

Education

For Akbayan, education is a life-long progression towards the realization of full human development, the deepening of social consciousness and the generation of responsible, critical, and dynamic citizens. Education should aim to provide for social and economic mobility towards promoting both individual and national development. It should encompass the learning and unlearning of knowledge, skills, and morals/ethics provided by “formal school education” and the construction of understanding facilitated by everyday experience that is often called “informal learning”.

POWER IN EDUCATION vs. EMPOWERING EDUCATION: THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE

Education is not neutral. It is always biased and will never be apolitical as some naive “centrists” propose it to be. Education is encompassing and is a changing process. There is always a perspective from a particular point of view and this is best reflected in society. There will always be ideas and perspectives that will fight for domination coming from different backgrounds and political biases.

Colonial Background

From the very inception of formal education in the country, education has been manipulated and utilized to serve the desires and whims of those in power. Rooted in our colonial past, education never meant enlightenment and learning. It has always been used as a tool to control the oppressed. The impact to the very consciousness of the Filipino people of this colonial education hampered the development of our nation.

Rather than empowering the people, the Spaniards relegated the teaching of the indios to the Church. Education was used to indoctrinate non-believers and bring them under the domain of religion and the state. The school was tasked to produce subservient and passive citizens who would be unwitting accessories to the colonial master plan. A free and inquiring mind is to be reprimanded rather than recognized.

The education program during the American rule likewise created a great and long lasting imprint on the country’s education system and psyche. Unlike the Spanish who concentrated on educating the elite, the introduction of public education in the Philippines inculcated a consciousness that would embrace American rule and influence in all spheres of society, reflected primarily in the imposition of the English language. This was evident even during the post-war and post-colonial era.

Post-colonial realities did not usher in an independent and competent educational system but instead paved the way for neo-liberal transformation where schools have become manufacturing plants of skilled and subservient labor for multi-national and trans-national institutions.

Capitalism and Neo-liberalism in Education

Instead of facilitating the full human development of the people, our current educational system produces and reproduces only the needed scientific and technological capacities for capitalist production. It produces skilled labor power and managerial skills needed for commodity production. Young people today are not allowed to choose their own path, career, and field of learning corresponding to their capacities, talents, and individual self-realizations. They are forced to accept disciplines, fields of learning, and jobs not of their own choosing but what the market dictates.

Community-based youth are in a more deplorable situation. Alienated by expensive education, a large part of this youth sub-sector is formally introduced at an early age to the vast reserve army of labor of underemployed and unemployed individuals. Our present educational system plays a major role in the reproduction of a capitalist society by tracking people from different classes to different educational paths. There are elite, middle class paths that are very much different from the mass educational path provided by our inefficient public school system.

Recent studies conducted by the government and the private sector aimed on the state of Philippine education point out that even our basic education is failing to teach core values and competencies average citizens need to become responsible, productive, and self-fulfilling.

Tertiary and technical vocational schools are not producing the workforce we need for our economic development. Even graduate schools do not generate the research-based knowledge we need to create more jobs to raise the value of production.

Instead of responding to identified issues and problems, the government's response is to subscribe to the labor requirements of structural adjustment programs prescribed by the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Instead of increasing government involvement the better to improve the quality of education, deregulation began as early as 1982.

With the onset of full implementation of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade-World Trade Organization (GATT-WTO) where trade barriers and other economic boundaries are dismantled, the education sector is re-engineering itself to conform to the demands of the global economy.

Because of this, young people are not educated to work in and toward a truly democratic society, but are educated to support the program presented by those in political power.

AKBAYAN'S RATIONALE FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Given the dire state of education in the country, to say our educational system needs reforms is an understatement. In the context of the numerous attempts to improve the delivery of services in education both from the public and private sector, Akbayan anchors its platform for education reform on three principles, namely: 1) Education is a basic human right; 2) Education is a social service; 3) Education is a tool for national development.

Education is a basic human right

We in Akbayan believe that education is a basic human right. The enhancement of knowledge and skills through education is necessary to achieve full human development. Basic education should enhance a person's ability to make sense of the information the world offers in order to make meaningful decisions in a wide array of issues and opportunities. Akbayan envisions a society where its citizens are genuinely aware, responsive, and empowered in all aspects of his/her personal development - physical, spiritual, economic, social, cultural, and political. Higher education should provide opportunities to further develop particular skills and interests.

Education is a social service

To promote our basic human right, education as a social service should be provided by the government. Primary and secondary education shall be free for all, as prescribed by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Higher education shall be made generally available and accessible to all with the state ensuring greater access to the underprivileged.

our platform

State-sponsored educational institutions should be adequate to meet the demands of the growing population. As a tool for development, education should be programmed to meet the needs of the local communities and the nation as a whole.

While Akbayan recognizes the role of private institutions in providing quality education, private educational institutions, together with public educational institution shall be regulated by the state.

Education is a tool for national development

With learned and empowered citizens and state support, Akbayan believes that accessible, quality, and relevant education will translate to national development. The educational system should not only develop individual capacities but also inculcate social consciousness that would encourage active participation in national development. A meaningful educational system empowers the people to individually and collectively engage with or work for the state toward the advancement of a democratic and socialist state.

To have maximum impact on people's livelihood, education should focus on the fields of agriculture, fisheries, and local manufacturing as priority areas. At the same time, we should develop skills in those economic sectors where we have comparative advantage.

