

Addressing Education Needs of Mindanao's Poorest

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December 2000

Documented experiences of developing countries have noted that education is about the most important variable that determines income, quality of life and social development. The Philippine State recognizes the critical role of education in national development and poverty eradication. The 1987 Constitution guarantees free basic education for all and mandates the state to assign the highest budgetary priority to education. The government maintains one of the most extensive public school systems in the developing world with combined enrollment in basic and tertiary education surpassing other countries that are far more developed than the Philippines.

Yet, despite the constitutional guarantees and high social support given to education, critical gaps in policy and performance remain. Collated statistics and reports consistently testify to the dismal performance of the education sector. While access and coverage improved significantly through the years, internal efficiency remains low and virtually stagnant. Widening disparity in performance across regions and population groups indicates that equity in education remains a serious concern. The worst part is that the quality of education and its output have deteriorated to such an alarming level that the country now ranks among the poorest performers in East Asia and the rest of the world.

Over the years, participation rate at the elementary level increased steadily from 85% in 1991 to 95% in 1997. Preliminary report showed that the rate increased further to 97% by 1999, thus, nearing the goal of universal primary education. By 1999, only 4,819 were without complete elementary schools and only 13 municipalities had no complete secondary schools. (*Briefing Materials: DECS Budget for 2001*)

The country's high enrollment rate placed the Philippines among the top developing countries whose citizens have the most number of years of schooling, averaging about 7.6 years. Combined enrollment in basic and tertiary schools is 82 percent of the school-age population. A fifth of the country's labor force had completed some university education or had graduated while three out of ten had attended high school. With the exception of South Korea and Taiwan, the Philippines has the most schooled workforce among the developing economies in the East Asian region. (*Arcelo, 2000*)

It is apparent, however, that the rapid expansion of the school system proceeded without ensuring the minimum requirements for delivering quality education. Efficiency and quality have been unduly sacrificed if only to fulfill the constitutional mandate of free and universal education at the primary and secondary levels. Thus, observers note that Filipinos are well-schooled but poorly educated.

The extensive school system in the country has not been able to accommodate everyone to enroll and complete basic education. Less than 50 percent of children are able to attend preschool, thus depriving many of early childhood education. Of every 100 students who enroll in grade 1, only 67 reach grade 6 and 48 eventually reach 4th year high school. This indicates a high fall-out rate, with a significant percentage of students dropping out between grades 2 and 4 even before functional literacy is achieved. Studies revealed that those who dropped out or never attended school came from poor families whose parents have had little or no schooling.

In its 10-year assessment of the Education for All (EFA) campaign, DECS noted the weak holding power of the school as indicated by the decline in elementary cohort survival rate from 68.7% in 1989 to 67.4% in 1997. The poor efficiency rating of the school system is further evidenced by the high and increasing dropout and repetition rates. The report noted that elementary dropout rate increased from 7.15% in 1991 to 7.7% in 1997 while mean repetition rate rose from 2.08% to 2.8% over the same period. (*Philippine Education for All: 2000 Assessment. DECS. September 1999*)

The dismal performance of the education sector is made worst by the large disparity in access to and quality of educational services across regions and across population groups. Generally, the poorest areas and the poorest income groups have the least access to the country's public school system, thus, perpetuating even more the cycle of poverty and social inequity in the Philippines. By geographical division, Mindanao has the least access to education and the lowest quality performance. Within Mindanao, the poorest regions (ARMM and Western Mindanao) stand out as the areas that consistently scored lowest in most education-related indicators.

Consider the following:

- Among the 10 provinces with the lowest HDI rating (1997), seven (7) are Mindanao provinces. Mindanao has half of the 10 poorest provinces based on the 1997 FIES statistics generated by the NSO. (*PHDR, 2000; NSO-FIES, 1997*)
- The affluent areas of the country are characterized by 100% participation rate with nearly 90% completion rate in elementary education, while the poorest areas in Mindanao have a non-completion rate of more than 70 percent. (*See Tables 1 & 2*)
- Elementary drop-out rate for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is about 25% throughout the 1990s. This is the highest among all the regions and is over three times the national average of a little over 7%. It is not surprising to note, therefore, that the survival rate at elementary level for ARMM is just 30%. That means that of 100 students that get enrolled in grade one, only 30 will eventually reach grade six within the prescribed period.
- For 1999, seven (7) of the 10 provinces having the lowest elementary cohort survival rates are Mindanao provinces. Lanao del Sur has the lowest survival rate with only 26% of grade one entrants surviving up to grade six. (*See Table*)

