

Teaching sustainable development in the Philippines: Looking through the lens of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

*Ace Ortila de la Serna

MA ASEAN Studies student, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand
aceserna1992@gmail.com

Abstract. The concept of Sustainable Development has generated an impetus for a number of equally vital multilateral environment agreements, incentives and policy frameworks. However, a fundamental change in human mindset and behavior is also needed. Against this backdrop, education is now widely considered as the most powerful path to sustainability. This led to the emergence of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which calls for the reorientation of education towards sustainable development. This paper is a descriptive analysis and an evaluative review of the Philippine policy environment and initiatives on ESD, using The Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD as framework. Analysis is framed using the GAP's priority action areas: advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building capacities of educators, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating sustainable solutions at local level – in order to highlight strong practices and draw out policy gaps and recommendations. This paper finds that the emphasis of ESD in the Philippines has been mostly on the environmental dimension. The country needs to broaden its vision to also encompass the sociocultural and economic dimensions. Nonetheless, the country now shows promise of a holistic ESD by taking cognizance of the latter dimensions in its neo-environmental education paradigm. Lastly, recognizing that central to ESD is the youth, this paper highlights the potential of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) (village youth council). The country can further harness this platform by integrating ESD into the SK's ethos, governance and practice. Not only can the SK expand learning beyond the confines of the classroom; it can also provide the youth with real-life and practical experiences.

Keywords— Education For Sustainable Development, Environmental Education, Sustainable Development, Sdgs, The Philippines

INTERODUCTION

The global community is now faced with the challenges of “deep economic and social inequalities, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, disruption caused by natural disasters and climate change” (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 3). In the Philippines, albeit currently among the fastest growing emerging economies (IHS, 2017); disturbing socioeconomic problems and environmental challenges continue to beset the country. The country's population surpassed the 100 million mark in 2015. One in five Filipinos remain poor and marginalized, which are mainly farmers, fishermen, children, women and youth (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). The country, while renowned for its abundant natural resources, thriving ecosystems and rich biodiversity, has been facing the problems of pollution and environmental degradation, mainly brought about by unsustainable human activities. While regarded as one of the seventeen megadiverse countries in the world, the country is also considered a biodiversity hotspot, with at least 700 threatened species brought about by overexploitation, deforestation, climate change, and pollution (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014).

Furthermore, the Philippines ranked the third most disaster-risk-prone country in the world, according to the World Risk Report 2012 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014). The country, as it is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire and stands astride a typhoon belt, is usually wrecked by natural disasters especially earthquakes, landslides, volcanic activities, flash floods, thunderstorms, tornados and tropical cyclones. Destructive tropical cyclones and flashfloods have claimed many lives and caused damages. One major natural disaster was Typhoon Yolanda (international name: Typhoon Haiyan) in 2013 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). The agricultural sector, which accounts for a significant share of employment (30%), has had a poor performance during the period 2010 – 2016; and the fishery subsector suffered consecutive declines for the past seven years, except in 2013. This can be traced to extreme weather events which wrecked the country across the spectrum (National Economic and Development Authority, 2017).

Sustainable development

These alarming realities, among others, continue to evidence the fact that the current, dominant trends of economic development and human activities are not sustainable and are altering the face of the planet. This has led to many calls for a new approach to development and the emergence of the term Sustainable Development. The most cited definition of the concept is by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in its 1987 report entitled *Our Common Future*. It is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43).

This generated an impetus for a number of equally vital initiatives and paradigms, multilateral environment agreements (MEAs), policies and frameworks concerning sustainability. Noteworthy, inter alia, are The Earth Summit / Rio Summit and Agenda 21 in 1992, the Rio+10 Earth Summit in 2002, the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and an accompanying set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Education for sustainable development (ESD)

However, these are not enough. A fundamental change in the way we think and act is needed (UNESCO, 2014b). As Cortese (1999) puts it, “this goal of sustainability, as defined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, will become more inaccessible without a dramatic change in our current mindset and behavior” (Cortese, 1999, p. 2). Against this backdrop, education is now widely considered as “the most powerful path to sustainability” (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 16). Education, therefore, needs to be globally

reoriented towards a central goal: “to learn to live and work sustainably” (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 3). This ultimately led to the emergence of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Building on that momentum, a global movement has then been launched to reorient the education systems of the world towards sustainable development. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) took place from 2005 to 2014, which has called on governments to integrate ESD in their respective educational strategies and action plans (UN, 2002). UNESCO was tasked as the lead agency for the Decade (UNESCO, 2014b).

