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COMMENTARY

Commentary : Stand and deliver

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AS THE WORLD MADE ITS WAY INTO THE 21ST century, 189 countries, including the Philippines, adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, the “highest profile articulation” of international cooperation on global issues like poverty, education, children, food, women, population and social development. The Millennium Declaration in turn led to the formulation of the UN Millennium Development Goals which the signatories committed to achieve by 2015.

Recently UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon declared 2010 to be “the year of development.” He said: “We need to focus attention and accelerate the process to achieve, to realize, the goals of the MDGs by the target year, 2015. We have only six years left.”

The 2009 Millennium Development Goals Report shows that there are still 72 million children in the world who are denied the right to education. The target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed. Globally, an additional 1.9 million teachers have to be recruited to reach universal primary education by 2015, but there is a shortage of trained teachers. These are but a handful of the issues that are to be addressed in order to achieve the goal of achieving universal primary education.

At the same time, the 2010 Education For All report emphasizes that teachers are the single most important education resource. It also mentions that most governments are systematically failing to address the persistent education disadvantages that leave large sections of the population marginalized, whereby economic and political failures lead to education disadvantages. The EFA report features an online tool called the Deprivation and Marginalization in Education (DME) data set that provides a window on the scale of marginalization within countries and the social composition of the marginalized. Results of the data set show that “despite the progress of the past decade, deprivation in education among 17- to 22-year-olds is extraordinarily high in Cambodia and Myanmar and remains significant in Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Vietnam.” It further states that “Education indicators for the Philippines are below what might be expected for a country at its income level and that extreme economic inequalities fuel education inequalities by pushing many children out of school and into employment.”

These may all be too familiar scenarios for the Philippines where majority of education hardware (classrooms, books, schools and facilities) need to be improved or changed; where access to education is limited by the lack of infrastructure, lack of resources, discrimination, inequality and the lack of educated parents. Education software such as quality teachers, quality materials and resources, competitive curriculums are lacking as well. Alongside educating our country’s children is also the need to educate the parents and increase literacy rates for adults. Studies have shown that parental literacy improves the health conditions of the family. Educated parents know the value of education and are more aware of environmental and health risks for their families.

The UN Millennium Development Goals, meanwhile, are more than just a way of monitoring progress over an agreed set of targets. Rather, the UN MDG serves to sharpen focus on development programs necessary to achieve these goals. It is also a means of understanding what reforms are needed and shaping the programs to fulfill that need rather than providing random solutions for an endless list of issues and problems.

An active citizenry, especially after having elected a new set of elected officials is needed to ensure accountability and monitor the activities and programs of elected officials vis-à-vis the MDG status at the local level.

The UN Millennium campaign was established to support citizens’ efforts to hold their governments to account for the achievement of the MDGs. It has ventured forth to an online presence through the iMDG, an online community focused on gathering youth participation in supporting the MDGs. In the Philippines, Youth Vote Philippines is iMDG’s implementing partner.

The need for vigilance in monitoring is our way, as citizens, of exacting accountability and ensuring that all promises are made and made visible through measurable progress. Education is the key to developing a progressive society, the competitive edge that will encompass issues of security, demographic change, youth development, poverty alleviation, environmental degradation, health and gender equality.

Ban Ki-moon is convinced that “In the decade since the Goals were first agreed, we have learned a great deal about what works, and where we need to focus our efforts. Evidence shows that the Goals can be achieved, even in the poorest countries, when good policies and projects are backed by adequate resources. We can and must do more, especially given the growing impact of climate change, increasing global hunger, and continuing fallout from the economic and financial crisis.”

The next six years poses a great challenge for the Philippines as far as achieving the UN Goals is concerned. Sen. Noyoy Aquino’s electoral victory promises an era of hope. Under his leadership, we have six years to stand and deliver.

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