



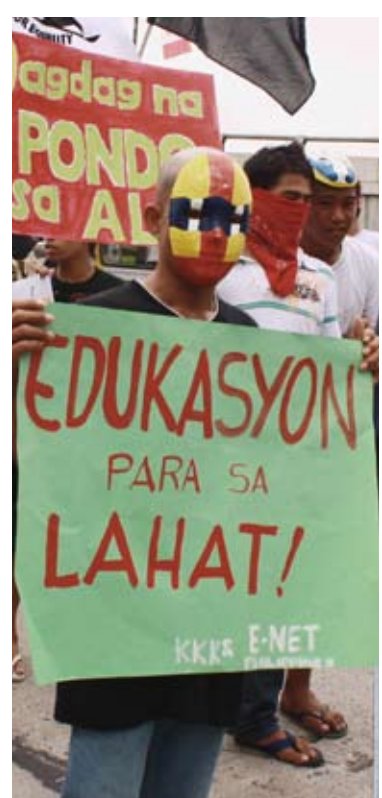
ADVENTURES IN ADVOCACY:

REAL WORLD STRATEGIES
FOR EDUCATION IN ASIA



Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR
EDUCATION
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ABOUT ASPBAE

The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organizations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, life-long adult education and learning. It strives to forge and sustain an Asia-Pacific movement dedicated to mobilising and supporting community and people's organisations, national education coalitions, teachers' associations, campaign networks and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments, ensuring the right of all to education, and upholding education as an empowering tool for combating poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, pursuing sustainable development, enabling active and meaningful participation in governance, and building a culture of peace and international understanding.

ASPBAE publications form an integral part of the information, education, and advocacy activities and efforts of ASPBAE, and seek to support sharing and learning among education stakeholders, advocates, practitioners, analysts and policymakers. The reader is therefore encouraged to write to ASPBAE if they wish to use the material contained herein for reproduction, adaptation and translation, and to provide feedback that could help in further improving these publications.

REAL WORLD STRATEGIES

Spurred by the challenge of pushing accelerated progress towards Education for All (EFA), ASPBAE and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) launched the Real World Strategies (RWS) programme to undertake realistic and practical initiatives based on the actual conditions, experiences and aspirations of people in communities.

Ten national coalitions in the Asia Pacific region carried out policy advocacies and campaigns in their countries and challenged governments to fast track their commitments to EFA. With support from GCE through a grant from the Dutch Government, RWS has been able to mobilise and amplify the civil society voice in making governments accountable to providing public quality education for all.

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The views expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect those of all ASPBAE members and of GCE and the Dutch Government.



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FOREWORD

In this book, we present case studies of some of the education advocacy campaigns in Asia supported by the Real World Strategies (RWS) programme of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), implemented by the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) in the Asia-Pacific region. We aim to offer a narrative on the impact of RWS upon these campaigns and the national education coalitions which have spearheaded these campaigns.

An analysis and discussion is also offered of the substantive campaign gains and outcomes – real change – attained. We explore the similarities and unique features of the various campaigns, the many lessons that have been learned in the course of conducting these campaigns, as well as remaining challenges that lie ahead in the continuing struggle to achieve quality education for all. We also describe the methods and approaches employed in this unique and powerful capacity-building initiative for education advocacy, led by the Global Campaign for Education.

It is very heartening that despite being beset, in recent years, by numerous challenges and difficulties such as the slowing down and reversals in government efforts towards achieving Education for All by 2015; constricting support for education by donors and international financial institutions in the aftermath of the global financial crisis; limited engagement spaces, labyrinthine bureaucracies and unresponsive officials; scarce funds and lack of resources, overstretched capacities and insufficient staff; and despite being set back by natural and man-made calamities such as a devastating flood and political conflicts, the national education coalitions in Asia and the education advocacy campaigns they have waged, nonetheless, continued to surge ahead – moving from strength to strength, and reaping gains in advancing education reforms.

Those denied their right to education were on the frontline of these campaigns – schoolchildren in India knocking on the doors of parliamentarians to campaign for legislation guaranteeing education rights, mothers with little or no education in Sri Lanka challenging government education officials in a national convention in the capital and in their own communities, and out-of-school youth volunteers lobbying with Congress representatives and education officials. They provided valuable observations and insights, shared their wisdom and experiences, and spoke of their lives – real stories, which had a profound effect upon the legislators, government officials and policymakers they related to – fostering deeper understanding and appreciation of their conditions and positions.

We admire the boldness of the education coalitions to try out new approaches and further innovate on these. We are awed at how they have become stronger – the credibility and respect they have built, the wider public awareness on education issues they have generated, the robust evidence base they have amassed through policy tracking and research, the spaces for civil society participation they have secured in education policy, and the policy reforms they have won.

We are honoured to have been part of this journey. We offer this account as a testimony to the value of solidarity and partnership. That it may inspire. And so that what we had all built may endure.

MARIA LOURDES ALMAZAN KHAN
Secretary General
Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABI	Alternative Budget Initiative
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AER	Action for Economic Reforms
AIACHE	All-India Association for Christian Higher Education
AIFTO	All-India Federation of Teachers Organisations
AIPTF	All-India Primary Teachers Federation
AISTF	All-India Secondary Teachers Federation
ALS	Alternative Learning System
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
A&E	Accreditation and Equivalency
ASPBAE	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
BALS	Bureau of Alternative Learning System
BBA	<i>Bachpan Bachao Andolan</i> (Save the Children Movement)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BESRA	Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CBO	Community-based organisation
CCC	Cooperative Committee of Cambodia
CDCF	Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum
CED	Coalition for Educational Development
CEF	Commonwealth Education Fund
CONFINTEA V I	Sixth International Conference on Adult Education
CSEF	Civil Society Education Fund
CSO	Civil society organization
DEO	Divisional Education Office
DepEd	Department of Education
DISE	District Information System for Education
DVV	<i>Deutschen Volksaochschul Verbandes</i> (International Institute of the German Adult Education Association)
ECCD	Early Child Care and Development
EdWatch	Education Watch
EFA	Education for All
EI	Education International
ELF	Education for Life Foundation
ESKAN	<i>Eskwelahan Sang Katawhan</i> (School of the Masses)
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ESSP	Education Sector Support Programme
ESWG	Education Sub-Sector Working Group
E-Net Philippines	Civil Society Network for Education Reforms
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GAW	Global Action Week
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GM	Global March Against Child Labour
GMR 2010	Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2010
GNP	Gross National Product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JTWG	Joint Technical Working Group

KAPE	Kampochea Action Primary Education
LCC	Literacy Coordinating Council
LDC	Local Development Council
LGU	Local Government Unit
LSB	Local School Board
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MP	Member of Parliament
NCE	National Coalition for Education
NCR	National Capital Region
NEP	NGO Education Partnership
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental organisation
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OJT	On-the-job training
OOSC	Out-of-school children
OSCY	Out-of-school children and youth
OSY	Out-of-school youth
PBAZ	<i>Paaralang Bayan ng Ayta sa Zambales</i> (Community School of the Ayta in Zambales)
PCE	Pakistan Coalition for Education
PCIJ	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism
PEPE	Popular Education for People's Empowerment
PhP	Philippine pesos
PIA	Philippine Information Agency
PIECE	Partners in Education for Community Empowerment
PILCD	People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development
PINASAMA	<i>Pinagsamang Samahan ng Magulang</i> (United Organisation of Parents)
PLCC	Provincial Literacy Coordinating Council
PO	People's organisation
POE	Provincial Office of Education
PTA	Parents-Teachers Organisation
RP	Republic of the Philippines
RTE	Right to Education
RWS	Real World Strategies
RWS 1	Real World Strategies – Phase 1
RWS 2	Real World Strategies – Phase 2
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SEAMEO	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
SEF	Special Education Fund
SSA	<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i> (Education for All Movement)
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNWFP	United Nations World Food Programme
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
UPWD	Urban Poor Women for Development
VCE	Village Committee on Education
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

EDUCATION ADVOCACY IN ASIA: IMPACT OF RWS



The struggle to advance education

In the face of compelling challenges, the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), as well as the national education coalitions in Asia, have levelled up efforts in the past five years to advance the right of all citizens to quality education and learning opportunities throughout their lives. Their vehicle was a global programme called the Real World Strategies (RWS) that built capacities of multiple stakeholders in advocating for Education for All (EFA).

Despite enormous difficulties, the national education coalitions, with the help of their partners and allies, have successfully spearheaded education advocacy campaigns, in the process garnering substantial gains and valuable lessons.

Education is indeed a most important and effective tool that a person can use to fight poverty, discrimination and all forms of exclu-



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sion. It arms us not just with knowledge, but also with the ability, strength and confidence to survive, fully realize our potentials, and live a good quality of life.

But in Asia and in the world, even today, millions of people continue to be deprived of their right to education.

Yet there are persistent advocates, veritable heroes who tirelessly push for changes in the education landscape through vigorous campaigns aimed at making policy improvements in their countries. These campaigners push governments to make education more available to all, even the poor and marginalised. All their efforts and initiatives seek to advance education as a powerful tool for bringing about poverty eradication, sustainable development and lasting peace.

In the lives of many, these campaigns are making real changes. This book is about those campaigns, and the women and men who spearheaded them.

Organisation of the book

We begin with an overview of the education situation in Asia, including challenges faced by national education coalitions as they struggle to advance the EFA goals in the region. This is followed by a discussion of some education advocacy campaigns waged in Asia and supported by the Real World Strategies programme, and identification of their common elements and strategies, and the issues they addressed. An analysis of the most significant gains and outcomes from these campaigns in general is offered.

The next four chapters present in detail four case studies of the education advocacy campaigns in: India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and the Philippines. While these experiences were chosen to illustrate campaign gains and outcomes, the narratives also include difficulties encountered, lessons learned and remaining challenges.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: EDUCATION SITUATION IN ASIA

Global crisis: Trends of stagnation and reversal

At this crucial juncture, the education advocacy movements in Asia face compelling challenges. As the region staggers from the impact of the global financial and economic crisis and its far-reaching effects, studies reveal alarming trends of stagnation and reversal in meeting the EFA and Millennium Development (MDG) goals.

Danger of reversing hard-won gains

Now, more than ever, education advocates in Asia have to vigorously pursue their efforts towards advancing education and attaining quality education and lifelong learning, because there is danger

that the hard-won gains in education achieved by many countries in the region in the decade following the adoption of the EFA and MDG goals in 2000 would be reversed.

Such trends would deny millions of people in Asia their fundamental human right to have access to empowering education that could alleviate their poverty, uplift their living conditions, transform their lives and equip them to actively participate in governance and in building societies and cultures of peace, justice and equality.

Worsening poverty and hunger

The global crisis has spawned worsening poverty and hunger as food prices soar and unemployment rises, further swelling the ranks of 947 million people who live in extreme poverty in the region, living on less than US\$1.25 a day (as of 2008), and 642 million hungry people in the Asia-Pacific region (as of 2009), as reported by *Paths to 2015 MDG Priorities in Asia and the Pacific*, the Asia-Pacific MDG Report for 2010-2011 issued by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).¹ The World Bank estimates that, in addition to the 160 to 200 million people who plunged into poverty between 2005 and 2008 due to rising food prices, 55 to 90 million more will be living in poverty than anticipated before the crisis.²



A positive trend in the eradication of hunger since the early 1990s was reversed in 2008, largely due to higher food prices, and the prevalence of hunger in the developing regions has risen from 16 per cent in 2006 to 17 per cent in 2008.³

The rising prices of basic commodities and the erosion of labour markets worldwide have resulted in decreased purchasing power, especially for poor households. This, in turn, had an adverse impact on living conditions, with poor households forced to cut down on their food consumption and health spending, as reported by several studies in such countries as India, Cambodia and Vietnam.



Withdrawal of children from school

Withdrawal of children, especially girls, from school, or shifting them to less costly but lower quality schools was also a common response to the crisis.

Reports from Bangladesh indicate that hunger is beginning to deter children from attending school, especially when they have to travel long distances to get to school.

In Pakistan, where as many as half of the country's children were already at work beginning with the food crisis in 2008, more children are being taken out of school to join the labour force.⁴

The score card on EFA

Amid numerous threats to education access and participation, it would do well to take stock, for education is at risk. How has the Asia-Pacific region scored in the achievement of EFA goals barely five years until the target year of 2015? How have governments and the international donor community delivered on their commitments towards attainment of education and development goals in the region?

Overall, the record has been mixed: There have been progress and improvements in some areas, but reversals and stagnation were also registered in other areas.

Participation in pre-primary education

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010 (GMR 2010)* noted that, globally, participation in pre-primary education has improved, rising to 140 million children in 2007 from 113 million children in 1997.⁵

The most pronounced increases in this area are from South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, but these increases come from a very low base. Furthermore, absolute deprivation in education, or the absolute number of persons deprived of education, remains at extraordinarily high levels throughout South and West Asia.

Out-of-school children

The number of out-of-school children (OOSC) has dropped by 33 million worldwide since 1999, but 72 million still remained out of school by 2007; and at this rate, 56 million children will still be out of school by 2015. South and West Asia witnessed a reduction of 21 million OOSC in this period (1999 to 2007).⁶

However, in East Asia and the Pacific, the number of OOSC increased significantly by more than three million in this period, going against the world trend. They are mostly concentrated in four countries with available data: one million in the Philippines; half a million in Indonesia; and about a quarter of a million each in Cambodia and Thailand.

Adult literacy

Globally, there are about 759 million adult illiterates today. The good news is that, in South and West Asia, the adult literacy rate increased by 17 percentage points between 1985-1994 and 2000-2007, to reach 64 per cent. The same encouraging trend is recorded in East Asia and the Pacific, with the number of adult illiterates decreasing by 121 million in this period, mostly due to a significant reduction in illiteracy in China.⁷

However, some of the countries with the largest populations of illiterate adults in the world can be found in the Asian region. India, with 270 million adult illiterates, remains the country with the largest number of adult illiterates in the world. China and Indonesia are also among the ten countries in the world with the largest populations of illiterate adults.⁸

Moreover, some countries in the region registered large absolute increases in the number of adult illiterates, such as an increase of over 1.4 million in the Philippines and 1.2 million in Vietnam.⁹

Ensuring education quality

Millions of children leave school without having acquired basic skills. Education quality needs to be improved. Over-sized classes and high pupil-to-teacher ratios; untrained, unskilled, and uncaring teachers; inadequate school facilities; lack of textbooks; out-moded curriculums and teaching styles – these are just some of the factors adversely affecting education quality.

Need for additional teachers

Some 8.4 million primary school teachers have to be recruited and trained worldwide to replace existing teachers expected to retire or leave their posts before 2015; South and West Asia account for almost a fifth (19%) of that total.¹⁰

An additional 1.9 million teachers have to be recruited globally to reach universal primary education by 2015. In Afghanistan and Bangladesh, this would mean increasing the number of teacher posts by more than four per cent each year.¹¹

Vocational education programmes

By and large, vocational educational programmes have suffered from a combination of under-financing, poor design and weak links to labour markets.

Traditional apprenticeships on on-the-job training (OJT) are by far the most important routes to skills development for majority of South and West Asian youth, but they tend to be biased against women and the very poor.





Gender disparity in education

Gender disparity in education is still prevalent: of the 759 million adult illiterates worldwide, two-thirds are women.¹² Overall, however, the gender gap in primary education is narrowing.

In South and West Asia, the expansion of primary education has gone hand in hand with progress towards gender parity. For this sub-region, the gender parity index (GPI) of the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary education rose to 0.95 in 2007 from 0.84 in 1999.¹³

In East Asia and the Pacific, the GPI of the GER in primary education was 0.99 in 2007, the same as in 1999. In this sub-region, gender parity has been reached in general secondary education as well as in vocational education, where nearly half the students are women. Women were also on par with men at the tertiary level, which shows significant improvement from 1999, when only 75 females to 100 males were enrolled.¹⁴

However, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea (PNG) still exhibit major disparities in primary education at the expense of girls.

Gender disparity is also evident in adult illiteracy rates, with women accounting for majority (63%) of the region's adult illiterate population. In India, Nepal, and Pakistan, women are about twice as likely as men to be illiterate.¹⁵

Sustained progress towards gender parity would require changes in social attitudes, household labour practices and early marriage customs that cause girls to leave school early, often once they reach puberty. Countries such as Bangladesh and Cambodia have demonstrated that financial incentives can both increase the likelihood of girls entering lower secondary school and raise demand for primary schooling.

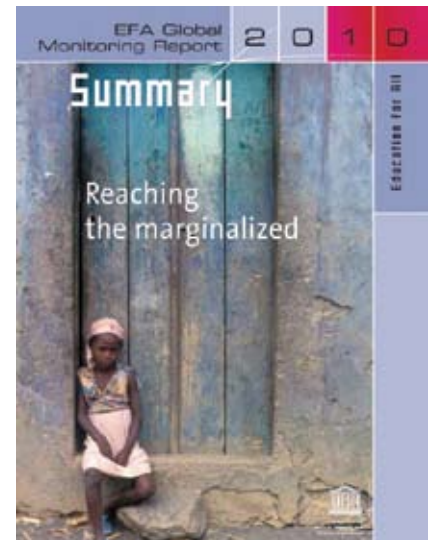
Marginalisation: Adverse effect on education access

GMR 2010 reveals that factors leading to marginalization in education do not operate in isolation: poverty and gender disparity intersect with discrimination, inequality and social stigmatization linked to ethnicity, language and cultural barriers, social class, disability, and location and rural-urban differences to create mutually reinforcing disadvantages that obstruct access to education. Hence, the factors leading to gender disparity which deprive many girls of education access and participation may be exacerbated by other aspects of marginalization, such as poverty and ethnicity.

For example, girls from poor households living in the state of Bihar in India receive less than two years of education on average. Also,

in India, wealthy urban boys and girls average more than 11 years in school, compared with less than six years for poor rural boys, and only three years for poor rural girls. Although the Hmong people in Vietnam comprise only one percent of the national population, almost nine out of ten of the members of this ethnic minority group are in the bottom fifth (20%) of the national distribution for years in school.¹⁶

Policies to combat marginalization in education, such as scholarships, cash incentives, feeding programmes, and progressive legislation guaranteeing free quality education, are making a difference in many areas, but these require financial investments.



Public spending on education

While the richer countries of Asia such as China, Malaysia, Korea, Singapore and Thailand can respond with large fiscal interventions to help their citizens weather the global financial crisis and its repercussions, most South Asian countries and some Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam lack the fiscal capacity to respond owing to high fiscal deficits, high levels of public debt, and current accounts deficits that continue to require external financing. Some countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Mongolia have already had to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for emergency assistance.

Declining revenues and tightening budgets have driven beleaguered governments under intense fiscal pressure to cut back on expenditure and raise user charges for public services, in order to reduce yawning fiscal deficits. This has resulted in reduced access to crucial public services, including education and health care.



Clearly, there is an EFA financing gap. The share of Gross National Product (GNP) allocated for education remains below the benchmark (6%) in the region. While this increased between 1999 and 2007 in four of the five countries with data in South and West Asia, especially in the Islamic Republic of Iran (from 4.5% to 5.6%) and Nepal (from 2.9% to 3.8%), it decreased in India (from 4.5% to 3.2%). Overall, the share of public spending on education in GNP ranged from 2.4 percent to 3.8 percent in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, well below the developing country median (4.5%).¹⁷

Within the same period, in East Asia and the Pacific, the share of education spending in GNP rose in five countries and fell in six, with the size of the increases being generally smaller than that of the decreases, which ranged from 13.0 per cent to 29.0 per cent. An exceptional increase took place in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, with the percentage of GNP devoted to education rising from one percent in 1999 to 3.6 per cent in 2007.¹⁸

The global EFA financing gap for basic education stands at about US\$16 billion, with South and West Asia accounting for more than one-fourth (27%) of this gap, amounting to US\$4.4 billion.¹⁹

Developing countries could close part of the financing gap themselves by according greater priority to education in national financing and budget allocation. Their governments need to increase public spending on education by 2.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), on average, to meet EFA goals.²⁰ But even with these efforts, the poorer countries cannot meet the costs of achieving the EFA goals without the aid of the donor community.

Insufficient donor aid

Although overall donor aid for education has been increasing, aid commitments are falling short of the US\$50 billion increase in aid commitments pledged in 2005. Aid commitment to education is

on a downturn: aid commitments to basic education fell by 22 per cent to US\$4.3 billion in 2007.²¹

GMR 2010 observed that the governments of richer countries and successive summits of the Group of 20 and the Group of 8 have allocated huge amounts to stabilise their financial systems; but, in contrast, they have provided little aid for the world's most vulnerable people.

While donors have provided some US\$2 billion to US\$3 billion in new and additional finance for low-income countries as a group, principally through the IMF, this was much less than the amount required to offset revenue shortfalls; sub-Saharan Africa alone faces an estimated revenue shortfall, against pre-crisis projections, of US\$80 billion per year in 2009 and 2010. Globally, aid levels for basic education need to increase six-fold – from US\$2.7 billion to around US\$16 billion to achieve EFA goals by 2015.²²

Much of the reported support provided to the poorest countries is, in fact, repackaged or reprogrammed aid, coming from a narrow donor base. For some Least Developed Countries, official development assistance (ODA) has dried up in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Moreover, aid to education does not always reach those who need it most, such as countries affected by conflict, thereby undermining prospects for recovery.

While it has registered some important achievements, the performance of the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI), which sought to establish a multilateral framework for strengthening national education plans and galvanizing the financing required to accelerate progress in achievement of universal primary education, among other goals, remains disappointing. It has failed to mobilise the scale of the resources required and has an abysmal disbursement record. Of the US\$1.2 billion funds received by the Catalytic Fund as of March 2009, only US\$491 million has been disbursed, and half of these to just three countries.²³ The FTI is undergoing an intensive evaluation process for strengthening and fundamental reform, and it is hoped that this process would result in its transformation into a genuine funding initiative for EFA.

Violence and conflict

Violence and conflict continue to afflict several countries of Asia, causing abject misery and suffering, resulting in forced displacement, breeding poverty and illness, disrupting schooling, denying millions their right to education, and posing a great barrier to achieving the EFA goals.

South Asia remains an area of violent conflict: the North-East, Jammu, Kashmir, and the Naxalite areas of India; and Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan are embroiled in

intermittent strife. War continues to rage in southern Philippines, and ethnic tensions continue to simmer in southern Thailand and in Malaysia.

Effects of climate change

The catastrophic effects of climate change have devastated many communities in several parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Several areas in the small Pacific island states are in imminent danger of sinking, with whole settlements and livelihoods threatened with extinction. The people of Carteret Island, off the west coast of PNG, have already been evacuated to Bougainville because of climate change.

Unprecedented torrential rains and rampaging floods in South India and many parts of Southeast Asia, such as Laos, Vietnam and the Philippines, have displaced tens of thousands of people, and have disrupted the schooling of many children.

THE REAL WORLD STRATEGIES CHALLENGE

Coming together

The movement to advance education and education reforms in Asia consists of a whole gamut of diverse groups and concerned individuals, ranging from civil society organisations (CSOs) and small non-government organisations (NGOs) primarily delivering basic services to local communities such as running day cares for young children in villages, to gigantic, well-entrenched teacher's unions and federations backed by millions of members; from fledgling advocates just starting to tread upon the intricate paths of policy advocacy, to well-seasoned veterans with long years of experience in advocacy campaigns and engagement; from community folk, youth volunteers, slum dwellers and indigenous people, to parliamentarians and legislators in high government positions – so diverse yet all committed to working for the achievement of EFA goals.

These diverse groups and concerned individuals have come together to form national education coalitions in the different countries of Asia so as to raise a powerful, collective voice that could more forcefully and effectively serve their common vision. They have launched massive campaigns that have generated widespread public awareness on education issues, and engaged with government officials and policymakers to advocate for education reforms.

Heightened level of engagement

The education advocacy movement in Asia has now ventured to carry forward the struggle for promoting education in the region to broader fronts and multiple platforms, including local, national, subregional, regional and global engagements and initiatives, using fresh approaches and innovative strategies.

This heightened level of engagement necessarily calls for increased capabilities, especially in areas requiring analytical and technical skills such as conducting research to gather solid evidence for advocacy, drafting policy briefs, keeping track of education budgets and education financing, and engaging in ODA advocacy, among others.

Moreover, there is the pressing need to forge partnerships, linking and cooperation among the diverse groups involved in education advocacy, and to bring all their disjointed voices and initiatives into a common platform for mutual sharing, learning and capacity-building.

Such was the premise upon which the RWS programme was conceived.

How RWS started

“The Real World Strategies, or RWS, is a very unique undertaking by civil society organisations. It was actually started by the Global Campaign for Education, together with Education International [EI], and it was funded by the Dutch Government. But from a mere project, it was rolled out in three regions of the World – Africa, Asia and Latin America,” ASPBAE Asia Policy Advocacy and Campaigns Coordinator Raquel Castillo said, relating the inception of the RWS programme.²⁴

Rationale of the RWS programme

Explaining the rationale of the RWS programme, GCE President and Founder of *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (BBA, or Save the Children Movement) Kailash Satyarthi said, “The whole idea was to strengthen the coalitions. Strengthening the coalitions means some sort of training or orientation for mutual understanding, mutual cooperation, and building their strength for advocacy work more scientifically and more professionally so that, with lesser input of resources, we can get higher output in terms of political gains.”²⁵

In brief, then, RWS was conceived to undertake the capacity-building in policy advocacy of CSOs and coalitions engaged in education advocacy.

Some components

Specifically, how is this to be done, and what are some of its components?

Bernie Lovegrove, Regional Coordinator of the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) for the Asia-Pacific region explained how the education coalitions would inevitably realize that they need to develop their capacities if they are to effectively engage in policy advocacy campaigns, and how the RWS programme persuasively brought this point to their attention and recognition, “The RWS

programme helped drive that point high. Very soon they see the need for research; very soon they see the need for better policy analysis. Soon they see the need to have writing skills; they have to know the media outlets; they need to know public relations aspects; and they seek to develop skills in sitting in meetings with the heads of these departments and ministries.”²⁶

Mission of RWS

With strengthened capacity for policy advocacy, CSOs can more fully participate in the development of education policy.

ASPBAE policy analyst Rene Raya said, “We note that education is one of the most important factors that determine human capabilities and quality of life. Unfortunately, government and donors are not giving adequate attention to education. We look at this as a very important mission of the Real World Strategies programme: Our mission is to ensure that education is given its due attention.”²⁷

RWS Steering Committee

A Steering Committee was established at the programme’s inception, responsible for programmatic oversight and strategic planning for RWS in the region. Raquel Castillo said, “When we do the strategic planning, it is always informed by the regional, subregional context and even the national context.”²⁸

The RWS Steering Committee consists of representatives from four organisations: ASPBAE (represented by Maria Khan); EI (represented by Aloysius Mathews); Global March Against Child Labour (represented by Priyanka Ribhu); and GCE (represented by the current representative of the national education coalitions in Asia to the GCE Board, Edicio dela Torre). The Committee meets at least once a year. As the RWS project-holder for Asia, ASPBAE acts as convener of the Committee.

SOME EDUCATION ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS IN ASIA

In line with its mission and avowed objectives, the RWS programme has thus been supporting, mentoring and guiding national education coalitions in building their capacities to more effectively conduct education advocacy campaigns in the different countries of Asia.

The case studies presented here feature some of the education advocacy campaigns supported by the RWS programme that were waged by national education coalitions, CSOs, NGOs, and their partners and allies in response to the challenges towards achieving Education for All in their particular countries in the Asia-Pacific region:

- *Philippines*

In the Philippines, poverty is forcing more and more children to drop out of school from primary and secondary school. The Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines) has been mobilising out-of-school youth (OSY) as directly affected stakeholders, and training and guiding them in lobbying with Congress to increase the national budget for education, especially the budget for Alternative Learning System (ALS), which provides education opportunities for dropouts and other marginalised children and youth not reached by the formal education system.

- *Cambodia*

In Cambodia, low-paid teachers collect “informal school fees” from students in public schools. These fees represent major expenses for families in Cambodia, almost a third (30%) of which live below the poverty line (as of 2007),²⁹ and discourage children from attending classes or force them to drop out of school. The NGO Education Partnership (NEP) has been lobbying with government, high-level groups, and development partners and donors to halt the practice of charging informal school fees by enforcing official decrees that ban these fees and, as a lasting solution, by increasing teachers’ salaries and improving their living and working conditions. NEP has also engaged in research to provide compelling evidence to propel its advocacy.

- *India*

In India, the National Coalition for Education (NCE) has been campaigning for legislation to guarantee free and compulsory education as a fundamental human right – not only for children and youth to partake of the immense benefits of education, but also as a means to prevent poor children from being made to work instead of going to school.

- *Sri Lanka*

Sri Lanka may have one of the highest literacy rates in the region, but behind the scenes there are a million functionally illiterate citizens, usually belonging to the older generation and mostly women who were unable to go to school when they were young. The Coalition for Educational Development (CED) has been campaigning for government to step up implementation of Non-Formal Education (NFE), including literacy and adult education classes, for mothers – both for their own empowerment and so that they can support their own children’s education.

CAMPAIGN SIMILARITIES

Although the national education coalitions addressed other challenges to education, these particular education advocacy campaigns are featured in the case studies presented here because these were

supported by the Real World Strategies programme which was coordinated in the Asia-Pacific region by the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education.

Common elements

The education issues addressed and the campaigns waged in the different countries may differ, but they also share many common elements:

- *High cost of education and poverty: Major factors for dropping out*
Although public basic education in these countries is supposedly “free,” in reality students and their families spend a significant amount for education-related expenses such as school supplies, transportation, food consumed in school, and fees for examinations and other school events. School uniforms and mid-day meals are provided for free in India and Sri Lanka, but not in Cambodia and the Philippines.

The high cost of education is consistently cited as the primary reason for students’ dropping out of school. A related issue is poverty, which forces many children to forego school and work instead to supplement their family’s income.

- *Gender disparity in education*
In access to education, girl children are particularly disadvantaged: They are often seen as less valuable than boys and, therefore, not worth the investment in education. Girls are also expected to stay home to take care of their siblings or assume responsibility for housework while their parents work. In some cultures, early marriage often results in girls spending fewer years in school compared to their male counterparts.

The bias against girl children in education is reflected in their lower enrolment and literacy rates in many Asian countries. Among the four case studies, the Philippines provides the sole exception, with more boys than girls dropping out of school; yet this too may still indicate gender disparity, with males expected to assume a bigger role in earning income to support the family.

- *Adult education neglected*
Most national coalitions prioritise the education needs of children and young adults, but Sri Lanka’s campaign on mothers’ education is a reminder of the importance of lifelong learning. Adult literacy is one of the EFA goals but is, sadly, often neglected. As education campaigners say, “One is never too old to learn.”
- *Need to provide adequate resources for quality education*
In all the countries covered by these case studies, governments hail the importance of education but without actually providing adequate resources needed for quality education. Only by allocat-

ing and spending sufficient funds for education can governments translate their rhetoric into action. Thus, the campaigns inevitably touched on the issue of education financing.

- *Lack of support and funding for NFE and ALS*

In both the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the campaigns exposed the minuscule attention to and funding for NFE programmes and ALS, with the great bulk of the education budget going to the formal education system. This contradicts official government pronouncements of adhering to a Lifelong Learning framework for education.

In all the countries featured, large numbers of children drop out each year. Unless governments invest more in NFE and ALS, the young people's low educational attainment will doom them to a life of unskilled labour and poorly-paid employment, thereby reinforcing the vicious cycle of low educational attainment and poverty.

- *Call for greater CSO participation in policy development*

The national coalitions' advocacy experiences also exemplify the often contentious relationship between governments and NGOs. Governments are gradually acknowledging the participation of NGOs and CSOs in development, but they are more comfortable with NGOs in service delivery roles, sometimes even encouraging NGOs to provide resources and services in areas where "government is lacking".

However, governments are often less receptive to NGOs or CSOs in advocacy roles. Education campaigners, therefore, face many challenges in pushing for greater CSO participation in policy development.

Similar strategies and activities

Likewise, the national education coalitions employed similar strategies and activities:

- *Providing evidence for advocacy*

As former representative to the Philippine Congress Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel noted, good research is essential in lobbying with legislators.³⁰ The experiences of the education coalitions as they engaged in advocacy confirmed the need to continually update and expand the scope of their evidence.

Evidence to support advocacy came in different forms:

- ◆ *Research by national coalitions*

The most common evidence was produced through research conducted by the national coalitions. Edicio de la Torre, E-Net Philippines President and current representative of the national education coalitions in Asia to the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) Board and the RWS Steering Committee, said,



The dilemma of advocacy groups and coalitions, especially in the field of basic education, is that the only data available at the national level are those gathered by government and they're very uneven in quality. That's also the limitation of the reports, like the one produced by UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization]; they are dependent on what government submits. And often, some NGO critics might have another analysis but we don't have enough information beyond a few anecdotes and beyond, maybe, a few project reports.

Education Watch forced us, and also trained us, and enabled CSOs to do research, generate data, and develop analysis that is comparable to research data gathered and analysed by governments and formal academic institutions.³¹



Education Watch (EdWatch) was an RWS project inspired by the experience of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), the national education coalition in Bangladesh, which challenged official government data. In Asia, EdWatch was carried out by the national education coalitions in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Social Watch Philippines and PRATHAM in India provided technical advice.

◆ *Government studies*

Government studies served their purpose, too. On occasion, education campaigners found it effective to support their arguments by quoting government data, which government officials could not refute.

◆ *Physical evidence*

In the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka, the national education coalitions also presented representatives of marginalised sectors under-reached by education such as OSY, formerly bonded children, and illiterate mothers as convincing, concrete physical evidence of prevailing deep-seated problems in education.

• *Mass mobilisations and media coverage*

Former Member of Parliament (MP) in India and NCE President Ravi Prakash Verma declared, "If the demand for quality education can be generated, then the system will comply."³² Mass mobilisations are a common means of expressing demands.

In the Philippines and India, campaigners demonstrated outside Congress/Parliament (and in the Philippines, campaigners even went inside the session hall) and the Education Department/Ministry to draw attention to education issues. Also in India, the national



education coalition and its member organisations organised marches, a traditional form of protest that brought the campaign to more locations and generated extensive public attention and awareness. In Sri Lanka, the mobilisation came in the form of a convention, but it was no less forceful or significant for the mothers involved.

Mobilisations were primarily intended to put pressure on government to take action on education issues, with the media coverage these inevitably generated, further adding to the pressure.

- *Lobbying with Parliament/Congress and other significant players in government*

The national coalitions lobbied with government, both at the national and local levels. At the national level, they lobbied with national officials of the Education Ministry/Department and representatives to Parliament/Congress. At the local level, they lobbied with local officials of the Education Ministry/Department, local government officials and local development councils (LDCs).

The national education coalitions were aware that decisions and policies are often made by key officials, so they sought to provide information and convincing arguments to influence these leaders' positions.

- *Deploying education stakeholders in both mass mobilisations and lobbying*

National coalitions deployed children, OSY, illiterate women and mothers, and other learners who had the greatest stake in the government policies they sought to influence, not only to participate in mass mobilisations, but also to undertake lobbying and advocacy. These were also constituents who wanted to hold accountable their representatives to government.

Lobbying for these education stakeholders required preparations such as consultations, briefings, workshops and training courses, which had the added benefit of building their capacity and confidence.

- *Cultivating and working with allies in government bodies*

A strategic move the national coalitions took was to develop and strengthen ties and partnerships with allies in high-level groups and government bodies such as Congress/Parliament, the Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG), and other policymaking forums. These well-placed and influential allies provided valuable support to the advocacy efforts of the national education coalitions.