With the adoption of the 2030 SDGs, ESD finally found its way into an even broader mainstream development thinking as enshrined in SDG Target 4.7 ; envisioning that by 2030, “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development” (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, 2015, p. 17). This means that the instrumental role of ESD in addressing sustainable development has to continue after the culmination of the DESD in 2014 and the adoption of SDGs in 2015 (Mochizuki, 2016). In fact, UNESCO (2014c) argues that it is in everyone ‘s interest to ensure that quality and transformative education is at the center of the post-2015 development agenda (UNESCO, 2014c).

The Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development was launched in 2014 as the follow-up mechanism to the DESD. It reaffirms the vision put forward by the DESD, which is “a world where everybody has the opportunity to benefit from education...required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 24). To achieve this goal, sustainable development has to be integrated into education; and likewise, education has to be integrated into sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a descriptive analysis and an evaluative review of the policy environment and initiatives on ESD in the Philippines, using data from official issuances, reports, memorandum orders and public releases from the Office of the President of the Philippines, relevant government agencies and units, education institutions and private organizations.. Analysis is framed by the Priority Action Areas of the GAP, being the incumbent overarching global framework for ESD. These are advancing policy, transforming learning and training environments, building capacities of educators and trainers, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating sustainable solutions at local level. Descriptive analysis is performed to highlight strong practices and draw out policy gaps and recommendations for ESD on the national level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy underpinning

An enabling policy environment is crucial for mobilizing and furthering ESD. Creating an enabling policy environment requires mainstreaming of ESD into education policies, including the integration of ESD in curricula and in national quality standards. At the same time, the role of education has to also be reflected in national policies relevant to key sustainable development challenges (UNESCO, 2014a).

The country demonstrates promise in the area of advancing policy. Its ESD policy environment is underpinned by a framework even before the 1992 Earth Summit. The Philippine Strategy for Sustainable Development (PSSD), formulated in 1987, represents the country’s first roadmap towards achieving sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.). One of its implementing strategies is the promotion of environmental education (EE). It suggests the integration of environmental concepts in the elementary and secondary schools, the development and promotion of tertiary and graduate courses in ecology, environmental science, resource management and resource economics; and the promotion of research and development (Republic of the Philippines, 1990, p. 11).

Advancing policies on ESD

The National Environmental Awareness and Education Act of 2008 (Republic Act 9512) mandates the integration of EE in the school curricula at all levels, whether public or private, including in local daycares, preschool, non-formal, technical-vocational, professional level, indigenous learning and out-of-school youth programs. It directs the government agencies on education to hold capacity-building programs nationwide such as trainings, seminars, workshops on EE, development and production of EE materials, and teacher-education courses on EE. In addition, it declares the month of November of every year as the “Environmental Awareness Month” throughout the country (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2008). By virtue of this policy, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) also issued Special Order No. 142 creating the Inter-Agency Steering Committee on Environmental Education, chaired by the DENR and composed of the Department of Education (DepEd), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and other key government agencies and private organizations (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

Advancing policy on ESD also entails enhancing the role of education in national policies concerning key sustainability challenges. The Climate Change Act of 2009 (Republic Act 9729) established the Climate Change Commission (CCC), the lead policy-making body of the government on climate change chaired by the President of the Philippines. One of the members of the advisory board is the Secretary (Minister) of the DepEd. The DepEd is then mandated to integrate climate change into the primary and secondary education curricula, textbooks and other educational materials. This policy also orders all relevant government agencies and local government units to allocate from their annual appropriations adequate funds for continuing education and training in climate change (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2012).

