

Review of the World Program of Action for Youth Implementation in the Philippines

By Cordillera Peoples Alliance Youth Center and Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network

This report aims to contribute an alternative analysis on the Philippine youth situation and in assessing the progress of the Philippines in implementing the goals of the World Program of Action for Youth particularly on indigenous youths in the Cordilleras.

Most of the information in the report has been gathered through interviews, results of workshops and discussions, and review from existing documentation from people's organization and government agencies.

The Situation of Filipino Youth

The Filipino youths are considered as the most valuable resource of the country. The "Youth in Nation-Building Act" (RA 8044) which was enacted in 1995 established the National Youth Commission and the National Comprehensive and Coordinated Program on Youth Development. This act defined the Filipino youth as those with ages 15-30.

Currently, the Philippines have a projected 85.2 million population. The youth comprises more than 40 percent of the total population. Of this, 21% are enrolled in high school, tertiary and vocational schools, 22% are young peasants, 21% are contractual young workers in the urban areas, 36% are unemployed and out of school and 4% are working students.

I. Education

In the Philippines, education is regarded as the key to success. Parents put a lot of premium to their child's education. Today, parents are now finding it hard to send their children to school.

Education is a basic right and the government must provide it to all Filipino youth. The Philippine Constitution and other laws affirm this but in reality, this is not the case.

Since the adoption and implementation of the structural adjustment programs in the Philippines, education is now one of the least priorities of the Philippine government these past years.

For 2005, the Department of Budget and Management allotted the Department of Education (DepEd) P102.62 billion. The budget for SUCs is only P15.71 billion. The amount is even lower than the budget allotted for SUCs in 2003 which is P17.07 billion.

The UNESCO prescribes that 6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product should go to education but only 2.6% - 2.2% has been allotted.

Percentage of National Budget	1997	2004
Debt servicing	15.9%	31.4%
Defense	5.9%	5.0%
Education	19.3%	15.5%
Health	2.9%	1.5%
Housing	0.5%	0.3%

The enactment of the Education of 1982 paved the way for the deregulation and commercialization of the Philippine educational system. Education is now regarded as one of the most profitable business venture in the Philippines. For how many years now, private universities and colleges end up as one of the top 1000 corporations in the country.

The Commission on Higher Education data show that there are 1, 380 colleges and universities, of which 1, 214 are privately-owned and 166 are either state-run or local government-run. Around 2.46 million students are enrolled in these institutions.

According to Wallace Report in June 2004, the drop out rate in primary school is 33 percent and in secondary school, 30 percent. Meanwhile, the drop out rate in college is as high as 73 percent. Of 100 children, 67 finish primary school, 45 finish secondary school and only seven are able to finish college. About 1.7 million children are out of school because of poverty.

In the 1998 Philippine Education Sector Study (PESS), tuition in a state college/university amounts to P3,100 yearly. Monthly expenses reach P6,900. The cost of education has soared since. State universities and colleges increase tuition and other fees as the government cuts down its spending for education. Thus, an average wage earner cannot simply provide education for the children.

Meanwhile, a student in a private school pays P22,200 for tuition and other fees every semester. Exclusive schools collect P65,000.

Based on the data by the Commission on Higher Education, tuition has increased by an average of 64.16 percent from 1999-2000 to 2003-2004. Last 2004 alone, 370 private higher educational institutions (HEIs) have hiked tuition by an average of P32.74 per unit.

The government have programs for scholarships and student loans but these are only cater to 1.82 percent of the student population.

One of the major problems in the basic education is the lack of access of the youth especially in the poor provinces. In the far-flung areas in the Cordillera, the students have to walk one to three hours of mountainous terrain to reach the school. Some

elementary schools do not offer complete elementary or high school such that they have to walk hours to reach the nearby barrio or municipality. The multi-grade system, where students of different year level share the same room and the same teacher is implemented in remote areas.

Poverty is the primary factor why students drop out of school. Even if basic education (elementary and high school) is considered as “free”, parents have to shell out for the students expenses for school supplies, uniforms, school projects, etc.

In a region where there is a high rate of poverty incidence involving 36.6 percent poor families and 43.7 percent of the 1, 365, 220 population, more and more youth prefer to work in the fields or look into other sources of employment than to study.

Aside from inaccessible education for most of indigenous youths, the education curriculum contributes to the further marginalization and discrimination of indigenous peoples. The Restructured Basic Education Curriculum does not provide space for the integration and development of indigenous knowledge. Even in the Cordillera, there is still much work to be done in terms of developing indigenous education that is relevant to the concrete situation of the community.