Allies helped the national coalitions to better understand the policy development process and maximise use of available openings and platforms. Allies also spoke in behalf of the national coalitions within government circles, presented their position papers, adopted



provisions from their policy briefs, posed their queries during official sessions, and helped recruit more advocates among their peers.

- *Meeting and engaging with key officials in regional and global platforms*
National coalition representatives had the opportunity of meeting and engaging with high government officials and policymakers in regional and global platforms, such as the Association on Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asia Ministers of Education Forum, South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

This helped to establish credibility and rapport, and facilitated the continued lobbying by the coalitions with these key officials later on at the country level.

CAMPAIGN ACHIEVEMENTS

Sharing in campaign successes

Attribution will always be a ticklish question in advocacy campaigns where many forces are involved. All the national coalitions admit they cannot claim sole responsibility for campaign successes; they acknowledge that credit must be shared by all those who collaborated to achieve the desired outcomes, including teachers unions and even supporters within government, who simultaneously raised their voices and pushed from multiple fronts.

As Angela Taneja, Education Programme Officer of ActionAid, commented, “The plurality of voices ... adds to the overall pressure on the government.”³³

Campaign gains

Foremost among the gains achieved by the education advocacy campaigns are the following:

- *Enactment of legislation or issuance of government pronouncements that advance education rights*

In India, the government finally acceded to campaign demands by passing a Constitutional Amendment and enabling legislation in the Education Act (which was subsequently notified) to guarantee the right to free and compulsory education for children between the ages of six and 14 years.

In Cambodia, aside from directives issued by the Education Ministry, the Prime Minister issued a sub-decree on the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers which reiterates in stronger terms prohibition of the practice of collecting informal school fees.

Although the Education Act in India falls short of the NCE's full demands, and the sub-decree in Cambodia is lacking in enforcement, nevertheless these are significant tools that the national coalitions can use to further promote their education advocacies.

- *Greater awareness of education rights and issues*

Increased awareness of education rights and issues is evident in greater discussion of education concerns within Congress/Parliament, in government meetings at the national and local levels, and in media reports.

NCE Convenor and Board member Rama Kant Rai said, "Of course, there are many things that still need to be done. But I'm very happy that the RTE [Right to Education] Act has not only become an agenda of the law, but there is internal preparedness within the teachers' community, the parent-child community and the NGO community. The people are asking, 'How will this law be implemented?'"³⁴

- *Bigger budget for education*

In the Philippines and Sri Lanka, coalition members have started to gain access to education funds from local government units (LGUs) and agencies. In India, the government has made a policy commitment to increase education spending. In Cambodia, the government has increased teachers' salaries.

- *Improved capacities of campaign participants*

In the course of the campaigns, campaign participants – including school children, OSY, mothers, and the national coalitions and their members – attained improved capacities and enhanced confidence.

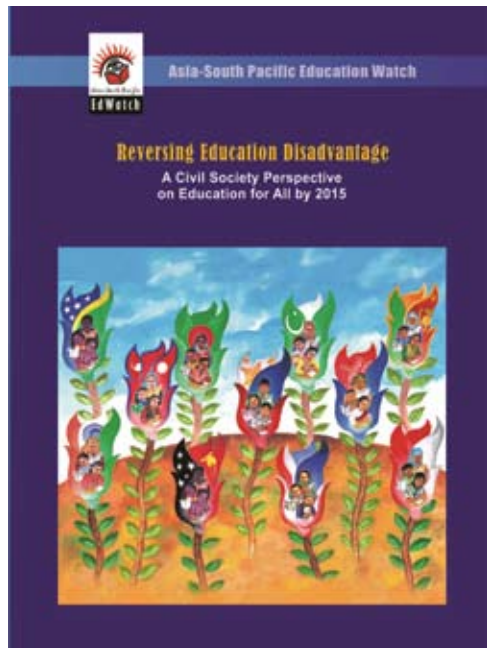
Participation in the campaigns benefited those mobilised, for example, by their gaining skills in research, lobbying and advocacy, organising, making effective presentations and even in honing their analytical skills. They also gained deeper understanding of legislative and decision-making processes, and of the links across different education issues.

In addition to their traditional functions as basic service providers for grassroots communities, CSOs and NGOs could now take on policy advocacy work and engage with government officials and decision makers in drafting policies which could subsequently translate into actions for the welfare of their communities and members.

- *Enhanced credibility of the education coalitions*

For example, NEP Executive Director In Samrithy said that in Cambodia, "NEP became widely recognized as the voice of education NGO. And it has been recognized, not only by the NEP members, but even by the government, especially the Ministry of





Education, Youth and Sports [MoEYS], as well as the development partners working in the education field.”³⁵

- *Generating evidence for sustained advocacy*

The EdWatch project had several results:

- ◆ It produced evidence that the national coalitions could use for their continuing campaigns.
- ◆ It helped those involved, particularly the coalition members, gain research and analytical skills.
- ◆ Publication of research findings added to the national coalitions’ credibility.

The value of EdWatch can be seen in how even governments used these studies to inform their EFA mid-term assessment reports. In Indonesia, for example, the findings of the coalition’s EdWatch research were included in the government’s Millennium Development Goals report. In Papua New Guinea, the national government announced its interest in expanding the survey to all provinces, in collaboration with the national coalition and ASPBAE.³⁶

Aloysius Matthews, Chief Coordinator in the Asia-Pacific region of Education International, one of the founding members of GCE, and a member of the RWS Steering Committee, also said EI members “benefited and utilised quite a lot of these research materials for our advocacy and campaign work.”³⁷

Whenever appropriate, skills and methodologies learned from this project can be applied or are transferable to other projects. For example, E-Net Philippines National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano related that E-Net Philippines made continued use of the “Education Watch technology” even beyond the original study it conducted in 2007 with RWS and ASPBAE. With funding support from Oxfam, and applying skills and methodologies learned from EdWatch, E-Net Philippines and its local partners, conducted another research study to map out education deficits in four municipalities in Central Mindanao: Datu Piglas, Paglat, Tulunan and Columbio – areas directly affected by armed conflict.³⁸

IMPACT OF RWS

Impact of RWS on education coalitions and campaigns

What has been the impact of RWS on the education advocacy campaigns waged in Asia and the national education coalitions at the forefront of these campaigns?

The impact of RWS on each country and national coalition went beyond the education campaigns featured in the case studies. The contributions and support of RWS were rendered in several significant ways:

- *Forging cooperation*

One of the important roles that RWS played was to bring together diverse groups and allow them to share experiences and learn from each other. The RWS Steering Committee was instrumental in facilitating better understanding and forging greater cooperation among the key constituent groups of GCE in the region – NGOs, teachers unions, child rights activists – which, at the onset of the RWS programme, had very limited experience of working together.

Committee members acknowledge there have been tensions in working together. Aloysius Matthews admitted, “One of the major problems was to bring the national teacher organisations to work together with NGOs. There has been a kind of misunderstanding ... suspicion where the teachers and NGOs are concerned. Teachers’ organisations are legal entities registered under the laws of the country, while many NGOs are not. The teachers’ organisations are big with the membership, whereas NGOs in some instances are just a small group of people trying to do what they can within the ambit of their work. And as a result, there has been this sort of divide.”³⁹

The differences in size, focus of work, and organisational character of the teachers unions and NGOs also made for many differences in ways and styles of working which needed to be understood by each group as they started interacting more closely. Over time, relations did improve, and both parties came to see the benefit of working together.

Today, Maria Khan observed, “ASPBAE and the national coalitions have a better understanding of teachers’ issues, and how teachers’ issues and interests form an intrinsic part of the core education policy advocacies prioritised by NGOs, especially in the spheres of education quality, equity and education financing. RWS made more concrete the need for teachers unions to work with NGOs.”⁴⁰

Aloysius Matthews agreed with this observation, saying, “One of the achievements of RWS is to bring together the CSOs, the NGOs and the teachers’ organisations at the national level to work in unison to promote education. Teachers themselves, and teacher organisations, need the support of civil society, especially the parent-teacher associations [PTAs], the other groups, even politicians, and the press. We have been able to work together, and this is one very important success story in this RWS initiative.”⁴¹

In turn, Priyanka Ribhu, who represents Global March Against Child Labour in the RWS Steering Committee, said, “Global March was able to use spaces created within RWS locally and

globally to promote the rights of the most marginalised children.” Global March partners initially led the national education coalitions in Pakistan and Nepal, and are also active in national education coalitions in Africa and South America.⁴²

- *Building a common vision*

Saloni Singh, Executive Chair of *Didi Bahini* in Nepal and member for South Asia of the ASPBAE Executive Council, said, “In RWS ... all organisations can join in making strategies. So it is a good programme for us because it helps different coalitions to work together. We visualize a common vision which can be achieved.”⁴³

ASPBAE South Asia Policy Advocacy and Campaigns Coordinator Mohammad Muntasim Tanvir elaborated on the need for summoning forceful, unified action and a collective voice, rather than undertaking disjointed initiatives, as was the previous practice of civil society, “The Real World Strategies programme was initiated to basically help build common platforms for civil society members to input in the education policy formulation and implementation process.”⁴⁴

Sharda Basnet, Board member of NCE – Nepal, said, “RWS, for me, means different sectors of people joining hands together to talk about the policy changes in the country.”⁴⁵

- *Building capacity*

The primary objective of the RWS programme was to build the capacity of CSOs and, more specifically, the national education coalitions, to engage effectively with government to achieve the EFA goals. The work of RWS should, therefore, be viewed in this frame, and not just in terms of the outcomes of the campaigns featured in the case studies.

In the Asia-Pacific region, RWS was implemented through ASPBAE, which undertook capacity-building through:

- ◆ Conducting and funding in-country workshops and training courses;
- ◆ Mentoring the coalitions’ Boards and Secretariats;
- ◆ Acting as a sounding board for the coalitions’ ideas;
- ◆ Providing information on subregional, regional and global education campaigns and initiatives;
- ◆ Organising subregional and regional workshops and training courses;
- ◆ Facilitating the exchange of experiences with other coalition networks;
- ◆ Facilitating links to donor organisations and other education players; and
- ◆ Facilitating the coalitions’ participation in regional and sub-regional platforms such as the ASEAN, South Asia Ministers of Education Forum, SEAMEO and UNESCO.

Maria Khan noted that capacity-building was embedded in the RWS programme. What made the RWS programme's approach even more unusual was its flexibility and openness. Khan said,

National coalitions had the freedom to define their priorities and campaigns. Along the way, they were offered training courses customised to their needs, opportunities for peer mentoring, greater access to information resources useful to their advocacy work, and spaces for policy engagements. Very few programmes would give you such a high degree of flexibility, coupled with accountability. We successfully managed to build a work ethos within the RWS support team which was highly facilitative.⁴⁶

Raquel Castillo described this as “a process of ‘marketing ideas’” to the coalitions. Castillo said,

We always respect the coalitions' independence and integrity. Even if we're coming together as partners in a network, there is this balancing between what, on one hand, the coalitions think as their priority areas of work, which of course we will consider, but, on the other hand, we also try to market to them, or try to convince them along certain thematic areas that they would not naturally go into, because they may not yet have the capacity to do so or they haven't really attempted looking at these policy areas yet. There are also some policy concerns that the global advocacy is strong on, but not all of the coalitions would be taking these up.⁴⁷

As the writer-philosopher Kahlil Gibran said, the wise teacher does not impose knowledge upon his student nor drill it into his head, but rather “leads the student to the threshold of his own mind”; for the good teacher delights in the student's coming into his own, gaining strength, power and confidence, blossoming and unfolding the wings of his potentialities.

Similarly, as mentor of the education coalitions in the work of policy advocacy, the role of RWS, to be an effective mentor, was not to impose its own ideas and methodologies upon the coalitions, but to advise and guide them in discovering for themselves, by tapping the rich wellsprings of their own creativity, the multi-fold possibilities of engagement, and in determining what would work best for them, what methodologies would be appropriate for their specific context, and what issues are most pressing for them to address based upon the particular needs of their country and people, and the capacities and strengths of their organisation and constituency.

This flexible and open approach of RWS was much appreciated by the national coalitions. For NEP in Cambodia, for example, the type of support offered by RWS was new and something it did not receive even from its main donor. Chandana Bandara, Director for Adult and Inclusive Education of the CED Board in Sri Lanka added, “Due to RWS, CED developed its capacity in advocacy. We learned what is meant by advocacy, where it can be applied, what it can change, and how to plan effective steps in a campaign.”⁴⁸

Rama Kant Rai concurred, saying, “RWS is a very, very powerful tool on how to plan, how to move ahead.”⁴⁹

Cecilia Soriano called the brand of service that RWS bestowed upon the education coalitions “demand-driven capacity-building.”⁵⁰ Like a solicitous mother feeding her hungry baby on demand, RWS provided the education coalitions, which were newly flexing their muscles in policy advocacy work, with specific forms of support on demand and as needed.

Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE) National Coordinator Zehra Arshad said, “RWS for me is bringing all the people together, and collectively strengthening the capacities of the coalition, and developing the culture of the coalition to advocate education for all.”⁵¹

Cecilia Soriano summed up capacity-building in these terms:

Power is not just about money and governmental resources. There is also people power, ideas power, connection and synergy. I think we should work, not on the basis simply of need and lack; we should also work on the basis of capabilities and assets. That is an important framework that has to be stressed. Southern countries, national coalitions and poor communities have needs; but they also have capabilities. But capabilities need to be assisted to be developed and, first of all, to be recognised by the stakeholders themselves, and by others. And, I think, that is the spirit that I value in a programme like RWS.⁵²

- *Gaining an international perspective*

Gaining an international perspective through RWS is one gain consistently mentioned by the education coalitions. E-Net Philippines President Edicio de la Torre said, “Like all national coalitions, our primary focus tends to be work within our borders. Subregional, regional and global work are secondary and perhaps would not even be addressed, were it not for the additional resources, stimulus and assistance from a programme like RWS.”⁵³



The opportunity, facilitated by RWS, to participate in ASEAN and UNESCO events enriched the coalitions' understanding of the dynamics between international organisations and national policies. Cecilia Soriano said, "Before E-Net joined RWS, we were already engaging with the Philippine government on EFA. But we didn't always understand why the government was involved in certain interventions. When we joined RWS in 2004, we were able to engage at the regional level. It was here that we saw where government was often taking its cue."⁵⁴

Cecilia Soriano further explained, "What RWS provided us are information and opportunities also to interact and engage with the government at the regional level. And, in that sense, we saw where government was getting its signals. Because at the national level, we participate in workshops, not knowing where the Philippine government is getting all its guidelines, not knowing why the government is doing certain actions, and not knowing why the government is opting for certain interventions."⁵⁵

In much the same way that travel to other lands broadens a person's perspective and educates by exposing him to different races and cultures, so also did RWS broaden the perspective of the national education coalitions into a global view which, as Cecilia Soriano said, helped them unravel the intricacies of policy advocacy and demystify seemingly awesome institutions.

- *Linking and engagement with other national education coalitions*
Raquel Castillo, who was the E-Net Philippines National Coordinator during the first phase of RWS (RWS 1), recalls it had always been emphasised that their coalition would not simply have a one-on-one relationship with ASPBAE, but engage with coalitions from other countries. Castillo said, "From the very start, it was meant to be a shared learning with other coalitions. So what happened was that we progressed very fast in looking at what were the common issues."⁵⁶

This was confirmed by Cecilia Soriano, saying, "RWS provided close partnerships with other coalitions."⁵⁷

As a result, the coalitions gained greater appreciation for education as a global issue which needed concerted action. For example, E-Net Philippines, Education Network for Justice in Indonesia, and NEP in Cambodia came to work together to address privatisation issues in education.

Listening to the experiences of other coalitions also prodded the coalitions to reflect on strategies and approaches they could adapt to their particular context. "Some of their ideas could not be applied to Cambodia," NEP Research Coordinator Ang Sopha ad-

mitted, “but they made me think hard about what approaches will work here.”⁵⁸

Coalitions were buoyed by the spirit of solidarity among their peers. Others gained confidence in their work. Moreover, the interactions produced a strong sense of solidarity. In Samrithy said, “I think RWS is about global links. We feel that, okay, we are not alone; we have friends in other coalitions and countries who care about us, and we care for them.”⁵⁹

- *Access to regional platforms*

Participating in regional forums was useful for the national coalitions, not just for gaining a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of how global and regional policies affect their countries’ education programmes, but also for providing an important venue for engaging with key officials.

Through RWS, national coalitions gained access to regional platforms for education advocacy. In 2007, for example, ASPBAE and three national coalitions attended the 8th UNESCO EFA Coordinators’ Meeting and spoke about indicators that should not be missed in the assessment. They also reminded governments of civil society participation as a requisite to success in achieving full EFA. Later that year, ASPBAE and two national coalitions participated in a UNESCO writers’ workshop for peer review of the draft EFA Mid-Decade Assessment at the subregional (East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia) and national levels.

Cecilia Soriano, representing E-Net Philippines, which joined both gatherings, said, “RWS provided us that window to influence some decisions on education at the regional level. E-Net was part of the UNESCO-SEAMEO forum that drafted a 10-point agenda to reach the unreached, including tracking dropouts.”⁶⁰

NCE and other national coalitions in South Asia convened to plot out their lobbying tactics at the South Asia Education Ministers Meeting in December 2009. As a result of intense lobbying by RWS representatives, the ministers’ Dhaka Declaration on Education for All encourages member countries to spend six percent of their GDP on education and supports the role of CSOs in achieving education goals.

In turn, the coalitions are also acknowledged by subregional or regional bodies on EFA and invited to participate in regional conferences and forums, unlike in the past when they had to gatecrash such forums, such as the UNESCO EFA Coordinators’ Meeting.⁶¹

The value of regional policy advocacy, Maria Khan stressed, needs to be acknowledged. “It’s often taken for granted it will take place, but it actually requires deliberate effort. We need to enlarge re-



gional policy spaces, e.g., with UNESCO, Asian Development Bank (ADB), ASEAN, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and World Bank – Asia, because, in some instances, processes and decisions here can be highly decisive in terms of policy directions at the national level,” said Khan.⁶²

RWS and ASPBAE facilitated and paved the way for the national education coalitions’ entry into regional platforms; they were, in turn, viewed by these coalitions as “the meeting point in defining our regional agenda,” providing a central focus or fulcrum upon which the various groups could converge to take on fresh initiatives in a broader arena of service.

- *Funding support*

RWS also provided funding support for education advocacy campaigns, such as those described in the case studies. As a funding mechanism, RWS is unusual in that it allowed coalitions much leeway in determining the subject of their campaigns, the forms these would take, and the kind of support requested from RWS. The coalitions appreciated this flexibility.

However, delays in RWS fund releases were repeatedly experienced. In 2006, the first year of RWS 2, for example, the first transfer of funds was done only in July, as a result of which project deliverables were likewise delayed.⁶³

Delayed release of funds in the next year was again noted by the *2008 RWS Annual Report*. Consequently, country-level activities bunched up in the second half of the year, especially in the last quarter. The report noted, “When fund transfers are delayed, only strong coalitions are able to accomplish the full deliverables as planned.”⁶⁴

The delays caused complications for regions and national coalitions; postponed activities threw plans awry and the funds then had to be spent and the activities implemented in a much shorter timeframe. National coalitions with secure core funding coped better than those which did not.

At the regional level, ASPBAE had to advance funds to cover staff salaries. ASPBAE also advanced the first tranche of RWS country allocation a few times.⁶⁵ It was only in 2009, more than halfway through RWS 2, that the full project funds were released within the calendar year to which they were allocated.⁶⁶

Highlights of RWS activities

The following table presents a partial listing of the highlights of RWS activities and engagements in its various projects and work areas from 2006 to 2009.⁶⁷

HIGHLIGHTS OF RWS ACTIVITIES

	Capacity-Building; General	Education Watch	Education Financing	Regional/Subregional Advocacy Engagements
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>October</i>: Asia Regional Training on Popular Communications for Education Advocates and Campaigners • <i>December</i>: RWS Strategic Planning Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EdWatch launched in Asia • <i>March</i>: Asia-Pacific EdWatch Planning Workshop • <i>July</i>: Subregional Training for EdWatch Researchers in Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>September</i>: ASPBAE delivered two workshops during the International People's Forum: "Debt and Privatisation of Education in Indonesia" and "Financing the Right to Quality Education" 	
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>July-August</i>: Conference on "Literacy Challenges in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>April</i>: Training Workshop for Data Analysts • <i>May</i>: Southeast Asia Workshop on "State Responsibility, Community Participation, and a Rights-Based Approach to Education Advocacy," hosted by E-Net Indonesia • <i>June</i>: South Asia Subregional EdWatch Workshop organised by ASPBAE, co-hosted by Child Workers in Nepal • Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Bangladesh EdWatch studies released • <i>December</i>: Regional EdWatch Synthesis presented in Public Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>July</i>: RWS Policy and Advocacy Team and some national coalition members participate in Regional Conference on ODA in Asia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASPBAE invited to join Technical Support Groups of UNESCO's Mid-Decade Assessment Steering Committee • <i>February</i>: ASPBAE facilitated participation of three national coalitions in 8th UNESCO EFA Coordinators' Meeting • <i>September</i>: ASPBAE and two national coalitions participate in UNESCO Writers Workshop for Peer Review of Draft EFA Mid-Decade Assessment for East Asian, South Asian and Southeast Asian member states • <i>December</i>: ASPBAE, GCE and NEP Cambodia jointly organized the GCE Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation

HIGHLIGHTS OF RWS ACTIVITIES				
2008		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India, Nepal and Sri Lanka EdWatch studies released • <i>September</i>: Regional EdWatch Evaluation Conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>May</i>: Working Group on ODA for Education formed • <i>October</i>: Participation in Follow-up Meeting and Capacity-Building Workshop on Education Financing, organised by EI and ActionAid • Pilot advocacy engagement on alternative budgets, Sri Lanka and Philippines (with Pakistan to follow in 2009) • <i>November</i>: RWS Asia-Pacific Conference on "Financing for Education and Development: Banking on the Class of 2015" • Advocacy handout on ODA for Education printed and disseminated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>May and August</i>: Policy Meeting of South Asian and Southeast Asian coalitions to strategise on engaging with UNESCO, government EFA units and education ministries in EFA Mid-Decade Assessment • <i>February and June</i>: UNESCO policy workshops for governments in Asia, ministries of education and other education stakeholders for Southeast Asia (February) and for South Asia (June) • <i>September</i>: Participation by ASPBAE and two national coalitions in "Reaching the Unreached: Meeting of South-East Asian Countries to Achieve the EFA Goals Together by 2015" • Three regionally coordinated campaigns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>April</i>: Global Action Week, with the theme "Education to End Exclusion" - Campaign on "Genuine Aid for Quality Education" around the G8 Summit and Doha Financing for Development - Reenergised campaign on adult education in preparation for CONFINTEA VI in 2009
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>March</i>: Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation of National Education Coalitions with the theme, "Strengthening the Frontlines to Propel Concrete Policy Action" • <i>October</i>: Consultation-Workshop on "Privatisation Issues in Education" • RWS Creative Narratives and Knowledge-Sharing Project • Transnational Advocacy Research Project, in Asia focusing on E-Net Philippines and NCE India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Toolkit on EdWatch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>February</i>: South Asia Workshop on "Budget Tracking Toolkit" • <i>Late 2009/early 2010</i>: Country-level Capacity-Building Workshops on "Education ODA" <p>(Both workshops were partially funded by RWS.)</p>	
<p><i>Source</i>: RWS annual reports, 2006-2009.</p>				

The overall impact of RWS on education advocacy in Asia can best be seen in its impact on the attainment of EFA goals, its contribution to the policy gains that were achieved, and its impact on policy advocacy.

Impact of RWS in achievement of EFA goals

ASPBAE Secretary General Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan identified the biggest impact of RWS on achievement of the Education for All goals:⁶⁸

One of the key strategies identified in the Dakar Framework of Action was the need to mobilise strong civil society participation in the development of policy. It was very much highlighted in the discussions in Dakar that in order to achieve the goals and targets set collectively by the international community, it would be important to involve key stakeholders and that included teachers unions, civil society organisations and NGOs.

I think we have moved closer to that premise because the Real World Strategies programme was able to build competencies and capacities for civil society organisations to better engage in Education for All processes, and to harness the competencies of civil society to contribute to the attainment of the EFA goals.

Important policy gains

Maria Khan highlighted several important policy gains of RWS in the Asia-Pacific. She pointed to “significant gains particularly in education financing that were achieved, particularly in the Philippines. The coalition in the Philippines was particularly successful in increasing budgetary allocation, for example, for alternative learning systems, and a lot of the work in building capacities of the coalition in the Philippines to achieve this has been through the support of the Real World Strategies programme.”⁶⁹

Maria Khan added, “There were also successful policy gains, for example, for the coalition in Cambodia. They were able to successfully work towards the eradication of informal school fees in the country, and steps are underway in terms of making sure that these are implemented more robustly in Cambodia.”⁷⁰

Maria Khan also considered the landmark Education Act in India as a significant policy gain, saying, “While, of course, there are several players who have contributed to making sure that this became a reality, the NCE in India has certainly been a key player in this.”⁷¹ And, as Khan noted, “The RWS programme has been highly supportive of these coalitions in their efforts to achieve these policy gains.”

Impact of RWS in policy advocacy

Reflecting on the impact of RWS in terms of policy advocacy, Maria Khan said,⁷²

One can cite several positive policy developments on account of stronger civil society engagement and input. We are so far away from the targets we have set for 2015, so the coming few years will be very critical in terms of making sure that whatever gains which have been achieved are not further eroded.

The financial crisis, the food crisis and climate change pose very serious threats in terms of securing these gains so it is important, especially in the last leg towards the 2015 targets, that CSOs are not thwarted in their efforts for lack of resources and lack of support to sustain their capacity to engage policy, and to engage governments and donors in preserving the gains and, indeed, moving even further to achieve EFA goals.

With the mentoring and support of RWS, the education coalitions realized that, to rise to the EFA challenge and advance the EFA goals, there was need for policy advocacy; there was need for training in effective advocacy; and there was need for conducting advocacy at all levels: local, national, subregional, regional and global.

Expanded scope of RWS 2

There is no doubt that the scope of RWS has expanded in its second phase.* In 2006 Real World Strategies – Phase 2 (RWS 2) covered only eight countries in Asia: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Solomon Islands. By 2010 RWS had included two more countries, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, and linked up with education advocacy networks in Thailand, Vietnam, Japan and Australia through various activities.

At present, RWS continues in its efforts to translate policy agenda into action at national and subnational levels by deepening the bench of expert policy researchers and policy advocates among the education coalitions, and by harnessing the knowledge and skills gained from the internal reflection processes conducted, in order to gain political impact through clustered engagements on common cross-cutting concerns.⁷³

Both ASPBAE and the national coalitions are unanimous in hoping the RWS programme can be sustained. Without RWS, Raquel Castillo fears that national coalitions might suddenly lose the space where they “collectively strengthened themselves, collectively learned things and collectively advocated around specific priority policy issues. The movement in Asia-Pacific might not be as vibrant.”⁷⁴ Continued advocacy in regional platforms, which is still at a relatively new stage, is particularly vulnerable without RWS support.

* RWS 1 covered India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.





The timing is also crucial, with only five years left to go before the target dates for achieving EFA and the MDGs in 2015. Raquel Castillo urged, “The cohesive force that transforms national coalitions into a movement should be kept.”⁷⁵

A strategic vision

While immediate campaign gains are gratifying and useful, the RWS looks farther afield, with a strategic vision.

Expounding on the importance of a strategic, long-term vision for RWS, Cecilia Soriano said, “This is what we have learned very strongly in RWS: Education advocacy should not be determined by projects. And we should be continuing to do this at the strategic level.... We believe that education advocacy is a lifetime dedication, and whatever needs to be done to ensure that every child, every youth, every adult receives education is something that we have to work together through RWS.”⁷⁶

Saloni Singh expressed this strategic, long-sighted perspective in this way, “In RWS, we build realistic strategies for the real world so that there can be no discrimination, we will have justice, and everybody enjoys peace. We seek to build a world of peace where we prioritize education for all.”⁷⁷

Realistic, practical, and pragmatic strategies

Although it may, so to say, look to the stars in having a far-ranging, strategic vision, RWS nevertheless has its feet firmly planted on the ground in adopting realistic and pragmatic strategies that can readily find practical application in the real world.

As Mohammad Muntasim Tanvir said, “The Real World Strategies programme ... is there to factor in practical, pragmatic strategies, not just theoretical or conceptual frameworks of advocacy, for making real changes in policy in favour of the people who are missing out on education.”⁷⁸

These are strategies for educational development that would not only look good on paper but would be truly effective out there in the field, in real world situations, and which can be practicably applied to garner concrete, tangible results on the ground, with real people and communities.

Raquel Castillo noted that RWS is interested in “drawing lessons from real world experiences”, and is about “learning by doing.”⁷⁹ Mohammad Muntasim Tanvir observed that the RWS is engaged in “sharpening skills and knowledge by testing these in the real world.”⁸⁰

As the NGO Education Partnership of Cambodia realized, differing political realities call for different modes of campaign.

Appreciating the human dimension

Often, with massive movements involving huge numbers of people, there is the tendency to reduce people to nameless, faceless statistics. RWS made an effort to appreciate the human dimension, always considering that even the large-scale campaigns at the national, regional, subregional and global levels involve real people, with real stories, aspiring for real change.

In the RWS reflection sessions for South Asia, Rama Kant Rai succinctly expressed a sense of this when he said that RWS serves a valuable and useful function in the community of education advocates and stakeholders in the region “because we have a very large family here in Asia. These are all the people that have real stories and seek real change, and I am confident that together we can all make education a reality for all.”⁸¹

In essence, this is what the RWS experience means: Real people. Real stories. Real change.

NOTES

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38. Interview with E-Net Philippines National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano, 8 March 2010.
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40. Interview with Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, 14 September 2010.
41. Interview with Aloysius Matthews, 1 March 2010.
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45. Interview with Sharda Basnet, Board member of the National Coalition for Education (NCE) – Nepal, RWS South Asia reflection sessions, Nepal, 18 February 2010.
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INDIA CASE STUDY: NATIONAL COALITION FOR EDUCATION



**National
Coalition
for Education**

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CAMPAIGNING FOR THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION LAW



Governing India poses daunting challenges for any administration. With a growth rate of 1.4 per cent,¹ India's population of more than one billion² is not only massive, but it is also incredibly diverse: the people speak 33 languages and 2,000 dialects, and practise a variety of religions.³

Almost two in five of the population are under 15 years old, which indicates the scale of administration required for a public education system.

STATE OF EDUCATION: LEAP AND GAPS

Persisting inequalities despite gains in education

In 1951, soon after the country attained independence, only about two out of eleven (18.3%) of the people were literate. By 2001, when the last national census was undertaken, literacy had risen to more than seven out of eleven (64.8%) – quite an accomplishment.

But a closer look reveals persisting inequalities: more than three-fourths (75.3%) of males are literate in contrast to more than half (53.8 per cent) for females, reflecting persisting gender disparity.⁴ There is also geographical disparity: almost four in five (79.9%) are literate in urban areas in contrast to less than three in five (58.7%) in rural areas.

Indeed, it is difficult to untangle the complex realities of education in India, where things are often not what they appear at first glance. The latest United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) figures, given in the following table, show significant gains; although at this rate of progress, India is not likely to achieve universal primary education by 2015.

PROGRESS OF INDIA IN THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 OF ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION (%)				
	2001	2005	2006	2007
Net enrolment ratio in primary education				
Both sexes	84.1	94.4	94.6	95.5
Boys	90.6	96.4	96.7	97.3
Girls	77.0	92.3	92.4	93.6
Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach last grade of primary				
Both sexes	61.4	65.8	x	x
Boys	59.7	66.2	x	x
Girls	63.5	65.3	x	x
Primary completion rate				
Both sexes	72.6	85.3	86.1	93.6
Boys	79.0	87.8	88.7	95.3
Girls	65.6	82.6	83.3	91.7
Literacy rate of 15-24 years old				
Both sexes	76.4	x	81.1	x
Men	84.2	x	88.4	x
Women	67.7	x	74.4	x

Source: Millennium Development Goals Indicators, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>.
Note: Some of the MDG data presented in this website have been adjusted by the responsible specialized agencies to ensure international comparability, in compliance with their shared mandate to assess progress towards achieving the MDGs at the regional and global levels. The mark "x" indicates unavailable data.

Missing facets in education picture

Many facets are also missing from the picture of the state of education in the country.

For one, there is no certainty just how many children never entered the school system in the first place. These include children forced into bonded labour or child slavery. The 2001 Census registered 12.7 million child workers, indicating an increase over the previous figure ten years before. There is also the issue of the vast multitudes of so-called nowhere children – not in school, but not at work either – who number 72 million.⁵

Nor is there a precise figure for children who dropped out without completing primary school, as different surveys cite different statistics. What is clear is that there are millions of them.

A study notes this discrepancy in figures: "At least 35 million children aged 6 to 14 years do not attend school (this number differs depending on who conducts the survey; government surveys suggest as little as 5 million out-of-school children, while other independently conducted surveys suggest as high as 85 million out-of-school children)."⁶ The 2001 Census reported the dropout rate in primary classes at nearly one out of three.⁷

The table below, published in the July 2009 Aide Memoire of the 10th Joint Review Mission of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA, or Education for All Movement), the India Government's flagship programme on education, also enumerated contradictory statistics:⁸

The 2001 Census reported the dropout rate in primary classes at nearly one out of three.



NATIONAL ANNUAL AVERAGE DROPOUT RATES FOR PRIMARY BY DATA SOURCE	
Data Source	Annual Average Dropout Rate Primary (%)
Dropout Study	1.4
District Information System for Education	8.1
Selected Education Statistics	7.1
Out-of-School Children Study	5.4

The biggest factor
is poverty:
almost three
out of eight (37%)
of the population
lived below
the poverty line
as of 2010.

The report cited the figure of 2.8 million out-of-school youth, based on household surveys by teachers and communities. At the same time, it doubted the “plausibility” of these figures, citing other studies on enrolment, dropout and survival to Class V (the last year of lower primary school) that suggest a far greater number of children remain out of school:

For example, calculations by the Mission, which use the (yet to be fully confirmed) overall class-wise dropout rates reported in the recently completed Dropout Study and class-wise enrolment data reported in DISE [District Information System for Education] 2008-09, suggest that 2.7 million children drop out of school **each year**, which would indicate a much higher number of out-of-school children overall, once the never-enrolled children are included.⁹

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development’s latest report on the number of OOSC (2.8 million), slightly less than 50 percent of these children were never enrolled in school and slightly more than 50 percent are dropouts. . . . The total estimated number of OOSC needs to be considered with caveats. Targeted efforts to track out-of-school children in Varanasi and Orissa have shown that the actual numbers of OOSC were 8 and 6 times more, respectively, than the SSA household survey numbers of OOSC. Furthermore, the child tracking surveys of Orissa indicate that there are double enrolments of the same children in some instances. This indicates a need to verify school enrolment registers (captured in DISE) with those in the Village Education Registers compiled through household census, to correct for possible double counting.¹⁰

Reasons for dropping out

Many factors conspire to keep children away from school.

The biggest factor is poverty: almost three out of eight (37%) of the population lived below the poverty line as of 2010.¹¹ Thus, many families withdraw their children from school and put them to work to contribute to family income as bonded labourers outside the home, unpaid labourers in farms and family livelihoods or, especially in the case of girls, to assume responsibilities at home while the parents work.

Human trafficking, including that of children, is a chronic problem especially in impoverished states whose populations are vulnerable to false promises of employment.

Disparity in access to education afflicts disadvantaged sectors. Muslims, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have traditionally had less access to education, a pattern that persists today.

