

# Korea's Official Development Assistance to the Philippine Education Sector: Observations and Inputs

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## I. Introduction

Advocating inclusive and equitable quality education (SGD 4: Quality Education) is central to sustainable development efforts anchored on collaboration and partnership that enable the policy-to-impact synergy. Agencies and institutions in various levels need to align motivations as they work towards realizing education for sustainable development (ESD). As education fuels sustainable development, school access and completion need to be prioritized, as wealth inequality and gender gap are eliminated.

Human capital investment involves the provision of relevant and responsive education systems and training. These mechanisms enable an individual to be productive and contribute to positive outcomes, improved standard of living, and potential gains. As a core element

to growth and poverty reduction, human capital suggests implementing significant and concrete progress in core education indices. Further, sustained economic growth, increased productivity value, and favorable social returns are manifested outcomes at the macro level.

A study by Mercan and Sezer (2014) established the positive impact of education spending and economic growth. Similarly, it could be noted how education investment offers mutual benefits for the economy. It is worthy to mention how strengthening the human capital could lead to economic growth and development, either on a short-term or long-term basis. Skills, experiences, and attributes of the human capital result in positive economic processes. With the work outcomes and outputs

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being dependent and influenced by school completion, low labor quality poses a detrimental effect on productivity.

**E**ducation spending of countries in the Asia-Pacific region presents allocation meant to comply with the global trend, while others are beyond the average figures. Some countries have reduced education expenditure owing to

various conditions. Table 1 presents the total Philippine basic education spending from 2010–2019, relative to its portion in the country's gross domestic product (GDP). However, according to the 2015 Incheon Declaration, the allocation must be pegged at 4 to 6 percent of the GDP, which is much higher than the Philippine figures.

**Table 1. Total Basic Education Spending, 2010-2019 (Million PHP)**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
National Government	191,118	218,817	240,238	291,030	284,606	365,202	430,048	577,924	567,092	500,272
Local Government	13,526	14,435	16,232	16,654	15,976	15,984	16,468	18,889	20,868	24,018
Total Government	204,644	233,252	256,470	307,684	300,582	381,186	446,516	596,813	587,960	524,290
% of GDP	2.20%	2.30%	2.30%	2.60%	2.30%	2.70%	3.00%	3.60%	3.00%	2.80%

Source: World Bank (2019) Philippine Basic Education Public Expenditure Review.

**O**ver the years, the loan and grant component of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Philippines has been consistently stable. Given the Philippines' limited fiscal and fi-

ancial capacity, the aid is instrumental in financing infrastructure and development projects, including education expenditures. ODA for education is classified under the social reform and development cluster.

**Table 2. Official Development Assistance Information for the Philippines, 2010-2019 (Million USD)**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total ODA	1,181.2	722.7	770.6	872.7	1,311.9	1,150.4	867.6	725.1	1,024.5	1,373.9
ODA for education	54.9	68.3	91.2	56.4	83.2	100.1	67.4	71.1	52.3	49.9
% ODA for education	4.60%	9.50%	11.80%	6.50%	6.20%	8.70%	7.80%	9.80%	5.10%	3.60%
ODA for basic education	33.1	19.5	32.4	21.7	41.2	71.7	30.7	31.4	21.9	15
% ODA for basic education	0.80%	2.70%	4.20%	2.50%	3.10%	6.20%	3.50%	4.30%	2.10%	1.10%

Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023).

South Korea has been the Philippines 6<sup>th</sup> largest ODA source since 2021. Grants are implemented through the Korea International Cooperation Agency, while loans are coursed through the Korea Export-Import Bank as the official credit agency.

This paper looks at the ODA from Korea to the Philippines in the context of education. The discussion will be anchored on the Philippine Development Plan and AmBisyon Natin 2040 as roadmaps reflecting the aspirations of every Filipino of having a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secured life.<sup>1</sup> Observations and inputs will be offered to ensure effective ODA and provide focus and ways forward towards access to and quality of education, along with programs and projects that contribute into any meaningful development of the Philippine economy.

## II. The Philippine Development Plan and AmBisyon Natin 2040

Through the National Economic Development Authority, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) of each administration outlines the direction on development planning for the entire term of office. PDP highlights the development roadmap of the Philippine president, in the context of policies, strategies, and programs in the socio-economic domains, which eventually contributes to the attainment of the long-term development plan.<sup>2</sup> With PDP in

place, a “shared vision” is created towards imagining the desired future, vis-à-vis the identified strategies and initiatives. As national government priorities, relative to the needs and concerns, are being identified and classified, government funds, investment, and expenditures are being aligned towards ultimately realizing the goals and objective for/of the country.