Integrating ESD into the curricula

In terms of curriculum, elements of sustainable development have already been integrated into the national curriculum and standards at all levels, and at varying extents. Presently, “socio-emotional development”, “values development” and

“understanding of the physical and natural environment” are some of the developmental domains of the kindergarten curriculum (Department of Education, 2016a). In elementary and junior high school, “environmental literacy” is one of the end goals of the science curriculum, where EE is one of the key elements of the grade-level standards (Department of Education, 2016e). One of the goals of *araling panlipunan* (social studies) is to foster students which are *makakalikasan* (pro-nature) (Department of Education, 2016b). *Pakiisa sa kalikasan* (harmony with nature) is one of the core values being taught in *edukasyon sa pagpapakatao* (values education) (Department of Education, 2016c). In senior high school, one of the performance standards of the earth and life science core subject is that the students shall be able to “prepare an action plan containing mitigation measures to address current environmental concerns and challenges in the community.” (Department of Education, 2016f). Another senior high school core subject is the “Introduction to the Philosophy of the Human Person” with the end goal of fostering students who are, *inter alia*, “environment-friendly” and “actively committed to the development of a more humane society.” One of the learning competencies is to be able to “show that care for the environment contributes to health, well-being and sustainable development” (Department of Education, 2016g). Physical education in senior high school curriculum is a course on recreational activities in outdoor, natural or semi-natural settings. It aims to enable learners to make a positive relationship with natural environments and promoting their sustainable use (Department of Education, 2016d). Global warming and climate change is one of the contents of the core course “Understanding Culture, Society and Politics” (Department of Education, 2013a). “Disaster Readiness and Risk Reduction” is also a core subject in senior high school (Department of Education, 2013b). Furthermore, the country shall develop master curricula dedicated to SDGs, and by 2030, this course shall be made mandatory at all grade levels (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

In tertiary education, the country is still planning to develop a master syllabus for sustainable development and make a course on sustainable development a compulsory elective in tertiary education by 2030 (Republic of the Philippines, 2017). Nevertheless, ESD is still integrated in tertiary education through other means. Bachelor and graduate programs with environmental specialization are being offered, for example, the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science (BS ES) and the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Planning (BS EP). According to the minimum policies and standards set by the CHED, the BS ES program is expected to produce graduates who are, among other things, knowledgeable regarding local, regional and global environmental issues; and capable to employ a rational structured approach to addressing environmental issues (CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 35, S. 2005) (Commission on Higher Education, 2005). The BS EP program aims to develop graduates who are able to improve the welfare of people and communities by creating an ecologically sustainable environment that contributes to economic prosperity of the present and future generations (CMO No. 60, s. 2017) (Commission on Higher Education, 2017b).

The National Service Training Program (NSTP)

Most of all, the main channel of ESD in Philippine tertiary education is the National Service Training Program (NSTP), institutionalized in 2002 (Republic Act 9163). The NSTP is part of the curricula of all baccalaureate degree courses and of at least two-year vocational courses in all public and private educational institutions. It is a requisite program for graduation, to be undertaken for an academic period of two semesters. The students, male and female, are required to undergo training in any of its three program components. First is the Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS). The CWTS contains training programs contributory to the enhancement of community elements, such as education, environment and morals of the citizenry. Second is the Literacy Training Service (LTS) program, which aims to train students to become teachers of literacy and numeracy skills to school children, out of school youth, and other segments of society. The third is the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), designed to provide military training to tertiary level students to train them for national defense preparedness. (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2002).

The NSTP has become an instrumental platform for ESD in the country. Several succeeding ESD policies have then been formulated with the NSTP as means of implementation. For example, Executive Order (EO) 579, signed in 2006, orders the implementation of Green Philippines through the NSTP. All students have to take at least thirty-six hours per semester (seventy-two hours in total) of activities involving the following: reforestation, beautification of villages and cities, building of urban parks and recreational areas, purification of bodies of water and clean-up of industrial sites (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2006). Furthermore, by virtue of the abovementioned National Environmental Awareness and Education Act of 2008 (Republic Act 9512), EE is integrated in the CWTS component of the NSTP (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2008).