Poverty affects not just children's entry into school but also their academic performance. Suchitra, a primary school teacher in Orissa state, told fellow participants at a workshop on education, "Some children are so hungry, they cannot concentrate in class; they just think about when the mid-day meal will arrive."¹²

The standing of women in society also affects girls' access to education.¹³ Figures consistently show girls lagging behind in literacy, school attendance and completion. More than half of girls fail to enrol in school; those who do are likely to drop out by the age of 12 years.¹⁴ Many of those who do enter the school system are withdrawn as soon as they reach puberty. Early marriage is outlawed but remains widely practiced in some states, and this practice dooms girls' chances of continuing their education.*

Part of the problem lies with parents' lack of awareness of the education system. For example, Delhi City Mayor Prithiraj Sahawi relates that the Delhi municipal government and around 20 non-governmental organisations teamed up in 2009 to visit parents in slum areas to clarify what incentives and benefits are provided by the public education system, and dissuade them from sending their children to work. As a result, 10,000 more children enrolled in school.¹⁵

Urgent issues in education

Schools in Delhi are comparatively better off as the municipal government has more resources, but some schools still lack basic equipment. In MCD Tajpur Goyla Primary School, for instance, children sit on the floor for lack of chairs and desks. The dearth of classrooms and teachers also results in teacher-pupil ratios of as high as 1:59.¹⁶ In rural villages, the lack of schools and the quality of education, where available, are urgent issues.

The 7th All-India Education Survey of 2002 lists some concerns on the state of education in India:¹⁷

- Only more than half (53%) of habitation has a primary school.
- Only a fifth (20%) of habitation has a secondary school.
- On average, an upper primary school is located three kilometres away in two out of nine (22%) areas under habitation.
- In nearly three out of five (60%) schools, there are less than two teachers to teach Classes I to V.

* To redress the gender bias, the Government of India has introduced incentives in the form of cash or bicycles to encourage families to send girl children to school.

Poverty affects
not just children's
entry into school
but also their
academic
performance.

- On average, there are less than three teachers per primary school, and they have to manage classes I to V every day.
- One in 40 primary schools conducted lessons in open spaces or tents.
- In Andhra Pradesh in South India, 52 upper primary schools operated without a building in 2002.
- In Maharashtra in West India, 32 schools operated without a building in 2002.

This is the situation in education that the National Coalition for Education (NCE) has sought to change in the past 15 years.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR EDUCATION AND THE SECOND FREEDOM STRUGGLE TO BREAK THE CHAINS OF ILLITERACY

From streets to Parliament:

Coalition claims children's right to education

During the 1990s, teachers unions, child rights activists and children's NGOs had worked both independently as well as collaboratively on the issues of child rights, child labour and the right to free and compulsory education.

In 1996 these organisations worked more closely together on the "Education for Liberation, and Liberation for Education" campaign spearheaded by *Bachpan Bachao Andolan*, known for rescuing children and campaigning against bonded child labour.

Call for constitutional amendment on right to education

The groups were particularly set on introducing a constitutional amendment on free and compulsory education as a fundamental right of children until the age of 18 years, believing this would be a decisive weapon for child protection.

Later, an informal agreement was made to form the National Coalition for Education and focus attention on achieving Education for All.

Spurred by NCE, progressive parliamentarians led by then Member of Parliament Ravi Prakash Verma established in 1999 the Parliamentary Forum on Education, which played a critical role in subsequent campaigns. The forum is now counted among NCE's members and described as "the epitome of political lobbying towards the formation of child-friendly policies."

NCE also played a significant role in establishing the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), which is the the Parliamentary Forum's counterpart in the state legislature, and in forming the panchayat, or Village Education Committee (VEC), at grassroots



level, composed of peoples' representatives, teachers and local government officials.¹⁸

Measures addressing disparity in education access

Meantime, the Indian government launched *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* in 2001 as its flagship programme on EFA.¹⁹ SSA had the following objectives:

- Ensure all children are in school, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternate School or “to School” camp by 2003.
- Ensure all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007.
- Ensure all children complete eight years of schooling by 2010.
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality, with emphasis on education for life.
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007, and at elementary education level by 2010.
- Achieve universal retention by 2010.

With the SSA, government started to provide uniforms, books, mid-day meals and some school supplies, which effectively reduced the financial burden on families.

TIMELINE	
1996.	Child rights activists, NGOs and teachers' federations informally agree to organize NCE.
1999.	Parliamentary Forum on Education is established.
April 2000.	Government signs Dakar Framework for Action on EFA.
2001.	Government launches SSA to achieve goal of “Universalisation of Elementary Education of Satisfactory Quality by 2010”. NCE organises Shiksha Yatra (Education March), covering 15,000 km.
January 2002	86th Constitutional Amendment passed, committing State to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years.
2002	NCE is formally organised.
2001.	UPA elected; issues National Common Minimum Programme with significant commitments to education, including passage of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Law.

Controversy on recruitment of para-teachers

But in an attempt to address the shortage of teachers, especially in remote rural areas, the SSA also institutionalised the controversial practice of recruiting para-teachers, a concept introduced by donor advisers in the late 1990s.

Para-teachers are usually local people who received basic training before being sent into classrooms. Para-teachers are also paid very low salaries, merely 2,000 to 9,500 rupees per month (in contrast to 24,000 rupees for regular teachers)²⁰ and have short contracts of up to 11 months, which need to be renewed constantly.

Rough estimates indicate that there is now one para-teacher for every three regular teachers.²¹ Professional teachers' organisations



Article 21A
falls directly
under Article 21,
which guarantees
the right to life,
as if to say that
education
helps guarantee
the quality
of life.

have opposed the practice of hiring para-teachers, warning that this would negatively affect the quality of education.²¹

Marching for education

While allies lobbied within Parliament, outside in the streets, NCE member organisations and their supporters launched demonstrations to claim children's right to education. This culminated in 2001 in a *Shiksha Yatra* (Education March) covering 15,000 kilometres over 20 states. Starting from Kanyakumari in India's southernmost tip, and reaching up to the capital, New Delhi, the march organised by NCE member organisations mobilised tens of thousands of people and generated much publicity. By the time the *yatra* ended in June 2001, the marchers had met with many MPs.

This was followed by four more *yatras* organised by one of NCE's biggest member organisations, the All-India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF). Ram Pal Singh, Secretary General of AIPTF, relates that from 23 September to 18 October 2001, teachers, children and even some politicians marched from Atari in the West, Motihari in the North, Guwahati in the East and Chennai in the South. Around 50,000 people converged in Bangalore, Karnataka State, where AIPTF convened its biennial conference. There, they pledged to continue fighting for children's right to education.²³

The attention spawned by these *yatras* prompted more than 200 questions on education immediately afterwards in Parliament. These included such questions as: Is the government aware of the *Shiksha Yatra*? What are the *yatra's* demands? What steps will the government take to meet these demands? Has the government taken a decision to bring about the Constitutional amendment being sought?

Major victory: Approval of constitutional amendment on children's right to education

There was widespread rejoicing in December 2002 when the 86th Amendment to the Constitution was approved. The amendment, contained in Article 21A, states, "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State may, **by law**, determine."

It is significant that Article 21A falls directly under Article 21, which guarantees the right to life, as if to say that education helps guarantee the quality of life.

Needed: An enabling law

By now it was clear that the battle for education rights was going to be waged one step at a time. The 86th Constitutional Amendment may have been a victory, but Parliament still had to pass an enabling law to enforce children's right to education.

NCE thus threw all its energies behind what it dubbed “The Second Freedom Struggle to Break the Chains of Illiteracy”.

Formal establishment of NCE

NCE was formally established in 2002, although it registered with government only in 2009. Today, NCE’s membership consists of a virtual powerhouse of Indian social movements, including:²⁴

- BBA, a network of more than 760 organisations and 80,000 social activists working on child rights
- All-India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF), a union of 1.3 million primary teachers
- All-India Federation of Teachers Organisations (AIFTO), a union of 1.2 million teachers
- All-India Secondary Teachers Federation (AISTF), a union of 850,000 secondary teachers
- All-India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE), a network of principals and teachers from 300 colleges and 20,000 schools
- World Vision India, an NGO foundation working for child rights, education, and development in 6,000 communities across India

NCE’s vision and mission are the following:

- Vision: NCE envisions a society where all children up to 18 years of age are in school and are getting free and good quality education driven by human values, to enable them to become empowered and productive citizens.
- Mission: NCE shall strive to restore the fundamental right of every child without exception to receive free and quality education up to the age of 18 years on the basis of equal opportunity, without discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity or religion, in an environment of love and care and with appropriate facilities conducive to joyful learning.

Gaining ground: UPA gets elected and includes education guarantees in government programme

The Second Freedom Struggle gained some ground in 2004 when the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was elected into power. The UPA initially included some progressive groups which prevailed upon the coalition to insert substantial education guarantees into the UPA government’s National Common Minimum Programme:²⁵

- Increase public spending in education to at least 6 per cent of GDP, with at least half of this amount allocated for the primary and secondary sectors.
- Introduce a cess on all central taxes to finance the commitment to universalise access to quality basic education.
- Ensure that nobody is denied professional education because he or she is poor.
- Introduce a national cooked nutritious mid-day meal scheme, funded mainly by the central government, in primary and secondary schools.



- Universalise the Integrated Child Development Services scheme to provide a functional *anganwadi* (government-sponsored mother-care and child-care centre for children aged from 0 to 6 years) in every settlement and ensure full coverage for all children.
- Fully back and support all NGO efforts in the area of primary education.
- Protect the rights of children, strive for the elimination of child labour, ensure facilities for schooling and extend special care to the girl child.

Of these promises, only two have been implemented throughout the country: a) the mid-day meal and b) 2 per cent primary/secondary education cess, and one per cent higher/technical education cess on all central taxes was immediately levied on income tax, excise duty, customs duty and service tax.

The UPA government also promised to pass a law on the right to free and compulsory education, as required by the Constitution, for education rights to be enforced. Draft bills were consequently introduced in Parliament in 2005, 2007 and 2008, but failed to muster the necessary votes.

Inadequate provisions of education bill

Nor did these bills have the full support of NCE and its member organisations who opposed several provisions. For one, they wanted the scope of the bill expanded to guarantee education for children who were from 0 to 18 years old, rather than just for those who were 6 to 14 years old, such that free and compulsory education would encompass pre-school, primary school and secondary school.

Under the UPA bill, which was deemed inadequate by NCE, the age bracket of from 6 to 14 years to be guaranteed free and compulsory education would encompass only five years in lower primary school and three years in upper primary school.

Massive demonstrations for improvements in the education bill

NCE member organisations again called on their forces to march in the streets.

On 21 February 2006, over 1,000 children led the Blackboard March from the Jantar Mantar to the Parliament. Their demands were written on blackboards they carried: “Ensure recruitment of trained teachers, to take immediate effect,” “No more child exploitation; we want education” and “Please invest 6 per cent of GDP on education.” They also submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India to convey their demands.²⁶

AIPTF constantly reviewed each draft bill and submitted counterproposals regarding controversial provisions on management of



schools and teachers. Member-teachers were mobilised for massive demonstrations in September 2005 and August 2006.

In February 2007, 100,000 teachers converged for a two-day demonstration outside Parliament, again calling for improvements in the draft bill. Shri Arjun Singh, then Union Minister for Human Resource Development, invited AIPTF leaders to a meeting and promised to support their demands.²⁷

Campaigning at the grassroots level

At the grassroots level, NCE member organisations brought legislators to schools to see for themselves the state of education infrastructure. This led to legislators' support for some improvements.

In child-friendly villages, NCE member organisations put up councils to monitor if some children were not going to school and determine the reasons for this, lobbied to get more teachers appointed so as to reduce the high teacher-pupil ratio, and encouraged school administrations to adopt child-focused planning.²⁸

Lobbying with government

NCE sent voluminous letters of appeal to the government, and NCE leaders met with Parliament ministers, the President and the Prime Minister. In 2007 AIPTF, along with the three other teacher federations in NCE, drafted their own version of the RTE bill and submitted this to the President of India, who passed it on to Parliament.

Nevertheless, by the time the UPA government reached the end of its term in 2009, an RTE bill had still not been passed by Parliament.

THE FINAL STRETCH: NCE MOBILISES FOR THE 2009 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

For NCE, the UPA government's failure to pass the RTE law amounted to a betrayal of its promises contained in the National Common Minimum Programme. NCE called government to task for the contrast between its rhetoric and the reality.** When general elections were called in April-May 2009, NCE pulled out all stops to ensure the elected MPs would consist of those who supported their cause.

Soliciting pledge of support

NCE called for a joint planning meeting in Delhi on 29 to 30 January, 2009, attended by 252 participants from 12 states.²⁹

Rama Kant Rai, NCE Convenor and Board member, unveiled

** This, incidentally, is also the title of the contribution of NCE to the Real World Strategies Asia – South Pacific Education Watch Reports: *Rhetoric vs. Reality: The State of Elementary Education in India*, published in 2008.



plans to enjoin all leading parties and candidates to sign a pledge supporting, among others:

- The Education for All Manifesto
- A law implementing education as a fundamental right
- Expenditure of 6 per cent of GDP on education
- Amendments of laws to eradicate child labour and child trafficking; and
- Enabling village panchayats (Village Education Committees, or VECs) and local communities to monitor government spending on education at the national and local levels.

Participants enthusiastically agreed to convene meetings in their 12 states and launch local campaigns. Special plans were also made for a media campaign.

Rai also announced that, in addition to NCE members, partners of prominent NGOs such as World Vision, Oxfam, Care International, ActionAid and Save the Children would also support the campaign.

According to NCE Research and Documentation Coordinator Sandeep Mishra and NCE National Advocacy Coordinator Umesh Kumar Gupta, NCE worked on three layers of target audiences for advocacy, each with a corresponding objective:³⁰

- Members of Parliament: for policy change
- NCE partners and support organisations: to lobby with their own constituencies (e.g., health or environmental groups) to consistently take up education advocacy when meeting government contacts
- Grassroots: to generate awareness of education issues

Election campaign strategies and components

NCE's election campaign concept paper listed the campaign's strategies and components:

- Strategies
 - ♦ Mount pressure on all the political parties to sign the pledge letter and change their election or party manifesto so as to be in tune with the campaign, since this will be an issue in the forthcoming election.
 - ♦ Strengthen people's vigilance on elementary education by encouraging them to monitor and contribute to the better functioning of schools.
 - ♦ Strengthen the VEC/*panchayat* and parents-teachers associations by training, guidance, and convergence with the government department, education department and teachers' unions.
- Components
 - ♦ Lobby with parliamentary candidates and currently seated parliamentarians to promote the right to education in the forthcoming election by including the issue in their party manifesto.
 - ♦ Engage Panchayat Raj institutions and teachers unions in monitoring the quality of education through civil society participation at the community level.

- ◆ Mobilise communities to increase enrolment in schools and monitor retention of students.

Winning strategies

Among the strategies effectively used in the campaign are the following:

- *Pledge letter signed by individual candidates*

NCE and its member organisations in 12 states tracked down the candidates for MP, explained the education issues and persuaded them to sign the pledge letter (shown below). For good measure, they were often accompanied by children from child-friendly villages or children who had been rescued from bonded labour and who, therefore, spoke with particular passion about the need for education to be made compulsory so that children go to school and not to work.

NCE announced, “We will declare a list of child-friendly (*bal mitra*) candidates who sign the pledge letters in favour of child rights.” The catch: NCE warned, “The candidates who will oppose the pledge letter and refuse to sign it will be blacklisted and opposed by the mass campaign.”³¹

NATIONAL COALITION FOR EDUCATION

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Campaign for Child Rights during the 15th General (*Lok Sabha*) Elections

Pledge Letter

Name of Candidate: _____

Local Address: _____

Name of *Lok Sabha* Constituency: _____

Name of Political Party: _____

I pledge that:

1. I do admit that the prevalence of child labour, child servitude, and child trafficking in the country is a disgrace for our civilized society. I will strive for the total eradication of child slavery and child trafficking and, accordingly, will work, with utmost sincerity, both inside and outside Parliament, to pursue this goal. I will exert the best of my efforts to ensure legislation and implementation of stringent laws against the evil practices of employing child labour, child abuse, and child trafficking, and make sure that the perpetrators are put behind bars.
2. I will strive for the public provisioning of equitable, quality, compulsory, and free education for all children of the age group from 0 to 18 years.
3. In particular, I will work for inclusion of children of the age group from 0 to 6 years in the definition of child. In addition, I will also strive for the universal provisioning of facilities and services targeting protection, security, good health, and development of all children, free from all forms of discrimination and exclusion.
4. I shall exert my honest efforts to ensure effective implementation of international covenants and Constitutional mandates relating to child rights.

Other Suggestions: _____

Date: _____ Signature of Candidate: _____

Name of the Volunteer / Activist / Organisation collecting the Pledge Letter: _____

Local Address: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

- *Appeal for inclusion of the right of children to education in party platforms and manifestos*

All major political parties were sent an appeal letter signed by the biggest member organisations of NCE – a not-so-subtle reminder of the groups’ constituencies which numbered several millions. In the letter, NCE cited statistics reflecting the dismal state of the educational system, summarised commitments to education made by other leading political parties as well as the central government under the SSA programme, and apprised the parties of how much more needed to be done to meet national targets. The letter ended with an appeal for the political parties to explicitly bring in NCE’s demands into their party platforms and manifestos:

“Keeping in view your concern and commitment in favour of millions of children, we are approaching you to kindly include these points in your party’s manifesto, raise your voice to make the ‘right of children to free and compulsory education’ a reality, and show your noble commitment towards the children of this country:

- Children aged 0 to 18 years should be included in the proposed legislation bill of 2008 for universal right to education (This same age group has been specified in child justice legislation in the United Nations Declaration.);
- Six percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be spent on education; one-fifth (20%) of the revenue budget and half (50%) of the education budget should be spent on elementary education;
- Regular teachers should be appointed to ensure quality education. The practice of appointing part-time and para-teachers should be stopped. All part-time teachers should be mainstreamed after training, along with regular teachers;
- Changes should be carried out in the proposed legislation to ensure quality education, with indicators that can be monitored so that parents and communities can monitor the quality of education;
- There should be a common schooling system for all children, irrespective of their parent’s socio-economic status;
- The present Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 should be amended to prohibit all labour involving children; and
- Proper arrangement for rigorous imprisonment of child labour and child trafficking offenders should be made.”

In addition, NCE examined the platforms of all political parties and monitored their policy pronouncements on education. It

also reminded opposition parties of failed UPA promises, such as expenditure of 6 per cent of GDP on education, thus giving them some political ammunition.

By the end of the electoral campaign, 200 of the 700 candidates for MP had signed the pledge. Of those who were eventually elected into office, four out of five (80%) had signed the pledge.³² Moreover, the Parliamentary Forum on Education gained 61 new members.³³ Four parties also responded positively by either inserting NCE's demands into their manifestos or agreeing to work on the issue of children's right to education. All these augured well for NCE and the children.

- *Media campaign*

NCE organised press conferences, sent out press releases and persuaded contacts in media to report on NCE's campaign. It also disclosed to media which candidates had signed the pledge and which ones refused to do so – stories that media eagerly grabbed and reported.

- *Lobbying in Parliament*

NCE did not let up the pressure. In July 2009, it sent congratulatory letters to all newly elected parliamentarians, reminding them yet again about the pending bill on the right to education, enclosing a detailed critique of the bill, and urging them to rectify the bill's weaknesses.

When the 15th Parliament convened, NCE campaigners knocked on the doors of parliamentarians in Delhi and legislative assembly members at the state level. NCE also continued its effective strategy of feeding questions to parliamentarian allies so these could be raised during official sessions. As a result, 95 MPs and more than 100 state legislative assembly members raised education-related questions in their respective Houses, spurring more discussion and greater awareness of education issues.

NCE also organised roundtable discussions to brief parliamentarians and legislative assembly members who were less familiar with the education issues.

Landmark moment: Passing of Education Act

It was crunch time. The UPA government was already under considerable pressure for failing to pass the Education Law in their first term. First, the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House of Parliament) debated and passed The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009. Then it was the turn of the *Lok Sabha* (Lower House), and on 4 August 2009, it too passed the Act. Finally, the Act received the assent of India President Pratibha Singh Patil on 26 August 2009 – a truly landmark moment in education history.

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The celebrations were sweet but short: to be enforced, the Education Act had to be notified, i.e., government needed to set a date by which the Act would take effect and the people responsible for its implementation could be held accountable. Intense lobbying resumed once more.

Mass mobilisations for notification of Education Act

In February 2010, NCE mobilised 5,000 activists, including teachers and children, to demonstrate in front of Parliament and demand action from the President and the Prime Minister. That same month, NCE also mobilised children in a week-long campaign which saw them knocking on the doors of MPs' houses to urge these parliamentarians to work for the implementation of the law. At least 16 MPs signed the pledge letter brought by the children and promised to raise the issue in Parliament.³⁴

Similar activities were organised outside Delhi. For example, NCE Orissa staff member Naba Kishore relates that in Orissa State, 2,000 people formed a human chain to symbolise their united commitment to pursuing the right to education law. The group included three members of the state legislature.³⁵

Salient Provisions of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009

- Children aged 6 to 14 years have a right to free and compulsory admission to elementary education (consisting of eight years of lower and higher primary school) in their neighbourhood.
- There shall be no entrance fee or other expenses preventing children from pursuing and completing elementary education.
- The state or local body shall undertake construction of a primary school within one kilometre, and of an upper primary school within three kilometres, of neighbourhoods.
- If government schools are not available, locally aided schools are obliged to provide free education to at least one-fourth (25%) of their intake capacity.
- In the absence of aided schools, unaided schools shall admit the children to at least one-fourth (25%) of their intake capacity.
- Children who have not enrolled previously or who have dropped out shall be admitted to the class appropriate to their age.
- No child shall be failed or expelled up to class 8.
- No child shall be subjected to corporal punishment.

It took eight months before the wheels finally moved. On 1 April 2010, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 was notified for implementation in all states and union territories of India.

REAPING THE FRUITS OF THE CAMPAIGN

Shared credit for success

NCE does not claim sole credit for the passage of the Right to Education Law. “We cannot say we did it alone,” said Rama Kant Rai. Other organisations had also put pressure on government and provided advice on legislation. Education Programme Officer for ActionAid Angela Taneja commented, “In a country like India, there are always many voices demanding the same thing and lobbying the same group of people. . . . The plurality of voices . . . demanding the same things also adds to the overall pressure on government.”³⁶

But having campaigned relentlessly for the law as a coalition since 2002, both at the national as well as the state levels, and with additional advocacy activities conducted by its member organisations, some of the credit is certainly due to NCE.

Critical presence for advocacy

Analysing the critical role NCE played in securing the passage of the RTE Act, Taneja observed:

NCE has strong roots in Delhi – which places it in an advantageous position for influencing Delhi-based policymakers. A lot of other coalitions and networks are not operating out of Delhi; since NCE does so, this gives it a pan-national reach, but not necessarily the ability to respond to issues immediately. This location advantage has been especially important in NCE’s efforts with MPs and government officials, as well as in its ability to influence donor agency people, many of whose headquarters are also in Delhi. . . .

While there were a number of voices demanding for the passage of an RTE Act at the beginning of the process, there has been something of an advocacy fatigue on the part of many coalitions. Consequently, there has been little actual coalition-based work at the end of the process. My personal impression is that NCE played a significant role at this point, filling a vacuum created by a lot of other networks that had effectively imploded or took a stand that was more radical (and, in my opinion, unrealistic – in the sense of being beyond their capacity to realistically deliver, based on their actual strength). NCE took a more balanced, middle-ground position.³⁷

Major campaign outcomes

NCE identifies three major outcomes of the campaign:

1. The campaign was able to obtain a guarantee that children will be provided education, and a tool – even a “weapon” – to compel all concerned to send children to school instead of to work.

Even before passage of the Right to Education Law, government had already taken measures towards providing EFA, which greatly reduced the financial burden on families. The law strengthens the guarantee that education is a fundamental right of all children in India, not subject to the whims of changing administrations. It also spells out the scaffolding that government must erect for public education infrastructure, including the necessary education financing, to substantiate this guarantee.

Just as importantly, the law makes the education of children mandatory, thus serving a warning to families who would rather generate income from their children and to those who would recruit children for work.

Although all parties are agreed that the law is not perfect (see the section on “Continuing Challenges”), nevertheless they concede that it is a bold starting point.

Already, children are starting to benefit by gaining greater access to schools. For example, a landmark ruling by the Delhi High Court declared that 874 children who were previously denied access to education be admitted to schools in accordance with the law. Most of these children came from disadvantaged sectors, and 350 of them were disabled.³⁸

2. The campaign generated greater awareness of education rights and issues.

NCE National Advocacy Coordinator Umesh Kumar Gupta says that greater awareness of education rights and issues is evident, for example, in the increased number questions on education and the longer time spent discussing education issues in parliamentary proceedings. Another indication of enhanced interest in education issues is that media was now calling NCE to ask for leads on stories regarding education and children.³⁹

The Parliamentary Forum for Education, whose establishment NCE had helped facilitate, has been cited as both an outcome of the campaign as well as a critical factor for the campaign’s success.⁴⁰ The Forum’s existence also ensures that education issues will always be highlighted in Parliament.

A landmark ruling by the Delhi High Court declared that 874 children who were previously denied access to education be admitted to schools in accordance with the law.

3. The campaign was able to push for a greater budgetary allocation for education.

NCE has pushed government to convert its rhetoric into reality by actually providing the resources needed to make quality education accessible. It has contributed to pressing the government to agree (at least in principle) to allocate expenditure on education amounting to 6.0 per cent of GDP. Actual education expenditure has increased, although not up to the scale promised: the actual figures are 3.2 per cent of GDP in 2009, and 4.3 per cent in 2010. The education budget for 2010 has also increased by 14.5 per cent from the 2009 level.⁴¹

Change seekers changed

Having spent so much time and effort campaigning for the Right to Education Law, NCE itself has been transformed by the experience. The following organisational changes have been noted:

- Within the coalition: more members and partners have joined and affiliated with the coalition, capabilities in planning and implementation have improved, advocacy skills have been developed, and a clearer understanding of their role as a coalition has been gained.
- Among coalition members: there has been an increase in education-focused campaigns.

Teachers' federations such as the AIPTE, which had previously been concerned primarily with teachers' welfare issues, became increasingly drawn to child-focused advocacy, as evident in the following comments:

- ♦ “Before, teachers thought it was government’s responsibility to bring children to school. But we see now that everyone has a role; we should all work together,” said Ram Chandra Dabas, principal of a primary school in Janak Puri, Delhi, and president of the Delhi chapter of AIPTE.⁴²
- ♦ Before, we worked to improve the teachers’ conditions, their status, and salaries. When we got these improvements, we decided to devote half of our time to improving education for children,” said Ram Pal Singh, Secretary General of AIPTE.⁴³

CAMPAIGN HIGHS AND LOWS

Factors for success

Some factors that greatly contributed towards attaining campaign objectives include:

- Evidence-based advocacy

Research, NCE realised, is the basic ingredient for successful advocacy. An education advocate said, “So we know the ground reality not by the government’s secondary data; we know the reality through our members, the school teachers, or the NGO partners. So we have the ground reality information and, based on this evidence, we do evidence-based advocacy.”⁴⁴

NCE’s evidence came in the form of the Education Watch research and briefing papers for MPs. NCE did its own research, but it also quoted from official reports, e.g., on early marriage, child trafficking, children affected by disasters etc., citing statistics and factual data which the government could not refute. On occasion, NCE would also show physical evidence, for example, by presenting during media conferences children who had been rescued from labour bondage, or by screening a video on rescued children.

Research continues to be a priority. Data gathered from participatory research covering 10 states in early 2010 will be used for future advocacy.

- Mass mobilisations

“If the demand for quality education can be generated, then the system will comply.”⁴⁵ This observation comes from someone who has an intimate knowledge of how government works: Ravi Prakash Verma, a former three-term MP who is also the current president of NCE.

Mass mobilisations serve several purposes:

- ♦ A show of force to remind government, particularly MPs, of the scale of organisational power behind the demands – and the size of NCE’s constituency is particularly impressive
- ♦ A magnet for media attention, which both adds to pressure upon the government and amplifies NCE’s message to the general public
- ♦ An opportunity to directly bring the issues to the people in the streets

Mass mobilisations, as these were conducted by NCE, were not just clenched-fist events. NCE also used “heart-touching” slogans and messages that appealed to the emotions such as: “No more child labour; we want education,” “Education is our right; give us education,” “Dear Finance Minister, spend 6 per cent of GDP on education” and “This is the second freedom struggle for education rights.”

- Direct lobbying with MPs and state legislators

NCE organised numerous face-to-face meetings with parliamentarians and legislators to lobby for education legislation and fi-

nancing. Delegations came to the meetings prepared, not just with evidence, but also with practical details of what legislators could do, e.g., visit primary schools to see for themselves the state of education, use the maximum amount of the MP Local Area Development Fund for education, ask questions during parliamentary sessions based on a list of questions that NCE had drafted.

NCE organisers knew that a single meeting would not suffice for their messages to get through, so they made repeat calls and follow-up visits. NCE also organised round-table discussions on education during each of the Parliament sessions.

MPs feel affinity for their constituency and are more responsive when confronted with their constituents. Hence, almost always during lobbying, education advocates were accompanied by children who had been rescued from bonded labour or who came from child-friendly villages supported by NCE partners. Children were briefed prior to lobbying and, after several experiences of lobbying, they became very assertive. When faced with the MPs' staff in their homes, the children would ask, "Are you the MP?" and if the response was, "No," they would then say, "Step aside, we want to speak with the MP."⁴⁶

- Parliamentary Forum and critical allies

A study noted, "One of the more outstanding achievements that was clear would not have happened if not for the NCE was the creation of the Parliamentary Forum. Without the NCE there would have been no space to create a dialogue amongst legislators and parliamentarians about the educational issues India is facing and how to go about change. Through this forum, the NCE has managed to get word out to the upper echelons of the government, in an attempt to begin a solid effort at educational reform."⁴⁷

Special mention for the establishment of the Parliamentary Forum on Education goes to former MP Ravi Prakesh Verma, who played a critical role in recruiting allies from among his peers at the *Lok Sabha*.

- Astute messaging

NCE Convenor and Board member Rama Kant Rai said, "Our messages to government and legislators were: a) 'This is good for your political agenda,' and b) 'Education is a good investment for the future.'"

NCE monitored the platforms of the political parties and the public statements of parliamentarians, and quoted these back to them. Rai said, "We would tell them, 'We're not asking for anything new; this is what you said in your platform.' It's more effective to convince them it was their idea all along, instead of making them feel we were selling something new."⁴⁸

“Without the NCE there would have been no space to create a dialogue amongst legislators and parliamentarians about the educational issues India is facing and how to go about change.”

- Organisational cohesion

“Campaigning is a matter of energising everyone,” said Rai. This starts with NCE Board members who, although busy with their own organisations’ tasks, were all active in the campaign. This also extends to member federations who came out in large numbers during mobilisations, and network partners at the district level who helped to identify and mobilise the children for lobbying and mass actions. The long campaigns have contributed to NCE’s internal cohesion, Rai observed.

Another NCE Board member, Dhram Vijay Pandit, who is also the Secretary General of the AIFTO, agreed. “We use consensus decision-making,” said Pandit. “We try to accommodate everyone. We trust each other; that’s why we have good relations. If there are any questions, we discuss these outside meetings.”⁴⁹

Laura Grant’s masteral thesis paper, submitted to the Universiteit van Amsterdam, documents many instances when NCE Board members resolved differences on policy issues by seeking to understand the other party’s position and finding common ground.⁵⁰

The challenge, however, is to build the capacity of district-level NCE members, partners, and supporters to undertake the tasks of lobbying and advocacy.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND LESSONS LEARNED

In the course of the campaign, problems were encountered and obstacles had to be surmounted. But these yielded valuable lessons that could be practically applied for more effective campaign work.

Difficulties and problems

Among the difficulties and problems met were:

- Large number of MPs and legislators vs. limited time
NCE officers Sandeep Mishra and Umesh Kumar Gupta explained that there are more than 740 MPs in the *Rajya Sabha* and the *Lok Sabha*. Each MP has a constituency of approximately 1.3 million people; thus, there are always heavy demands on the MPs’ time. The MPs are usually in Delhi only during parliamentary sessions (four sessions per year, with each session lasting from 15 days up to a month). The window of opportunity to visit them either at home or in their offices is from 8 to 11 a.m. and from 6 to 9 p.m. Even if NCE had a confirmed appointment, MPs could still ease their way out of meetings, be late or be in a hurry. For the lobbying to create results, NCE tried to meet with the MPs not just once, but three to four times a year.⁵¹ Therefore, the workload required by lobbying was heavy, even for a coalition with a deep bench of members.

One of the most frequently cited lessons is the need for more lobbying with MPs while they are in their respective states. This is because they spend more time there, and it would be easier to arrange meetings with local constituents. The challenge, however, is to build the capacity of district-level NCE members, partners, and supporters to undertake the tasks of lobbying and advocacy.

- Need to expand organisational reach
Laura Grant observed, “Right now the NCE’s presence in the south is by association only through member organisations, so the NCE is virtually unknown in the south. This also limits their strategies to the level of advocacy, with little or no local mobilisation.”⁵²

LESSONS LEARNED THAT HAVE INFLUENCED STRATEGY

Grant summarised the following lessons learned that have influenced NCE strategy:

- The need for advocacy at all levels of government
- The importance of getting MPs informed and involved (as a point of entry into the government)
- The importance of having recourse to the judiciary and Supreme Courts (to make the government accountable)
- The impact of moral leverage and mass mobilisation (following Gandhi’s example) to make the government liable for its promises and obligations
- The importance of grassroots activity in garnering a strong base for evidence-based advocacy

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Although many gains have been achieved in the campaign waged for the right to education, NCE and its partners and supporters continue to face some persisting challenges.

Inadequate provisions and loopholes in Education Act

There is widespread consensus that the Education Act represents a significant gain for Education for All. However, there is also prevalent agreement that the Education Act, as it now stands, is imperfect and retains many provisions that NCE had previously opposed, as well as loopholes that undermine education access and quality. These, therefore, present continuing challenges for NCE and its campaign for the right to education.

Particular provisions and aspects of the Education Act that NCE challenges and over which it harbours some misgivings are:

There is also prevalent agreement that the Education Act, as it now stands, is imperfect and retains many provisions that NCE had previously opposed, as well as loopholes that undermine education access and quality.

- Scope: The Education Act covers only children aged 6 to 14 years old, such that preschool and secondary school are excluded.
- Education financing: Education resource requirements are massive, e.g., for construction of thousands of new schools, recruitment of 1.5 million additional teachers, education costs for millions of children added to the school population every year. Even if the Act provides for a 65-35 per cent cost-sharing scheme for education expenditure between central and state governments, NCE fears that states which are poor and have limited resources, or whose local administrations lack commitment to education, will not match the funding required.
- Education quality: The law provides that regardless of their performance, students will not be failed and detained, but would instead automatically progress to the next class. NCE is apprehensive that this would undermine learning and quality education.
- School Management Committees: The law mandates that these committees are to be established. They could provide a bigger role for civil society organisations and greater opportunity for their participation; however, they could also be vulnerable to manipulation or politicising.
- Public-Private Partnership: Promoted by the Education Act, this is viewed as a move that may tend towards further privatisation of education.
- Inclusive education: Children with special needs will be brought for admission into mainstream schools. While this sounds good in concept, it requires a great deal of preparation for the school system (e.g., infrastructure modified to be accessible), the teachers and the students themselves.
- Special measures for child labourers and trafficked children: The Education Act is silent on special measures needed to bring education to child workers or trafficked children.