In some schools, there are attempts to include cultural practice such as traditional dances as part of the Physical Education subject but not as a separate and comprehensive learning system of indigenous culture. Worst is the effort of local governments to highlight cultural traditions and heritage as a major tourism vehicle to draw in more and more international and local tourists in the area. The sacredness of the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples is totally disregarded.

Human rights education is not a priority and oftentimes disregarded in the education curriculum. Though Political science students study human rights laws and statutes, it is practiced because certain oppressive mechanisms inside the school do not allow them to.

In the name of regulation and stricter policies for recognition of student organization and activities, universities are trampling on basic student rights like the freedom of speech, right to association, and to peaceably assemble. In some schools, student institutions like student councils/governments and student publications are not encouraged.

In 2001, the National Service Training Program (NSTP) Act (RA 9163) has been signed into law due to the strong clamor of the students to scrap the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC). Though the ROTC is not totally removed, the students instead have other choices: Literacy Training Service and Civic Welfare Training Service. College students are required to undergo the program as a requisite for graduation. Accredited non-government organizations (NGOs) are encouraged to participate and manage civic welfare and literacy programs in the NSTP. Since its implementation, more students prefer to take Literacy and Civic Welfare Service rather than military training.

The quality of education has been declining as seen in the low results of licensure examinations. Capable teachers and professionals are leaving the country in droves in search for better salaries and work conditions. There is also a need to implement a stricter system of monitoring and approval of courses and curriculum and also in putting up new schools.

There is a need to re-orient the Philippine educational system to work for the development and contribute to nation-building instead of training the youth to become ready-made resource base for the trans-national or multi-national corporations.

Recommendations:

1. At least 6% of the gross national product should be allocated to education.
2. Actualize policies for free basic education for all.
3. Ensure quality education by providing stricter systems of monitoring and implementation of education policies.
4. Scrap the Education Act of 1982 and other education laws and policies that are hindering access of the youth to higher education.
5. Give attention to teachers and ensure that they have training support and competitive salaries and benefits.
6. Integrate and develop the curriculum in promoting indigenous peoples rights and cultural heritage.
7. Provide effective mechanisms for the participation of the youth in the formulation of policies and guidelines in education.

II. Employment

After college graduations (usually done in end March and April), unemployment and underemployment rate of the Philippines tends to increase due to the bulk of fresh graduates who cannot find decent jobs that is suitable for the course they have finished or no job at all.

Young workers are considered reserved labor force and victims of cheap labor. Those who cannot find jobs here opt to become domestic helpers or workers/laborers elsewhere in the world.

In the Cordillera, young workers can be found in the mining community, in small scale agricultural production, industrial economic zone, service sector and the call centers. Workers in the industrial areas receive around P 250-P350 or roughly \$4.6 – 6.5 per day. Agricultural workers receive P150-P190 or \$ 2.7 -\$3.5 per day. According to the Secretary of Department of Labor and Employment, young workers may receive below minimum wage because they are not yet considered as skilled labor. There are also cases of child labor particularly in agricultural communities of Benguet. Instead of attending school, children are forced to work in vegetable gardens because of poverty. They earn around P50-P60.00 or \$.92-\$1.1 daily.

Due to the massive practice of contractualization, young workers in the region do not have Security of Tenure. Contracts are usually for three to six months. The Philippine Labor Code and Civil Code guarantees the workers' rights but these are oftentimes violated in actual setting. Managements engage in union-busting to weaken the worker's collective unity and industrial economic zones have a "no union, no strike policy."

Aside from that, there are also cases of retrenchment or lay-off without due process. The youth have a hard time in accessing the services of lawyers because of high cost of legal fees and sometimes due to lack of information on legal procedures. In the end, the workers have no recourse but to accept that they are unemployed once again. This is a vicious cycle affecting the workers since the passage of the Herrera Law that legitimized contractualization of labor in the country.

Recommendations:

1. The government should create more jobs and equal job opportunities for the youth to mitigate brain drain.
2. Review and change national laws and policies detrimental to the welfare of workers. Scrap the contractualization law
3. Actively implement the recognition and protection of workers' rights.
4. Legislate a wage increase and standardize the minimum wage.

3. Hunger and Poverty

The Philippines is mainly an agricultural country. Most of the population is peasants who rely solely on agriculture. Ironically, the country's food producers are experiencing hunger and extreme poverty.

Around 60% of the agricultural lands of the Philippines are owned and controlled by 13% of the total population. Because of the lack of lands to till, most farmers are forced to enter into unjust relations with big land lords. Peasants are usually victims of high land rent, usury, low wages for farm workers, and high cost of production and low prices for agricultural produce.