AKBAYAN'S PLATFORM FOR EDUCATION REFORM: TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE, QUALITY AND RELEVANT EDUCATION

Our educational system continues to face three perennial problems: accessibility, quality, and relevance. It is unable to adequately respond to the growing number of out-of-school youth. Those who are lucky enough to get formal education are made to deal with elementary and high schools that fail to teach the social competence and consciousness necessary to become critical, dynamic, and responsible citizens. Colleges and technical vocational schools as well as graduate schools also fail to produce enough productive citizens working for full human and national development.

Today, more than at any point in our history, education sectors and stakeholders are forced to contend with the realities of our deteriorating educational system.

The main reasons for these problems are the low priority given to education by the state and the market-driven orientation of successive administrations of traditional politicians. The state is simply not investing enough in an educational system that would translate to full human and national development. To add to such neglect, our educational system is poorly managed by officials who have to constantly pay attention to the demands of traditional politicians.

We in Akbayan believe that an empowered citizenry must engage the state in responding to these problems.

Accessible, Quality and Relevant Education

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For our educational system to be accessible, we insist that the state must address, among others, the lack of educational institutions in remote areas, rising cost of education as educational institutions resort to tuition and other fee increases, rationalization of scholarships awarded by government educational institutions, and various forms of discrimination in the admission system of these educational institutions. The increasing drop-out rate clearly points to the problem of accessibility.

For quality education to be attainable, the state must provide clear and reasonable accreditation and regulation policies for both private and public educational institutions and respond to the problems of large classes and shortage of classrooms and teachers, and poor quality of facilities, instruction, and materials especially in state-sponsored educational institutions.

To make relevant education possible, the state must ensure academic freedom, democratization, and sectoral empowerment in promoting education. The state should also give equal importance to the humanities and social sciences and prioritize education in the areas of agriculture, fisheries, and local manufacturing.

Sectoral Issues in Philippine Education

For education to be accessible, high quality, and relevant, we maintain that the state must take into account the particular concerns of various education sectors and stakeholders.

The state must address the need for an alternative learning system and immediate relief for the growing number of out-of-school youth.

The state must end the increasing assaults on students' rights and welfare. In the admission system of schools, students should not be discriminated against because of their gender, parents' marital status, or religion. The right to establish free and independent student councils, organizations, and publications should be acknowledged, as well as the right to student representation in the school boards.

The state must focus on the problems of the education profession related to faculty rights and welfare especially low salaries and minimal benefits, large classes and poor facilities and materials, long working hours, absence of institutional support for professional development, and unrealistic professional regulation policies.

The state must guarantee the professionalization of the administration and bureaucracy of educational institutions to free them from a system of corruption and mismanagement promoted by traditional politics. Professionalization also means better institutional support for workers' rights and welfare.

The state must make sure that educational institutions are responsive to the communities' needs. This also means that these educational institutions should promote community rights and welfare and provide service to the community.



The Akbayan Response

Responding to these problems and sectoral issues, Akbayan's platform for education reform is geared towards working for a higher education budget, promotion and protection of sectoral rights and welfare, and reorientation towards premium human and national development.

In particular, we will move for:

1. Highest budget prioritization based on the international benchmark (at least 6% of the gross national product should be allocated to education);
2. Moratorium on unreasonable and unnecessary tuition and other fee increases to give way to a comprehensive review and regulation on fee increases;
3. Review implementation of Fair and Equitable Access to Education Act especially with reference to achieving ideal classroom-student ratio based on international standards (1 classroom: not more than 45 students) especially for basic education;
4. Review Adopt-A-School Act to maximize private sector assistance to programmatic reforms
5. Moratorium on the creation of SCUs and local colleges and universities (LCUs) to pave the way for the strengthening of existing ones to make them institutions of excellence (but such moratorium should not be geared towards privatization);
6. Alternative learning system developed by SCUs and LCUs for out-of-school youth;
7. Survey of human rights violations of educational institutions; magna carta of students, or if not practicable, legislations emphasizing students' rights and welfare;
8. Magna carta of teachers stressing faculty rights and welfare; exemption of teachers from the Salary Standardization Law (SSL); making Filipino and the vernacular the medium of instruction especially for basic education;
9. Review and reorientation of basic education curriculum (including but not limited to Makabayan) to give equal importance to the humanities and social sciences;
10. Strengthening of Local School Boards (LSBs) oriented toward answering community and local needs;
11. Review and reorientation of the National Service Training Program (NSTP) to respond to community and local needs; and reorientation of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to prioritize local industries and national development.



AKBAYAN'S EDUCATION PLATFORM: A CONTINUING DIALOGUE

In the process of crafting Akbayan's Education Platform, we identified several gaps and issues that require more comprehensive consultations and discussions. These issues include policy commitments on:

1. Amending or repealing of the Education Act of 1982 which provides for the deregulation of educational institutions;
2. Continuing assistance for underprivileged public school students through the Government Assistance for Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE) - the immediate relief program provides for the Department of Education (DepEd) to pay private schools a yearly subsidy of P4,000 per student to accommodate public school students entering private high schools; and
3. Pushing for free or socialized tuition for tertiary education - the socialized tuition program is further articulated in two ways: a) socialized tuition provides that students who can afford should pay the full cost of their education, and students who cannot should be granted subsidies in the form of discounts in tuition and other fees, book allowances, and monthly stipends; and b) socialized tuition should never negate SCUs' character as state-sponsored educational institutions and thus, without exemptions, all students (but in different and socialized degrees) should be beneficiaries of greater state support.
4. Developing a comprehensive program to reorient education for the empowerment of women.
5. Developing mechanisms for an open university system. Such system may be proposed as an alternative to conventional higher education or as a mode of continuing education.