Challenge in framing model rules

Meantime, model rules (or state laws) defining how the Education Act will be implemented at the state level are required to be framed and approved before July 2011. By August 2010, however, only four of the 28 states had drafted their model rules.

This, for NCE, presents both a challenge as well as an opportunity. “The Act states the minimum, but not the maximum; therefore, some states can do more,” said Rama Kant Rai. Naturally, NCE will be campaigning for the “maximum”.

NCE positions on education issues

The following are NCE's positions on some education issues, as outlined in the workshop "Implementation of RTE Act/Model Rules and Role of Civil Society, held on 13 August 2010 in Bhubaneswar, Orissa State:⁵³

- Ensure drafting of state model rules as soon as possible, with public participation.
- Allocate government expenditure on education amounting to 6 per cent of GDP, or one-fifth (20%) of government budget, with half (50%) of the education budget allocated for elementary education.
- Recruit regular and trained teachers in place of untrained and para-teachers, to ensure quality of education. Existing para-teachers should be trained and regularised.
- Draft and pass legislative provisions for a quality education system with measurable indicators, so that parents and communities can monitor the quality of education.
- Build the capacity of School Management Committees to strengthen school governance, planning and monitoring in a supportive manner.
- Drop all forms of privatisation, including Public-Private Partnerships and franchises to corporate bodies, that lead to profiteering, commercialisation of education and weakening of the public education system.
- Increase the central government's share of the RTE implementation funds from 65 to 85 per cent.

THE ROAD AHEAD

What happens next for NCE and its campaign on the right to education? What lies ahead may be gleaned from the following:

- Continue campaign on RTE Law
NCE will continue its campaign on the Right to Education Law – for greater public awareness, so that children can claim their rights; for the law's implementation, so that access to education can be broadened; for model rules to be drafted immediately at state level; and for some sections to be amended to address loopholes.

Towards this end, NCE leaders have been holding meetings with member organisations and partners to step up actions in the different states.

- Retrace steps: Marching and motoring for education
Almost ten years ago, NCE mobilised its forces for a Shiksha Yatra (Education March), which helped push government to introduce the vital Constitutional amendment guaranteeing education as a fundamental right.

NCE will continue
its campaign
on the Right
to Education Law
– for greater public
awareness, so that
children can claim
their rights.

NCE plans to retrace its steps. In November 2010, another march-motorcade, covering 70,000 kilometres, will be held from Kanyakumari to Delhi, with similar marches in other states. All marchers will converge in Delhi on 10 December 2010, International Human Rights Day.

This time, the *Shiksha Yatra* shall serve two major purposes:

1. To collect evidence along the way on:
 - Situation of children's education: Are the children in school? If not, why?
 - Adequacy of schools and school facilities
 - Violations of the RTE law, such as children in bonded labour
 - Examples of good practices in education
2. To campaign for changes in the RTE law:
 - Lobby with state/district officials and communities in 10 states, and push them to draft model rules and guidelines that are in line with NCE's advocacy.

EDUCATION FINANCING AND BUDGET TRACKING

NCE has been campaigning for government to demonstrate its commitment to education by actually allocating adequate resources for education.

NCE takes some credit for pushing the UPA administration, when it assumed power in 2004, to find a sustainable way of generating funds for education.

Introducing cess for education

The UPA had earlier declared that, as a growing economy, India would no longer accept official development assistance for education. The solution implemented, instead, was to introduce a cess of 2 per cent for primary and secondary education, and 1 per cent for higher education. The cess currently generates 65 per cent of the education budget.

Government's unfulfilled promise on education spending

But that same year, the UPA government did not live up to its promise of spending on education the equivalent of 6 per cent of GDP and one-fifth (20%) of the annual national budget. As of 2010, education expenditure is projected at only 4.3 per cent of GDP – a 1.1 per cent increase over the 2009 level, but still not enough.

Instead of the promised 20 per cent of the annual national budget, the combined budget for education at the central and state levels in 2010 is only 13 per cent of the total budget. This may have increased by 14.5 per cent from the 2009 level, but much of the gains are eroded by inflation, which ran at 10.7 per cent in June 2010.⁵⁴

Government's underspending on education

NCE claims that the government is underspending on education. Its proof: with just one more year to go before the end of the government's five-year development plan (covering the years 2007 to 2012), only 60 to 65 per cent of the education budget has been used. This shows a lack of commitment, NCE says.

Lobbying in Parliament to increase the education budget

At the national level, NCE has been lobbying with MPs to encourage them to increase the education budget. Campaign activities usually peak in February, which is when Parliament approves the annual budget. Campaigners are often accompanied by children when they "knock on the doors" of Parliament or the MPs' houses. NCE repeatedly reminds opposition parties of UPA's failure to deliver on its promises, thus giving them more ammunition against the government, and thereby increasing pressure from within government.

Presenting concrete proposals and clear evidence

Although many education activists have long clamoured for adequate resource allocation, they have not come up with detailed and concrete proposals nor challenged government with clear evidence. That is going to change now, NCE declares.

NCE conducted budget tracking training-workshops in November and December 2009, and in February 2010. As a result, a total of 200 teachers and NCE members are now able to monitor the cess, track the budget from school level up, and demand education resources where these are needed.

Awareness-raising booklets

To further raise awareness and understanding of education financing and budget tracking, NCE published and distributed two booklets to its members:

- One, in English, about ODA in education; and
- Another, in Hindi, about budget tracking in elementary education for use by mid-level activists in the social/voluntary sector.



Initiatives in
India are richer
in terms of
collaboration,
for example,
with teachers,
federations,
and civil society
organisations.

Along the way, NCE expects to hold 1,000 public hearings within 45 days.

- *Sustain advocacy for increased education financing*
NCE will also sustain its advocacy for government to increase education financing to levels adequate for ensuring quality education.

REFLECTIONS ON THE REAL WORLD STRATEGIES PROGRAMME

NCE was one of the first partners of the Real World Strategies programme. But Rama Kant Rai learned about the RWS programme only when he was appointed NCE Convenor in 2008. One of his first tasks as NCE Convenor was to complete the research report entitled *Rhetoric vs. Reality: The State of Elementary Education in India*, which presents the numerous challenges to achieving Education for All in India.

The research study was NCE's contribution to the Education Watch (EdWatch) project of RWS. In making the study, NCE drew on existing national reports, as well as field research in five states. Not only has the EdWatch report been useful for conducting evidence-based advocacy, it also provided an opportunity to develop the research skills of NCE members at the local levels.

Since then, much progress has been made in the relationship between NCE and the Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, which facilitated RWS implementation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Support of RWS and ASPBAE

Rai expressed appreciation for the support, guidance and assistance provided by RWS and ASPBAE to NCE:

We are thankful to RWS and ASPBAE for training, events, materials, and exchanges with other countries. Because of the opportunity to meet our counterparts from other countries, we started doing introspection on our work. We compared what is good in other countries to what we are doing. We realised that what we are doing is important and sometimes more progressive than what is being done in other countries. We found that initiatives in India are richer in terms of collaboration, for example, with teachers, federations, and civil society organisations. That gave us more confidence, especially in extending our work to more than 13 states.

In education financing, the RWS programme of ASPBAE gave us a very powerful tool for advocacy and planning how to move ahead. After attending training on official development assistance and budget tracking conducted by RWS,

NCE held three training-workshops at the national and state levels on the same topic. These generated deeper understanding among NCE members on ODA and education financing. It made us look at a new angle in advocacy. Now we have become more detailed in determining and proposing how much government should allocate and how much government should spend on education, and in applying pressure on government to ensure timely release of funds.

Publication of the ODA and budget tracking booklets prepared by NCE was also supported by RWS.

Exposure to regional advocacy

Rai also expressed appreciation for RWS' facilitating NCE's exposure to advocacy at the regional level.

For instance, in December 2009, ASPBAE and its national coalition partner in Bangladesh convened the national education coalition partners of RWS in South Asia for consultations in preparation for the South Asia Education Ministers Meeting. The national coalition representatives drafted and agreed on a set of recommendations to submit to the ministers.

As a result of intense lobbying by RWS representatives, the Dhaka Declaration on Education for All issued by the ministers encourages member countries to spend six percent of GDP on education and supports the role and participation of civil society organisations in advancing education reforms. Rai declared, "We saw how this forum can make binding commitments on member countries."

RWS contribution in capacity-building for advocacy

"RWS should continue. There's still a lot to do in implementing RTE and capacity-building. We cannot leave RTE to government alone. Local bodies have never done this kind of work before; we need to give good examples. Long-lasting advocacy lays the ground for long-term impact," urged Rai.⁵⁵

RWS has contributed to NCE's plans for long-lasting advocacy by building its capacity to undertake this task; in turn, NCE has built the capacity for advocacy of its members and partners.

Campaign innovations sought

Faced with the challenges that lie ahead, NCE aspires to accomplish even more towards furthering its mission of upholding and promoting the right to education. In this regard, Umesh Kumar Gupta, NCE's National Advocacy Coordinator, asked, "How can we innovate in the campaign, especially in community-based strategies, or in using information technology? Our current approaches may be effective, but we want to continue to grow and develop. Maybe, this is something that could be considered by RWS."⁵⁶

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SRI LANKA CASE STUDY: COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



CAMPAIGNING FOR MOTHERS' EDUCATION



STATE OF EDUCATION

Great strides in education

It is immediately evident that Sri Lanka has made enviable progress in education.

Education has been considered a basic right since 1943. Government provides free education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Since the 1980s, this has included free textbooks, uniform material, mid-day meals and subsidised bus tickets.

In 1997 education for children aged 5 to 14 years was made mandatory and enforced through the School Attendance and School Supervision Committees down to the lowest government level.¹ As a result, figures for youth and adult literacy, and enrolment in primary school in Sri Lanka are consistently among the highest in the South Asia region.²

PROGRESS IN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 OF ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION			
	2001	2007	2008
Net enrolment ratio in primary education (%)			
Both sexes	98.8		99.5
Boys			99.1
Girls			99.8
Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach last grade of primary (%)			
Both sexes		98.0	
Boys		97.9	
Girls		98.1	
Primary completion rate (%)			
Both sexes	101.2	104.3	98.4
Boys	101.4	104.8	97.9
Girls	100.9	105.0	98.9
Literacy rate of 15-24 years old (%)			
Both sexes	95.6		98.0
Men	95.1		97.3
Women	96.1		98.6

Source: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>.

Important note: Some of the MDG data presented in this website have been adjusted by the responsible specialized agencies to ensure international comparability, in compliance with their shared mandate to assess progress towards the MDGs at the regional and global levels.

Challenges remain

But many challenges remain, the government admits. Education officials cannot remain complacent, with the recent drop in the completion rate of primary education. The generally impressive education indicators also mask serious deficiencies in the quality and efficiency of education, such as:³

- Shortage of qualified teachers and disparities in teacher deployment, especially in disadvantaged areas
- Incompetence of teachers and non-adaptation of school curricula to local needs
- Disparities in education standards between rural and urban children, with less than three out of eight (37 per cent) of rural children have mastered local language skills, and only slightly more (38 per cent) who have obtained numeracy skills⁴
- Insufficient government funding for improving staffing and facilities provided to schools in poor areas
- Lack of adequate education infrastructure and services for children in conflict areas (e.g., North and East)
- Dropping out of school caused by extreme poverty, such that children have to seek employment to help support their families

A study by Transparency International – Sri Lanka also shows discrepancies in dropout rates, with children in estate schools* at a particular disadvantage: out of a thousand children, 14 have dropped out overall (i.e., national dropout rate), in contrast to 84 in plantation schools.⁵

Reasons for dropping out

Poverty and lack of parental support are cited as the primary reasons for dropping out. Lack of interest and lack of parental support are also cited as impediments to school attendance and performance, particularly for children whose mothers worked overseas, usually as housemaids in the Middle East.

Other reasons cited for poor educational achievement are lack of transport facilities, unsafe school buildings, poor condition of classrooms, lack of school facilities (e.g., desk, chair, blackboard), lack of learning materials (e.g., textbooks, writing books, pens), and lack of drinking water and inadequate sanitation facilities in school.⁶

In rural communities, many children drop out during peak seasons in agriculture, when they are required to help in family farms.⁷

Enrolment not a guarantee to literacy

It would seem that even enrolment and literacy figures stand on shaky ground.

Poverty and lack of parental support are cited as the primary reasons for dropping out.

* Estate schools refer to schools located inside plantations (e.g., tea plantations).

Studies by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre of the University of Colombo, the National Institute of Education, and the National Education Commission cited in the “2008 Education for All (EFA) Mid-Decade Assessment Report – Sri Lanka” issued by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, clearly convey a message that “enrolment in school does not guarantee literacy or mastery of key skills in language (even the mother tongue) or numeracy for all children. This situation undoubtedly has repercussions on the national literacy rates.”⁸

The country’s 2008 *EFA Mid-Decade Assessment Report* also states, “Literacy in Sri Lanka is defined as the ability to read and write in the first language, and the procedure used to assess literacy is to ask the respondents whether they can read and write. Thus, due to the lack of a standardised procedure being used to assess literacy as no actual literacy assessment is being carried out, the validity of these rates is open to question.”⁹

“We want to implement a literacy assessment because we don’t know the real literacy rate. The problem is where to find the funds and the personnel to do this,” said Lalani Wijesekara, Deputy Director of the EFA branch of the Ministry of Education.¹⁰

Bright spot: Increase in female education participation

One bright spot is the increase in female participation in education.

Today, girls are even more likely than boys to finish primary school. But that has not always been true. Many years ago, when primary education was not yet mandatory, large numbers of girls – who are mothers today – were unable to go to school or were forced to drop out early, thus resulting in delearning or reverting to illiteracy.

In focus group discussions in Asokatenna Village, Kurunegala District and Iranawila Village, Puttalam District, both in the North-Western Province, women said they wanted to go to school when they were young, but their parents could not afford it. Gender roles and expectations also had a hand in the parents’ decision to withdraw them from school.

“We had to stay home to cook, help with housework, or care for younger siblings,” the women said. Of the 23 women interviewed, one never entered school, six finished only up to Grade 4, and seven only up to Grade 5. Their brothers had more years of schooling, the women confided. One man, listening to the group discussion, admitted he spent four years in school but none of his sisters ever had any education.

Impact of women’s limited education

With limited education, many women did not achieve functional literacy. The result was social exclusion.

The women had less access to information because they could not read newspapers or notices in community bulletin boards, such as those about dengue prevention. They had difficulty moving about as they could not read bus signs. As mothers, they could not read letters their children brought home from their teachers, much less help them with homework. They also had less access to services such as loans. One woman hampered by limited education related, “One day I went to the bank but I couldn’t fill up the loan form. No one could help me. I went back the following day but the same thing happened.”¹¹

Without the benefit of education to boost their economic opportunities, the women remain poor. In Kurunegala District, where 32 families share two acres of land, the women lament their fate: discrimination because of their caste, poverty because of lack of livelihood and resources, and social isolation because of illiteracy.

Adult and youth illiteracy

As the table on adult and youth illiteracy shows, the stories of these women denied education are shared by many other women in Sri Lanka. Improving adult literacy is one of the six EFA goals and, in Sri Lanka, this urgently needs more attention.

ADULT AND YOUTH ILLITERACY				
	2000-2007		Projected 2015	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
Adult illiteracy (15 years old and above)	1,339,000	61%	1,061,000	59%
Youth illiteracy (15-24 years old)	90,000	40%	43,000	35%

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Reaching the Marginalized*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, 2010, pages 312-313.

Important note: Literacy rates for the most recent year do not include some geographic regions.

Government action plans for adult literacy

The government has drawn up a series of action plans for adult literacy. But the *EFA Mid-Decade Assessment Report* in 2008 noted,

Overall, the examination of these Action Plans from 2000 to 2004-2008 indicates that the importance of ensuring universal or near universal literacy (which is a realistic goal, in view of the achievements made so far by the country) has not been adequately recognised. Firstly, a specific target percentage of literacy has not been identified as expected from the Dakar Framework. Secondly, the findings from research (Gunawardena, et al., 1997) which question the validity of official statistics on literacy, indicating a clear difference between claimed and actual literacy, have not been considered. Moreover, the implicit assumption in planning to improve literacy with specific

targets being out-of-school children, appears to be that participation in basic education enables children to become literate, which has been refuted by recent studies on learning achievement (NEREC, 2003). Fourthly, literacy needs to be a goal for development of, not only the children and youth, but even for adults in the context of interest in life-long education.¹²

Fortunately, the Draft National Action Plan (2007-2010) pays more attention to these concerns, the *Mid-Decade Assessment* reported.

Non-formal and special education programmes

In Sri Lanka, responsibility for adult education falls under the Non-Formal and Special Education Branch of the Ministry of Education, which has the following main programmes:¹³

- Functional literacy centres: in areas where there are high concentrations of children who did not enrol or who have dropped out of school. In 2009 the programme reached 2,071 persons: 1,206 females and 865 males. Note that the population reached is just a small fraction of the total number of illiterate adults, as shown in the table;
- Community learning centres: programmes for target groups such as prisoners, covering simple literacy, life enrichment courses and skills training;
- Vocational training centres: based in schools, with classes usually held thrice a week in the afternoons. In 2009 the programme reached a total of 26,677 persons: 22,199 females and 4,478 males. Courses include house electrical wiring, mechanics and training for those preparing to work overseas (e.g., those who are preparing to work as housemaids in the Middle East receive training on how to use household appliances). At least three in five (60 per cent) Sri Lankans who work overseas are female; and
- Special programmes, e.g., centres for street children and literacy centres for adults, in areas where there is a perceived need.

H. P. N. Lakshman, Director of the Non-Formal and Special Education branch of the Ministry of Education, said there are over 200 programmes on non-formal education throughout the country, attached to the Divisional Education Office (DEO). The DEO puts up notices about its activities in villages and responds to requests for assistance from illiterate people.

Non-formal education services at the local level

Local education authorities confirm the availability of non-formal education services at the local level. As Director for Non-Formal Education in Puttalam District, North-Western Province, P. Subasinghe administers two major programmes: one on functional literacy for adults, and another on vocational training. These are provided for free and held in either village schools or community halls. Majority of learners are female.

Adult education classes first started in the 1970s, Subasinghe said, but special classes for mothers in the Puttalam District started only recently and include family health issues such as communicable diseases, and social issues such as drug addiction and incest.

Limited budget for non-formal education

However, the reach and scope of non-formal education services have been constrained by the limited budget. Lakshman declined to name an exact figure, saying only “it is a little low” because government’s priority is in formal education.

Sri Lanka is not alone in this, Lakshman said. At a South Asia conference, delegates from all the participating countries complained of meagre funds for non-formal education. As Lakshman notes, there is an “attitude problem. Most people don’t get attention on this project.”

Impact of funding constraints

The impact of funding constraints may be glimpsed in vocational training. Many learners have expressed interest in computers and information technology, but vocational centres have limited facilities and instead offer training on making traditional crafts. But the market for crafts is small, and learners have difficulty selling products they learned to produce in vocational training. Thus, K. V. Karunaratne, Zonal Education Officer for Ibbagamuwa, Kurunegala District, admits, livelihood skills do not necessarily translate into higher income.¹⁴

The limited funds for the government’s non-formal education programmes and the resultant constraints on both their scope and effectiveness, are what prompt critics to complain that there is no coherent adult education policy, and no adult education programme that makes a substantial impact on the affected population.¹⁵

Lack of coordination

Another dimension to the problem was pointed out by Prithiviraj Perera, Secretary General of the Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO.

Although various government agencies, Buddhist temple organisations, and non-government organisations have vocational training programmes, lack of coordination had led to some duplication in the non-formal education sector, Perera said.¹⁶

THE COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR MOTHERS’ EDUCATION

Coalition to coordinate work on EFA

Several NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) had been working separately with the Commonwealth Education Fund

(CEF) on EFA. Occasionally, they would meet and exchange experiences on the issue.

With CEF's encouragement, these organisations agreed to form the Coalition for Educational Development (CED) in 2004 as a forum for coordinating their work and avoiding duplication. CED was, thus, formally registered as a legal organisation in 2006.

CED goals

CED's goals, as reflected in its vision, mission and objectives, are the following:

Vision

To ensure quality and equity in education for all, irrespective of race, religion, language, social status and disabilities

Mission

To promote and advocate the involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) from community level to national level in the formulation and implementation of national policy on quality education for all, and to support the achievement of innovative educational programmes at all levels to ensure quality and equal opportunities in education

Objectives

- To promote and advocate the involvement of CSOs, from community to national levels, in the formulation and implementation of national policies that will promote quality education and equal education for all
- To strengthen the capacity of CSOs at all levels in order to promote educational development activities in an inclusive manner and incorporate the participation of all stakeholders
- To advocate and support the reforms and programmes directed towards achieving educational development of the highest possible level in keeping with national needs and international standards
- To monitor the implementation of educational programmes, and utilisation of funds and resources to ensure quality and equitable education for all

CED membership and organisational structure

At present, CED has 61 member organisations (CED prefers the term "partners") from all nine provinces of the country.

During the annual general assembly of CED, members elect the Board of Directors, consisting of two founding members and nine others representing each province. The members of the board serve a two-year term, although in practice many are re-elected and serve longer terms. The board meets every month.

In addition, CED has an Advisory Council composed of five educators who are tapped by CED on an individual basis, as needed. CED also has a secretariat with full-time staff.

CED initiatives and affiliations

As a relatively young coalition, CED has only started flexing its muscles to do advocacy at the national level in recent years. Prior to this, most of the key member organisations of CED had focused on improving education at the provincial, district and village levels, whether through provision of direct services or through advocacy at the local level.

Some of the initiatives at the provincial level that have been undertaken include raising awareness on education issues and participation of civil society in budget tracking in the Eastern Province and enquiring into the participation in formal education of children of compulsory schooling age in the fisheries villages of the Southern Province. Other provinces have drawn up plans and are looking to CED for help in finding sources of funds to implement these plans.

Through the Real World Strategies and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education, CED was able to connect with Aflatoun, a Netherlands-based partnership organisation which will support the Western Province's initiative, starting in 2011, to raise participation in formal education of children from low-income families and disadvantaged areas in Colombo.

CED is also a member of the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), a forum in which development organisations, donor agencies and government can discuss education concerns. This working group is chaired by the Ministry of Education.

As a national education coalition, CED has sought to address issues such as school enrolment and dropouts.

Education financing: A major concern

Education financing is another major concern and the subject of CED research. An executive summary of the research findings has been published, entitled "Budget Process and Budget Tracking in Formal School Education in Sri Lanka."** This has also been the subject of several workshops and forums among members.

Presented below are CED's activities in education financing and the rationale for such efforts.

** Research was funded by Save the Children, and the executive summary of the research report was published with funds provided by the Education Watch project of RWS.

EDUCATION FINANCING

The Challenge

“In the 1960s, the state set apart about 4.5 per cent of the gross domestic product and 14 per cent of the annual budget for education. Over the past two decades, the share of education in the GDP has been about 2.8 per cent, and the share in the annual budget about 8 per cent to 9 per cent, owing to financial difficulties from high oil prices, greater investment on infrastructure development, and the internal conflicts” (*EFA Mid-Decade Assessment Report – Sri Lanka, 2000-2006* [Battaramulla, Sri Lanka: MoE and UNESCO, 2008], 13).

Education’s share of GDP continues to decline: 2.9 per cent in 2007, 2.6 per cent in 2009, and 2.4 per cent in 2010 (Interview with A. Sriskandarajah, UNICEF, 19 August 2010).

CED and Education Financing

CED has had a key interest in education financing for many years. In 2007 it obtained funds from Save the Children to research on budget processes related to education. The summary of its research findings, entitled “Budget Process and Budget Tracking in Formal School Education in Sri Lanka,” was published the following year as part of the RWS Education Watch initiative.

In November 2009, CED organised the three-day Capacity Building Workshop on Official Development Assistance for Education, with funding support and resource persons from ASPBAE and RWS. The workshop was attended by 39 participants from as many CED member organisations. Following this workshop, some CED members were encouraged to approach local officials in their areas and lobby for funding support of their programmes, including mothers’ education.

On 21 January 2010, CED organised the dissemination seminar Budget Process and Budget Tracking in Formal School Education in Sri Lanka.

Working with women and mothers

Many CED member organisations, particularly those based in communities, had been working with women and mothers for many years in varying degrees.

For example, Sarvodaya, an NGO, has set up a mothers' group in every village in Puttalam District, North-Western Province. Many women in this district are illiterate, and in some Muslim communities there, a number of these women had never been to school.

Another example is the Mihikatha Environmental Organisation, also an NGO, which, since 2006, has targeted mothers in poor villages for livelihood skills training in pig and poultry raising, vegetable gardening, fish drying and sewing.¹⁷

Critical role of mothers in children's education

The issue of mothers' education emerged when Sarvodaya was contracted to do research in tsunami-affected areas in Eastern Province. In these disaster areas, traumatised mothers were afraid to let their children go to school, and it became clear that education programmes could succeed only if they actively engaged with the mothers.

Within the family, it is often the mother who decides on the children's education: whether they should continue schooling or drop out. Mothers' attendance in school or non-formal education courses would guarantee that they, too, would be supportive of their own children's education.

For Sarvodaya, therefore, mothers' education was essential both for the mothers' own empowerment as well as for the education of their children and future generations.¹⁸

Campaign on mothers' education

Thus, as early as 2007, CED had already envisioned conducting a campaign on mothers' education and had been holding brainstorming workshops with members to discuss the contours of such a programme.¹⁹

However, it was not easy to get started. The first project proposal on mothers' education submitted by CED was disapproved, and CED considered how to rewrite the proposal.

In 2008, during a CED Executive Committee meeting called to consider revisions to the project proposal on mothers' education, Chandana Bandara, Director for Adult and Inclusive Education of the CED Board, narrated the difficulty of obtaining information on adult education from the relevant ministries and the lack of proper policies and activities for achieving the adult literacy and education goal under EFA.

National convention on mothers' education

In response, Nishantha Kasthuri, Director for Local Networking of the CED Board, proposed holding a national convention where mothers themselves would articulate the need for a coherent and effective adult education policy in the country. The convention

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would be a major component and peak event of the campaign on mothers' education.

The proposal for a national convention on mothers' education was unanimously approved. To obtain funding for the planned convention, a new project proposal was submitted to ASPBAE. ASPBAE had earlier funded, through the RWS Programme, the publication of the executive summary of CED's research on budget tracking in education. This time, CED's proposal received a positive response.

CED's plan was to hold in December 2008 a one-day convention of mothers who were either functionally illiterate or who had attained very few years of education – as a way of demonstrating that adult illiteracy exists on a significant scale in the country. But CED also wanted the process to be empowering, to give a voice to the mothers who had been kept unheard and in the shadows for so long.

Campaign's opening salvo: Promoting literacy

As their opening salvo for the campaign on mothers' education, CED printed banners in time for the International Literacy Day in September 2008, and distributed these to CED members throughout the country.

Although the banners did not make specific reference to mothers, these proclaimed, "Literacy is the key to health and well-being."

Planning Meeting

On 2 October 2008, 34 CED member organisations from eight provinces met to draw up plans for the convention.

Only the Northern Province was not represented during the planning meeting, as armed conflict at the time prevented CED members there from travelling to the meeting site in Colombo.

Links between illiteracy and life problems

Later, back in their respective districts, CED members went to the villages to seek out mothers who were either non-literate or had low educational attainment, to help them understand the links between illiteracy and other problems in their life.

In one area, for example, it was found that abused children often came from families whose mothers had little education.

Village consultations: initial steps in advocacy

For CED, the process of holding village consultations and drawing out the mothers already constituted initial steps in advocacy. These village consultations drew attention to the often overlooked issue of the importance of mothers' education and the need for appropriate response from government.



CED members started to play a role in facilitating dialogues between community women and government education officials, including education extension staff and higher-level zone education officers.

Enthusiastic response of mothers

CED members also sought the mothers' feedback on the planned national convention on mothers' education.

The response was overwhelming. Mothers were very enthusiastic about a project involving them. Some were understandably nervous about publicly admitting their illiteracy, but majority acknowledged the importance of such a convention and were very keen to participate.

NATIONAL CONVENTION ON MOTHERS' EDUCATION

The national convention on mothers' education aimed to accomplish the following:

General Objective

To advocate with policymakers to effect necessary changes in the existing national adult education policy, so that it gives more prominence to women and, especially, to mothers' education.

Specific Objectives

- To mobilise women, especially mothers from disadvantaged communities, to come together and build a broad national alliance to advocate for changes in the adult education policy, so that it would be made more gender sensitive and responsive to the education needs and aspirations of women and mothers
- To build a common consensus that a vacuum exists in the present adult education policy due to non-recognition of the importance of improving education standards for women, especially mothers
- To create a platform for women and mothers at the provincial and national levels that would allow them to raise their voices to draw the attention of policymakers to the need for a gender-sensitive adult education policy

Inclusive participation in convention

Finally, the national convention on mothers' education was held on 13 December 2008 and the mothers gathered in the capital, Colombo.

From the start, CED organisers were determined to ensure that convention participation should be as wide and inclusive as possible. Thus, participants came from eight of nine provinces, and 18 of the 24 districts in the country. Moreover, the women delegates represented all major ethnic groups in the country: Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims.

Well-attended convention

In all, 478 mothers attended the convention, along with 75 men from the same communities. Their participation was facilitated by 39 CED member organisations which brought them to Colombo.

Guests from international NGOs, multilateral development agencies such as the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), and representatives of CED member organisations brought the total number of convention participants to approximately 600.

The Minister of Education had earlier confirmed his attendance but withdrew at the last minute. However, government at the national level was represented by officials of the Ministry of Education, including the Deputy Director for Non-Formal Education and the Director of the National Institute of Education. Also present were provincial education officials, including the Secretary of Education of the Central Province.

The convention was also reported in mass media, such as in Tamil newspapers and in the national television news telecast *Esanin Puwath*.

Empowering milestone in mothers' lives

That day marked a watershed in the mothers' lives.

Not only did the government and NGO leaders speak to them and about them, but they too were accorded the opportunity to talk about their lives and concerns before a distinguished gathering.

Mothers also participated in cultural presentations through songs and dances.²⁰

Campaign activities continue

Buoyed by the convention, the mothers and CED member organisations continued their efforts to raise awareness of the need for mothers' education and to lobby for this during meetings with government staff assigned to the field, and even with grassroots politicians.

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CED member organisations also continued to deliver services to women, particularly mothers.

Comprehensive education for mothers

As much as possible, literacy and numeracy were integrated into the training courses for mothers conducted by the CED member organisations.

In sewing classes, for example, mothers discovered they could not determine how much they could charge for sewing a dress unless they learned to keep accounts of how much they had spent.

“You have to make numeracy lessons practical; otherwise, women will be bored,” said Mrs. J. Gallage of the Mihikatha Environmental Organisation. Other educators had similar suggestions, for example, teaching women to count as they took measurements while sewing clothes.²¹

Capacity building for mothers addressed not just acquisition of livelihood skills but also development of leadership skills.

Another proposal on mothers' education

To keep the momentum going, in 2009 CED submitted another proposal on mothers' education to RWS-ASPBAE.²² The objectives, expected outcomes and methodology for this project are outlined below:



PROPOSAL ON MOTHERS' EDUCATION

Main Objective

To empower women and mothers to achieve their full potential by educating them to become co-equal and productive members of society in every available field of work

Specific Objectives

- To consolidate and strengthen the already-initiated advocacy campaign of lobbying with policymakers in order to effect necessary changes in the existing national adult education policy, in such a way that it gives more prominence to women and, especially, to mothers' education
- To strengthen and build the capacity of CED and its partner organizations and, thereby, enable them to work out and implement an effective advocacy plan to lobby for changes in the adult education policy that would ensure inclusion of the importance of mothers' education

Expected Outcomes

- Sufficient awareness is created among CED partners about the objectives and outcomes of the capacity-building project, inclusive of the initiatives to bring about changes in the adult education policy

The envisaged changes are tangibly reflected in:

- A memo addressed to the Line Ministry of Education to widen the scope of and provision for non-formal education
 - Memos sent to all Provincial Ministers and Secretaries of Education
 - Increased provision for non-formal education programmes
 - Raising the allowance of the non-formal education assistants
 - Activation of relevant officers at the Divisional Secretariats to undertake more adult education programmes
- Preparedness and capacity of CED and its partners are enhanced to undertake and implement the capacity-building project

The “partners” here encompass, not only the partners of the CSOs affiliated to CED, but also other members of NGOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) who volunteer to network with the effort, as well as officers of the state institutions (i.e., officers of the Line Ministry of Education, provincial departments of education, and divisional secretariats). The enhanced capacity of the partners is mirrored by their implementation of such activities as:

- Processions, poster parades and competitions that coincide with prominent events such as International Literacy Day, Mothers’ Day etc.
- Formation of regional mothers’ clubs and interaction circles
- Publication of articles and success stories in newspapers, periodicals and the CED publication *Voice*
- Proposals for policy initiatives submitted to education authorities
- Review of current education policies and identification of gaps
- Investigation of good practices in education, for translation into policies

Methodology

- Conducting awareness programs for partners
- Conducting preliminary discussions with officials of the National Education Commission, provincial secretaries of education and Non-Formal Education officers of the provinces, in order to make them aware of the intended initiatives of CED to advocate for changes in the national adult education policy
- Media information dialogue, to solicit the support of media in stressing the importance of mothers' education in the national adult education initiative and in advocating for necessary changes

Although the project was approved, funds were received only in September 2009; thus, some activities were implemented until early 2010.

Collecting data on mothers' education

Using their own very limited funds, some CED members also started to compile a database of mothers with little or no education in four provinces: Western Province, Southern Province, North-Western Province, and North-Central Province.²³ In these provinces, CED mobilised 19

partner organisations whose staff underwent a one-day research orientation before proceeding to interview mothers in the villages, as well as to collect data from divisional secretaries and education divisions.

The research report *Capacity-Building for Advocacy on Neglected Goals of EFA by Developing a District-Level Front for Mothers' Basic Education* was completed in June 2010.²⁴ In these provinces, researchers identified and studied 831 women, 696 of whom were illiterate and 135 with education up to grade 6. In general, these mothers came from low-income, marginalised communities. Some had children who were disabled or who were not in school, or had dropped out of school and were thus illiterate. Other mothers were then in jail or had just been released from jail.²⁵

EXCERPTS FROM THE RESEARCH REPORT ON CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR ADVOCACY ON NEGLECTED GOALS OF EFA BY DEVELOPING A DISTRICT-LEVEL FRONT FOR MOTHERS' BASIC EDUCATION

Reasons for illiteracy or low level of education

- Poverty
- Unfavourable attitude of parents towards education
- Distance to school; lack of school in the vicinity
- Responsibility of looking after siblings
- Early marriage
- Abuse by elders
- Slow learning
- Caste-based discrimination
- Father's alcoholism

Problems associated with illiteracy or low level of education

- Inability to support children's schooling (e.g., providing help with homework; reading and understanding notices from school)
- Being restricted to poorly paid work
- Inability to make self heard in social forums
- Difficulty in daily life (e.g., keeping accounts and banking; finding out prices and the expiry date of goods; reading bus signs, road signs and billboards)
- Proneness to being duped or cheated
- Lack of access to information on hygiene and health (e.g., how to administer medication)
- Lack of access to public information from newspapers, books and periodicals
- Inability to fulfil tasks in state institutions, village-level organisations and society, and thus obtain benefits and exercise rights
- Inability to seek legal redress in case of abuse, domestic violence or violation of civil rights
- Inability to give proper treatment to disabled children

Research recommendations

The research made several recommendations such as:

- Conducting income-generating activities coupled with literacy training
- Establishment of adult education centres
- Multi-level advocacy for provision of government programmes on mothers' education
- Establishment of a mothers' education fund

Sharing the research findings

Research findings were shared with the adult education authorities in the respective provinces, and with the officials of the National Education Commission.

