigenous groups, among many others;
- Strongly encourage child participation in schools and strengthen school child protection for a positive and safe learning environment; and
- Ensure the quality of pre-service teacher education and availability of teacher training programmes to educate and improve teachers and other educational personnel, well-equipped to respond to students' learning needs.

1   Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019. https://psa.gov.ph/nap-press-release
2   Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018. https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/nid/138411
3   World Risk Report, 2018. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WorldRiskReport-2018.pdf
4   Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2018. https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1820.pdf
5   UNICEF, 2016. https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/1681/file/UNICEF-EDT-Comoros-2016-children-with-disabilities.pdf
6   Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF Philippines, 2016. https://www.unicef.org/philippines/PHL_NBSVAC_Reco.pdf

Youth Spotlight Report for SDG 4

The Philippines has one of the youngest populations in Asia where the youth, aged 15 to 24 years, accounts for 30 million (National Youth Commission). Given a supportive environment to develop their full potential, the youth is a driving force for sustainable development. However, there are persistent challenges facing the country which affects the Filipino youth and their right to education. The 2017 data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showing the number of out-of-school youth (OSY) aged 16 to 24 at 3.6 million does not paint a positive outlook for the long-term sustainability of the country. Nationwide, about 53 per cent of OSYs belong to families whose income falls at the bottom 30 per cent based on their per capita income (PSA, 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey).

The youth is a key driver of transformative change that will help ensure sustainable development and fulfil the 2030 Agenda's promise of leaving no one behind. Nine consultations were thus held with the Filipino youth to use their perspectives to inform policy decisions and bring their voices for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the country. One of which is the consultation on what "Quality Education" means for the Muslim youth in Datu Piang areas in Mindanao. The SDGs, particularly SDG 4 and its targets, were discussed and the youth participants were given opportunities to ask questions, share their concerns and insights, and offer recommendations on how the government, along with the local government, can achieve SDG 4 and provide quality education for all. There were also consultations conducted with youth with disabilities, youth labourers in Negros, youth-led organisations such as Pinasama Youth Organization and Little Lakas in Ayta Community, and students of One Cainta College, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, and Benguet National High School-PILCD Youth.

Youth participants of these consultations raised a number of pressing challenges that stand in the way of their right to inclusive and equitable quality education. Poverty is the major reason why most of the Filipino youth have become vulnerable and marginalised – the urban poor youth and from the largely poor rural areas, indigenous youth and Muslims, youth with disabilities. Additional factors, such as natural disasters and conflict situations, further aggravate the situation. Although basic education is free, direct and indirect costs, such as transportation, school supplies, uniforms, and school projects, continue to increase. In many cases, hunger, the lack of nutrition, and poor health and sanitation services as a result of poverty have consequent impacts on school attendance and performance. Participation in education becomes even more dismal at the tertiary level where 88 per cent of higher education institutions (HEIs) are privately owned. This translates to a commercialised cost of education while public tertiary suffers low-funding levels and limited capacities.

Other growing problems of the Filipino youth today were brought to light during these youth consultations. Among these are early marriage and adolescent pregnancy that have been cited by PSA cited as the primary reasons for dropping out of school, particularly for women OSY who compose 59.3 per cent of the total OSY. According to the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS 2017) from the Department of Health (DOH), 9 per cent of women from the ages of 15 to 19 have already started childbearing. This is almost twice as high compared to the overall adolescent pregnancy rates in Southeast Asia.

The Philippine government has intensified its programmes to address the education of OSY. Since introducing Senior High School in 2016, The Department of Education (DepEd) reported that it has improved the profile of school participation of the country's youth. The attendance of Balik-Aral learners or students who returned to school after dropping out – grew from 158,131 learners in school year (SY) 2015-2016 to 301,744 in SY 2017-2018 (DepEd). Non-formal education or the Alternative Learning System (ALS) has also been a key priority of DepEd. It has integrated skills education and training into the ALS (ALS-EST) to produce completers of basic education and to enable these learners to acquire the necessary technical skills for immediate employment. DepEd's cumulative target for three years from 2016 to 2018 is 2 million ALS enrollees. However, programmes for indigenous youth, children and youth with disabilities, and Muslim learners are still in urgent need for improvement as they remain severely under-resourced, only accounting for less than 1 per cent of the education budget. What matters now is that there exist political commitment and financial resources to guarantee the development, implementation, and improvement of the Philippine education system.

It remains to be seen if the Philippines can fully achieve SDG 4 and its targets. As the main cause of the youth's vulnerability, poverty needs to be addressed significantly so that efforts in boosting education can have substantial results for the youth. Drawing on E-Net Philippines' youth consultations for the SDG 4 Spotlight Reporting, the education interventions for the youth should include the following:

- Increased budget for more targeted education programmes for indigenous youth, children and youth with disabilities, Muslim youth, child/youth labourers, rural and urban poor youth, and other marginalised youth;

- Encourage young people to stay in or return to school by providing scholarships, especially at the tertiary level, meal and transportation subsidies, funding and expanding different modes of attending school, such as night schools and open high schools;

- Significant financial allocation for expanding the coverage of ALS-EST;

- Install appropriate community-based TVET that is sensible and suited to the unique needs and situations at the local level;

- Provide effective and age-appropriate continuing education on sexuality and reproductive health within schools and non-formal education; and

- Strengthen the coordination of agencies to ensure productive exit points for Senior High and ALS graduates. •