The PDP during the term of former President Benigno Aquino III covered the years 2011–2016. Anchored on inclusive growth, the plan highlighted Aquino’s good governance campaign as an offshoot to people employment and poverty alleviation. The Aquino administration aimed for continued growth and development and raised the standard of living of the Filipino people. Government transparency and accountability has been the constant focus, which eventually strengthened industrial competitiveness, which contributed to improved life quality and emergency from poverty through rapid economic expansion. Five core approaches of PDP were identified, which included job creation by strengthening effective entities, availability of enhanced finance services, focus on infrastructure development funding, good governance, and boosting social services and protection.

According to the World Bank’s Poverty Assessment, high school graduation lowers the likelihood of poverty (World Bank 2018). Education, being one of the factors and indicators

<sup>1</sup> <https://2040.neda.gov.ph/about-ambisyon-natin-2040/> (Accessed January 17, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> <https://pdp.neda.gov.ph/about-the-philippine-development-plan/> (Accessed January 20, 2023)

of development, has contributed to the realization of the PDP. As the Philippine government invested in human capital as an economic development prerequisite, the quality of life has improved and each individual's capacity to be productive becomes central. Education serves as an instrument in advancing efforts related to sound economic and entrepreneurial activities.

Through the PDP, the Aquino administration has recognized education as one key element which is crucial in job acquisition and labor efficiency. Similarly, it was also acknowledged that decreased allocation on social services led

to poorer performance, yielding higher costs for citizens to spend on what the state had to offer, thus the commitment to increase government spending on education. One public expenditure management reform pipelined was to significantly increase productive spending for education. Table 3 shows how the total appropriations for basic education vis-à-vis other agencies. It was during this period that the country launched a drastic education reform by introducing the K-12 curriculum. The PDP also outlined how investment in education contributes to the total factor productivity contribution to GDP growth.

**Table 3. Education Sector Appropriations FY 2010-2020**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
DepEd	174,966	207,271	238,766	293,401	309,415	367,122	533,383	568,436	580,632	531,565	554,213
CHED	2,539	1,695	2,207	3,604	8,012	3,402	9,657	19,567	50,534	52,436	47,907
TESDA	2,991	2,953	2,855	3,107	5,250	5,442	6,861	6,828	7,717	12,730	13,152
SUC	22,477	25,097	27,307	34,924	38,075	44,397	49,661	61,440	65,245	68,338	77,352

Source: Department of Budget and Management (2023).

The Aquino administration's education priorities are classified under the social development cluster. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) was seen to be expanded to encourage primary education participation. The conditional cash transfer (CCT) was also recognized as an essential approach so families will send their children to school. It has been reported that three-quarters of poor Filipinos reside in rural areas where poverty rate is triple compared to urban spaces (World Bank 2018).

The PDP under the Duterte administration (2017–2022) is anchored on establishing a solid base enabling more equitable and progressive society with emphasis on intellectual capital. This plan, along with other medium-term plans, contributes to the ultimate long-term vision dubbed as AmBisyon Natin 2040. To achieve this, the roadmap has recognized the value of education and school completion, specifically that of tertiary level education as a must for obtaining a respectable career. At

the core of Duterte's PDP are three pillars: enhancing the social fabric inequality-reducing transformation, and increasing growth potential. Education provisions can be found all throughout the PDP's seven-part, twenty-one-chapter document.

**T**owards realizing a national economy which puts a premium on sciences and applied research, lifelong learning is advocated as an accessible resource for all. In order to guarantee access to quality and responsive compulsory basic education, investment and spending for education need to be secured and prioritized starting from the early childhood level. Teacher training and the school curriculum have also been mentioned to be enabling mechanisms towards achieving a strong knowledge economy. The government spending has also been found to impact considerable efforts towards enhancing the higher and technical–vocational education domain.

**T**he development of human capital is at the core of efforts to capacitate individuals to be productive. This is done by amplifying education outcomes and outputs and intensified education investments. Social infrastructure budget is also envisioned to respond to existing infrastructure shortage in schools. Despite these efforts, the country still could not keep pace with school infrastructure, which eventually affects students' academic outcome and performance (Navarro 2022).