Daya Ariyawethi is a member of the CED Board representing the North-Western Province. She also heads the Children's Section of the Women's Development Foundation, which works with urban poor communities in the province. After the research was completed, Ariyawethi and her colleagues presented the research findings to provincial authorities.

Some government officials were stunned by the report, Ariyawethi said, "They asked, 'Do we really have illiterates in the 21st century?'" She hopes the research and follow-up lobbying will convince authorities to allocate more funds for non-formal education, and for adult education in particular.

For Ariyawethi, livelihood skills offered by vocational training courses are not enough; women also need to know their rights. Confined to their homes and to work, many women are not aware of what services they can avail of from government.

The research findings were also discussed in community meetings. In one such meeting, some mothers cried after doing a role play or short skit depicting their problems. "They said, 'All our lives, we had to face challenges. In this activity, we gained strength.' The mothers are brave, but they don't always realise it," Ariyawethi observed.^w

OUTCOMES OF THE CAMPAIGN

Three major outcomes may be said to have emerged from CED's campaign on mothers' education:

1. Greater awareness of the illiteracy and low educational attainment of many mothers, and the consequences on their empowerment and on their children's education. Before CED embarked on this campaign, much had been made of Sri Lanka's impressive statistics in education and literacy, and perhaps there was even some smugness about these records. By shifting the spotlight to

illiterate mothers, CED has, in effect, reminded government and the public of persisting challenges that must be addressed before Sri Lanka can achieve Education for All.

This awareness has been amplified at the local level through community meetings and dialogues with local officials, and at the national level through discussions with government officials and development organisations. Much needed publicity was also generated through media coverage of the December 2008 mothers' education convention.

Further discussion within CED and the resulting awareness among its member organisations have produced greater commitment to address the issue. This is evident, for example, in the interest and commitment of members to deepen the research in the North-Western Province, even without external funding. The study, still in progress, aims to identify gaps in the current implementation procedures of the non-formal education divisions in the province for empowering women, and to formulate recommendations for raising the educational level of mothers.

2. Greater self-esteem for the mothers. Some mothers admitted to feeling ashamed of their illiteracy. Gradually, the attention given them has reduced some of the stigma. By coming together for the first time, the mothers felt less isolated. By being acknowledged by government, the mothers moved one step away from exclusion. By having their aspirations for education recognised, the mothers became more determined to pursue their dreams.
3. Improved capacity to engage in advocacy for CED and its member organisations. "A national-level campaign is not enough; we have to do local advocacy at the same time," noted CED Board Chairman Charles Elamaldeniya.²⁶

For CED and its member organisations, advocacy is still a very new endeavour. NGOs and community-based organisations at ground level are more familiar with services delivery, and some have started to organise mothers at the village level. They have continued giving trainings and other forms of support to mothers while conducting additional advocacy activities. Initial success has been reported by member organisations in Kurunegala and Puttulam in obtaining funds (150,000 and 50,000 rupees, respectively) from local government offices for mothers' education.²⁷

CED itself is a new organisation with limited capabilities. "Before, we thought that advocacy meant demonstrating, as what anti-government forces do," a CED Board member admitted.²⁸ With this campaign, CED found that this was not so, and it was forced to learn the ropes in lobbying with government officials and making persuasive presentations. Its ability to convene up

to 600 participants in the mothers' education convention raised CED's confidence and enhanced its credibility.

The recently completed research on mothers' education also provides CED with concrete evidence to strengthen its advocacy.

CAMPAIGN HIGHS AND LOWS

Factors for success

Any gains in the campaign can be credited to the mothers' interest and commitment to make themselves available for meetings and consultations.

CED member organisations should also be commended for their commitment to mothers' education and for their willingness to step outside their comfort zone and engage in advocacy activities.

Challenges encountered and lessons learned

Many lessons were learned by campaign organisers in the course of carrying out the campaign. Some challenges encountered in the field related to practical issues such as:

- Difficulty in finding available time for meeting with mothers who have both work and family obligations. One lesson learned was to try to make meetings "attractive" by showing films or drama presentations which communities appreciated, as these were both entertaining and informative.
- Difficulty in navigating the government bureaucracy, for example, in arranging meetings with government officials. Some officials were reluctant to meet with NGO representatives unless prior clearance had been given by higher-level officials, but this could be even more difficult to obtain. Despite this difficulty, however, CED campaigners found it easier to reach and engage with local officials rather than those at the national level, and this reinforced their interest in local-level advocacy.
- Meagre funds, for example, for transportation and meals, which limited the number of mothers and community representatives that CED could mobilise for the national convention in 2008, or for conducting more in-depth research in 2009.

Other challenges concern the need to upgrade CED members' capacity in such skills as basic research, writing and analysis. In hindsight, CED realised that the one-day research orientation it conducted should have been expanded to provide more in-depth training.²⁹ Capacity building in advocacy, and other aspects of programme and organisational management, should also be sustained.

The biggest challenge involves policymakers: how to get them to change their priorities and allocate more resources for non-formal education, and mothers' literacy in particular.

Recommended actions

Given the chance to start the campaign all over again, CED would recommend two actions:

1. Building district-level mothers' organisations which can serve as pressure groups during advocacy campaigns
2. Doing participatory planning and implementation with other education stakeholders at the district, provincial and national levels to expand the constituency for mothers' education

THE ROAD AHEAD

What happens next for CED and its campaign for mothers' education?

The campaign for mothers' education will be sustained by CED members working at the grassroots level.

Pushing for a progressive education law

At the national level, one venue for advocacy pertains to the new Education Act, which is currently under consideration in Parliament and will be voted on in early 2011. CED and other education stakeholders would like to see the law expand the reach of non-formal education. To this end, CED and other education stakeholders met on 28 August 2010 and agreed to gather one million signatures to create a groundswell of popular support pushing for a progressive education law.

Building upon past achievements

Looking forward to the tasks that lie ahead for CED as it builds upon its past achievements, CED Board Chairman Charles Elamaldeniya had this to say:

Getting the needed state intervention and attention was one of our achievements. We were able to reach many government bureaucrats who were leading personalities in the local education fraternity, and such advocacy was supported by CED's raising awareness of the issue in responsible policy circles. By calling attention to this issue, CED also became known as a pioneering organisation in discussions on a national education policy.

The lessons learned by CED member organisations in this project resulted in follow-up activities at the regional and local levels. They have maintained an abiding interest in working with the regional non-formal education authorities to mitigate the plight of mothers lacking education in their localities.

We have just initiated a campaign; we need to do more to address the issue of mothers' education. In particular, the

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advocacy programme should be brought to war-affected regions and areas with ethnic minorities. The dropout rate in the North Province (which is affected by war) is reportedly more than three in five (60%). Civil society organisations must advocate with relevant parties to bring those children back to school. Hence, our future mothers' education programmes should explore strategies for dealing with the responsible government authorities.

CED members should be trained for policy advocacy. Therefore, it would be better if we can organise a policy advocacy programme for CED members, as well as other education organisations and officers.³⁰

REFLECTIONS ON THE REAL WORLD STRATEGIES PROGRAMME

Capacity building for advocacy

CED associates the Real World Strategies programme and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education with capacity-building. Like the NGO Education Partnership of Cambodia, CED's first exposure to RWS capability building was at the Asia Regional Training on Popular Communications for Education Advocates and Campaigners in Kuala Lumpur in September 2006.

Since then, CED members have participated in other RWS capacity building and advocacy training courses. As a result, CED was able to draft a national framework and identify priority areas for advocacy, including the development of CSOs' capacity for advocacy and for education reform and development. This is currently being supported by RWS and the Civil Society Education Fund.

CED Director for Adult and Inclusive Education Chandana Bandara added, "Due to the training courses and other support given by RWS, CED developed its capacity for advocacy. We learned what is meant by advocacy, where it can be applied, what it can change, and how to plan effective steps in a campaign."³¹

Funding and mentoring support

Charles Elamaldeniya observed, "The CED learned about advocacy from RWS. In so doing, RWS helped to make the idea of Education for All a reality. CED's advocacy work would not have been successful without funding and proper guidance from RWS."³²

As Elamaldeniya noted, "In particular, RWS and ASPBAE have provided funding and mentoring support in CED's first ever national advocacy campaign on mothers' education in 2008."

Facilitating links with global and regional networks

Elamaldeniya also credited RWS as being “the turning point in relation to making contacts and links with regional and global networks” and with being largely responsible for CED’s gaining “knowledgeable exposure via participation in various regional and international forums and seminars.” This includes, for example, CED’s participation in the UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs Conference held in Dhaka in March 2010.³³

CED was thus bolstered by RWS training, funding, linking and mentoring support as it made significant progress in its campaign for mothers’ education. This campaign has had tremendous impact on the welfare of mothers and their children and, in particular, on their access to education. It has also strengthened CED with greater capacity for advocacy, and has placed it in a better position to engage with education officials as it steps up its campaign at the national and local levels.

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CAMBODIA CASE STUDY: NGO EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP



ភាពជាដៃគូរបស់នៃអង្គការក្រៅរដ្ឋាភិបាល
NGO EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST INFORMAL SCHOOL FEES



HIDDEN COSTS IN BASIC EDUCATION

Legal right to free basic education

The right of every citizen to free basic education is provided for by law in Cambodia. Article 31 of Cambodia's Education Law states: "Every citizen has the right to access quality education of at least nine years in public schools *free of charge*."¹

These nine years cover six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school, which together constitutes basic education in the country.

Informal school fees: How do these creep in?

In reality, however, basic education comes at a price. A 2007 study by the NGO Education Partnership identified four types of what it calls "informal school fees." The NEP study shows how these fees creep in to encumber parents with hidden costs, thereby posing an obstacle to education access:²

1. Daily costs, e.g., expenses for food consumed in school and fee for bicycle parking

Issues:

- Some teachers sell food items to supplement their salaries. Children feel obliged to buy from the teachers, fearing that failure to do so would negatively affect their school marks.
- The parking fee reportedly goes to someone who ensures the bicycles' safety, but some accounts indicate that a share of the fee goes to the school administrator.

2. School fees, e.g., teachers' fees paid either on either a daily or a monthly basis,* and fees for private tutoring, lesson handouts and examination papers

Issues:

- Teachers charge fees to supplement their meagre salaries. Children are often too embarrassed to go to school and attend classes if they do not have money to contribute to these supplemental teachers' fees.
- "Private tutoring" is done by the same teachers who handle the regular classes. Tutorial lessons are often part of the regular curriculum, rather than supplementary. These are often

* Some informants for this case study say that teachers' fees are seldom solicited in rural areas where poor families simply cannot afford to pay these fees.

held in preparation for school examinations. Hence, children who do not attend these private tutorial classes, having missed out on part of what they are required to learn, invariably do poorly on the examinations and may even have to repeat the grade.

3. Start-up costs, e.g., expenses for school uniform (including daily uniform, sportswear and shoes), study materials (including bag, notebooks and pens), and school registration fees (including registration forms, identification photographs, study record booklets and fees for sports)

Issue:

- These are one-time purchases made at the start of the school year, requiring large amounts which might prevent parents from sending their children to school.

4. Miscellaneous fees, e.g., expenses for study and class supplies, bicycle maintenance, gifts for teachers, offerings during ceremonies and contributions for water and electricity bills, as well as garbage disposal service fees

Issues:

- Requiring gifts for teachers is not commonly practiced in Grades 1 to 6 in some provinces. There were cases, however, in which supplies intended for some lessons actually went to teachers, e.g., “manual production” classes became opportunities for teachers to receive items purchased by students from the market.
- Schools have a budget for maintenance and repair of facilities, but the funds for these are often insufficient; thus, students are asked to contribute.

NEP’s research on informal school fees covered Phnom Penh, the capital city, and the provinces of Battambang, Kampot and Takeo. All expenses were found to be considerably higher in Phnom Penh; everyone agrees that this is typically so in urban centres because of the higher cost of living in these areas.

The table below shows the average school expenses at different grade levels.³

AVERAGE EXPENSES PER GRADE LEVEL							
Grade Level	Daily Costs (in Riels)	School Fees (in Riels)	Start-up Costs (in Riels)	Misc. Fees	Total Cost per Child		
					In Riels**	In US \$	% of Annual Family Income
1-3	132,133	55,435	49,362	9,035	245,965	60.00	4.8
4-6	171,732	112,536	69,027	14,814	368,109	89.78	7.1
7-9	261,376	251,717	105,812	28,453	647,358	157.89	12.5
1-9	195,874	151,513	77,836	18,575	443,797	108.24	8.6

** The exchange rate at the time of the NEP study (2007) was 4,100 riels to US\$1. Today (2010) it is 4,239 riels to the dollar.



Inability to afford these costs is a primary factor for dropping out.

*Inability to afford education costs:
Primary factor for dropping out*

Education costs represent major expenses for families in Cambodia, in which three in ten (30%) live below the poverty line (as of 2007).⁴ Inability to afford these costs is a primary factor for dropping out. “Parent is poor and has no ability to pay” was cited by majority (63%) of the NEP study’s respondents as their reason for quitting school.

Other studies had similar findings. In a more recent study conducted in 2010 in six provinces by Save the Children – Norway, the two main reasons cited for non-attendance in school were remarkably consistent: “need to work at home” and “can’t afford it”; these reasons are closely related.⁵

Informal school fees have grave implications on Cambodia’s ability to achieve the Millennium

Lack of awareness of parents

The NEP study had another disturbing finding: one-fourth (25%) of parents were not even aware of the government policy on free education.⁶ It is also possible that parents accept costs such as teachers’ fees as normal rather than illicit. In Kampung Cham, for example, parents interviewed initially denied paying extra fees but, when asked to list their children’s education expenses, cited 40,000 riels (US\$9.46) paid for private lessons.⁷

NEP has been particularly concerned about fees charged by teachers for daily lessons, extra tuition and food items.

During an informal meeting in Cheko, Krol Ko Village, Phnom Penh City, all the children admitted they had recently skipped classes for at least one day because they could not afford the teachers’ fee. Sreynich, a 14-year-old girl still in grade 4, was forced to take the longest leave, a full month, for this reason. Later, she said, it was difficult to catch up with lessons.⁸

Stumbling block towards achieving universal primary education

Informal school fees have grave implications on Cambodia’s ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. Already, there are indications the country will not be able to reach this target by 2015. This is evident in the country’s education figures presented in the following table:

Development Goal of universal primary education.

CAMBODIA'S PROGRESS IN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 OF ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION (%)			
	1999	2007	2008
Net enrolment ratio in primary education			
Both sexes	83.4	89.8	88.6
Boys	87.3	91.7	90.4
Girls	79.4	87.8	86.7
Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach last grade of primary			
Both sexes	48.6	54.4	
Boys	51.9	51.9	
Girls	45.0	57.3	
Primary completion rate			
Both sexes	40.9	85.0	79.5
Boys	46.4	85.4	79.9
Girls	35.3	84.6	79.0
Literacy rate of 15-24 years old			
Both sexes			87.5
Men			89.4
Women			85.5
<i>Source:</i> Millennium Development Goals Indicators, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/data.aspx <i>Important Note:</i> Some of the MDG data presented in this website have been adjusted by the responsible specialized agencies to ensure international comparability, in compliance with their shared mandate to assess progress towards the MDGs at the regional and global levels.			

Government action on informal school fees

The government is fully aware that informal school fees are being collected and has issued directives to prohibit the practice:

- On 17 October 2002, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports issued *Directive on Taking Measures to Prevent Abnormalities in Primary Schools* (unofficial translation; copy obtained from Save the Children – Norway). The directive, signed by MoEYS Secretary of State Im Sethy, lists such abnormalities as the following:
 - Teaching is not based on scheduled teaching time. There is not enough teaching time.
 - Students are compelled to attend private classes. Private classes are conducted during the periods intended for public classes in order to obtain money from students.
 - Students are asked to give money that is not stated in any regulation or law.
 - The academic performance of students who attend private classes is not impartially judged. Students are forced to buy valuable objects in order to obtain good scores for manual labour.
 - Students are forced to buy souvenirs for teachers.
 - Scores are sold; food/refreshments are sold by teachers in the classroom.
 - Students are asked to give money for a party or other traditional ceremony.

The directive mandates the establishment of commissions at the district and school levels to prevent and eliminate the abnormali-

ties cited and to mete out the necessary punishment, ranging from warning, suspension, demotion and even up to expulsion.

No commission has actually been established for the sole purpose of abolishing the practice of informal school fees, but government claims the issue is currently addressed by various committees such as the disciplinary council at the district and provincial levels, the Education for All Committee at all levels, and the school support committee.

- On 12 April 2005, MoEYS issued *Direction Statement Implemented Prakas No. 513 About the Abolishment of Money Collection from Students at Public Primary and Secondary Schools* (unofficial translation; copy obtained from MoEYS Legislation Department). The document was signed by Kol Pheng, then MoEYS Minister, and directs education offices and public schools to “stop the informal collection of money or materials from students at public school (primary and secondary).”
- The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2006-2010 lists, as one of the government’s priority policies, “ensuring equitable access to education.” To achieve this, it promised to reduce parental cost barriers, such as informal payments. Its target: to abolish informal payments in grades 1 to 9 nationwide by the end of 2008.⁹

Nevertheless, the practice of charging informal school fees remains as widespread as ever.

NEP AND THE CAMPAIGN TO STOP INFORMAL SCHOOL FEES

From the start, NEP was envisioned as a channel for non-governmental organizations to engage with government on education policy.

NEP’s establishment

NEP traces its origins to a meeting with MoEYS in August 2000, to which NGOs were invited to participate in discussions on the partnership of the Ministry and NGOs in education sector management.

The Education Sub-Sector Working Group proposed the formation of an NGO Education Partnership, and NEP was established the following year.¹⁰ Today, NEP has 85 member NGOs, both local as well as international.

NEP’s aims

As expressed in its vision and mission statements, NEP seeks to achieve the following:



Vision:

To work together to achieve equal and timely access to high quality education for all Cambodian people

Mission:

NEP is a membership organisation that coordinates dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders to improve the quality and accessibility of education in Cambodia

NEP's activities

NEP is committed to building its members' capacity to effectively engage in education programmes. It organises regular meetings, at least twice yearly, wherein members exchange information on education issues and best practices in education.

In a recent meeting, for example, NEP member organisation Save the Children – Norway presented the findings of its research on early childhood care and development and primary education in six provinces. Another NEP member organisation, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), shared its work on engaging with communities in school development.

Additional meetings are held to discuss positions on critical issues such as the government's ESP 2006-2010.¹¹ NEP convenes an annual general meeting to review the year's activities and to plan for the following year.

Training courses and workshops are periodically held, for example, on research skills, fundraising schemes and the basic features of the Education Law passed in December 2007. NEP also publishes a quarterly newsletter.

Participation in the annual Global Action Week of the Global Campaign for Education is another opportunity for NEP to promote its advocacies on education.

Research to gather evidence for advocacy

Research is an essential component of NEP's programmes. Every year, NEP produces a report on NGOs in education – what their programmes are, where these are conducted, and what challenges they have encountered. These reports are intended to encourage complementation, rather than duplication, of efforts. NEP also researches on education issues. To date, NEP has published these reports:

- *The Impact of Informal School Fees on Family Expenditure* (with ASPBAE), 2007
- *The Impact of Preschools on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia*, 2008
- *Teaching Matters: A Policy Report on the Motivation and Morale of Teachers in Cambodia* (with VSO), 2008



- *Community Engagement in Quality Education* (with ASPBAE and CSEF), 2010 (ongoing)
- *Experiences in Scholarship Implementation in Promoting Education for All (Scholarships Implemented by Government/NGO for Students of Grades 5-9)*, 2010 (ongoing)

The research reports of NEP and its member organisations can be downloaded from NEP's website, <http://www.nepcambodia.org>. The website is intended to function as an online resource centre; thus, NEP proactively gathers government policy documents on education to make these more accessible to all education stakeholders.

By providing concrete evidence to support its arguments, research serves as ammunition for NEP's policy advocacy with government.

Research on informal school fees

For several years now, one of NEP's biggest advocacies has been stopping the collection of informal school fees.

This is a major issue for families throughout the country. It is an issue repeatedly raised by NEP member organisations, particularly those working at the grassroots level. These local partners of NEP witness the deleterious consequences when families withdraw children from school, with girls being the first ones taken out.

Thus, for its first major research project, NEP chose the subject of informal school fees.

Funding and technical support

In early 2007, the United Nations International Children's Education Fund provided funds for NEP to do initial research in one province. But NEP saw the need for wider and more in-depth research to demonstrate that the problem is not limited to a single province, but rather a systematic and widespread practice throughout Cambodia.

Funding support for the expanded research on informal school fees came from the Real World Strategies programme, through ASPBAE and GCE. This research project marked the start of NEP's partnership with RWS.

NEP trained five partner NGOs to conduct research in four provinces: Phnom Penh, Kampot, Takeo and Battambang, covering areas ranging from urban to rural, to remote areas as well. A total of 210 respondent families were interviewed about school fees paid for children in Grades 1-9.¹² VSO, which has been posting a series of volunteer advisers to NEP, rendered technical support.

Research difficulties

It was a challenging project. Because of the sensitive subject, local government officials were initially reluctant to allow interviews in their areas.

Cambodia's elaborate bureaucracy further complicated the difficulty of obtaining the necessary endorsements from high-ranking officials. Kou Bun Kheang, NEP Board Vice Chairperson and Senior Programme Officer of Save the Children – Norway, relates that NEP Board members, many of whom represented international NGOs supporting local projects, were called in to facilitate dialogues with government officials and obtain permission for the research teams to proceed.¹³

Similar constraints were faced when interviewing teachers and students. "Some hesitated to tell the truth. We had to build a good relationship and interact with them so we could get the correct information. We had to phrase our questions in such a way that they could answer honestly," said NEP Research Coordinator Ang Sopha. "During analysis, we also encountered difficulties like translating the information in a way not too sensitive and understandable by MoEYS and teachers/students."¹⁴

Launch of research findings

In December 2007, NEP launched its research findings in a big gathering attended by donor organisations and NGOs. The event was reported by the *Phnom Penh Post* and other media.

Although invited, the MoEYS Minister did not make an appearance, but he did send a representative. NEP was disappointed yet undeterred. Now it had the evidence to back up a sustained campaign.

A different form of campaign: Lobbying within high-level bodies

The concept of "campaign" assumes different meanings in different countries, prompted by their differing political realities. In Cambodia, for example, mass mobilisations in the streets or outside government offices would endanger people's safety and freedom, without attaining the results sought.

Instead, NEP conducts its lobbying activities within high-level inter-agency bodies in which it is a member. These include:

- Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) – composed of government ministries, donors and development partners such as UNICEF, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and NGOs. NEP has from five to seven seats in the JTWG, which holds bi-monthly meetings;
- Education Sub-Sector Working Group (ESWG) – composed of multilateral and bilateral agencies, and NGOs engaged in education programmes. It is chaired by development partners such

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“We ask them to speak against the informal school fees because, when they talk, we know that government will listen.”



as UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. NEP has seven seats in the ESWG.

“In all meetings, in all these forums, we say the same thing: We don’t blame you, but we need to address this issue in order to expand access to education. Please stop the collection of informal school fees,” said NEP Executive Director In Samrithy.¹⁵

Sharing the research findings

Copies of the NEP research report on informal school fees were distributed during these meetings and quoted by NEP representatives and its member organisations in numerous presentations.

One example was the presentation of the NEP research findings at the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF) in November 2008. NEP laid out the challenges for students, teachers and school administrators. It noted, “Children who drop out are more likely to be from disadvantaged groups. The burden of these children is worsened when they are asked for informal payments by teachers whose salaries are low or who receive full or partial payments infrequently.”

Another instance was the annual Education Congress convened by government in March 2009. Majority of the delegates came from MoEYS offices from the national to the district levels, along with development partners and NGOs. NEP Executive Director In Samrithy delivered a speech about Education for All – who the marginalised are and what can be done to reach them. He also spoke about informal school fees as a barrier to accessing quality education. The Minister of Education acknowledged In Samrithy’s remarks, agreed that charging informal school fees was a criminal violation, and instructed government delegates to take action on violators.

Media, both local and international, picked up the issue. NEP’s research was reported in local newspapers and was even featured in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio/TV programme.

Another form of campaign: Lobbying with influential groups

Another form of campaign NEP undertakes is lobbying with groups who have clout, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, to use their considerable influence with government to promote education reforms.

“We ask them to speak against the informal school fees because, when they talk, we know that government will listen,” In Samrithy said.¹⁶

Cooperation with other coalitions

NEP also cooperates with other coalitions such as:

- Cooperation Committee of Cambodia (CCC), a group of around 116 NGOs committed to facilitate information exchange and

foster productive and mutually beneficial relationships among the NGO community

- NGO Forum, an organisation of over 80 local and international NGOs working for information sharing, debate and advocacy on priority issues affecting Cambodia's development
- Education Cambodia, an informal group of mainly international NGOs with education advocacies

CCC, NGO Forum and another coalition, Medicam, recently co-published the NGO Position Papers on Cambodia's Development in 2009-2010 to the 3rd CDCF. This set of documents contains the NGOs' findings and positions on the implementation of the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) and the 2008 CDCF Joint Monitoring Indicators.

NEP authored the section on education, in which it repeatedly emphasised the negative impact of informal school fees on children's access to education. NEP stressed, "The government's commitment to the elimination of unofficial payments in schools is commendable; however, the practice is still prevalent and urgently needs to be addressed to ensure equitable access to education for all children, especially the poor."¹⁷

Earlier, NEP had tried to convince MoEYS to add the elimination of the practice of informal school fees as one of the joint monitoring indicators to measure progress towards meeting education targets. MoEYS demurred.

Grassroots campaign

Meanwhile, some NEP member organisations campaigned against informal school fees at the grassroots level.

An example is the Urban Poor Women for Development (UPWD), which works in 19 communities in Phnom Penh. At first, the NGO officers tried to facilitate dialogues between parents and the school administration and teachers. They even obtained letters from local authorities certifying, "This child comes from a poor family. Please do not charge fees." The teachers agreed, but the children later complained they were ignored in class.

In 2010 UPWD asked teachers for a "50 per cent discount" on the daily fees (to which the teachers agreed) and provided partial funding for fees for 200 children in their communities. Everyone seems happy so far but, as UPWD Project Officer Noch Chamroeun admits, the scheme may not be sustained when the NGO funds dry up.¹⁸

Parallel campaign for teachers' welfare

Campaigning against informal school fees is no simple matter, NEP campaigners realised. They could not merely oppose the practice;

"The government's commitment to the elimination of unofficial payments in schools is commendable; however, the practice is still prevalent and urgently needs to be addressed."





“It’s very hard for teachers to maintain high morale when they receive such low salaries. You cannot fight with the stomach.”

they also had to propose a sustainable solution. Thus, NEP engaged in a parallel campaign to raise teachers’ salaries and improve their working conditions.

In its campaign against informal school fees, NEP has taken care not to blame the teachers. “It’s very hard for teachers to maintain high morale when they receive such low salaries. You cannot fight with the stomach,” said NEP Board member Kan Kall, who is also the country director of an international NGO, Room to Read.

Research on teachers’ motivation and morale

Once again, NEP engaged in research to gather evidence on the condition of teachers in Cambodia. It teamed up with VSO, which provided financial support and personnel, in producing *Teaching Matters: A Policy Report on the Motivation and Morale of Teachers in Cambodia*. VSO had conducted similar researches in 12 other developing countries under its Valuing Teachers programme.

The research had the following objectives:

- To examine education in Cambodia from the perspective of its core providers: the teachers; with the research focusing on those issues that affect their motivation, morale, performance and, ultimately, the quality of education they can deliver
- To determine the views of other education stakeholders about the position of teachers and their role in providing quality education in Cambodia
- To support the cooperative efforts of the Cambodian government and its civil society and development agency partners by offering recommendations on how improvements might be made to teacher motivation, participation and performance, thereby increasing the quality of education

Factors for teachers’ dissatisfaction

The report painted a detailed, vivid and often heart-rending picture of the teachers’ daily lives. It disclosed, “Public school teachers perceive themselves to be underpaid, under-supported, and working in under-resourced schools.”¹⁹ The following table presents the factors most often cited by teachers as the cause of their dissatisfaction:

FACTORS CITED BY TEACHERS AS CAUSE OF DISSATISFACTION	
Factors	Number of Teachers' Responses
Inadequate salary	91
Poor leadership	65
Corruption / Nepotism	65
Poor living conditions	45
Student behaviour	42
Working environment	41
Distance from home to school	35
Lack of materials	31
Late arrival of salary	28
Society fails to value teachers	28
No participation from stakeholders	24
Student attendance	19
Poor benefits package	15
Workload	14
No forum to air views	13
Social problems	10
Personal problems	7
Student learning	5

Source: Teaching Matters: A Policy Report on the Motivation and Morale of Teachers in Cambodia. NEP and VSO, December 2008, page 14.

Teachers' inadequate salaries

The teachers' dissatisfaction with their salary is understandable. At the time of the study, teachers in Cambodia earned on average US\$30-60 per month, depending on their qualifications, *** years of experience and number of shifts worked. In addition, they received a salary supplement of 5,000 riels (equivalent to US\$1.25) for each child they had. Teachers, in their first year of probation, were paid only the basic salary.

The report also cites a World Bank paper stating that after 16 years of experience, the teachers' salaries increased by only around 20 per cent, and after 28 years by about 30 per cent of the initial base salary.²⁰

However, the full cost of living cannot be adequately covered by such meagre remuneration. For example, Cambodia has one of the highest rates in Asia for electricity and gas. Kan Kall, estimated that a city-based family with two children would need US\$200-250 per month just to survive.²¹

The research report on teachers' conditions pointed out that the MoEYS budget in 2008 was more than double what it received in 2000. In the same period, teachers' salaries rose by only 50 per cent. Thus, the proportion of teachers' salaries in the budget for education has actually declined.²² The report stated:

*** Some teachers do not have formal teacher training. In some instances, government has recruited local, unqualified teachers, usually in remote and rural areas where there is an acute shortage of qualified teachers. The government has been encouraging teachers who have no bachelor's degree to go back to university so that their salaries can be raised, but without actually providing scholarships or leave with pay.



They argued
that teachers’
performance would
improve if they
received an increase
as they would
spend more time
preparing lessons
and be able to give
up their additional
jobs.

In every focus group conducted with teachers, the issue of pay emerged as the most powerful de-motivating factor for them, cited by nine out of ten male, and seven out of ten female teachers. Phnom Penh teachers tend to have higher rates of pay than provincial teachers, and also have greater opportunities to earn extra money through private tuition. Despite this, most have much higher expectations of what a reasonable salary should be (some say from US\$300 to US\$600 a month) because of higher living and travel expenses in the capital.²³

All the teachers consulted in the research recommended a substantial flat rate increase; a reasonable basic salary level, most agreed, should be around US\$100. Provincial Office of Education (POE) staff members also suggested US\$100 would be a reasonable salary for teachers, saying that teachers try hard despite low salaries. They argued that teachers’ performance would improve if they received an increase as they would spend more time preparing lessons and be able to give up their additional jobs. It would then be easier for the POE to ask for extra effort or to take action where commitment is low.

With four-hour school days the norm, and with the time and opportunity for additional employment that this allows, teachers giving up extra jobs may be a little optimistic. However, a reasonable salary would make the pressure to earn a living wage less intense, which should then have a positive effect on teachers’ commitment and practice.

Delayed salary releases

The problem of low salary is compounded by delayed salary releases, another issue described in the report. Following up delayed salaries would require teachers to go all the way to the provincial education office, taking them away from teaching assignments.

Bureaucratic inefficiency is a perennial problem in Cambodia. Funds are supposed to be issued on a quarterly basis, but are often released only late into the next quarter.²⁴

Government acknowledges as much. “The three-month delay in entry of new teachers into the salary lists also serves as a disincentive to new teachers to remain in the provincial postings,” the government’s *National Strategic Development Plan Update 2009-2013* admits.²⁵

Impact of teachers’ low salaries

The research report reveals the impact of the teachers’ low salaries:

The inevitable result of very low salaries and sometimes unreliable payment procedures is that teachers often have to endure very poor living conditions. At present, salary

levels make it impossible for teachers to afford the basic necessities of food, housing, clothes, medicines, rent, supporting children and elderly relatives, and the charity contributions that are expected in a Buddhist society.

Teachers see themselves as having no option but to seek other income-generating activities; 93 percent of individual interviewees had second jobs, and 99 percent of them said that a teacher's salary alone is not enough for them to live on.²⁶

As a result of taking on a second job, in addition to teaching six days a week, from Monday to Saturday, teachers do not have sufficient time to prepare and deliver lessons effectively. "Teachers themselves appreciate that their quality of work suffers and that perhaps they are open to criticism from communities for not working to the expected standard; they are devaluing their own role due to enforced circumstances," the report disclosed.²⁷

Collecting informal school fees to augment low salaries

As a consequence of their low salaries, teachers resort to collecting informal school fees.

It is interesting that every school visited by the NEP research teams, "without exception, denied charging children any extra informal payments or fees for their education."²⁸ For obvious reasons, they did not want to admit to breaking the law. But some teachers who had children in secondary school admitted paying 500 riels (equivalent to US\$0.13) an hour for extra lessons and additional examination entrance fees.

Chim Manavy, NEP Board Chairperson and Executive Director of Open Institute, asked, "If teachers are hungry, can they be justified in finding ways to make money? Does the system force teachers to become corrupt?"²⁹

Poor living conditions

The research also described the teachers' dire living conditions.

Those posted in urban areas have more options, even though their houses may be some distance away from the school, requiring a long commute. But those in rural areas, particularly in remote locations, are not as fortunate; no accommodations are provided. In these areas, many teachers interviewed had to convert part of the classrooms into makeshift quarters which they occupied with their families.

In another community, as many as eight teachers were forced to share a single room at the District Office of Education. One teacher slept in the school office, behind a curtain. Many did not have running water and toilet facilities. Some had to share the houses of local families.



Many teachers interviewed had to convert part of the classrooms into makeshift quarters which they occupied with their families.

Research recommendation: Increase salaries

In its recommendations, the research called on government to increase the salaries of teachers, school directors and the staff of the provincial and district offices of education to levels appropriate to the cost of living and adjusted with inflation.

NEP has campaigned
for raising teachers'
salaries as a lasting
solution to the
problem of informal
school fees.

This recommendation was actually a reminder of government's own commitment, contained in ESP 2006-2010, to ensure equal access to education by eliminating informal payments from parents and increasing teachers' salaries.

Because the report contained direct quotes from the teachers themselves, and from the school directors and local education officials, the Cambodian government could not just reject nor ignore the report findings.

Stepping up pressure on government

To step up pressure on the government, in September 2008 VSO was able to solicit the services of British Member of Parliament Angus McNeil in presenting the NEP research report on the condition of teachers to Cambodia's Minister of Education Im Sethy and Secretary of State for Education Nath Bunrouen.

McNeil had spent two weeks in Cambodia, hosted by VSO. Having seen first hand the situation in local schools and communities, "I knew what I was talking about when I made the *Valuing Teachers* recommendations to the government," McNeil said. To ensure that the minister's "promises of increased pay will come about, I'm following up my meeting with him with a letter that I'll send this month and another one in six months," McNeil assured.³⁰

Campaign to raise teachers' salaries

The research report *Teaching Matters: A Policy Report on the Motivation and Morale of Teachers in Cambodia*, prepared by NEP and VSO, was formally launched in December 2008. Since then, NEP has campaigned for raising teachers' salaries as a lasting solution to the problem of informal school fees.