Environmental education (EE)

In essence, ESD in the Philippines is under the umbrella of environmental education (EE). ESD in the Philippines is enshrined in the National Environmental Education Action Plan (NEEAP), the country’s official national framework and guide to ESD (Galang, 2010). The first NEEAP covered the period 1992-2002. It was succeeded by the NEEAP 2005-2014, which was in consonance with the UN DESD. The 2005-2014 action plan’s objectives, priority areas and key strategies were mainly centered on EE, environmental conservation and environmental human power (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2005). In order words, the emphasis of ESD in the Philippines has been on the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

A holistic ESD

The country has recently taken a big step in advancing ESD. The country recently released the first version of the NEEAP 2018-2040. First of all, the forty-four-page document shall employ a top down and bottom up strategy. National policies, roadmaps, legislation and incentives are enforced from the top, which are then supported by education, awareness campaigns and programs from the bottom. It shall be implemented into three main implementation periods: medium term (2018-2022), long term (2023-2030) and foresight (2030-2040) (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

Most importantly, the present Action Plan showcases a promising improvement of the previous national action plans, which mainly emphasized on environmental elements. This time around, the NEEAP takes cognizance of the fact that a

fundamental change in how humans think and behave are socio-culturally driven. It advocates a more holistic and balanced view of ESD; and asserts that students should be equipped with a comprehensive knowledge about sustainable development and global citizenship. Students should be fostered to respect their own culture and other cultures, respect for the past, present and future generations; and respect towards the planet (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

The Action Plan aims to support the achievement of SDGs in the country through capitalizing on local values and culture. In that context, the country presents its extended neo environmental education model (Figure 1). At its core is the environment which is of three types (second ring): natural, economic and built, and socio-cultural. The third ring symbolizes the Filipino cultural values identified as the main drivers towards sustainable development. The fourth ring represents the global agenda (SDGs), and the final ring is the ultimate vision: the Philippines as a sustainable nation (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).



Figure 1. Philippines Environmental Education Model (Republic of the Philippines, 2017, p. 18)

Furthermore, the present action plan proposes that ESD should be people-centric, context-driven and culturally relevant. The overall binding theme is *Luntiang Puso* (Green Heart) and the Filipino cultural values which should drive ESD are *Bayanihan* (cooperation), *Pagtitipid* (prudence) and *Malasakit* (empathy). Contextualizing ESD allows the students to better relate to sustainable development, making sustainable development no longer an alien concept to the Filipino youth (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

Transforming learning environments

ESD is about much more than teaching sustainable development. Learning environments themselves should take a holistic view of ESD, focused not only on transferring content about sustainability, but also on integrating sustainability principles into their ethos, governance and daily practices. Furthermore, learning institutions should be more actively involved in accelerating sustainable solutions and scaling up ESD programmes at local level (UNESCO, 2014a). The country holds its National Search for Sustainable and Eco-friendly Schools (NSSEFS). It is a national recognition piloted in 2009 by the Inter-Agency Steering Committee on Environmental Education and in partnership with the private sector. It aims to recognize environment-friendly schools and encourage learning institutions to be more actively involved in environmental issues at a practical and local level. Special awards are also given in partnership with the business sector, such as the Nestle Water Leadership Award, the Meralco Energy Leadership Award and the Landbank Green Leadership Award. The theme for the 2017 NSSEFS was “Building Climate-Resilient Philippines” (Environmental Management Bureau, 2016) (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2017).

The NSSEFS utilizes a rating scheme jointly formulated by the inter-agency committee and representatives from academic, civil and private sectors (Environmental Management Bureau, 2016).

For the elementary and high school category, the criteria are as follows:

- Clear articulation and integration of social, ethical and environmental responsibility in the institution’s vision, mission and governance (10 points)
- Environmental dimensions of school operations (40 points)
- Environment-related features of the curriculum (20 points)
- Presence of vibrant eco organizations in campus (10 points)
- Presence of environmental partners and linkages in various programs, projects and activities (9 points)
- Socio-cultural sustainability (6 points)
- Economic sustainability (5 points)

For higher education:

- Administration (10 points)
- Curriculum and instruction (20 points)
- Sustainability programs (40 points)
- Research (10 points)

- Extension (e.g. community involvement and outreach; interschool, local, national and international linkages) (10 points)
- Student engagement (e.g. eco-clubs, programs for indigenous communities) (10 points)
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At present, the country is planning to capitalize and bolster this platform. The NSSEFS can be further enhanced with the inclusion of economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Furthermore, the NSSEFS is presently on a voluntary basis. The country plans to make elements of the NSSEFS compulsory to all schools and officially institutionalize the scheme by 2030. In addition, there is also a plan to make it compulsory for schools to organize community level projects at least every two years by 2040, in order to provide students with real-life experiences (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