- The rest of Mindanao may be faring better than ARMM, but most of them are also located somewhere in the bottom of the education performance matrix. For the most part of the 1990s, Central and Western Mindanao have double-digit drop-out rates for elementary level. This indicates a strong link between the high incidence of armed conflict and the weakening hold of the school system on its students. In the last decade, these regions – ARMM, Central Mindanao and Western Mindanao – are the most conflict-prone and battered areas in the entire country and the social cost is proving to be quite high, especially for children.
- An earlier study done by AER revealed that the richest 10 provinces had a literacy rate of 88.3%) while the poorest 10 provinces managed only 72.2% rate. Similarly, the richest provinces had more access to basic education with the top 10 provinces having a participation rate of .99 at the primary level and .72 at the secondary level. The corresponding figures for the poorest 10 provinces were .87 at the primary level and .42 at the secondary level. Finally, elementary cohort survival ratio was recorded at 85% for the richest 10 provinces while the poorest 10 had only 49% survival rate. That means that the poor are the ones that dropped out of school, and thereby, deprived of the benefits of free secondary education and higher education. (*AER: Public Policy Initiatives, 2000*)
- A survey of households done by AER in 1999 indicates that children from the poorest 20% households had to travel nearly twice the time to reach the nearest day care center, elementary school and high school compared to children belonging to the richest 20%. The poorest 20% have had only 4.3 years of education while the top 20% had 6.4 years of schooling. Participation rate in elementary school was 73% compared to 93% for the top 20% income earners. The same level of disparity was observed for high school participation rate, with the lowest income group having a participation rate of only 30%. (*AER, Quality of Life Study*)
- Another study (World Bank/Asian Development Bank) noted that 95% of children from the richest third households complete elementary education, while nearly 25%

of children from the poorest third households dropped out before reaching grade 6. About three-fourths of children from the richest third survived in high school but only one in every three children from the poorest third are able to reach 4th year high school. (*ADB: 1998 Philippine Education Sector Study, 1999*)

- Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Sulu have the lowest literacy rate among all provinces with just about half of the adult population literate. Among the 10 provinces with the lowest literacy rate, 7 are Mindanao provinces. (*FLEMMS, 1994*)
- In 1997, High School participation rate is only 15% for the province of Sulu, the lowest rate among the country's 77 provinces. This means that only 15% of the children 13-17 years old are attending secondary education. The corresponding figures for Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao are 20% and 26%, respectively. In fact, nine of the ten provinces having the lowest participation rate in high school are in Mindanao. (*DECS: Statistical Office*)

Expenditure Per Capita by Region (1997)

REGION	Expenditure Per School-Age Population		REGION	Expenditure Per School-Age Population	
	Total	MOOE		Total	MOOE
CAR	3,563	189	VII. Central Visayas	2,640	126
I. Ilocos Region	3,668	187	VIII. Eastern Visayas	3,533	146
II. Cagayan Valley	3,346	193	IX. Western Mindanao	3,226	164
III. Central Luzon	2,662	157	X. Northern Mindanao	2,993	159
IV. Southern Tagalog	2,627	135	XI. Southern Mindanao	2,941	138
V. Bicol Region	3,620	209	XII. Central Mindanao	2,442	142
VI. Western Visayas	3,459	159	CARAGA	3,006	111

Source: 1998 Philippine Education Sector Study, ADB, 1999.

Outside of the National Capital Region, the Mindanao regions, along with Central Visayas and Southern Tagalog, incurred the lowest education expenditure, both in terms of total expenditure and MOOE (Maintenance and Other Operating Expenditures).

The capacity of the income poor regions of Mindanao to generate their own resources for education is also limited as reflected in the Special Education fund raised by most of the regions and provinces of Mindanao.