Another British MP, Sharon Hodgson, visited Cambodia in September 2009, again hosted by VSO, and followed up the issue of raising teachers' salaries in her meetings with government officials.

In October 2009 NEP and other education NGOs celebrated World Teachers' Day at the National Institute of Education in Phnom Penh. The theme for the occasion was "Investing in Teachers for Quality Education." Copies of *Teaching Matters* were distributed during the event. The celebration received widespread support from development partners such as UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and involved the Teacher Training Department of MoEYS in organising preparations.

Secretary of State for Education Nath Bunrouen graced the event and delivered a speech about the history and importance of World Teachers Day. The day's activities were extensively covered by newspapers and radio programmes.

EXCERPTS FROM TEACHING MATTERS: A POLICY REPORT ON THE MOTIVATION AND MORALE OF TEACHERS IN CAMBODIA

Conclusions

Paying teachers adequately can be seen as an investment in the future of the Cambodian people. Salaries should be kept under constant review by the government and regularly adjusted on an annual basis to at least keep pace with the cost of living and current inflation. There should be no need for teachers to seek alternative ways of supplementing their low salaries. Success in achieving Education for All (EFA) depends on long-term education expenditure and a continuing commitment to the implementation of their strategic plan by the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Nevertheless, there are other issues that can positively affect teacher motivation. The research shows that active community support for schools helps build a sustainable relationship between the community and teachers. This, in turn, provides a strong motivating incentive for teachers and, indeed, a feeling of being valued. This type of mutually beneficial relationship requires commitment and effort from all involved, including supporting non-government organisations (NGOs) and donor organisations.

Recommendations

- **Increase the salaries of teachers, school directors, and staff of the provincial and district offices of education to levels appropriate to the cost of living, and adjust these with inflation.**

In every focus group conducted with teachers, the issue of pay emerged as the most powerful de-motivating factor. It is impossible to earn a living on the current teacher's salary in Cambodia. This basic need is going to remain the top priority over and above any other aspirations teachers have for the quality of their teaching practice until it is fulfilled.

- **Train teachers' managers in leadership skills at all levels.**

Poor leadership is a strong de-motivating factor, identified as such by nearly 70 percent of teachers in the research. A study on teacher motivation (Bennel and Akyeampong 2007, 43) says: "Teacher motivation depends critically on effective man-

agement, particularly at the school level. If systems and structures set up to manage and support teachers are dysfunctional, teachers are likely to lose their sense of professional responsibility and commitment. Teacher management is most crucial at the school level, where the importance of teachers' work and their competence in performing it are crucially influenced by the quality of both internal and external supervision.”

- **Strengthen links and dialogue mechanisms among all education stakeholders.**

The development of mechanisms for regular dialogue, to discuss and negotiate issues that directly affect teachers, would benefit teachers and students and contribute to the Royal Government of Cambodia's aim of quality education for all.

- **Strengthen quality assurance processes at all levels within the education sector.**

Making standards and criteria public will help to normalise assessment, and will cause monitoring and evaluation to be seen as essential procedures. For example, evaluations of teacher actions that have an impact on students can be used to appraise teacher performance, as well as to improve a school's instructional evaluation and planning.

- **Develop reliable, effective data systems for education statistics to enable better planning and provision of resources, thereby helping to support teachers.**

Accurate national data, from independent and verifiable sources, will be essential if realistic targets are to be set and progress towards them is to be effectively monitored by all stakeholders. Future plans and budgets are currently being made from unreliable data. It is likely that teachers have a better awareness of the actual situation, at least in their own schools; this has an impact on their perception of the education system and, thus, on their morale.

- **Promote the value of quality education to parents and communities.**

Educated and informed parents realise the value of education and this can help to break the community cycle of undervaluing education.

- **Pass and implement the anti-corruption law.**

The effects of corruption and nepotism were identified by teachers as significantly de-motivating factors.

Source: Teaching Matters: A Policy Report on the Motivation and Morale of Teachers in Cambodia (NEP and VSO, December 2008), 9-10.

REAPING THE HARVEST: OUTCOMES OF THE CAMPAIGN

NEP did not run a conventional campaign with planned activities and a structured timeframe. Instead, it utilised all available opportunities in meetings with government, development partners and fellow NGOs to remind them that the practice of charging informal school fees continued in violation of the law and could only be solved in the long run by raising teachers' salaries. This message was repeated in all of NEP's public engagements.

Shared credit for success

NEP would be the first to admit that the campaign is not theirs alone. Development partners have also employed their considerable influence to lobby with government on the issue. NEP member organisations have likewise campaigned at the local levels. Credit for any success, therefore, rightly belongs to all who worked against informal school fees.

Campaign gains

Among the many gains resulting from the campaign are the following:

- Greater awareness on teachers' inadequate salaries and deplorable working and living conditions, and on the adverse impact of informal school fees on education access. Of all the outcomes, NEP acknowledges that this gain is what can be most directly attributed to their research and campaign efforts. Public awareness on education issues has been raised, too, as a result of media coverage. Even MoEYS official Sorn Seng Hok gives NEP credit for "helping the MoEYS in information dissemination."³¹
- Issuance of *Sub-Decree No. 126 on Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (unofficial translation, obtained from Care International) issued on 9 September 2008. Article 13 of this sub-decree states, "Teachers shall not raise or collect money informally, or make businesses in the classroom. Teachers shall avoid doing business in the compound of the educational establishments." Violators would be punished by transfer, demotion or expulsion. Unlike earlier directives which were issued at the ministry level, the sub-decree is significant in that it was signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen, and therefore signifies greater commitment from government.

Although dated 2008, the sub-decree was announced to the public only in 2009. MoEYS Director of Legislation Sorn Seng Hok affirmed that the sub-decree is being enforced and, as a result, "many have already been punished." Anyone can complain to the ministry, which will then send an investigating committee, he said.³²

As an example substantiating MoEYS claim, NEP Education Co-ordinator Leng Theavy monitored a Radio Free Asia report on

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Teachers' salaries
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five teachers who were fired by the Phnom Penh municipal education department after parents complained of their noncompliance with the directive.³³

- Some progress in ensuring equal access to education and retaining students in school. The National Strategy Development Plan Update 2009-2013, reporting on measures to advance education implemented by the government, stated, "To reduce parental cost barriers and retain students in schools, efforts have been made such as increasing school operational budget, eliminating unofficial payments in schools, and providing scholarships to poor students, in particular, 17,667 girls per year in Grades 7 to 9."³⁴
- *Increase in teachers' salaries.* In 2009 Prime Minister Hun Sen appeared on television announcing that teachers' salaries would be increased by 20 per cent every year, starting in 2010. In January 2010, Secretary of State for Education Nath Bunrouen announced that, effective immediately, teachers' monthly salaries would now stand at:

- Primary school teachers	US\$50
- Lower secondary school teachers	US\$75
- Upper secondary school teachers	US\$100

Teachers posted to remote areas would receive an additional allowance as incentive. Teachers' salaries would continue to be raised by 20 per cent every year, government promised. Even at this rate, teachers' salaries would still not meet the high cost of living, but for NEP, this is already a good indication of government's sincerity in responding to the problem.

CAMPAIGN HIGHS AND LOWS

Factors for success

Several factors and winning strategies contributed to the successes attained by NEP in its campaign:

- *Two-pronged effort*
NEP carried out a two-pronged effort in conducting overlapping campaigns:
 - Opposing informal school fees and demonstrating its negative consequences on children's access to education
 - Proposing the increase of teachers' salaries as a necessary step in stopping the pernicious practice of charging informal school fees
 By taking these two distinct yet complementary tracks, NEP increased the chances that its advocacy would yield results.
- *Support of influential partners*
As mentioned earlier, NEP was not alone in campaigning against informal school fees. The campaign was joined by many other

organisations, acting singly or in collaboration with NEP.

Moreover, NEP did not just have many allies; it had powerful allies. These included development partners such as UNICEF, UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank and other bilateral donors. Because Cambodia is heavily reliant on official development assistance, these agencies wield considerable influence over government. “When they push, change comes more quickly,” NEP coordinators Ang Sopha and Leng Theavy observed.³⁵ MoEYS official Sorn Seng Hok agreed, saying, “Development partners help to speed up change processes.”³⁶

Even UNICEF supports NEP’s strategy of working through high-level bodies such as the JTWG. “Development partners and NEP/NGOs having the same voice will be more powerful and effective,” commented UNICEF Education Specialist Chie Takahashi.³⁷

- *Cultivating good relations with government*

NEP has actively worked at cultivating good relations with government. NEP Executive Director In Samrithy said, “We try to get ideas and feedback from MoEYS about our plans before implementing these. We engage, rather than confront. Our message is always, ‘We’re not here to harm you.’”

As a result, MoEYS and government officials are more willing to listen to NEP and its messages, for example, its research findings.³⁸

- *Building credibility as a coalition*

NEP has also worked hard to build its credibility as a coalition. Making people aware that NEP represents and has the backing of a strong and sizable constituency effectively strengthens its position and credibility in its advocacy work.

In Samrithy gave an example of how NEP goes about doing this: “During speeches, we don’t say, ‘In behalf of NEP.’ Instead, we say, ‘In behalf of the 85 member organisations of NEP.’ That makes a difference.”³⁹

- *Serving a crucial role in coordination*

With more than 100 NGOs working to uplift the state of education in Cambodia, majority of which are field based, coordination can be a problem. It is here, UNESCO Education Programme Specialist Sun Lei notes, where NEP serves a crucial role. Sun Lei remarked, “UNESCO and NEP had excellent cooperation in the last couple of years, in advocacy and some pilot projects on the ground. It will be very meaningful to keep and strengthen this cooperation.”⁴⁰

- *Generating evidence for advocacy*

For NEP, perhaps the most effective way of building credibility was by generating evidence for advocacy through its research papers.

NEP did not just have many allies; it had powerful allies.

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The most obvious challenge faced by NEP is that the practice of collecting informal school fees is still as widespread as ever.

NEP coordinators Ang Sopha and Leng Theavy declared, “Talk is not enough, but we have evidence.”⁴¹ This was verified by development partners who expressed appreciation for NEP’s thorough research and documentation work.

Using quotations and personal stories also added a more heartfelt and humane dimension to the report’s presentation of the issues. Research has been NEP’s distinct contribution to a campaign supported by many players.

- *Financial and technical support*

NEP acknowledges the vital role played by RWS and VSO in providing much needed financial and technical support throughout its research and advocacy activities.

Challenges and lessons learned

Undoubtedly, NEP’s campaign yielded significant gains. But, along the way, there were various challenges encountered and many lessons learned, among which were:

- *Persisting (mal)practice*

The most obvious challenge faced by NEP is that the practice of collecting informal school fees is still as widespread as ever. Government has missed its target of abolishing the practice by 2008. The sub-decree prohibiting the practice, while significant, has not eliminated the problem, and there are doubts if it is being seriously enforced.

Public awareness of the sub-decree appears to be low. For example, of five mothers interviewed at a school in Kampong Cham, only one had heard about the sub-decree.⁴²

Families have not directly benefitted from the sub-decree. Instead, teachers’ fees have even increased since the study was made in 2007. Then, the daily fee ranged from 200 to 300 riels; today it ranges from 500 to 700 riels.⁴³

- *Behavioural change*

Public awareness is not enough; NEP wants to see this translated into behavioural change.

“Parents may be aware that it’s wrong to pay informal school fees, but they continue paying instead of coming together and opposing the practice,” observed Seng Hong, former NEP Executive Director.

This challenge confronting NEP may indicate a role for its field-based NEP member organisations with local constituencies.⁴⁴

- *Inadequate teachers' salaries*

Despite the recent increase, teachers' salaries remain inadequate. While NEP acknowledges government efforts to address problems in education,**** Cambodia's resource constraints prevent government from giving more.

One of the NEP Board members was present during a meeting when an ADB official offered to cover teachers' salaries to the required adequate level for two years. Not surprisingly, the Cambodian government refused, knowing it could not sustain the salaries at this level after the grant had expired.⁴⁵

- *Diplomatic engagement with government*

NEP also faces the challenge of adopting a diplomatic approach in its advocacy with government.

Corruption – perhaps not only within MoEYS itself, but in the whole government structure – two NEP Board members revealed, prevents government resources from being responsive to people's needs and from being used effectively. Hence, some NEP officers would like NEP to go beyond education issues and work with other forces to pressure government to stop corruption.⁴⁶ However, this view is not widely shared within the coalition. NEP has always had to tread carefully in relating with government, knowing that government's ambivalent attitude toward NGOs could easily swing against it and negate any gains made in more quiet diplomacy.

UNICEF, for example, is only too aware of government officials' sensitivity to corruption charges. In 2005 the government suddenly stopped a UNICEF-funded, MoEYS-managed media campaign on the abolition of informal school fees. No reason was given, but UNICEF sensed that government officials had become very touchy about the subject of corruption.⁴⁷

Thus, anticipating government officials' reactions and ensuring they do not lose face is a constant consideration in the campaign. The use of the term "informal" rather than "illegal" in referring to the school fees is deliberate, for example. "We have to phrase our advocacy and criticism in a positive way so that government will not be angry with us," cautioned Seng Hong.⁴⁸

- *Need to recruit full-time staff for advocacy*

Advocacy campaigns are central to NEP's work, but it does not have a full-time staff for advocacy. In the past, VSO volunteers advised NEP on advocacy.

****For example, MoEYS and the Ministry of Health have been exempted from the government policy preventing ministries from hiring new personnel.

NEP has always had to tread carefully in relating with government, knowing that government's ambivalent attitude toward NGOs could easily swing against it and negate any gains made in more quiet diplomacy.

A three-year advocacy plan is currently being drawn up, and an experienced local staff dedicated to advocacy must be recruited to see this through.

- *Coordination with local NGOs*
“NEP alone is not powerful enough; we need the voices of local NGOs to say the same thing,” Seng Hong said.⁴⁹

NEP member organisations have campaigned against informal school fees in varying degrees. These efforts have to be stepped up and coordinated.

THE ROAD AHEAD

What happens next for NEP and its campaign?

NEP is committed to continue campaigning for teachers’ salaries to be increased to adequate levels and for informal school fees to be abolished. It will continue speaking on these issues during inter-agency meetings and coordinating with development partners to similarly lobby with government. Other tentative plans include:

- More aggressive media and public information campaign on informal school fees, the laws banning these, and the consequences for violators
- Training and capacity-building for NEP partners so they can run their own campaigns in their communities
- Gathering NEP partners and other stakeholders to exchange experiences on their varying approaches to the problem

Reflections on the Real World Strategies programme

NEP officers and staff acknowledge that RWS has contributed to NEP in several significant ways.

Initial dealings

In September 2006, ASPBAE, which coordinates RWS implementation in the Asia-Pacific region, sponsored a national reflection workshop of education NGOs engaged in activities of the Global Action Week. NEP, being a Leading Committee member of this event, participated in this workshop.

The following month, NEP was invited to the Asia Regional Training on Popular Communications for Education Advocates and Campaigners conducted by RWS in Kuala Lumpur.

Formalisation of RWS membership: Participation in EdWatch

NEP's membership in the RWS programme was formalised in 2007 with NEP's participation in Education Watch, a regionally coordinated RWS initiative to assess issues that deterred from achieving the goal of Education for All in the different countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

NEP's contribution to Education Watch was its study on informal school fees. The research for this study was financially supported by GCE in partnership with ASPBAE through RWS. This research provided detailed and first-hand evidence to propel NEP's advocacy.

Help in obtaining funding

According to Seng Hong, NEP's Executive Director during this period, the support of RWS and ASPBAE came at a critical point for NEP when institutional funding from a donor agency was about to end. Although it was a NEP Board member who told NEP about Misereor, a German development agency, Seng Hong credits ASPBAE's endorsement for NEP's eventually obtaining multi-year funding from Misereor.

Later, ASPBAE introduced NEP to a long-time partner, Deutschen Volkshochschul Verbandes International (DVV). Today, DVV supports NEP's programme on adult literacy.

These funding grants have enabled NEP to make long-term plans and expand its programmes.

RWS funds also enabled two NEP member NGOs to conduct campaigns to increase school enrolment.

Support in capacity-building


RWS support to NEP went beyond financial assistance. "They were actually interested in building our capacity," Seng Hong said – this was something NEP had not experienced with their institutional donor.

During periodic meetings, ASPBAE gave NEP advice on its advocacy plan and updates on international campaigns such as the Global Action Week, and shared the experiences of other national coalitions in expanding membership and working with media.

Through RWS, ASPBAE contributed to the capacity-building of NEP members. This included the holding of a three-day training workshop on monitoring and evaluation, and seminars on the Education Law.

Helping forge links and broaden perspectives

RWS and ASPBAE introduced NEP to other groups engaged in education, such as Save the Children – Sweden and Education In-



ternational. RWS also arranged for the meeting and interaction of NEP staff with other RWS partners and national education coalitions in international conferences wherein participants exchanged experiences on effective campaigns.

“Some of their ideas could not be applied to Cambodia,” NEP Research Coordinator Ang Sopha admitted, “but they made me think hard about what approaches will work here.”⁵⁰

Ang Sopha recalled, “Before we affiliated with RWS, all I knew was the Cambodian content. After joining meetings organised by RWS, I learned that Education for All is a commitment of governments all over the world, not only in Cambodia. I also realised that a lot of information is available here in our country. During meetings, we had to make presentations. This forced me to research and, in so doing, I came to understand the issues better.”⁵¹

Facilitating participation in regional advocacy

RWS also facilitated NEP’s participation in region-level advocacy, for example, in UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Office conferences and workshops. This included the mid-decade assessment processes where NEP met with its MoEYS counterparts, including State Secretary for Education Nath Bunrouen.

RWS made possible NEP’s participation in these important engagements which were considered both as advocacy events and opportunities for capacity-building in policy advocacy.

Reflecting on the RWS programme and its contributions to NEP, In Samrithy said, “I think Real World Strategies is about global links. We feel that, okay, we are not alone; we have friends in other coalitions and countries who care about us, and we care for them.”⁵²

NOTES

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12. *The Impact of Informal School Fees*.

After joining meetings organised by RWS, I learned that Education for All is a commitment of governments all over the world, not only in Cambodia.

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17. NGO Position Papers on Cambodia's Development in 2009-2010, to the 3rd Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum: Monitoring the Implementation of the National Strategic Development Plan and the 2008 CDCF Joint Monitoring Indicators, NGO Forum, Cooperation Committee of Cambodia, and Medicam (2007), 96.
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30. VSO, <http://www.vsointernational.org/story/22566/stories>.
31. Interview with MoEYS Director of Legislation Sorn Seng Hok, 29 July 2010.
32. Ibid.
33. Interview with NEP Education Coordinator Leng Theavy, 29 July 2010.
34. Royal Government of Cambodia, *National Strategy Development Plan Update 2009-2013*, 63.
35. Interview with NEP coordinators Ang Sopha and Leng Theavy, 30 July 2010.
36. Interview with MoEYS Director of Legislation Sorn Seng Hok, 29 July 2010.
37. Email correspondence with Chie Takahashi, UNICEF Education Specialist, 12 August 2010.
38. Interview with In Samrithy, 30 July 2010.
39. Ibid.
40. Email correspondence with Sun Lei, UNESCO Education Programme Specialist, 6 August 2010.
41. Interview with Ang Sopha and Leng Theavy, 30 July 2010.
42. Focus group discussion with five mothers in Kampung Cham, 28 July 2010.
43. Interview with Seng Hong, 30 July 2010.
44. Ibid.
45. Interview with Kan Kall, 28 July 2010.
46. Interviews with Kan Kall, 28 July 2010; and with Chim Manavy, 29 July 2010.
47. Email correspondence from Chie Takahashi, 12 August 2010.
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PHILIPPINES CASE STUDY: CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORMS



E-Net Philippines

MOBILISING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH TO ADVOCATE FOR EDUCATION FINANCING



Jamaica Malapit was 15 years old when she quit school. “I had just finished second-year high school,” she recounted. With several children in school at the same time, her parents were forced to take a loan to cover their expenses, but it simply wasn’t enough. Giving way to two older siblings, Jamaica and a younger sister dropped out of school, “just for a while,” they hoped. Her mother, a day care teacher in their urban poor community, had taught them to value education, so this was a painful decision for everyone.

After a year spent selling vegetables in the market, Jamaica had saved enough to help her younger sister resume schooling. But would she ever go back to school herself?¹

Jamaica’s story is repeated everyday in countless communities throughout the Philippines where poverty prevents children from completing their education.

Many school-related expenses

Despite guarantees of free elementary and high school education in government or public schools, in reality there are many school-related expenses such as uniforms, school bags, sports fees, school supplies, transportation and food consumed in school.

Numerous payments collected by schools are passed off as “voluntary contributions” or “donations”, e.g., for Boy/Girl Scouts, sports events and special school activities, fees collected before students can take the examinations, and sometimes even fees to help cover electricity and water bills, school repair and maintenance costs, and furniture and equipment purchase.

All these add up to quite a sum, especially for poor families which, typically have larger numbers of children. The 2007 Education Watch report of the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms found that families with children in public schools spent an average of Philippine pesos (PhP) 2,450 a year for elementary students and PhP 5,246 a year for those in high school.² These figures do not yet include food expenses.

Barriers to education participation

Poverty also forces many children to quit school to find a job or livelihood, or to take on household chores and child-rearing re-

sponsibilities so that their parents could work. Ironically, although many of these children have dropped out in order to work and earn some income, their low level of education reduces their chances of employment, or limits them to low-paying jobs. And even if child workers attempt to maintain schooling, physical exhaustion often prevents them from learning, thus resulting in their earning low grades and their eventually dropping out just the same.

Hunger and malnutrition, the Department of Education (DepEd) admits, are also barriers to participation in education.³ The United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) reports that more than one in four (28 per cent) of children under five years old in the country are underweight⁴ and many children go to school hungry.

The *Philippines Midterm Progress Report (2007) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* confirms that participation rate in primary education is inversely correlated with the incidence rates for food and overall poverty. Regions with the lowest poverty incidence rates had the highest participation rates, highest cohort survival rates and lowest dropout rates.⁵

Worsening education participation rates

Compared to many others, Jamaica could even be considered fortunate to have gone as far as second year high school. For of 100 Filipino children who enter grade 1, only 66 reach grade 6, only 43 complete high school and only 14 earn a college degree.⁶

Indeed, fewer children are going to school. Table 1 shows the steady drop in the number of Filipino children enrolled in elementary school. This has led an official government report to conclude there is a low probability that the country would meet the MDG target of achieving universal primary education by 2015.⁷

TABLE 1. PROGRESS IN THE MDG GOAL 2 OF ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION				
	Indicators (Elementary)			
	Participation Rate	Cohort Survival Rate	Completion Rate	
Baseline 1990 or year closest to 1990 (%)	85.10	68.65	66.50	
Current Level (2005/2006 or year closest to 2005/2006) (%)	84.44	69.90	67.99	
Target by 2015 (%)	100.00	84.67	81.04	
Average Rate of Progress (1990 to 2005/2006 or year closest) (%)	-0.05	0.09	0.11	
Required Rate of Progress (2005/2006 to 2015) (%)	1.37	1.48	1.30	
Probability of Attaining the Target	Low	Low	Low	

Source: *Philippines Mid-Term Progress Report on the MDGs, 2007*.

In 1990 the elementary participation rate was computed based on the figures for the 7 to 12 years age group, which was changed to the 6 to 11 years age group beginning school year 2002-2003.

The Philippines Midterm Progress Report (2007) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) confirms that participation rate in primary education is inversely correlated with the incidence rates for food and overall poverty.

That school year (2002-2003), the elementary participation rate was 90.29 per cent; viewed against the figure for that school year, the 2005-2006 elementary participation rate of 84.44 per cent represents an alarming decline.⁸

Increasing dropout rates

Table 2 below shows the increasing dropout rates and number of dropouts against school populations for the elementary and secondary school levels in recent years.

TABLE 2. DROPOUT RATE (ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVELS)			
Elementary Level			
School Year	Population	Dropouts	
		%	Total
2001-2002	12,056,162	6.51	784,856
2002-2003	12,075,013	6.69	807,818
2003-2004	12,101,061	6.89	833,950
2004-2005	11,990,686	6.98	836,950
2005-2006	12,096,656	7.33	886,685
2006-2007	12,318,505	6.33	779,761
2007-2008	13,144,193	14.77	1,941,353
2008-2009	13,412,332	13.99	1,877,010
Secondary Level			
School Year	Population	Dropouts	
		%	Total
2001-2002	4,824,789	8.53	411,555
2002-2003	5,063,978	8.45	427,906
2003-2004	5,100,061	8.16	416,165
2004-2005	5,013,577	7.99	400,585
2005-2006	5,072,210	12.51	634,533
2006-2007	5,173,330	8.55	442,320
2007-2008	7,992,807	11.97	956,436
2008-2009	8,157,269	11.93	973,415

Source: Department of Education Office of Planning Service.

The precise figure for out-of-school youths is not known. Table 2 above was provided by the DepEd Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) Director Carolina Guerrero. But, she said, no one knows what happened to those who dropped out – whether they returned to school the following year, or whether they have completely stopped schooling. If it is the latter case, then the total number of dropouts should actually be much higher than the figure on record.⁹ Moreover, DepEd only collects the dropout rate two months after school starts, leaving uncounted the larger numbers of schoolchildren who drop out in succeeding months.¹⁰

In 2006 BALS estimated that almost two million (1.84 million) Filipino children in the 6 to 11 years age group and nearly four million (3.94 million) in the 12 to 15 years age group were not in school.¹¹

More male dropouts

Males comprise the majority of dropouts in the country. In high school, for example, there are two boys who drop out for every girl who quits school. For every 100 boys who enter in the first year, only 57 eventually earn a high school diploma, compared to 71 girls.

The higher dropout rate for boys is usually attributed to the heavier reliance on males to supplement family income by finding work, but also in part to their greater vulnerability to distractions and risk-taking behaviour.¹²

Dismal literacy figures

These alarming dropout rates are matched by dismal literacy figures: less than six out of seven (84.1 per cent) Filipinos are functionally literate. Put another way, 9.6 million Filipinos are not functionally literate.¹³

Females have a slight edge over males in simple literacy rates (94.3 per cent vs. 92.6 per cent) and functional literacy rates (86.3 per cent vs. 81.9 per cent).¹⁴

E-NET AND THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM

The Civil Society Network for Education Reforms was organised in 2000. Its mission: “to expand and strengthen civil society participation in reforming the Philippine education system and in developing alternative learning systems, with special concern for marginalised, excluded and vulnerable sectors.”¹⁵

Claiming the right to education

“E-Net is basically an advocacy organisation,” said E-Net Philippines National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano. “We believe education is a right we should claim from government. And civil society has a big role in decision-making on the public education system.”¹⁶

Today, E-Net Philippines counts 150 members and partners. These include non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, people’s organisations (POs), day care centres and teachers’ associations.

In 2006 E-Net was invited to co-chair the Education for All Committee in the Philippines. E-Net Philippines is also a member of the Board of the Global Campaign for Education, an international movement working for the realisation of Education for All.

Advocating for lifelong learning and ALS

With lifelong learning explicitly mentioned in its vision statement, and the development of alternative learning system, especially for marginalised sectors, clearly stated in its mission, E-Net commits itself to advocating education for OSY. ALS is also the focus of one of E-Net Philippines’s five Working Groups.

Out of school youth is now around 6 Million and counting;



E-Net Philippines's
advocacy for ALS has
been so consistent
that the coalition is
now often equated
with the issue.

Many member organisations of E-Net Philippines are engaged in popular education, adult education and distance learning, with a growing number involved in the government's Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) programme.

ALS festivals: Showcasing the diversity of ALS programmes

Thus, an ALS Festival in 2002 was one of the network's first major activities, with festival participants doing a show-and-tell of their education programmes ranging from health and nutrition education, indigenous education, women's education and several other initiatives shared by educators within the network. The ALS Festival was replicated both at the national and local levels in succeeding years.

When the DepEd Bureau of Non-Formal Education was renamed Bureau of Alternative Learning System in 2004, E-Net Philippines took this opportunity to define "alternative" from the perspective of the marginalised. In 2007 it organized yet another ALS Festival to demonstrate to DepEd, BALS and the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) the diversity of ALS programmes being implemented by NGOs and POs.

E-Net Philippines's advocacy for ALS has been so consistent that the coalition is now often equated with the issue. "Whenever someone mentions ALS, the others always say, 'Oh, that's E-Net; let's bring them in,'" said Cecilia Soriano.¹⁷

Long collaboration with students and OSY

E-Net Philippines has extensive experience in collaborating with students and OSY. This collaboration is periodically demonstrated during the annual Global Action Week (GAW) for Education – which actually becomes more of Global Action Month as it is observed in the Philippines. OSY help organise the activities for this event and are themselves the main participants, particularly in activities held in the communities.

For the GAW with the theme of "*World's Biggest Lesson*", for example, OSY planned the concept and executed it too: they displayed a big blanket upon which they had written their aspirations.

Education Watch research: Surveying disadvantaged groups in education

E-Net Philippines members are particularly drawn to ALS because of the magnitude of the dropout problem: often, they would encounter large numbers of dropouts and OSY in the areas where they operate.

In 2007 E-Net Philippines and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education¹⁸ collaborated on the Education Watch project, with support from the Real World Strategies programme.

For the EdWatch project, E-Net Philippines gathered education figures and statistics from national censuses, surveys and reports. Its researchers also surveyed four local areas to substantiate education trends at the national level. This study resulted in the publication in 2007 of the research report *Mapping Out Disadvantaged Groups in Education*, which explains why many of the marginalised are not in school.

Through the local surveys it conducted, the research study found that only about four out of five (81.1%) children aged 6 to 11 years were attending elementary school, and little more than half (55.8%) of those aged 12 to 15 years were enrolled in high school. Moreover, three in five (60%) of the schoolchildren lagged behind their school levels by one or two years.¹⁹

For E-Net Philippines, these figures are unjustifiable. “It’s incredible there isn’t more public outrage over the vast numbers of school dropouts, or more concern over the implications on families and the national community,” said Reginaldo “Regie” Guillen, former Advocacy and Campaigns Associate of E-Net Philippines.²⁰

The EdWatch report gave E-Net Philippines greater impetus in its work and provided it with the evidence required in advocating for the OSY right to education.

Successes in local advocacy

At the local level, E-Net Philippines’s member organisations lobbied with local government units to invest in ALS. For example, they lobbied for the utilisation of special education funds (SEF), not only for school-based activities, but also for education programmes for OSYs.

Some notable successes achieved by these local advocacy efforts include the following:²¹

- In Benguet Province, the Popular Education for People’s Empowerment (PEPE) received PhP 50,000 from the Mayor’s Office for mentoring indigenous children.
- In Baguio City, the People’s Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD) gained access to a resource centre and a learning centre, and was appointed NGO representative in the Provincial Literacy Coordinating Council (PLCC). Eventually, PILCD was accredited by DepEd BALS as a service provider and contracted to implement ALS, with a grant of PhP 100,000 for 100 learners.
- In Botolan, the Paaralang Bayan ng Ayta sa Zambales (PBAZ), with the help of Education for Life Foundation (ELF) and the LGU signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) that stipulates support for ALS. PBAZ has also been accredited by BALS as a service provider and, since 2008, has received DepEd contracts as service provider for the education of Aytas, who are in-

The EdWatch report gave E-Net Philippines greater impetus in its work and provided it with the evidence required in advocating for the OSY right to education.

digenous Filipinos; and in Negros Occidental, the Eskwelahan Sang Katawhan (ESKAN, or School of the Masses) mobilised PhP 300,000 for the education of child labourers in sugar plantations.

Tracking the education budget

Among the government agencies, DepED receives the highest total budget. There have thus been calls for DepEd to use its resources more efficiently, instead of being allocated additional resources.

To monitor the national DepEd budget and how this is disbursed and used at the school/local level, E-Net Philippines did a budget tracking up to the school/community level in four districts in Luzon – National Capital Region (NCR).

The budget tracking covered six education inputs:

- Teacher items
- Computer programme
- ALS contracting scheme
- School building
- Food for school programme; and
- Maintenance and operating and other expenses.

The project also examined the bottlenecks in requesting, authorising, releasing and using funds for these six items, and scrutinised the governance aspect and quality of implementation at school level.

Mapping out education deficits in conflict areas

E-Net Philippines has utilised the RWS Education Watch technology beyond the original study it conducted in 2007. With funding support from Oxfam, E-Net Philippines and its local partners mapped out education deficits in four municipalities in Central Mindanao: Datu Piglas, Paglat, Tulunan and Columbio – areas directly affected by armed conflict.

Campaigning for education programmes for OSY

Thereafter, E-Net Philippines campaigned for LGUs to finance ALS and functional literacy programmes for OSY. It also launched a media campaign, including airing advertisements over the radio. In turn, these advertisements produced in Mindanao are being adapted to the national context. Soon, E-Net Philippines will be working with the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) on a media campaign on education for OSY.²²

At the national level, ALS advocacy is addressed to both DepEd officials and Congress representatives. During budget deliberations, legislators are often supportive of school-related inputs but fail to summon the same level of interest in education programmes for out-of-school children and youth (OSCY), and much less for adult education.



Challenging commonly held notions on dropouts

Everything starts with challenging deeply ingrained perspectives and mindsets on education, and how these relate to issues affecting OSCY.

The commonly held notion of government officials and school authorities is that the dropouts chose to leave the formal education system; it is, therefore, considered the fault of the dropouts and their families, and they are the ones blamed that the dropouts have quit school, and they are then told that the dropouts should simply return.

Reasons for dropping out

Challenging this commonly held notion on dropouts, E-Net Philippines studied and disclosed the foremost reasons for dropping out. These include:

- *Poverty: major reason for dropping out*

Poverty is the major reason for the dropouts' leaving school.

This debunks the notion that the dropouts chose to quit school, since poverty, which forced them to leave school in the first place, was hardly their choice.

- *“Lack of interest”*

Another oft-cited reason for leaving school is “lack of interest”, which needs to be further analysed and understood, according to E-Net Philippines. With further probing, “lack of interest” could turn out to mean having difficulty learning in an environment where class sizes typically exceed 50 students and can even go as high as 120; where classrooms are small and overcrowded; where school facilities are inadequate; where school locations are inaccessible; and where teaching styles are not learner based nor child centred.

If the students are not learning well and receive low grades, they would tend to lose interest in attending classes and find it easier to make the decision to quit school.

- *Negative attitude of teachers towards poor students*

The BALS Director admitted the impatient, even derisive, attitude of some teachers towards poor students also contributes to the problem.

Despite vigorous campaigns against the practice, the legislature has not yet passed a law specifically banning corporal punishment in school, and some children still report being hit or hurt by teachers. There is, however, a law against child abuse which children, parents, child rights activists and education advocates could use to counter not just physical violence, but also emotion-

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al and psychological violence, which causes traumatised children to quit school.

- *School disruptions due to armed conflict and natural disasters*
For thousands of children affected by armed conflict and natural disasters, remaining in school was not an option. In the municipality of Datu Piang, Maguindanao, for example, 65,000 people were evacuated in 2008 due to clan conflicts. A total of 4,652 pupils stopped schooling for 59 days; more than 13,000 children stayed in evacuation camps where sickness was rampant.²³

School disruption and poor health clearly adversely affect the chances that children caught in armed conflict and natural calamities would finish basic education.

*The longer the dropouts stay away,
the slimmer their chances of going back to school*

Educators' insistence that dropouts should simply return to the formal school system flies in the face of evidence. Studies show that the likelihood of dropouts returning to school decreases the longer they stay away.

Rene Raya, Coordinator of E-Net Philippines's Working Group on Education Financing, said, "Maybe in the first year, there's still a chance they'll go back. But after two years, and especially when they already look physically different from other students in that level . . ." ²⁴ Rene's voice trailed off.