To further maximize profits, big landlords chose to convert massive tracts of farmlands into industrial economic zones and plantations for agricultural transnational corporations decreasing the areas for local food production.

Farmers receive limited support from the government. Awarding land titles sometimes becomes bloody as the big land lord oftentimes refuse to implement the distribution of lands.

Government programs on farming and agriculture are mainly focused on promoting high-yielding variety of crops and the use of pesticides. The Philippines' adherence on the Agreement on Agriculture paved the way for the demise of agriculture. The country is

now flooded with imported vegetables and poultry. Progressive farmer's groups are determined in lobbying the government to stop the liberalization of agriculture. Even the provincial government of Benguet, Cordillera is supporting the move to stop the importation of vegetables which are locally grown in Benguet.

Poverty in the countryside is driving the youths to migrate to the cities in the hope of uplifting their situation. Interviews with Baguio indigenous urban poor youth show that they left their home towns hoping to get a decent job in the city only to find out that there are no enough jobs available and wages are not enough to sustain their daily expenses. Those who initially wanted to enter college, end up as working students eventually as drop outs because of the high cost of tertiary education. They articulated their disappointment in the government's program and policies on the educational system, job security and the lack of basic social services like water, shelter and health care.

The Cordillera region, home of indigenous peoples collectively known as Igorots is considered by the national government as resource base for extractive industries like mining. Since 1901, the mineral-rich areas of Benguet have been mined-out. Now, the indigenous youths are suffering the consequences of mining such as depletion of natural resources, unhealthy environment, and dislocation of their people, culture and traditions.

Progressive peoples' organization and non-government organizations are now actively campaigning against the government's thrust to revitalize the mining industry in the country.

Recommendations:

1. Review existing policies on trade and agriculture that are not beneficial to the people.
2. Conduct information and education campaign on the impact of genetically modified organisms.
3. Provide accessible and relevant skills training to the youth.
4. Ensure that the people's rights are protected. The free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) must be obtained before implementing projects and programs in indigenous people's territories.
5. Conduct a more comprehensive and rights-based approach in addressing hunger and poverty.

4. Girls and Young Women

The Filipino women remain marginalized in the Filipino society. It is then important that we identify the underlying factors that sustain this morbid situation the Filipino women are enmeshed into.

- There are 85.2 million Filipinos, half of them are women.
- 70% of women reside in the country sides.
- Most women fall within the ranks of workers and peasants, fishermen, indigenous people and youth.

- Women suffer with men, the tortures of disregard and harassment. Manifested by poverty, discontent, absence of jobs, substandard housing, lack of social services, overwhelming price of basic commodities and the absence of land as abode and livelihood.

Manifestations in the domains of Economy, Politics and Culture

ECONOMY- Despite a considerably numerical strength of women and their contribution in the occupational structure they are still treated with minimal consideration. More so, they are precluded in joining the workforce. Domestication remains prevalent. Because women are under house arrest, the irresponsible government wears a wider grin for they are exempted in providing basic services like centralized laundry shops, day care centers, etc. While a handful of women are employed as secretaries, clerk, nurse, teacher and other low-paying jobs.

POLITICS- Women's representation in the political arena is still in question there being just 21 Congresswomen from a pool of 250, 4 out of 24 Senators and way extinct when it comes to lower positions. The penal laws provide different penalties for apparently similar offense of not sticking into one partner for married people. Women are at risk of having to suffer 2 months to 6 years for this while men are for just 6 days to 2 years. Inutile laws like the Anti-Rape Law, Anti-Sexual Harassment Act and the Sex Trafficking took decades before they are passed. The Labor Code ensures the provisions for the health and well being of women workers like maternity leave and day care but not in reality. Women are denied of their rights to their children in cases of annulment. Especially so when the child is already 8 years old when she is forced to choose the father, only because the father is employed as compared to the mother who laboriously cared for the child.

CULTURE- The feudal and bourgeois stigma against women remains uncut. That women are low, domesticated, patient and weak is bannered by the feudal thought. That they are sex slaves, inherently prostitutes and entertainers is the slogan of the bourgeois conclave. The family, the church and the social system promote the patriarchal structure. Women are taught of traditional and retrogressive values.

The data presented is already sufficient to picture the true situation of the Filipino women- oppressed and exploited.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure women's participation in the international, national to local decision-making bodies. Review and change discriminatory legal mechanisms to protect women's rights.
2. Provide opportunities for women regardless to develop and harness their own potential.

3. Ensure equal access and rights of young women to primary, secondary and higher education.
4. Protect and promote women's rights at all levels. Conduct information campaign on women's rights to educate not only the women but also men.

5. Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making

Aside from the National Youth Commission, the youth are also elected as *Sangguniang Kabataan* (Youth Council) in all 77 provinces up to the barangay level. Originally, youth aged 15-21 old can be elected at the different levels but the Philippine Congress changed the age limit to 15 to 17 years old. Currently, there is a legislation calling for the abolition of the Sangguniang Kabataan.

The national government considers it as the representation of the youth in government affairs but not all youth councils are functioning the way it should be.

The age bracket should be reverted back 15 to 21 years old or more to ensure maturity and effective representation of the youth. Because of the very young age bracket, members of the Sangguniang Kabataan are oftentimes involved with partisan politics. It is also being used as a training ground for young aspiring politicians.

There is a need to review and revitalize its program to truly serve the interests of the youths in their respective communities.

The party-list law provided space for youth representation in the Congress.

Last 2004 a new youth party joined in the party-list elections, the Anak ng Bayan Youth Party committed to advance nationalist policies and upholds youth empowerment by contributing in the process of nation-building and social transformation. Unfortunately, it did not get the minimum number of votes for its representation in Congress. There were documented cases of irregularities and fraud during the election. The party filed complaints and called for investigation but is yet to hear results from the Commission on Elections. There is a big challenge to educate the youth on the party-list system.

Recommendations:

1. Guarantee the participation of the youth in all affairs of governance and decision-making bodies of the government.
2. Capacity-building programs should be encouraged.
3. Create independent national youth councils composed of youth NGOs and organizations.
4. Ensure a wide participation of youth organizations and youth NGOs in the formulation of policies and programs for the youth. The diverse characteristics and interests of the youth should be considered in decision-making especially indigenous youths, migrants, youth with special needs and refugees).

6. Youth and conflict prevention

Due to prevalent poverty and of the rotten economic and political systems, an increasing number of people coming from the poor sectors of society are forced to join either the revolutionary movement or the military forces.

Not a few individuals have enlisted themselves with the government's military, the police, the military's auxiliary forces CAGU, the CPLA and other military-controlled paramilitary groups mainly because of financial need.

Tribal members who are recruited to the government's military discontinue their loyalty to their tribal communities and become instruments of the State in its attempt to implement anti-people projects and programs. They are now paid to defend the interests of those who are in power and paid to force tribal communities to accept capitalist projects such as dams and mines. This is the case in the Cordilleras.

The recruitment of tribal members into the military is not new however. It was adopted by American colonialists decades ago when it enlisted tribal members with the Philippine Constabulary in 1901. With the Constabulary, the tribal control of its own warriors eventually was dissolved and those who joined the Constabulary were used against other tribal groups, for instance, the Ibontok warriors who, with the Constabulary's command, attacked the Talubin tribe.

This practice continues up to these days and even resulted to wars and conflicts between tribal communities:

- The tribal war between the Butbut and Sadanga tribes which began in 1975 and was only resolved in 1981. The tribal war erupted when a Sadanga tribe member who belonged to the police force killed Butbut member, allegedly a hold-upper.
- In 1982, the tribal war between Butbut and Talocot tribes erupted when the government adopted a military solution to a protest of retrenched workers of the government-owned National Irrigation Administration. Eight protesting workers from Butbut were killed and one of the perpetrators of the killings was a government soldier, a member of Talocot tribe.
- During the anti-Chico dam struggles, the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities formed and armed a Civilian Home Defense Force in Basao which worsened the Butbut and Basao tribal war.

There is a pressing need to further study and document the dynamic landscapes in the affairs and concerns of indigenous peoples like tribal wars and conflicts.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure a free, democratic, secure and peaceful environment for the youth.
2. Programs on conflict resolutions and peace building should be grounded on their concrete social contexts.
3. Ensure that youth below 18 years old should not take a direct part in hostilities.
4. Provide capacity-building for the youth to effectively handle conflicts in their communities.

5. Respect the indigenous social system in resolving inter-tribal conflict.
6. Provide more opportunities for young people to keep them away from anti-social activities like drugs, alcoholism and gangsters.
7. The youth should actively participate in resolving inter-tribal conflicts and not be the one to trigger it. Crimes against persons should not be held as a basis for declaring tribal war against another tribe.

The situation of the youth is intertwined with the current economic, political and cultural circumstances of the country. The aspirations of the Filipino youth for a just and democratic society and their participation to nation-building cannot be attained unless the roots of their marginalization and oppression are actively addressed by the youth themselves together with the other democratic sectors of society. This is not an easy task that can be achieved within the time frame set for the World Program of Action for Youth but the historical role of the youth as catalysts of change cannot be denied.

Let the collective baby steps breed a gigantic victory for the young people's call to break free from the suffocating bondage of marginalization and oppression. #

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