Special Education Fund (SEF) Income by Region, 1996 (P Million)

REGION	SEF INCOME		REGION	SEF INCOME	
	TOTAL	Per Capita		TOTAL	Per Capita
NCR	2,326.3	998.7	Central Visayas	216.5	175.0
CAR	36.8	118.9	Eastern Visayas	68.6	82.5
Ilocos Region	90.7	97.0	Western Mindanao	30.1	43.6
Cagayan Valley	53.1	85	Northern Mindanao	99.8	160.2
Central Luzon	278.5	162.8	Southern Mindanao	165.7	146.8
Southern Tagalog	682.9	276.9	Central Mindanao	113.3	194.1
Bicol Region	71.6	67.2	CARAGA	49.5	102.4
Western Visayas	241.3	169.7	ARMM	4.3	8.7

Source: 1998 Philippine Education Sector Study, ADB, 1999.

The correlation between poverty incidence and education-related indicators is consistently high. The correlation is particularly strong for cohort survival rate and number of years in school. The level of education is also a sensitive measure in determining lifetime income. Studies have shown that a person who has completed elementary education has an income advantage of 50% compared to a person without any education. Similarly, a person who has completed high school has an income advantage of 65% over those with only elementary education. Finally, college graduates have an income advantage of 140% compared to those who have completed only high school education. (*Arceo, 2000*)

Other studies have similarly noted that education is the most important variable influencing earning capacity for a significant segment of the working population. Yet children of poor families receive little education and, thus, deprived of the very means to improve their livelihood. Thus, poverty is replicated from generation to generation. Without addressing the issue of access to quality education, it will be difficult to achieve any substantial improvement in the country's poverty situation.

Table I. Key Education Performance Indicators By Region – Elementary Level

	Elementary Participation Rate					Dropout Rate for Elementary Level					Cohort Survival Rate for Elementary Level		
	1990-1991	1993-1994	1995-1996	1999-2000	2000-2001	1990-1991	1993-1994	1995-1996	1999-2000	2000-2001	1993-1994	1995-1996	1999-2000
Philippines	99.1	85.37	92.7	96.95	96.4	1.65	7.15	7.31	7.3	7.18	67.50%	67.16%	69.29%
NCR	99.46	91.65	97.27	99.08	97.51	0.56	2.66	3.17	3.92	3.66	87.73%	85.85%	81.60%
CAR	98.8	86.48	95.19	94.09	94.76	0.8	1.07	7.69	7.6	5.77	63.15%	62.30%	68.28%
Region 1	99.79	94.11	95.53	97.52	97.02	0.82	3.46	3.18	2.73	2.81	79.71%	79.14%	81.90%
Region 2	92.84	86.66	94.8	96.53	96	0.92	5.76	7.09	6	5.46	69.30%	69.48%	72.82%
Region 3	102.84	93.14	97.72	99.88	98.32	0.93	4.75	4.15	3.75	4.26	77.45%	76.87%	82.15%
Region 4	99.66	89.8	97.26	99.89	98.99	1.12	5.00	4.5	5.39	5.2	75.98%	77.51%	78.26%
Region 5	99.49	87.93	93.74	95.78	96.47	2.04	6.03	7.19	7.79	6.83	70.24%	68.38%	69.02%
Region 6	96.44	84.6	89.14	96.48	96.24	1.95	7.57	9.92	8.2	8.33	63.77%	62.27%	65.33%
Region 7	98.21	81.03	86.25	99.96	99.14	3.16	6.83	7.35	4.73	5.64	63.84%	68.60%	68.90%
Region 8	94.59	80.99	87.79	95.62	94.53	3.17	10.39	9.22	9.53	9.49	58.63%	58.24%	61.60%
Region 9	98.55	74.57	85.84	92.08	90.88	2.2	9.08	10.68	12.76	12.28	53.81%	52.72%	54.83%
Region 10	97.12	75.75	88.28	95.84	95.06	2.05	8.48	7.1	7.71	8.2	61.25%	62.95%	67.11%
Region 11	99.07	78.87	74.84	92.44	93.87	1.81	8.88	8.37	10.31	9.12	60.28%	64.22%	64.18%
Region 12	107.95	72.98	99.14	93.14	92.93	2.37	12.91	10.97	11.43	11.56	58.64%	53.46%	58.47%
ARMM	...	80.19	75.43	93.57	93.26	...	27.31	22.8	22.32	23.86	30.66%	27.82%	32.82%
CARAGA	...	...	82.66	92.65	93.64	...	...	11.72	10.11	8.8		59.01%	61.48%

Sources:

1. Department of Education, Culture and Sports. Philippine Education for All: 2000 Assessment. September 1999.
2. Department of Education, Culture and Sports. DECS Statistical Bulletin. Various years. Manila, Philippines.