Undue emphasis on formal education

And yet, DepEd programmes revolve around the formal education system, into which virtually all its resources are poured. The government policy is to bring back dropouts to the formal education systems because all government resources are concentrated here: schools, teachers and textbooks.

"It's hard to get ALS appreciated by those who know only formal education. Yes, improvements in the formal school system may dissuade some students from dropping out. But the reality is that millions of dropouts will not return, and we aren't reaching them in adequate numbers," rued the BALS Director.²⁵

Teachers who have worked with E-Net Philippines say that since schools in Metro Manila and other cities are overcrowded, students who dropped out of school were simply allowed to leave, without the government putting in place affirmative action for children at risk. Flora Arellano, President of TEACHERS, Inc., noted the government's dropout reduction programme passes on the responsibility to BALS without understanding the true nature of the students' inability to stay in school.²⁶

Low priority for ALS

- *Meagre ALS budget*

An indication of the low regard for ALS is the meagre BALS budget: in the last ten years, it averaged just 0.15 per cent of the total DepEd budget. And while some significance may be gleaned in the 2009 BALS budget being 0.26 per cent of the total DepEd budget compared to 0.08 per cent in 2000, it remains a tiny fraction.²⁷

The limited funds allocated by the government for BALS is starkly disproportional to the vast numbers of OSY that BALS seeks to reach and serve; neither is this budget adequate for providing quality services.

Cecilia Soriano said, “DepEd calculates that it takes PhP 5,000 per year to educate a child in the formal system. Yet the BALS budget in the service-contracting scheme is just PhP 800 per child.” E-Net Philippines argues that, to ensure quality, ALS should also allocate at least PhP 5,000 per learner, inclusive of modules and operational expenses to enable instructional managers to reach out to learners.

- *Nonprinting of A&E modules*

Another indication of the low priority given to ALS: the government has not reprinted modules since 1999, despite the entreaties of BALS. Lack of funds for reproducing the modules contributes to the low number of passers for Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E), BALS’s core programme whereby those who did not complete elementary and high school can study a series of more than 500 modules, and then take an examination to qualify to get a diploma.

In 2009 the passing rate for A&E at both elementary and high school levels was just about one out of five (21 per cent), a drop from about one out of four (26 per cent) the previous year. E-Net Philippines fears the low passing rate would discourage more learners from signing up for A&E.

Improving and expanding the scope of ALS

In addition to pushing DepEd and Congress for a bigger ALS budget, E-Net Philippines also seeks to improve and expand the scope of ALS.

BALS used to focus solely on A&E. Over the years, E-Net Philippines has encouraged BALS to adopt the spirit of lifelong learning and expand its programmes. One way of doing this is by integrating livelihood, enterprise development, life skills and other interventions for OSCY who mostly come from poor and marginalised families.

Today, BALS programmes cover literacy, life skills (technical skills for livelihood) and informal education (e.g., certificate courses for parents), especially those who have worked in partnership with the

“DepEd calculates that it takes PhP 5,000 per year to educate a child in the formal system. Yet the BALS budget in the service-contracting scheme is just PhP 800 per child.”



E-Net Philippines
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LGUs. “DepEd may not admit it, but I think E-Net can claim credit for some of these changes,” said May Cinco, a member of E-Net Philippines’s Working Group on ALS.²⁸

Improving quality and access to ALS

Quality and access to ALS are just as important. Among E-Net Philippines’s key advocacies are the following:

- A more flexible criteria for accrediting learning centres
This would benefit E-Net Philippines member organisations which are interested in becoming accredited as ALS service providers and which would like their community initiatives to be recognised.
- A more flexible criteria for instructional managers
BALS currently requires instructional managers to be college graduates. E-Net Philippines questions the likelihood that college graduates would agree to be assigned to remote and far-flung villages. Instead, E-Net proposes that instructional managers be developed from among those people in the village who already have some experience in education and training, even if they are not college graduates.
- More flexible arrangements to enable dual accreditation/certification
Right now, BALS requires learners under the life skills (technical skills for livelihood) programme to have a high school diploma. E-Net is lobbying for learners to be able to simultaneously train in life skills and study for the high school A&E.
- A&E examination questions that correspond to the learning strands of the A&E modules
There are five A&E learning strands:
 1. Communication skills
 2. Critical thinking and problem-solving
 3. Sustainable use of resources/productivity
 4. Development of self and a sense of community
 5. Expanding one’s world vision

Learners complain that A&E examination questions put more emphasis on mathematics and science, instead of covering the full scope of modules actually studied.

Legislative agenda for education

Beyond ALS, E-Net Philippines regularly draws up policy briefs that highlight deficits in education and identify areas where government should invest in quality education. This agenda is advocated to Congress every year. The current *10-Point Legislative Agenda for Education* drafted by E-Net Philippines covers:²⁹

- Early child care and development (ECCD) for all
- Quality education programmes for out-of-school youth
- Affirmative action for indigenous peoples

- Quality education programmes for people with disabilities
- Relevant education programmes to eradicate child labour
- Sustained and relevant adult education programmes
- Student participation in education
- Right to education of teenage mothers
- Teachers' rights and welfare for quality EFA
- The Bangsa Moro people's right to education

Still unable to go back to high school, Jamaica availed of free training courses in her barangay (village), Payatas. There was a two-month computer literacy course being offered, and another course on English proficiency held thrice a week. She even signed up for a two-week call centre training course, although her chances of landing a job at a call centre without a high school diploma were nil.

In 2009 Jamaica joined the Pinagsamang Samahan ng Magulang (PINASAMA) Youth Organisation, the youth arm of a community-based organisation working for the rights of urban poor and women. A long-time member of E-Net Philippines, PINASAMA manages 23 day care centres in five barangays.

Constant discussion of ALS within E-Net encouraged PINASAMA to initiate its own ALS programme. PINASAMA day care teachers were trained by E-Net Philippines and ELF to handle the modules used in preparing learners for a high school A&E examination. The reception was immediate and overwhelming: dozens of OSY signed up enthusiastically; one of them was Jamaica. On Saturdays, three PINASAMA day care centres were converted into ALS learning centres.

After a few months, PINASAMA ran into problems. They did not have any funding for ALS and had to charge a fee for photocopying the modules; but many learners could not afford this fee. Some learners had children or part-time jobs that left them too exhausted and distracted during the all-day Saturday classes. The teachers, too, were tired, after handling full-time day care responsibilities the previous five days.

After three to four months, PINASAMA decided to suspend the ALS programme. "Our biggest lesson is that ALS won't work without a budget, without money for instructional materials. We really need to prepare ourselves more," said PINASAMA President Estrella Soriano.³⁰

For Jamaica, the door to education was again temporarily closed.

CAMPAIGN FOR CONGRESS TO ALLOCATE A BIGGER BUDGET FOR ALS

“Education for All
is possible when
government
invests at least
20 per cent of its
national budget
and 6 per cent of
its gross national
product (GNP)
on education”

As an advocacy organisation, E-Net Philippines calls on government to allocate resources needed to translate their education agenda into action. Since 2005 E-Net and other civil society organisations supported by the Social Watch – Alternative Budget Initiative (ABI) have lobbied with Congress to increase the budgets for their particular advocacies. E-Net heads the education cluster of ABI; for this reason, its Working Group on Education Financing plays a crucial role in the advocacy for a bigger education budget.

Government may claim DepEd has received a bigger budget over the years. But, actually, the increase has barely kept up with inflation and the increasing number of entrants into the educational system. “Education for All is possible when government invests at least 20 per cent of its national budget and 6 per cent of its gross national product (GNP) on education,”³¹ declared E-Net Philippine’s *Legislative Agenda for the 15th Congress*. In contrast, the 2009 DepEd budget was only 13.51 per cent of the total national budget.³²

E-Net Philippines proposed to increase the budgets for teacher development, additional teacher items, community learning centres, appropriate school feeding programmes, and quality inputs. It emphasised the urgency of increasing the ALS budget as an affirmative education action that will benefit mostly marginalised groups, and called on government to allocate 3 per cent of the national DepEd budget for ALS.

Scaling up advocacy for a bigger ALS budget

In 2009 E-Net Philippines decided to scale up its advocacy for increasing the ALS budget. Its campaign goal: get Congress to allocate one billion pesos to ALS.

Regie Guillen was E-Net Philippines’s Advocacy and Campaigns Associate during that period. Together with the E-Net Philippines Secretariat, Regie drafted a campaign plan that was presented to and subsequently approved by the E-Net Philippines Board. E-Net Philippines called for meetings with members, particularly those in the ALS and Education Financing Working Groups, and Early Childhood Care and Development Working Group members with ALS programmes, to plan the campaign’s execution.

Distinguishing feature of campaign: Mobilising OSY for lobbying

What distinguished the 2009 campaign from previous E-Net Philippines campaigns with OSY participants was that, this time, OSY stepped beyond their communities and were mobilised, not just to take part in mass actions, but also to undertake lobbying with DepEd and Congress.

Because of resource constraints, and because of the locations of DepEd and Congress, E-Net Philippines decided to limit campaign participants to those referred by its member organisations, and to OSY living in Metro Manila and Cavite province.

Campaign preparations

Preparations for the campaign took many forms:

- *Identification and selection of OSY volunteers*

This was done by E-Net Philippines member organisations in urban poor communities in Metro Manila and Cavite, using the following criteria:³³

- Current or previous experience of being out of school
- Initial experience, and potential to be leaders and campaigners
- Willingness to undergo formation and training
- Availability to devote time for E-Net Philippines campaigns

By February 2009, E-Net Philippines had started holding informal talks in the communities. The following month, 25 youth volunteers from urban poor communities were identified. Majority were teenagers, and a couple of others were in their early 20s.

- *Capacity-building of youth volunteers*

Developing the capabilities of the youth volunteers included:

- *Advocacy and Campaign Skills and Leadership Training* (30 March to 1 April 2009)

The course also included an orientation on EFA, and sessions on developing skills in public speaking and community organising. Trainers came from the E-Net Philippines Board, Secretariat and member organisations.

- *Global Action Week 2009* (April 2009)

GAW 2009 adopted the theme “Youth and Adult Education, and Lifelong Learning”. For the youth volunteers to develop their leadership skills in a practical and hands-on way, the youth campaigners were tasked to be among the main movers during the GAW 2009 event, and to lead many of the preparatory as well as main campaign activities. They put up posters and did local campaigns for education. They also presented songs, dances and other popular forms of advocacy.³⁴ To drum up interest in GAW 2009, E-Net Philippines organised a press conference on 20 March 2009, with one of the youth volunteers in the panel fielding questions from media.

- *Painting and arts workshops* (May 2009)

The immediate objective of these workshops was to train the youth volunteers in producing attractive campaign materials such as placards, leaflets and posters; but the practical arts skills they gained could be used in many other creative



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ways. For example, some youth volunteers designed artwork for canvas bags with education messages to raise campaign funds.

- *Mentoring and peer group meetings*

Mentoring was provided over several months by the E-Net Philippines Secretariat and member organisations to guide the youth volunteers in building their confidence and capabilities in advocacy and other skills. The E-Net Philippines Secretariat also facilitated peer group meetings for shared learning and interaction in the different communities where the youth volunteers lived.

- *Role plays on negotiation (May 2009)*

The OSY volunteers sharpened their advocacy and lobbying skills by doing role plays on negotiation. These were scheduled just before the mobilisation of youth volunteers outside the DepEd head office on 1 June 2009. Anticipating that DepEd officials would come out to meet them, E-Net Philippines and ELF prepared and coached the youth volunteers on engaging in a dialogue.

- *Training on education financing (19-20 August 2009)*

Participants included both the youth volunteers as well as representatives of E-Net Philippines member organisations. Trainees came from Action for Economic Reforms (AER), an E-Net Philippines partner.

Campaign highlights

Highlights of the campaign included:

• *Engagement with government education officials*

Youth volunteers were mobilised to gather for a mass action outside the DepEd office on the first day of school, 9 June 2009. Joined by E-Net Philippines Secretariat staff and member organisations (urban poor organisations), the group of around 50 campaigners held up placards. DepEd security guards immediately closed the gates, and police from the station a hundred metres away approached the group. BALS officials later invited the group's representatives to come inside for a dialogue. Five youth volunteers met with DepEd officials, accompanied by the E-Net staff. In this dialogue, DepEd BALS was represented by Assistant Director Carmelita Joble.

E-Net Philippines had hoped for such a dialogue and had prepared the following messages which were presented to the DepEd officials:

- DepEd must work for more investments to enable ALS to reach out to more out-of-school children and youth, and to enable BALS to innovate in adult education programmes.
- Provide modules for use of ALS learners.

- Make available free trainings for ALS facilitators from NGOs and POs.
- Create more venues for civil society groups to provide inputs on ALS and other education policies.

E-Net Philippines also informed BALS it would bring the campaign for a bigger ALS budget to Congress.

- *Government concessions*

The dialogue with government education officials resulted in some concessions from government. In turn, BALS agreed to:

- Involve E-Net Philippines in the formulation of the ALS Omnibus Guidelines.
- Look for more funds for printing ALS modules.
- Provide training on ALS to E-Net Philippines members, free of charge. (However, this did not materialise, although BALS Deputy Director Carmelita Joble and BALS Senior Staff Edna Golusino served as resource persons in training courses on ALS organised by E-Net Philippines.)
- Extend other technical assistance to E-Net Philippines members implementing ALS.

The mobilisation was featured in *Umagang Kay Ganda (Morning That's So Beautiful)*, the early morning news programme of a leading TV station.

- *Lobbying with Congress*

By tradition, the President of the Republic delivers an annual State of the Nation Address before Congress on the last Monday of July (in 2009, on 27 July). In this speech, the President usually gives marching orders to the executive branch and presents the legislative agenda.

Within a month, the President submits the proposed national budget for the following year to Congress, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives (the Philippines follows the US bicameral system of government). The proposed budget is then discussed in both Houses of Congress, and government departments such as DepEd are called upon to report on their achievements the previous year and justify their budget proposal for the next year.

Starting September, the Congressional Appropriations Committee calls for budget hearings. The proposed budget is deliberated initially in the House of Representatives, which drafts its version of the budget and submits this to the Senate. The Senate, in turn, drafts and submits its own version of the budget. Then the Bicameral Committee, composed of representatives from both Houses of Congress, reconciles the Senate and House of Representatives versions and decides on the final budget configuration.



CLAIMING OUR FUTURE TODAY!

Excerpts from Campaign Concept Paper of E-Net Philippines

Campaign Objectives

- Led by OSY, highlight issues on Literacy/Illiteracy towards effecting policy changes in DepEd;
- Engage DepEd/government on issues related to literacy and access to education of OSY;
- Build a sustained campaign machinery of OSY that will craft and advocate for an education reform agenda from the perspective out-of-school children and youth; and
- Link up the campaign with the Alternative Budget Initiative (ABI) at the national and local levels.

Campaign Calls

- **Reaching the unreached** – There should be focus on areas where there are large concentrations of OSY, especially indigenous people's communities. This would include setting up community learning centres and/or increasing the number of mobile teachers and service providers of ALS in areas where they are badly needed;
- **Focus and prioritisation of addressing OSY through ALS**, at the same time bringing the children back to school – While ALS is already institutionalised, the problem is the inattention of DepEd in developing this towards its emergence as an effective programme addressing the learning needs of those who are not able to stay in school
- **Broadening Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) participation** – This would include cascading of EFA Committees at the Division Level which should complement CSO participation at the local government unit (LGU) level through the Local School Board (LSB);

Proposed Budget Increases

The Education Cluster of the Alternative Budget Initiative (ABI) headed by E-Net Philippines proposes the following budget increases to effectively address the growing number of OSY:

- **PhP 800 million to ensure Quality ALS Programmes** – This would target 160,000 of the 5.7 million out-of-school children and youth (6-15 years old) [Figures from BALS, 2007];

- **PhP 70 million for Community Learning Centres** – In poor communities in Davao Oriental, Agusan, and South Cotabato, there are high concentrations of indigenous peoples who are not able to finish high school or even elementary education. To meet the learning needs of these learners in remote and poverty-stricken areas, Community Learning Centres must be conceptualised and constructed in partnership with local communities to cater to children, youth, and adults who need functional literacy programmes and continuing basic education. This proposed budget will cover construction of Community Learning Centres, complete with learning materials, in 20 indigenous communities, with a budget of PhP350,000 per learning centre;
- **PhP 50 million for Materials Development for ALS** – The ALS is an innovative way of delivering education for marginalised sectors which cannot afford the expenses and time of going to school every day. To deliver quality ALS programmes, government should invest in materials development, particularly in printing the ALS modules for the elementary and high school accreditation and equivalency (A&E) programme being implemented by DepEd and civil society. ABI's proposed budget for materials development would allow printing of 10,000 copies of the ALS modules (at PhP 5,000 per complete set of ALS modules x 10,000 copies);
- **PhP 10 million for a National Campaign on Literacy** - While the Philippines boasts of high literacy rates, there are still more than 5.2 million Filipinos who are unable to read and write. [*Functional Literacy Education and Mass Media Survey*, 2003]. To ensure that LGUs and other agencies are able to channel funds for functional literacy programmes for these learners, the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC), together with other stakeholders, is set to launch a National Literacy Campaign. ABI proposes an additional budget of PhP 10 million to support this campaign, and ensure wider reach and greater effectiveness.

Source: Claiming Our Future Today!, E-Net Philippines campaign concept paper, undated.

E-Net Philippines guided the youth volunteers in lobbying with Congress. Campaign activities aimed at Congress include:

-Mobilisation of OSY and students during the President's State of the Nation Address, 27 July 2009. Coordinated by E-Net Philip-



Philippines member organisation Kabataan Kontra Kahirapan (Youth Against Poverty), this mobilisation aimed to draw attention to the need for a bigger ALS budget. The campaign message was mainstreamed alongside the broader call of “educate to end poverty.”

-Mobilisation of youth volunteers during the Congressional hearing on the DepEd budget, 23 September 2009. Around 20 OSY trooped to the House of Representatives to observe the DepEd budget hearing. Earlier, E-Net Philippines had coordinated with an ally, then Representative Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel, to arrange with Congress security staff to allow the youth volunteers’ entry. Shirts printed with advocacy messages are not allowed inside the session hall, so the youth volunteers initially covered up their orange T-shirts bearing the slogan “Increase ALS budget to PhP 1 billion,” and then unbuttoned their outer shirts when they were seated inside.



Although only legislators are allowed to participate in Congressional discussions, the youth volunteers were able to observe legislative procedures. Upon E-Net Philippines’ request, Representative Hontiveros-Baraquel read to the body the entire position paper it had prepared, particularly E-Net’s call for a PhP 1 billion budget for ALS; the paper was also used for interpolations on the legislative floor. Later, Representative Hontiveros-Baraquel assured E-Net Philippines she would pursue the PhP 1 billion budget call in subsequent Congressional hearings.

-Distribution of E-Net Philippines policy briefs, from July to November 2009. Policy briefs on ALS and the situation of OSY were prepared by E-Net Philippines and distributed by the youth volunteers to some offices in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

-Attendance of youth volunteers at the Social Watch presentation of the consolidated alternative budgets of civil society organisations to the minority parties in Congress, and during the Social Watch briefings for individual members of the Congressional Appropriations Committee.

-Serenade by youth volunteers outside a building where the Bicameral Committee of Congress was meeting to decide on the national budget, December 2009. Deviating from the usual campaign methods to create a more festive atmosphere and employ the youth’s enthusiasm for music, more than 30 youth volunteers were joined by their parents and neighbours from urban poor communities in this activity.

-Lobbying for a budget for ALS linked to livelihoods for OSY in armed conflict areas with then Representative Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel and Teofisto Guingona III.

- *School-roving campaign*

E-Net Philippines wanted to link the youth volunteers' campaign to similar issues in the formal education system. E-Net Philippines had also hoped to attract the attention of the extension services of some universities which could be mobilised for community-based education programmes.

Youth volunteers conducted a school roving campaign to generate awareness on the need for a bigger ALS budget. They visited four universities and a high school: University of the Philippines, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Dela Salle University, Ateneo de Manila University and Ramon Magsaysay Cubao High School. For two to three days in each school, they set up booths where they entertained interested students, distributed information materials and sold campaign materials such as pens and canvas bags which they had designed. On a few occasions, youth volunteers were also invited to speak before students in the classrooms.

- *Awareness-raising through the media*

Another important component of the campaign was raising public awareness on the issue through the media. This includes:

- Press conferences during GAW 2009, the launch of the Big Read campaign which focused, on education for youth and adults, and the DepEd Forum on Financing Programs for OSY;
- Media interviews – E-Net Philippines President Edicio dela Torre was interviewed by two radio stations and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the country's leading newspaper. Two other newspapers with national circulation, *Malaya* and *Manila Standard*, printed articles on EFA and OSY. These were picked up by other media, thus leading to succeeding interviews;
- The Big Read campaign was featured in *Unang Hirit (First Nudge)*, a morning TV programme, which featured children denied basic education
- Speaking in a radio programme, March 2009
- Issuance of press releases, for example, on the 1 June 2009 mobilisation, 24 September 2009 DepEd budget hearing in Congress, and Senator Edgardo Angara's promise of support in increasing the ALS budget by PhP 500 million
- Use of internet social networking sites such as Facebook and email messages to promote the campaign
- Although not a deliberate part of the campaign, E-Net Philippines also ran a one-day orientation workshop for media on EFA and the need to support ALS. The workshop was supported by the RWS programme.

E-Net Philippines had also hoped to generate support from the Catholic Church in the form of a pastoral letter, to be read in all church services on Sunday, enjoining the Philippine government to heed the growing problem of school dropouts and provide education for out-of-school youth. However, because of resource con-

Youth volunteers
conducted a school
roving campaign to
generate awareness
on the need for a
bigger ALS budget.



straints and lack of time, E-Net Philippines was unable to pursue this plan.

One of the campaign youth volunteers was Jamaica. “I joined because of my own experience of being forced to drop out,” she said.

The Advocacy and Campaign Skills and Leadership Training she attended was fun, she said, “The atmosphere was light-hearted, with lots of kidding around. The trainers didn’t come across like our strict teachers in school. At the end of the training, we were given a chance to say what we thought. I also learned other things like the rights of women and children.”

Jamaica was among the five youth volunteers invited for the dialogue with BALS officials during the 1 June 2009 mobilisation. Jamaica recalled, “Regie had warned us earlier that we have to prepare what to say. So I talked about dropping out of school, and about having to spend to photocopy modules for the PINASAMA ALS. I also asked them to support E-Net. BALS Director Guerrero answered that she welcomed any organisation that helped in education. The government staff members were gentle with us; they were willing to listen.” Jamaica reckoned the dialogue lasted about an hour.

Jamaica also remembers going to a dialogue with members of other youth organisations in front of the Quezon City Hall. “We invited them to join the E-Net campaign,” she said.

She was present, too, during the 24 September 2009 hearing in Congress on the DepEd budget. E-Net’s press release, distributed the following day, quotes Jamaica: “The number of out-of-school youth is now equivalent to the number of children who are in school. If the Government wouldn’t heed our plea, the number of out-of-school youth will continue to rise. In this case, what’s left of our future?”³⁵

Most E-Net Philippines campaign activities were directed at the House of Representatives in which campaigners have more allies and contacts, partly because the law provides for representation of disadvantaged groups in so-called partylist groups at the House of Representatives.

At the Senate, E-Net was able to arrange separate meetings with three senators, including Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and Senator Edgardo Angara, chairperson of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Campaign setback: Battered by typhoon

Midway through the campaign, E-Net Philippines and its members were set back when Typhoon Ketsana battered Metro Manila and adjacent provinces, bringing a record volume of rainfall. The E-Net office was submerged in almost two metres of flood water, destroying files and equipment, including two computers.

Urban poor communities suffered even more damage, as rampaging floods, mud and debris washed away flimsy shanties. After this, it became difficult to mobilise the youth and village people to participate in the campaign, as they were understandably more engrossed with surviving in the aftermath of the devastating typhoon. For a while, “we were too embarrassed to call for meetings”, Cecilia Soriano admitted, knowing what their member organisations were grappling with. E-Net helped raise relief funds for some communities.

Getting back on track: ALS gets bigger budget

Later, the campaign tried to get back on track. E-Net Philippines was overjoyed when Senator Angara assured them of his support for a PhP 500 million increase in the ALS budget. This was less than the PhP 1 billion they sought, but E-Net was ecstatic, nevertheless. “We thought it was already in the can”, Cecilia Soriano said.

At the end of the budgetary process, deliberations hinged on the Bicameral Committee of Congress which met behind closed doors. Only Committee members could participate, and this excluded E-Net Philippines’s allies in the House of Representatives. E-Net and other CSOs under the Social Watch – Alternative Budget Initiative tried to keep up the pressure with a picket-serenade outside the building where the Bicameral Committee met.

In the final version of the 2010 national budget, BALS got PhP 40 million more than in the previous year. This was less than what E-Net Philippines had hoped for. Even so, it believes that getting support for ALS from legislators who initially had no idea about the programme is already a victory for ALS advocates. E-Net views the Bicameral Committee’s decision not to grant a more substantial budget increase as a challenge to intensify awareness raising on ALS in Congress.

CAMPAIGN HIGHS AND LOWS

Looking back on the campaign a year later, E-Net Philippines reviewed what has transpired.

Factors for success

Several factors contributed to the attainment of campaign gains. These included:

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- *Evidence from research*

According to Representative Hontiveros-Baraquel, the most important thing in lobbying with Congress is good research. E-Net Philippines's research, made through the RWS-supported Education Watch, provided the compelling evidence that was used in the campaign.

“Research on EFA deficits prepared the youth spokespersons and other E-Net members to confidently talk about statistical realities on the OSY”, said Cecilia Soriano.³⁶

- *Support of members and partners*

The E-Net Philippines Board and members, particularly the urban poor organisations, gave full support to the campaign. For example, the urban poor organisations took responsibility for identifying youth volunteers, monitoring them in the communities and mobilising them for campaign activities. The support of E-Net partners such as AER, ELF and Social Watch was also critical in crafting the campaign plan and strategies.

- *Allies in Congress*

E-Net Philippines and the youth volunteers were able to gain a foothold in Congress through allies such as the Akbayan partylist group, represented by Representative Hontiveros-Baraquel, and even individual allies (such as Representative Del de Guzman, who chaired the Education Committee, Rep. Erin Tañada and Teofisto Guingona III; and Senator Allan Peter Cayetano) from more traditional political parties who, nevertheless, adopted progressive positions on education.

These allies helped facilitate the entry of youth volunteers into Congress and presented E-Net's policy briefs in their behalf. For example, although Representative Hontiveros-Baraquel was not a member of Congress's Education Committee or Appropriations Committee, she attended the hearings of these Committees and read E-Net's position paper in full.

- *Youth volunteers' commitment*

E-Net Philippines gives the biggest credit to the youth volunteers who made themselves available for campaign activities and were effective in presenting issues directly affecting them because they spoke from the heart. As youth volunteer Jamaica Malapit attests, this commitment stems from personal experience and disappointment at being forced to leave school, and their strong desire for education. The youth volunteers were excited about their role as campaigners and constantly asked what more they could do.

Cecilia Soriano observed that hearing directly from the youth volunteers made a difference to politicians who asked questions afterwards on the issues they raised. Even E-Net Philippines staff-

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ers and members learned more about the nuances of school dropout issues from directly interacting with the youth campaigners. For example, they learned from some youth volunteers that their reasons for dropping out of school were simple lapses in the government bureaucracy, or even a paltry amount, such as a fee of \$10, which they could not pay. Seemingly small matters, yet the consequences were so heavy for them. For E-Net Philippines, this affirmed their position that the voices of OSYs are essential to shedding light on their plight.

- *Support from RWS and ASPBAE*

E-Net Philippines's Education Watch report, produced with RWS and ASPBAE in 2007, was a key resource for writing policy briefs on the situation of OSY in the country. Through the RWS programme, ASPBAE supported E-Net's strategy of mobilising OSY as advocates. This enabled the organising and capability building of the youth volunteers so that their voices could be heard.

On a wider scale, the RWS programme of ASPBAE expanded the capability of E-Net Philippines in areas such as research, analysis of EFA deficits, building partnerships for EFA and launching campaigns that promote the interests of marginalised groups. ASPBAE repeatedly challenged E-Net Philippines by asking, "Where are the marginalised?" in their programmes, Regie Guillen said.

CHALLENGES FACED AND LESSONS LEARNED

Many lessons were learned by campaign organisers and participants in the course of conducting the campaign. Although numerous gains have been achieved, several challenges remain for E-Net and its campaign partners, which include:

- *Changing mindsets*

For E-Net Philippines, the most strategic challenge is changing the mindset in both DepEd and Congress that the solution to the problem of OSY lies solely or primarily in formal education. This mindset is what prevents ALS from getting a fairer share of the education budget.

One approach could be to update research on the number and situation of OSY in the country, and show the long-term benefits of investing in innovative education programmes such as ALS that address their difficult circumstances, empower them economically and build their confidence to participate in society.

- *Declining share of education budget*

ALS is not unique in being underfunded. The social sector has suffered the brunt of the budget squeeze in the last five years, including declining per capita spending on education by govern-

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ment. The actual DepEd budget may have increased, but its share of the national budget has gone down.

SHARE OF EDUCATION IN THE NATIONAL BUDGET		
	2009	2010
DepEd budget (PhP)	158,210,142,000	161,405,905,000
Total national budget (PhP)	1,170,318,753,000	1,304,406,400,000
DepEd share of the national budget (%)	13.52	12.37

Source: Republic Act No. 9524, General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2009; and Republic Act No. 9970, General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2010.

- *Need for long-term and sustained alternative budget advocacy*
E-Net Philippines's collaboration with the rest of CSOs for an alternative budget requires long-term and sustained engagement.

Regie Guillen estimates that, to be effective, the campaign to increase the ALS budget should have been undertaken for at least 18 months.

- *Resource constraints*
E-Net Philippines was hobbled by resource constraints, particularly after its long-time source of institutional funds changed its priorities in the region and stopped core funding. By the end of 2009, E-Net Secretariat staffing was reduced to two, from the original four who already juggled multiple assignments.

Although the E-Net Board and member organisations were very supportive, they were busy with their own programmes and could not commit to more of the hands-on, time-consuming work that advocacy requires. This affected the campaign to some extent. For instance, the limited activities of the school roving campaign did not produce the results sought, and some aspects of the media campaign could not be sustained. E-Net activities to build the capability of youth volunteers were likewise constrained by inadequate funds.

- *Building a reliable constituency of youth campaigners*
Personal circumstances prevented some youth volunteers from participating in campaign activities until the end of the campaign: some had relocated to a different community, and two had gotten married in the midst of the campaign; but the biggest deterrent was their need to work or to find work.

Over time, the number of OSYs mobilised dwindled. As a result, E-Net Philippines had to recruit, train and deal with a new batch of youth volunteers from member organisations; it also had to boost the confidence and morale of the original team.

From this, the lesson derived by E-Net Philippines is the need for comprehensive and continuing capacity building of a larger and fresh pool of youth volunteers – in the knowledge that some of them will be unable to sustain their participation in the cam-

paign, but also in order to build a reliable constituency of youth volunteers who could be mobilised for campaigns.

Such capacity building, however, requires a range of training courses, workshops and mentoring which, in turn, require resources.

- *Convening an annual gathering of youth advocates*
In the light of the challenging circumstances of OSYs, E-Net Philippines deems it necessary to convene an annual gathering of youth advocates. They could be recruited, for example, among ALS learners who stay in an education programme for six to ten months until taking their A&E test. They can be tapped as advocates for a year and possibly for a longer time beyond this, if they stay in the same community or remain in contact with their community organisation.
- *Establishing and developing a national network of OSY*
Regie Guillen proposes going even further and encouraging OSY to go beyond village-level organising and work towards establishing and developing a national network of OSYs that would actively promote their issues.
- *Need for more one-on-one dialogues*
If E-Net Philippines was to go through the campaign again, Cecilia Soriano suggests organising more one-on-one dialogues between the youth volunteers and members of Congress, and not just lobbying at the Congressional Committee level.

REAPING THE HARVEST: OUTCOMES OF THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign of OSY for a bigger ALS budget achieved many gains, among which were the following:

- *Capability-building of OSY*
The campaign resulted in increased capacity and commitment of OSYs to campaign on education issues affecting them, and their increased self-confidence in general, as attested to by the E-Net Philippines Secretariat staffers and the urban poor organisation members who had frequent contacts with them.
- *Increased capacity in advocacy of E-Net Philippines members*
The capacity of E-Net Philippines member organisations to understand the processes in DepEd and Congress, engage in advocacy, and appreciate the link between policy change and their own programmes was enhanced. This is evident in:
 - Initiatives in local advocacy of urban poor organisations, such as KUMPAS, which participated in the campaign and later lob-

The campaign resulted in increased capacity and commitment of OSYs to campaign on education issues affecting them, and their increased self-confidence in general.



E-Net is now a member of the Technical Working Group of the Literacy Coordinating Council, the body that oversees policy development and implementation of functional literacy programmes by LGUs.

bied with their local government unit for support in establishing ALS programmes in their communities

- Confidence displayed by urban poor organisations and other E-Net members in representing the network in subsequent DepEd workshops and conferences

- *Greater recognition of E-Net Philippines and its work*

As a result of the campaign, there is greater recognition of E-Net Philippines and its work from the Department of Education and other concerned agencies. This is expressed in the following:

- On several occasions, BALS officials publicly cited E-Net's assistance in helping campaign for the increase in the ALS budget.

- Consistent invitations were received from DepEd for E-Net to represent CSOs in discussions concerning ALS.

- ♦ Following the 1 June 2009 mobilisation, BALS invited E-Net to join the discussions on ALS, including the ALS Omnibus Guidelines, of the Technical Working Group on the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA). The discussions included such topics as governance, curriculum development, testing and assessment, teacher development, and advocacy for ALS – thus providing an ideal venue for E-Net to influence ALS quality, access and management. The guidelines were finalised in October 2010.

- ♦ During the ALS Festival organised by BALS in August 2009, E-Net was invited to present a paper on ALS work done by CSOs for OSYs in armed conflict areas in Central Mindanao.

- E-Net is now a member of the Technical Working Group of the Literacy Coordinating Council, the body that oversees policy development and implementation of functional literacy programmes by LGUs. It has been tasked to organize the CSO Forum with the LCC to discuss policies, good practices and partnerships between government and civil society in implementing functional literacy programmes. This is usually a yearly event but was held twice in 2009, in Sultan Kudarat and in Quezon City.

- E-Net has also been invited to represent CSOs in a working group led by the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) that, among others, would map children at risk of dropping out and investigate the inordinate drop-out rate among boys.

- E-Net National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano was invited by DepEd to join the panel of judges for the Search for the Most Functional Community Learning Centre of the BALS.

- Likewise, E-Net Philippines President Edicio de la Torre and National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano joined the panel of judges in the National Literacy Awards, which give recognition to good practices in functional literacy programmes.
- Greater awareness of Congress members on education issues
There is now greater awareness among members of Congress on education issues, factors contributing to the high dropout rates, the problems affecting access to public education, and the role of ALS in providing education for OSY.
- Greater awareness of LGUs on OSY and ALS
There is greater awareness of LGUs on the situation of the OSY in their areas, what ALS is, and how ALS can be implemented.
- Production of policy briefs
E-Net Philippines produced policy briefs that succinctly discussed the problems of impoverished out-of-school youths from their own perspective, and the impact of ALS on their development.
- Organisational transformation
The campaign also prompted changes within E-Net Philippines, which include:
 - Increased exchanges between and support among E-Net members because of the camaraderie they developed during the campaign
 - Realisation that the youth sector should be represented in the E-Net Philippines Board of Directors in order to allow the youth, as stakeholders in education, to voice their concerns, contribute inputs from their perspective, and help in drafting and directing the policy agenda and actions of the coalition

THE ROAD AHEAD

What happens next for E-Net Philippines and its campaign?