Building capacities of educators

Educators are “powerful agents of change”. In order for them to help the educational response to sustainable development and usher the transition to a sustainable society, they must first acquire the necessary competencies, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (UNESCO, 2014a). This is particularly relevant in the Philippines, where majority of the students are pursuing to become teachers. Teacher education is the discipline with the most enrollees (35% in academic year 2016-2017); and has also produced the most number of graduates (32%) in the same reference period (Commission on Higher Education, 2017a).

Upon examination of the national policies, standards and guidelines for Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) issued by the CHED, it appears that the country still has a long way to go in integrating ESD into the core curriculum (apart from the mandatory NSTP and specialization courses e.g., science and good manners and right conduct (GMRC)) (Commission on Higher Education, 2017c). Likewise, ESD can be more integrated into the core curriculum and indicators of the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd). Nonetheless, elements of sustainable development are already included in the specialization courses for BSEd majors in Science (e.g., environmental science) and Values Education (e.g., transformative education and values education through community service) (Commission on Higher Education, 2017d). The country aims that by 2022, a teaching module on sustainable development that is not subject-specific has to be developed. Teachers of any subject can use this module and adapt it into their own subjects and specialization. Also, by that year, EE shall be a compulsory elective for teacher training institutes (Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

National networks also exist in the country dedicated to environmental educators and ESD, especially in higher education. First is the Philippine Association of Tertiary Level Educational Institutions in Environmental Protection and Management (PATLEPAM). The PATLEPAM, established in 1995, envisions higher education institutions with educators who are equipped with knowledge and skills for sustainable development. It conducts collaborative programs on instruction, research and development, and extension in environmental management. Presently, there are 380 higher educational institutions who are members of this network (Environmental Management Bureau, n.d.). Second is the Philippines Network of Educators on Environment (PNEE). Established in 1988, the network promotes ESD through teacher training, curriculum development, research and outreach programs. At present, the PNEE has 87 institutional members (state universities and colleges and non-government organizations) and 105 individual members (faculty, and researchers) nationwide (School of Environmental Science and Management, University of the Philippines, Los Banos, 2018).

Empowering the youth

Lastly, the youth should be empowered and mobilized. Central to the vision of sustainability is the youth, as they bear the responsibility of sustainable development both today and tomorrow (UNESCO, 2014a). This is especially relevant to the Philippines, where the population is young, with a median age of 24.3 years old (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). The country’s Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) created the EMB Youth Desk, which is a one-stop-shop for the youth seeking information and consultations on youth and environment matters (Environmental Management Bureau, 2012). The DepEd established the Youth for Environment in Schools (YES) Organization in 2003. The YES serves as the co-curricular environmental club in basic education, which aims to promote environmental awareness through programs, projects, community extension, networking, trainings and the Youth for Environment Summer Camp (Department of Education, 2003). In 2009, Philippine Youth Environment Network (PhilYEN) was launched as the umbrella network of all youth organizations in pursuit of environmental advocacy and sustainable development. It aims to mobilize the youth, promote environmental citizenship; and be a platform for youth environmental leaders nationwide to tap into their creativity to generate innovative solutions for their schools and localities (Philippine Youth Environment Network, n.d.).

Furthermore, the benefits of information and communication technologies, including social media, should be harnessed. For example, the YES and PhilYEN have social media presence and network through their Facebook Pages and Groups¹. These online platforms serve not only as learning and promotional platforms, but also as venues for the youth to collaborate and share their ideas on sustainable development (UNESCO, 2014a).