Table II. Key Education Performance Indicators By Region – Secondary Education

	Secondary Participation Rate					Dropout Rate for Secondary Level					Cohort Survival Rate for Secondary Level		
	1990-1991	1993-1994	1995-1996	1999-2000	1998	1990-1991	1993-1994	1995-1996	1999-2000	2000-2001	1994-1995	1996-1997	1999-2000
Philippines	54.71	57.62	62.25	65.43	50.08	5.88	8.6	9.11	10.81	8.7			
NCR	74.55	74.95	76.12	80.29	54.39	6.38	5.9	5.75	10.39	6.99	83.4	76	72.62
CAR	60.33	46.25	76.39	74.47	51.05	5.58	12.24	6.67	13.04	8.32	76.1	75	71.46
Region 1	64.5	67.78	71.4	79.22	47.58	4.12	4.68	7.03	11.39	7.5	81.1	83	77.25
Region 2	49.51	56.34	64.68	67.27	52.7	5.16	9.54	8.37	13.8	6.55	77.1	79	75.15
Region 3	57.39	62.83	68.17	71.15	50.14	4.97	8.29	8.12	9.95	7.18	76.7	75	74.11
Region 4	59.59	63.3	67.81	71.73	48.96	5.55	7.12	7.68	6.77	6.35	78.6	73	75.23
Region 5	46.29	54.16	61.15	65.45	51.1	6.08	10.38	14.02	10.52	10.11	72.3	67	57.63
Region 6	57.88	60.33	66.98	72.7	50.42	5.73	6.42	8.16	8.29	10.73	79.5	68	67.28
Region 7	48.33	51.91	60.41	65.62	50.43	5.67	12.3	5.97	9.25	8.65	72.6	71	66.53
Region 8	40.65	47.51	53.91	52.41	61.02	8.19	12.35	14.04	21.02	12.28	71.7	50	75.46
Region 9	38.37	45.95	50.51	50.5	54.58	7.81	5.06	13.67	11.01	14.09	65.1	62	62.69
Region 10	50.52	53.05	45.09	50	50.18	7.1	11.58	14.34	12.86	10.4	70.3	66	68.23
Region 11	52.39	52.27	54.9	50.87	43.67	6.05	12.79	11.28	12.5	10.64	70.8	64	66.67
Region 12	46.05	55.29	57.94	58.75	39.35	5.64	3.91	15.48	13.35	9.74	65.8	66	65.35
ARMM	...	20.26	22.12	31.91	46.18	...	27.18	12.75	10.33	12.51	57.1	61	71.67
CARAGA	...	...	51.2	49.45	49.32	...	...	15.48	17.33	10.09			75.98

Sources:

1. Department of Education, Culture and Sports. Philippine Education for All: 2000 Assessment. September 1999.
2. Department of Education, Culture and Sports. DECS Statistical Bulletin. Various years. Manila, Philippines.

**Table III. Elementary Cohort Survival Rate
By Province, 1999**

PROVINCE	CSR
BATANES	0.923
BATAAN	0.891
SIQUIJOR	0.875
CAVITE	0.869
RIZAL	0.863
BULACAN	0.859
BATANGAS	0.846
PANGASINAN	0.837
TARLAC	0.831
ILOCOS NORTE	0.821
LAGUNA	0.819
GUIMARAS	0.799
PAMPANGA	0.796
ZAMBALES	0.796
LA UNION	0.793
NUEVA ECIJA	0.791
MISAMIS ORIENTAL	0.788
BENGUET	0.772
ILOCOS SUR	0.767
ILOILO	0.764
ALBAY	0.762
CAGAYAN	0.756
CAMIGUIN	0.754
CAMARINES NORTE	0.754
SOUTHERN LEYTE	0.754
CEBU	0.745
ISABELA	0.743
ABRA	0.741
CATANDUANES	0.738
BOHOL	0.73
SORSOGON	0.73
QUEZON	0.726
MARINDUQUE	0.726
ANTIQUE	0.725
ROMBLON	0.713
CAMARINES SUR	0.713
AURORA	0.709
DAVAO DEL NORTE	0.698
BILIRAN	0.696