Budget advocacy

For E-Net, the campaign to increase the ALS budget did not start and end in 2009. The campaign started years before that, and it will continue. As Cecilia Soriano noted, “Budget advocacy is an institutional advocacy of E-Net and continues to be part of yearly and long-term education financing advocacy.”

In February 2010, for example, youth volunteers pursued the campaign by participating in the People’s Voices for Education, which presented to electoral candidates an education platform that included an agenda for the OSY.

Proposed DepEd budget

As part of the Alternative Budget Initiative of civil society organisations, E-Net Philippines expects to draft and submit its proposed DepEd budget by late August 2010. This will be consolidated, along with the proposed DepEd budgets of other partners, for submission to and lobbying with Congress, which expects to start budget hearings in mid-September.

More allies in Congress

There is slightly more room for cautious optimism in the newly elected 15th Congress for the years 2010 to 2013. Some key allies are now in the majority party, which increases E-Net's chances of being heard. E-Net has also identified new allies among the newly elected representatives who have expressed interest in supporting education advocacy, with one ally categorically declaring his interest in ALS. On the other hand, some of last year's allies have also left Congress.

Continuing national and local advocacies

Within DepEd, E-Net expects to maximise opportunities for advancing its advocacies in the DepEd team crafting the ALS Omnibus Guidelines.

At the local level, E-Net members who have been trained in education financing expect to continue lobbying with local government units and local development councils for support to ALS.

For E-Net, the 2009 campaign which mobilised out-of-school youth for increasing ALS funding cannot be assessed in isolation of its wider campaign for greater recognition and support for ALS. Changes are slowly becoming evident. ALS is being discussed more widely. National-level campaigns are being matched by E-Net members on the ground.

The journey of E-Net

Cecilia Soriano likens the campaign's progression to E-Net's own journey. She tells the story of how, five years ago, a researcher interviewed the head of the EFA Secretariat about E-Net and education CSOs. "Ugh, they just hinder our work", the researcher was told. Last year, another researcher interviewed the same official and was told, "Without E-Net, everything would be a mess."

She recalls another conversation with an out-of-school youth who, in talking about ALS, said, "Here, we are accepted for who we are."

It is stories like these that give Cecilia Soriano and E-Net Philippines strength and encouragement.

After the PINASAMA ALS programme was suspended, PINASAMA facilitated Jamaica's transfer to an ALS learning centre where an E-Net partner worked. Jamaica continued attending the learning sessions and took the A&E test in October 2009. In March 2009, she was informed that she had passed the A&E for high school. Jamaica could take further education, if she liked.

"I learned from E-Net that all of us can help in education. I'd like to teach children myself", Jamaica confides. "Before the campaign, I didn't talk much except to say 'yes' whenever someone asked me a question. I talk more now."

REFLECTIONS ON THE REAL WORLD STRATEGIES PROGRAMME

RWS: Providing funds and capacity-building

E-Net Philippines's campaign that mobilised out-of-school youths to lobby for education financing was supported by the GCE in partnership with ASPBAE, through the RWS initiative. RWS provided both the funds as well as demand-driven capacity building.

Other RWS components

Other components of RWS are advocacy on official development assistance, constituency and policy advocacy on EFA goals, and promotion of adult education as articulated in the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI).

Impact and contributions of RWS

A summary of its reflections on how RWS expanded its perspectives, capabilities and opportunities for advocacy, from the national to the regional level, was presented by E-Net Philippines:³⁷

- *Meaning of RWS for E-Net: information, transnational connections and innovation*
RWS, for E-Net Philippines, means three things: information, transnational connections and innovation. RWS provided us access to information, connections to powerful institutions and influential people in the education sector, and skills to do our work more effectively.
- *Providing access to information at the regional level*
Before E-Net joined RWS, we were already engaging with the Philippine government on EFA. But we didn't always understand why the government was involved in certain interventions. When we joined RWS in 2004, we were able to engage at the regional level. It was here that we saw where government was often taking its cue.

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Some things that RWS was pushing for, such as official development assistance and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) education programmes, are not easily visible at the country level. We don't see how ODA is negotiated inside the Philippines.

RWS provided us very important opportunities and first-hand access to information at the regional level. For example, we were able to participate in the EFA Coordinators Meeting in the region, in which we saw what the Philippine government was committing in terms of its EFA plan. We also saw first hand why the government is prioritising certain programmes over the others.

- *Providing education advocacy opportunities at the regional level*

At the regional level, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation lays down all the guidelines for the countries. Through our participation, the national coalitions supported by RWS succeeded in influencing these guidelines and gave civil society organisations a strong voice in education-making. This was a very important contribution of RWS to E-Net Philippines.

RWS provided us that window to influence some decisions on education at the regional level. E-Net was part of the UNESCO - SEAMEO Forum that drafted a 10-point agenda to reach the unreached, including tracking dropouts.

- *Entering a new field: Advocacy on ODA and education financing*

E-Net's advocacy on ODA is definitely the product of RWS – Phase 2. Through citizen-based information generated by Education Watch, RWS gave us the confidence and courage to go into a new field. It also highlighted the urgency to act on such a big issue.

- *Facilitating linking and partnerships*

RWS also provided us the close partnership with other national coalitions to pursue ODA nationally and at the regional level. It enabled us to see connections between ODA in the Philippines, and that in Indonesia, Cambodia and other countries.

- *Influencing the civil society agenda*

During the ASEAN high-level meeting, the national coalitions from Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philip-

piners saw that EFA was not part of the blueprint. We were able to influence the civil society agenda on the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Blueprint.

We did not limit ourselves to the EFA Coordinators Meeting, but also looked at other portals such as ASEAN, SEAMEO, Innotech and other international organisations making decisions on education.

- *Understanding regional advocacy and institutional processes*
RWS provided the opportunity for us to meet people working in regional organisations and financial institutions. And we saw that this labyrinth of advocacy can actually be broken down into details, and can be understood if you study and work together.

So RWS demystified these seemingly big institutions and gave us again the courage to see these as institutions we can penetrate and processes we can participate in, as long as we are prepared.

- *Following up on engagements at the national level*
Organisations such as UNESCO saw we were following up on engagements at the national level; it had confidence that civil society would engage continuously in many of the forums and technical working groups at the regional level.

This was an opportunity to prove ourselves further, to continue studying, to continue the links at the regional and national levels, and to test whether the policies we had agreed on at the regional level are actually being implemented in the countries.

- *Working together on EFA with other national coalitions*
During our EFA orientation, we always say that education deficit is a global problem and education for all is a global movement. So if we do not work together with other national coalitions, then we are not being true to our word. ASPBAE is the meeting point for defining our regional agenda.

When national coalitions learn what the others are doing, we get motivated; we want our advocacy for EFA to be at par or even better; we want to improve. And when coalitions have common advocacies, we strive to work together at the ASEAN and UNESCO-Bangkok levels to synergize our advocacy.

During our EFA orientation, we always say that education deficit is a global problem and education for all is a global movement.

Engaging regional and subregional formations

E-Net Philippines President Edicio de la Torre admits, “It is very difficult to find venues or even to have the capability to come together and engage regional and subregional formations.” RWS helped in this regard.

With RWS support, the national coalitions of the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia initiated the Southeast Asia Education Network as a subregional platform for engaging with ASEAN.

Commenting on the general impact of the RWS programme on E-Net Philippines, Edicio de la Torre said, “Like all national coalitions, our primary focus tends to be work within our borders. Subregional, regional and global work are secondary and perhaps would not even be addressed, were it not for the additional resources, stimulus, and assistance from a programme like Real World Strategies.”³⁸

Strong imprint on capacity: From research to linking

ASPBAE and RWS support has left a strong imprint on E-Net Philippines’s capacity: from undertaking primary research which, in turn, became a powerful tool for advocacy, to linking with other national coalitions for setting up a regional advocacy platform on ODA and education financing. Their national-level campaigns, as well as those of member organisations on the ground, have increased E-Net Philippines’ effectiveness and credibility with both government agencies and local communities.

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EDUCATION ADVOCACY IN ASIA: REMAINING CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

REMAINING CHALLENGES

The experiences of India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and the Philippines showed how policy advocacy groups, national education coalitions, ordinary citizens, and partners and allies can come together to challenge governments to do better and to give more, and to effect policy changes that would improve the education condition in their countries towards achievement of EFA goals. Many gains were achieved and lessons learned.

Nevertheless, many challenges remain.

- *Implementation of legislation and government pronouncements*

Legislation and government pronouncements signify important milestones in the campaign, but not the destination itself. The journey could even be described as never-ending.

National coalitions need to continue campaigning for the implementation, enforcement and even amendment of laws, or for actual allocation of budgets and release of promised funds.

For example, education advocates say that the Right to Education Act of India remains imperfect; some changes need to be made and more work needs to be done. NCE Board member and World Vision Director of Advocacy Reni Jacob said, “We are not very satisfied with some of the elements that came out in the Act, such as leaving the responsibility of the government to private corporations ... because we feel that the Act is talking about fundamental rights, and in this, the government should be the primary responsibility-holder.”¹

- *Translation of awareness into behavioural change*

Although national coalitions can claim greater awareness of education issues within government circles as well as with the general public, a lot more needs to be done to translate this awareness into behavioural change and action.

In Cambodia, impoverished communities and families resent paying informal school fees, but continue to do so just the same. In the Philippines and Sri Lanka, funding support by local governments or local education units for ALS and NFE, which benefit school dropouts, is still relatively new and, therefore, more the exception rather than the rule. Education campaigners have to sustain and expand their advocacy so that what is now considered “alternative” is actually mainstreamed.

- *Demonstrating the long-term value of government investment in education*
Possibly with the exception of India, all the countries featured are underdeveloped, their governments hobbled by resource constraints. These countries are characterised by huge internal disparities, with significant numbers of their population living in chronic poverty. Because of armed conflict, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines devote a significant share of their national budgets to the military. In the Philippines, the biggest slice of the national budget is automatically appropriated to service foreign debts.

Consequently, advocacy for bigger spending on education and other social services will always be an uphill battle. The challenge is to demonstrate that government investment in education pays high dividends in the long term, and that failure to do so will have harsh consequences.

- *Unexpected events and disturbances*
Unanticipated developments and unforeseen disturbances could also pose challenges and disruptions to advocacy and campaign work.

In the Philippines, for instance, a high government official’s assurance to education advocates was overturned in a closed door meeting. Carefully cultivated allies within government can be replaced or removed from power.

Unstable political scenarios, as well as natural disasters, can wreak havoc on communities and disrupt even carefully planned advocacy campaigns, as manifested in the travel difficulties experienced by campaign organisers coming from conflict areas in Sri Lanka and the massive disruption caused by a devastating flood to the Philippine campaign.

- *Need for effective campaign strategies*
The search for effective strategies is something that has continually occupied education campaigners.

The *2007 Asia RWS Report* recommends:

Given the slow progress on meeting the EFA promise – with damaging consequences, especially for the poor and marginalised – coalitions need to more carefully strategise on a campaign approach that is likely to bring about the more decisive ‘wins’ for EFA.

A targeted, more focused approach – combining lobbying and engagement with sustained public and political pressure may be considered. Greater coordination between local- and national-level advocacy efforts needs consideration. The use of the media and Global Action Week high profile events in a manner that more effectively serves policy change strategies should be contemplated.²

The question of strategies was raised by the national coalitions and other groups which similarly seek to engage with governments more productively. Identifying the right strategies is particularly crucial when education campaigners confront governments with sensitive issues. For example, the mid-term review of the NEP in Cambodia quoted an NGO member asking, “How can NEP seriously engage with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports around the ‘uncomfortable truths?’”³ What are the right buttons to press? NEP faces a particular challenge in engaging with a repressive government that strikes hard against opposing views.

For other education coalitions or their members, such as CED in Sri Lanka, advocacy work is something relatively new to them so they are still finding their way around.

- *Need for new approaches and forms of engagement*

Some education coalitions tend to go for advocacy activities they are already familiar with, instead of trying new approaches outside their comfort zone. Or, if they try something new (as E-Net Philippines did with education financing), they do so more cautiously under the aegis of a larger group rather than venturing off by themselves (as E-Net Philippines conducted this new form of engagement under the umbrella of Social Watch – Alternative Budget Initiative).

E-Net Philippines National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano said, “One of the things we did closely in partnership with teachers organisations is the alternative budget for education. We saw that it was a very powerful message where local government units, out-of-school youth, and teachers organisations are working together in one single advocacy because it showed the government that education is not only education inside the school, but education is also addressing the needs of those who are not in school.”⁴

As Cecilia Soriano explained, “E-Net Philippines’ advocacy on ODA and education financing was definitely a product of RWS 2. Through citizen-based information generated by EdWatch, RWS gave us confidence to go into a new field (ODA advocacy).”⁵

Cecilia Soriano also disclosed that RWS led or “shepherded” their coalition into what were, for them, new fields and fresh areas and directions in education advocacy, including advocacy on ODA; constituency building and policy advocacy on EFA goals; and promotion of adult education as articulated in the Sixth International Conference on adult education (CONFINTEA VI).

This reluctance to venture into new fields and fresh directions is especially true when organisations have limited funds; they are then less able to make long-term plans and less open to experimentation which might entail risks.⁶ Many education coalitions obtain funds only for specific projects or programmes, but not core funding for organisational development.

There are exceptions, of course. Real World Strategies – Phase 2 (RWS 2) marked new forms of engagement for the national coalitions with advocacy on education financing, and advocacy addressed to subregional and regional platforms.

- *Organisational constraints*

Aside from funding and resource constraints, the education coalitions continue to be hampered by organisational constraints, which include:

- ♦ *Inadequate staff*

Most of the coalitions have inadequate staff, and their few full-time staff members are inevitably overstretched. Of the four coalitions featured, only NCE in India had a full-time staff dedicated to campaigns.

- ♦ *Leadership changes*

In coalitions, the director or coordinator plays a very critical role in weaving the voices and roles of diverse member organisations. Leadership changes can, therefore, have the effect of disrupting implementation of plans. The education coalitions in Asia went through many leadership changes: in 2008 alone, seven of the ten national coalitions changed leaders.

- ♦ *Members preoccupied with their own problems and concerns*

Although the coalitions are backed by their members, these member organisations can likewise face resource constraints and be preoccupied with delivering their own programmes.

- *Need for capacity-building*

Advocacy requires that organisations be innovative, agile and capable of thinking on their feet. In general, much needs to be done to increase the organisational capacity of the national coalitions – something repeatedly mentioned in the RWS Asia annual reports. For example, the *2007 Asia RWS Report* noted, “Fragile capacities of education campaign coalitions rendered some vulnerable to the pressures of political instability and internal debates and discord – with impact on planned RWS activities and delays.”

As education campaigners expand their advocacies to include education financing, new knowledge and skills have to be developed. The *2008 Asia RWS Report* emphasised, “For the campaign on Education Financing and ODA for Education, the weak knowledge base of coalitions on the subject, the dearth of available policy materials on the subject, and difficult access

to government data posed obstacles.” Fortunately, the report continued, these challenges were surmounted.

Progress in capacity-building made by the education coalitions is a testament to their determination as well as the mentoring support provided by RWS and ASPBAE.

LESSONS LEARNED

Along the way, important lessons were learned:

- *Adopting campaign forms appropriate to different political and social realities*

As mentioned in the Cambodia case study, the political and social realities in each country dictate which forms of campaign and advocacy are possible. Education coalitions have to assess what the government allows, or is responsive to, what captures the public imagination, as well as what the coalitions are capable of delivering with their limited resources. For example, mass mobilisations may work in some countries, but not in others where backroom diplomacy would be more effective.

Thus, while there are benefits to be derived from exchanging experiences amongst education coalitions, at the end of the day each one has to reflect on what works for its specific context, how others’ approaches can be adapted rather than adopted wholesale, or whether it can simply be inspired by someone’s success but must carve out its own path.

- *Need for local-level advocacy*

Gathering evidence from local communities was one activity in which the coalitions involved their field-based members. But over time, it became apparent that their members needed to be mobilised more directly in local-level advocacy activities, for the following reasons:

- ◆ Because LGUs have power and resources that coalitions could tap, and may even be more amenable to civil society advocacies, as in the Philippines and Sri Lanka;
- ◆ Because the Right to Education Act drawn by the National Parliament in India required state-level model rules to be formulated; and
- ◆ Because local campaigns can amplify national advocacies, as in Cambodia.

Local-level advocacy posed many challenges for coalition members. Advocacy is usually seen as the responsibility of national coalitions which, because they represent multiple organisations, can speak with a louder voice. In contrast, local organisations may be more adept in organising or services delivery but unfamiliar with the advocacy processes, starting with the steps for passing local legislation to knowing the nuances of lobbying. Multi-level advocacy, while imperative, also places greater demand on capacity-building and constituency-building at the local level.

- *Education financing*

Education financing – including budget tracking and official development assistance – is one area that education coalitions have ventured into only recently. Cambodia, India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka credit RWS for their engagements in this area. NCE Convenor and Board member Rama Kant Rai said,

In education financing, ASPBAE gave us a very powerful tool for advocacy and planning how to move ahead. After attending training on ODA and budget tracking, NCE did three training-workshops at the national and state levels on the same topic. These generated new understanding among our members on ODA and education financing. It made us look at a new angle in advocacy. Now, we have become more detailed in determining how much government should allocate and how much government should spend, and in putting pressure on government to ensure timely release of funds.⁷

ASPBAE Secretary General Maria Khan pointed out that the budget tracking process is a crucial starting point in demystifying the whole issue of education financing. Maria Khan said, “Budget tracking sends the message that not only does the issue affect me, but that I can do something about it. We track down: where does the budget really go and how long [does it take to get there]?”

Budget tracking rooted education campaigns more deeply amongst NGOs advancing the issue of better and greater education financing. “Many of the coalitions run the budget tracking process in the mode of action research. There was no need to wait to aggregate results nationally; they could use the data gathered immediately for local battles and local-level claim making,” said Maria Khan.⁸

In South Asia, education financing advocacy was facilitated by the EdWatch studies, which explored this issue. Because of knowledge gained from RWS, coalition member organisations in India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka have already had some success in accessing local funds for their education programmes, thus benefiting directly from their advocacy engagement.

Education financing is attractive because campaigns can be applied at various levels, covering any education issue, and the gains are tangible. This can be one area, therefore, where local-level advocacy can be expanded further.

- *Exploring more advocacy approaches*

Education coalitions can explore more advocacy approaches such as:

- ◆ *Strategic engagements with media*

Coalitions have realised that media is essential to rallying public opinion and generating awareness outside and among the direct stakeholders. However, stepping up media engagements requires resources and organisational capacity.

Apart from India, none of the coalitions were prepared to have strategic engagements with media. At the most, they issued press releases, held press conferences or invited media to cover special events; but these were exceptional activities rather than something done on a regular basis.

♦ *Promoting best practices among local officials*

Advocacy consultants also attest to the effectiveness of local government officials (e.g., legislators, policymakers, programme directors) learning from their peers over hearing the same ideas from CSOs. Education coalitions and their members may want to consider promoting best practices, and organising dialogues or cross-visits with other local officials who have adopted the policy/programme they advocate and who can attest to its value or demonstrate its success. Again, this will require resources and organisational capacity.

• *Importance of timing*

Yet another important learning for the RWS team is the importance of timing. Advocacy plans, it has learned, should be designed around prominent national events such as summits, national elections and major EFA reviews. However, the *2008 RWS Annual Report* cautioned, expectations on deliverables need to be scaled down during periods of political turmoil or natural calamity.⁹

• *Advocacy as a sustained and focused process*

The coalitions' campaign experiences also underscored the lesson that advocacy is not a one-shot deal, but rather a sustained and focused process.

With all the challenges and difficulties, such as entrenched bureaucratic policies and practices, which have to be surmounted, education campaigns require long years of sustained advocacy. It is difficult to achieve campaign goals in the short- or even medium-term as governments can sometimes be oblivious to public opinion.

Education advocates can only seek to influence decisions, but ultimately these decisions are not theirs to make. Governments can be selective about the policy pronouncements they will actually implement. The *RWS Asia 2008 Report*, for example, noted that although policy recommendations by education coalitions were accepted in UNESCO regional workshops in South and Southeast Asia, these still await concrete policy action by governments at the country level.

India, Cambodia and the Philippines were able to score policy gains because they have built their campaigns upon many years of previous effort. CED in Sri Lanka has just started to inform and engage government around the issues of mothers' education and literacy, NFE, and lifelong learning; consequently, it has not yet registered policy gains in the short span of its two years of advocacy work.

Cecilia Soriano said, “There are frustrations, there are disappointments, while we do our work; there is corruption in government. But, in the long run, if we continue doing education reform, we can have a public education system that our people deserve.”¹⁰

The education advocacy campaigns featured here give a sense of the struggles for education advancement of people and communities with diverse cultures coming from different countries in Asia. They present the unfolding drama of people in the grip of life-changing struggles, surmounting various obstacles, limitations and constraints, to gain greater access to education in order to fight poverty, discrimination and exclusion, to develop themselves, and to improve their condition. These are real stories of real people seeking real change in their lives.

Being provided, through these campaigns, with the platforms and opportunities to express their aspirations, present their issues and concerns, and engage with key officials and leaders was very empowering for these people, especially those coming from the ranks of the marginalized sectors. In turn, the government officials and leaders were given the rare opportunity to come face to face with these disadvantaged education stakeholders and directly hear their stories from them.

In spearheading the education advocacy campaigns presented here, the national education coalitions and their partners and allies virtually waged battles in pushing for changes in policies and practices that have to be made in their countries, so that each and every child, woman and man can claim the right to quality education and lifelong learning, enjoy the full benefits of empowering and transformative education, realize dreams, and live with dignity.

NOTES

- 1 Interview with NCE Board member and World Vision Director of Advocacy Reni Jacob, RWS reflection sessions, Nepal, 2010.
2. *2007 Asia RWS Report*, page 9.
3. *NEP Mid-Term Review and Membership Survey*, August 2008, page 25.
4. Interview with E-Net Philippines National Coordinator Cecilia Soriano, 8 March 2010.
5. Ibid.
6. Interview with Raquel Castillo, ASPBAE Asia Policy Advocacy and Campaigns Coordinator, 11 September 2010.
7. Interview with NCE Convenor and Board member Rama Kant Rai, 17 August 2010.
8. Interview with ASPBAE Secretary General Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, 14 September 2010.
9. *2008 RWS Annual Report*, page 25.
10. Interview with Cecilia Soriano, 8 March 2010.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF RESPONDENTS (INDIA)

Name	Position/Organisation/Location	Date of Interview
Naba Kishore	National Coalition for Education (NCE) Orissa Staff	12 August 2010
Reny Jacob	Director, Vikasani Centre for Women's Studies and Development All-India Association of Christian Higher Education (AIACHE) Board Member, NCE	12 August 2010
Ravi Prakash Verma	Three-term former Member of Parliament President NCE	12 August 2010
R. S. Chaurasia	Chairperson, <i>Bachpan Bachao Andolan</i> (BBA or Save the Children Movement) Board Member NCE	12 August 2010
Indra Shekhar Mishra	Secretary General All-India Secondary Teachers Federation (AISTF)	12 August 2010
Umesh Kumar Gupta	Advocacy Coordinator, NCE	13 August 2010
Sandeep C. Mishra	Research and Documentation Coordinator, NCE	13 August 2010
Dhram Vijay Pandit	Secretary General All-India Federation of Teachers Organisations (AIFTO) Board Member, NCE	13 August 2010
Mondira Dutta	Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University Board Member, NCE	13 August 2010
Reni Jacob	Advocacy Manager, World Vision – India Board Member, NCE	13 August 2010
Cecilia Barbieri	Education Officer, UNESCO	15 August 2010
Ram Chandra Dabas	Principal, MCD Primary School C5 Janak Puri, Delhi President Delhi Chapter, All-India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF)	16 August 2010
Anjana Rani, Vishwajeet Yadav and other teachers	MCD Primary School C5 Janak Puri, Delhi	16 August 2010
Prithiraj Sahani	Mayor, Delhi City	16 August 2010
Primary School Teachers	MCD Primary School Tajpur Goyla, Delhi	16 August 2010 FGD
Ram Pal Singh	Secretary General Board Member, NCE President, AIPTF	17 August 2010
Damodaran Kuppuswami	Senior Manager for Organisational Development National Theme Leader for Education ActionAid	17 August 2010
Priyanka Ribhu	Policy Advocacy Coordinator Global March Against Child Labour Member, RWS Steering Committee	17 August 2010
Rama Kant Rai	Convenor Board Member, NCE	17 August 2010
Kailash Satyarthi	President, Global Campaign for Education (GCE) Founder, BBA	17 August 2010
Dominic D'Souza	Associate Director, Laya ASPBAE Executive Council Member for South Asia	21 August 2010
Anjela Taneja	Education Programme Officer, ActionAid	26 and 30 August 2010 Email

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF RESPONDENTS (SRI LANKA)

Name	Position/Organisation/Location	Date of Interview
Saman Leelarathna	Project Coordinator Prathibha Children Development Foundation Kurunegala District, North-Western Province	19 August 2010
Chitrawathie, Siriyalatha, Ramyalatha, Anusha, Asokamala, Mirawathie, Siriyawathie, Neela, Udeni, Sudarma, and Samanmali	Mothers (11) Asokatenna Village, Kurunegala District, North-Western Province	19 August 2010 FGD
K. V. Karunaratne	Zonal Education Officer Ibbagamuwa, Kurunegala, North-Western Province	19 August 2010
J. Gallage	Project Coordinator Mihikatha Environmental Organisation Puttalam District, North-Western Province	19 August 2010
Chandrani, Kumari, Ireka, Ranjani, Nilanka, Rangika, Winifreda, Dilrukshi, Rasamma, Chamila, Vajira, and Nilanthi	Mothers (12) Iranawila Village, Puttalam District, North-Western Province	19 August 2010 FGD
P. Subasinghe	Director Non-Formal Education, Puttalam District, North-Western Province	19 August 2010
A. Sriskandarajah	Emergency Education Officer UNICEF	20 August 2010
W. G. I. Chaturanga (Iresh)	Project/Administrative Officer Coalition for Educational Development (CED)	20 August 2010
Lalani Wijesekara	Deputy Director Education for All Branch, Ministry of Education	20 August 2010
Charles Elamaldeniya	Chairperson Board of Directors, CED	20 August 2010
Karu Gamage	Founder/President Janoda Foundation (CED member)	21 August 2010
Daya Ariyawethi	Member Board of Directors, CED (Representing North-Western Province)	21 August 2010
H. P. N. Lakshman	Director Non-Formal and Special Education Branch Ministry of Education	23 August 2010
Amara K. Peeris	Chief Advisor Sarvodaya Women's Movement Member, Advisory Committee, CED	23 August 2010
M. A. P. Munasinghe	Consultant, CED	23 August 2010
Prithiviraj Perera	Secretary General Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO	23 August 2010
Chandana Bandara	Director for Adult and Inclusive Education CED Board	15 and 16 August 2010 Email and telephone interviews

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF RESPONDENTS (CAMBODIA)

NAME	POSITION / ORGANISATION / LOCATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW
Kan Kall	Country Director Room to Read Member of the Board NGO Education Partnership (NEP)	28 July 2010
Kou Bun Kheang	Senior Programme Officer Save the Children - Norway Vice Chairperson of the Board, NEP	28 July 2010
Eng Sok	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer World Education Treasurer of the Board, NEP	28 July 2010
Keo Sareth	Project Facilitator, Kampochea Action Primary Education (KAPE) Bataey District, Kampung Cham	28 July 2010
Sek Chhay	Director, Challea Primary School Kampung Cham	28 July 2010
Tapmara, Svaysanat, Pousokha, Luan Eng Srunt, and Chhon Vanar	Mothers of students of Challea Primary School Kampung Cham	28 July 2010
Noch Chamroeun	Project Officer Urban Poor Women for Development (UPWD)	29 July 2010
Sreynich and other children	Cheka community	29 July 2010 FGD
Ang Sopha	Research Coordinator, NEP	2 March 2010 29-30 July 2010
Leng Theavy	Education Coordinator, NEP	29 and 30 July 2010
Chim Manavy	Executive Director, Open Institute Chairperson of the Board, NEP	29 July 2010
Sorn Seng Hok	Director of Legislation Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS)	29 July 2010
Seng Hong	Former Executive Director, NEP	2 March 2010 30 July 2010
In Samrithy	Executive Director, NEP	30 July 2010
Yuk Sothirith	Programme Manager for Education Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)	30 July 2010
Kim Dara	Advisor, World Education	30 July 2010
Sun Lei	Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO	6 August 2010 Email
Chie Takahashi	Education Specialist, UNICEF	12 August 2010 Email

APPENDIX 4. LIST OF RESPONDENTS (PHILIPPINES)

NAME	POSITION / ORGANISATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW
Edicio de la Torre	President and Chairperson of the Board E-Net Philippines President Education for Life Foundation (ELF) Current representative of the National Education Coalitions of Asia to the GCE Board and the RWS Steering Committee	2 March 2010
Cecilia V. Soriano (Thea)	National Coordinator E-Net Philippines	8 March, 20 July and 5 August 2010
Reginaldo Guillen (Regie)	Former Advocacy and Campaigns Associate E-Net Philippines	21 July 2010
Maribella Tanag	Administration and Finance Officer E-Net Philippines	23 July 2010
Estrella Soriano	President, PINASAMA	24 July 2010
Petrona Gamayo, Daisy Borja, Elsie etc.	Day Care Teachers, PINASAMA	24 July 2010
Jamaica Malapit	Member, PINASAMA Youth Organisation	26 July 2010
Carolina S. Guerrero	Director Bureau of Alternative Learning System, Department of Education	2 August 2010
Risa Hontiveros- Baraquel	Former Representative House of Representatives, Philippine Congress	2 August 2010
May Cinco	Coordinator, ELF	3 August 2010
Rene Raya	Coordinator Working Group on Education Financing E-Net Philippines Policy Analyst, ASPBAE	3 August 2010

APPENDIX 5. HIGHLIGHTS OF RWS ACTIVITIES (PARTIAL LIST)

EVENT	2006	2007	2008	2009
Capacity-Building; General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>October</i>: Asia Regional Training on Popular Communications for Education Advocates and Campaigners • <i>December</i>: RWS Strategic Planning Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>July-August</i>: Conference on “Literacy Challenges in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches” 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>March</i>: Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation of National Education Coalitions with the theme, “Strengthening the Frontlines to Propel Concrete Policy Action” • <i>October</i>: Consultation-Workshop on “Privatisation Issues in Education” • RWS Creative Narratives and Knowledge-Sharing Project • Transnational Advocacy Research Project, in Asia focusing on E-Net Philippines and NCE India
Education Watch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EdWatch launched in Asia • <i>March</i>: Asia-Pacific Ed-Watch Planning Workshop • <i>July</i>: Sub-Regional Training for EdWatch Researchers in Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>April</i>: Training Workshop for Data Analysts • <i>May</i>: Southeast Asia Workshop on “State Responsibility, Community Participation, and a Rights-Based Approach to Education Advocacy,” hosted by E-Net Indonesia • <i>June</i>: South Asia Sub-Regional EdWatch Workshop organised by ASPBAE, co-hosted by Child Workers in Nepal • Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Bangladesh EdWatch studies released • <i>December</i>: Regional Ed-Watch Synthesis presented in Public Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka EdWatch studies released • <i>September</i>: Regional Ed-Watch Evaluation Conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Toolkit on EdWatch

EVENT	2006	2007	2008	2009
Education Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September: ASPBAE delivered two workshops during the International People's Forum on: "Debt and Privatisation of Education in Indonesia" and "Financing the Right to Quality Education" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> July: RWS Policy and Advocacy Team and some national coalition members participate in Regional Conference on ODA in Asia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May: Working Group on ODA for Education formed October: Participation in Follow-up Meeting and Capacity-Building Workshop on Education Financing, organised by EI and ActionAid Pilot advocacy engagement on alternative budgets, Sri Lanka and Philippines (with Pakistan to follow in 2009) November: RWS Asia-Pacific Conference on "Financing for Education and Development: Banking on the Class of 2015" Advocacy handout on ODA for Education printed and disseminated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> February: South Asia Workshop on "Budget Tracking Toolkit" Late 2009 / early 2010: Country-level Capacity-Building Workshops on "Education ODA" <p>(Both workshops were partially funded by RWS.)</p>
Regional / Sub-Regional Advocacy Engagements		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASPBAE invited to join Technical Support Groups of UNESCO's Mid-Decade Assessment Steering Committee February: ASPBAE facilitated participation of 3 national coalitions in 8th UNESCO EFA Coordinators Meeting September: ASPBAE and 2 national coalitions participate in UNESCO Writers Workshop for Peer Review of Draft EFA Mid-Decade Assessment for East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian member states December: ASPBAE, GCE, and NEP Cambodia jointly organized the GCE Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May and August: Policy Meeting of South Asian and Southeast Asian coalitions to strategise on engaging with UNESCO, government EFA units, and education ministries in EFA Mid-Decade Assessment February and June: UNESCO policy workshops for governments in Asia, ministries of education and other education stakeholders for Southeast Asia (February) and for South Asia (June) September: Participation by ASPBAE and two national coalitions in "Reaching the Unreached: Meeting of South-East Asian Countries to Achieve the EFA Goals Together by 2015" Three regionally coordinated campaigns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> April: Global Action Week, with the theme "Education to End Exclusion" Campaign on "Genuine Aid for Quality Education" around the G8 Summit and Doha Financing for Development Reenergised campaign on adult education in preparation for CONFINTEA VI in 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> February: Challenge to ASEAN: Attend to the QUEUE (Quality Education for the Unreached and Excluded), sub-regional engagement on ASEAN processes during the ASEAN Peoples' Forum in Bangkok March: GCE-RWS Regional Consultation of National Education Coalitions: "Strengthening the Frontlines to Propel Concrete Policy Actions" held in Malaysia May: Regional workshop on Education Financing during the Civil Society Forum to engage the ADB's Annual Governors Meeting held in Bali, Indonesia May: 10th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators December: South Asia Civil Society Consultation in preparation for South Asia Education Ministers Meeting; lobbying during the meeting

Source: RWS Annual Reports, 2006-2009.



Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale



ASPBAE POLICY TEAM:

RAQUEL DE GUZMAN CASTILLO – Asia Policy Advocacy and Campaigns Coordinator

RENE RAYA – Lead Policy Analyst

MOHAMMAD MUNTASIM TANVIR – South Asia Policy Advocacy and Campaigns Coordinator

CLAUDINE DE LA CRUZ CLARIDAD - Asia Policy Advocacy and Campaigns Support Officer

RWS STEERING COMMITTEE:

MARIA LOURDES ALMAZAN-KHAN – Vice Chair, Global Campaign for Education/ASPBAE Secretary General

ALOYSIUS MATHEWS – Chief Coordinator, Asia-Pacific Region, Education International

PRIYANKA RIBHU – Policy Advocacy Coordinator, Global March Against Child Labour

EDICIO DELA TORRE – Board Member, Global Campaign for Education/E-Net Philippines President

NATIONAL COALITIONS:

South Asia

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) – Bangladesh

National Coalition for Education (NCE) – India

Coalition for Educational Development (CED) – Sri Lanka

National Campaign for Education (NCE) – Nepal

Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE)

South East Asia

Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net) – Philippines

NGO Education Partnership (NEP) – Cambodia

Education Network for Justice (E-Net for Justice) – Indonesia

Pacific

Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN)

Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands (COESI)