Sangguniang Kabataan (SK)

What appears to be the most promising platform in the Philippines to empower the youth in bringing about sustainable solutions at the local level is the *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK) (Youth Council) and *Katipunan ng Kabataan* (KK) (Youth Assembly), by virtue of Republic Act 10742. In a nutshell: In every *barangay* (village), which is the country’s basic political unit, there shall be a Youth Assembly, composed of citizens between the ages of 15 and 30. The assembly is mandated to serve as the highest policy-making body to decide on youth matters in the *barangay*. The Assembly shall elect the SK, composed of a chairperson and seven council members. The SK, with the concurrence of the Assembly, shall plan, implement and administer

¹ PhilYEN Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/171536842800/>); YES Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/YES-O-Youth-for-Environment-in-Schools-Organization-134000133292113/>)

projects and programs for the community youth; and shall hold office for a fixed term of three years. In addition, in every province, city and municipality, a Local Youth Development Council (LYDC) shall be created, which is mandated to assist in the planning and execution of the SK's projects (Office of the President of the Philippines, 2016).

According to the 2017 SK Operations Manual, one of the functions of the SK is to plan and execute programs of specific advocacies, including climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resiliency, gender sensitivity, accessible education and sustainable development. The SK is also mandated to create mandatory committees. Noteworthy are the Committee on Education and Culture; and Committee on Environmental Protection, Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), and Disaster Risk Reduction and Resiliency (DRRR) (National Youth Commission, 2017).

This paper recommends to regard the SK as one of the drivers of ESD in the Philippines, especially that it has been widely participated by the youth. According to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), for the May 2018 SK elections, a total of 418,906 youths (83,127 for SK chairman and 335,779 for SK councilors) filed their certificates of candidacy to seek post in the SK (Inquirer, 2018).

The country can do more in harnessing the SK as an ESD platform. This can be done by articulating ESD in the SK operations framework, building the capacity of SK officials regarding ESD through workshops and trainings; and enjoining SK units nationwide to plan and execute ESD projects, in partnership with the relevant sectors of the community.

The SK shows strong potential to drive ESD among the Filipino youth. Not only can it extend ESD beyond the confines of the classroom and make ESD accessible for all; it can provide the youth with real-life experiences and empower them to be more active in accelerating sustainable solutions at the local and community level. Most importantly, it reaffirms the role of the Filipino youth in building a sustainable nation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper finds that the Philippines has shown promise in advancing policies on education for sustainable development (ESD) and in empowering and mobilizing the youth in accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level. Noteworthy are the National Environmental Awareness and Education Act of 2008, the National Service Training Program (NSTP) and the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK). This is important considering the Philippine population is young. However, the country's efforts still need to be further bolstered especially in terms of curricula, transforming learning environments, building capacities of educators; and monitoring and evaluation. The National Search for Sustainable and Eco-friendly Schools (NSSEFS), while functional, remains voluntary. The country can consider capitalizing the NSSEFS and institutionalizing it as a compulsory accreditation scheme. Moreover, integrating ESD into the curricula and national education standards still has a long way to go, especially in tertiary education. The mandatory NSTP and the standalone degree programs with an environmental focus can be further complemented with programs and requisite electives on sustainable development. Furthermore, sustainable development can be included as a core course in teacher education, considering that teacher education has been the discipline with the most number of enrollees and graduates in the recent years. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, the country still lacks a mechanism to track the progress and outputs of the ESD initiatives.

Overall, ESD in the Philippines remains under the umbrella of environmental education (EE). ESD is enshrined in its National Environmental Education Action Plan (NEEAP). In other words, the emphasis of ESD in the Philippines has been mostly on the environmental dimension of sustainable development. The country's vision needs to be broadened to also encompass the sociocultural and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The present action plan, NEEAP 2018-2040, now shows promise of a more holistic and balanced ESD, by taking cognizance of the sociocultural and economic dimensions. It presents a neo environmental education paradigm, which identifies the Filipino cultural values as the main drivers towards sustainable development. The country needs to build on this momentum by integrating and articulating a holistic ESD in the country's policies, curricula, education standards, recognition and accreditation schemes; and by highlighting and harnessing the key role of ESD in realizing not just the sustainable development goals (SDGs) but also the development trajectory of the country as a whole.

Lastly, recognizing that central to the vision of sustainability is the youth and that local communities are one of the key drivers for sustainable development, this paper highlights the strong potential of the village Youth Council. The country can further harness this platform by integrating ESD into the ethos, governance and practice of the SK. Not only can the SK expand learning beyond the confines of the classroom; it can also provide the youth with real-life and practical experiences. Most importantly, it reaffirms the role of the Filipino youth in building a sustainable Philippines

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