PROVINCE	CSR
SOUTH COTABATO	0.695
ORIENTAL MINDORO	0.691
SURIGAO DEL NORTE	0.682
AGUSAN DEL NORTE	0.671
PALAWAN	0.667
AKLAN	0.666
DAVAO DEL SUR	0.663
MISAMIS OCCIDENTAL	0.662
NUEVA VIZCAYA	0.657
MOUNTAIN PROVINCE	0.639
CAPIZ	0.638
SURIGAO DEL SUR	0.612
OCCIDENTAL MINDORO	0.612
SULTAN KUDARAT	0.609
APAYAO	0.605
EASTERN SAMAR	0.602
QUIRINO	0.602
COMPOSTELA VALLEY	0.601
LANAO DEL NORTE	0.596
NEGROS OCCIDENTAL	0.591
NORTH COTABATO	0.588
LEYTE	0.587
IFUGAO	0.581
BUKIDNON	0.581
KALINGA	0.566
ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR	0.564
ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE	0.559
DAVAO ORIENTAL	0.535
NORTHERN SAMAR	0.535
SAMAR	0.532
AGUSAN DEL SUR	0.528
NEGROS ORIENTAL	0.519
SARANGANI	0.519
MASBATE	0.512
TAWI-TAWI	0.455
BASILAN	0.428
SULU	0.388
MAGUINDANAO	0.343
LANAO DEL SUR	0.262

Key Issues

It is generally acknowledged that Mindanao has been the most neglected area of the country especially in terms of basic services. In basic education, this neglect is reflected most evidently in the high drop-out/low survival rate; low budget and income-generating capacity; and appropriateness and orientation gaps. While the problems and shortfalls of the educational system cut across the nation and affect school children in all areas, there are problems and issues that are most felt or very specific to Mindanao. These issues must be investigated and addressed decisively.

- Mindanao receives a disproportionate share of the education budget. This has been the situation in the past that has persisted up to the present time. Resources for education allocated for Mindanao regions and provinces are grossly inadequate based on population size and need. It is generally low compared to other provinces with similar school-age populations and poverty level. Since the distribution of the education budget is based primarily on enrollment size, areas that have low school attendance get lower allocation for education. The prevailing allocation system must be modified to provide larger resources especially for areas that are lagging behind in terms of enrollment size, survival rate and performance.
- The continuing armed conflict has affected large areas and population pockets in Mindanao, particularly ARMM, Central Mindanao and Western Mindanao. The debilitating conflict had caused disruptions or breakdowns in the delivery of basic services. School activities are frequently disrupted. Not a few schools have totally ceased operations due to the critical situation and the lack of teachers willing to be posted in conflict-prone areas. Mass evacuations and displacements of residents have made it difficult for children to sustain attendance in school. Studies have shown that the long-drawn conflict in Mindanao has been a major factor that accounts for the low school attendance and high drop-out rates.

The realities of war, organized criminal activities and banditry must be considered in education programming for Mindanao. Emergency measures and alternative learning approaches must be implemented especially for high conflict areas. NGOs have tried mobile schools, literacy campaigns, skills training and alternative education as contingency measures, particularly for displaced communities. Some of these initiatives proved successful but the coverage has been very limited. Adequate funding must be secured and innovative approaches implemented to reduce the disruption caused by the recurring conflict situation in many parts of Mindanao.

- The extremely low school attendance and completion rate particularly among the Muslim children and indigenous peoples is particularly alarming. The low interest and social priority for formal education are factors that partly explain the low school attendance among these population groups. Observers also note that in high conflict areas, female students usually outnumber their male counterparts. This situation needs further investigation. A sustained and effective campaign to reach out to children must be implemented. Such campaign should not be fixated on bringing back the children to school. Innovative approaches in non-formal education that are culturally-appropriate must be developed to ensure education even outside the formal school system.
- Poor infrastructure has been a perennial problem especially for children in remote towns and communities. Access to schools is usually difficult, if not impossible, for children residing in remote areas. Cost-effective considerations, however, prevent DECS from constructing schools in areas that have low student population density. The alternative is to bring school children nearer to town centers as suggested by some education officials. This is an impractical option. Instead, alternative or nonformal education can be implemented in such areas to effectively reach out to children in remote areas and armed conflict zones.
- The school curricula and teaching approaches must be reviewed and revised accordingly to make them relevant, effective and culturally sensitive. Questions have

been raised about the relevance of education especially for Muslim and IP communities. Even a cursory examination of school textbooks, curriculum and teaching approaches indicate biases in learning modules that is used throughout the country without considering the local situation and circumstances. NGOs and educators have suggested to “indigenize” the school curriculum and teaching approaches – that means, providing greater autonomy to the local school boards and traditional community educators in developing appropriate curricula and innovating teaching approaches that are more appropriate to the target population. DECS officials, however, remain passive about such proposals.

Policy Implications

Strengthening Non-formal Education (NFE) Programs for Mindanao

In many areas of Mindanao, the formal school set-up may be inappropriate and more costly to operate. It lacks the flexibility to adjust to emergency situations and to the local situation. Alternative or nonformal education, based on the experiences of groups that had implemented such programs, can be more effective and appropriate. The consistently low budget for NFE is reflective of the continuing neglect of and misconception about non-formal education. The dominant thinking among policymakers and educators is that education can only be provided in a formal school set-up and by teachers trained in formal education courses. Thus, NFE is viewed as an inferior mode of learning and should, therefore, be regarded merely as a stop-gap measure. The orientation is how to bring the children back to the formal school system. Thus, learnings are measured by equivalency ratings based on the same parameters used for students in the formal system. This thinking would necessarily look at funds invested in non-formal education as wasted resources that can serve better if channeled to the formal school system.

This study asserts the validity and critical role of non-formal education in Philippine society and, therefore, must be developed with its own dynamism and not as disposable accessories of the formal school system. Along with this, the budget for non-formal

education must be increased to a more respectable level particularly because this may be the only form of education that is available to the majority of poor children in Mindanao. Based on available statistics, it is estimated that as much as 60% of school-aged children from ultra poor families – those belonging to the lowest quintile or poorest 20% income bracket - are not covered by the school system.

Part of the resources can be channeled to NGOs and community organizations that can better handle this program in specific areas and for specific population groups. One concrete proposal, as suggested by the World Bank study on Philippine Education, is to allow local communities and NGOs to implement education programs in very small communities not eligible for DECS-operated schools or where such schools operate with very low efficiency.

Increase the Education Budget for Mindanao

There is an urgent need to realign the education budget to provide more resources for Mindanao, particularly for the poorest provinces. Resources should be allocated with a clear bias in favor of:

- the poorest areas and population groups
- basic and nonformal education
- armed conflict areas
- Muslim and IP communities

In connection with this, the budget for nonformal education must increase from the current 0.4% to at least 5% because this is about the only education that majority of the poorest can avail of.

Specific budgetary provisions should be provided to respond to emergency situations to reduce the negative impact of school disruptions in displaced and high conflict communities. The budget should cover repairs and reconstruction of school buildings and facilities and implementation of alternative education programs.

Targeted subsidies for Muslim and IP children should be provided to increase enrollment at the basic and tertiary levels. Subsidies can take the forms of scholarships, allowances for transportation, housing, books and school materials, socialized tuition fees for college students and educational loans.

Active Recruitment and Training of Locally-Based Teachers

Government supported teachers' education and training programs should stress on increasing the number of teachers from income-poor and conflict-prone areas of Mindanao, particularly from among Muslims and IPs. Such initiatives are intended to strengthen the participation of the target areas and population groups in the education sector and to facilitate better communications and learning approaches. Locally-based teachers also reduce the risks of teachers abandoning their posts in cases of displacement and armed conflict situations.

Decentralize DECS and Strengthen Local Autonomy

DECS should seriously consider a more decentralized system especially for selected areas of Mindanao, particularly the provinces in ARMM, CARAGA and Southern Mindanao. Apart from making the operation more efficient and cost-effective, a decentralized system provides greater latitude for responding to the local situation and emergencies. The active participation of the local officials, the community and traditional educators can ensure the development of more appropriate curricula and teaching approaches.

Strengthen Partnership with NGOs and Communities

NGOs, particularly those active in poor and critical areas, should be enlisted to assist in implementing alternative and nonformal education programs targeting specifically high-conflict areas and Muslim and IP communities. Partnership with local communities should be strengthened to mobilize them for education-related services. DECS should consider a funding window specifically for NGOs and community-based organizations that can implement alternative education programs especially in poor, remote or conflict-prone areas in Mindanao.

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