**A**mBisyon Natin 2040 as a roadmap encapsulates the shared long-term vision of the Fili-

pino people for themselves and for the Philippines. The aspirations are drawn for the year 2040, which becomes central in planning, growth, and development, as spearheaded by the government.

**T**he thrust of the AmBisyon Natin 2040 visualizes the Filipino lifestyle ingrained on the concept of a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life. Under the banner of Filipino families living a comfortable life, education is viewed as a pathway towards being a valuable citizen by maximizing one's own capacity as an individual. Quality education sequentially led to feasible income and other productive financial activities.

**A**mBisyon Natin 2040 carries the ambition that no one will be considered poor in the Philippines by 2040. It is crucial that all stakeholders contribute in realizing this aspiration. The government is urged to maximize fiscal and financial schemes towards the achievement of the identified goals in various elements such as economic, human, social, and others. Under education services, formal education and lifelong learning opportunities are promoted. Quality and accessible education for children is also ensured.

**L**inking economic growth with education brings equally important discourse on how the government must emphasize crafting a dynamic and outcome-oriented education strategies and plan of action. AmBisyon Natin 2040 fosters learning targets that exhibit skills and character beyond the standard measures. It

highlights critical thinking, creativity, intuitive, leadership, and other abilities that require constant enhancement.

To fulfill the provisions of the AmBisyon Natin 2040, it involves aligning medium-term intentions with an overarching goal. These serve as prerequisites in harmonizing with related drivers such as the Sustainable Development Goals, ASEAN 2050, and others. The focus on education and lifelong learning can reduce poverty level and social inequality. Eventually, educated Filipinos advocate a society where culture is given merit and values are observed.

Education is a prerequisite to economic development. The Philippines' PDP under the last two administrations have shown efforts to highlight the focus and locus of education as an inclusive and equitable undertaking, along with creating opportunities so all can avail of lifelong learning opportunities. While the Philippines continue to pursue motivations and ambitions for the Filipino people and the country through education, it is vital to recognize fiscal and financial constraints to sustain these programs and projects. Official development assistance from various donor countries plays significant roles in education financing mainly through loans and/or grants.

### III. From Korea to the Philippines: Grants and Loans

Literatures suggest efforts to highlight the absolute value of ODA in responding to the press-

ing and genuine issue related to poverty and education. With valid evidence linking education and socio-economic development, it is imperative to analyze the alignment of education priorities (as conveyed through various development plans and roadmaps) with ODA targets. Jin and Oh (2012) noted that ODA objectives determine whether the foreign aid can be considered beneficial or not, especially in the context of the recipient country.

Apparently, ongoing projects (2015–2026) are mostly in-line with infrastructure development, aquatic technology and fisheries, climate change mitigation, and capacity and human resource development. Among the on-going education-related projects, The Capacity Building for Higher Education and Establishment of Agricultural Research Center at the UPLB (grant amount: USD 14,950,000 from 2021-2026) seeks to set up agricultural facilities and equipment. Laboratories are also expected to be built with the help of Korean specialists. The second education-related project, titled Better Life for Out-of-School Girls in Tacloban to Fight Against Poverty and Injustice in the Philippines (grant amount: USD 6,100,000 from 2017-2022) is based in the province of Leyte, and is the basis for the construction of the Girls Education Center. In coordination with the Philippine Department of Education and UNESCO, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) curriculum has been enhanced and aligned with the K-12 Curriculum. ALS teachers were also provided with professional development training and skills development training were provided to out-of-school girls.

Completed KOICA projects in the Philippines (2010–2019) are mostly related to disaster prevention, climate change, health, rural development, and agriculture. A higher education project was launched and completed in the Visayas State University (grant amount: USD 4,000,000 from 2014–2018) in support of the campus repair from the damage of the super typhoon Haiyan. The funding also provided support for affected students as well as the upkeep of the University facilities. Overall, KOICA’s education thrust involves attention to education crisis, gender issues, and skills acquisition in the context of developing countries. With this, grants provided through ODA contribute to the enhancement of the education services anchored on three focused areas: tech-voc and higher education, digital learning, and quality education.

Korea’s development cooperation efforts in education in 2016 focused on enhancing students’ academic performance, teacher training and capacity building, and education access for all. A total of USD 14,758,000 was allocated for the Philippines for pipelined priority projects related to health care access, economic growth and development, and disaster management. In terms of loans provided, all three projects fall under the transport (road and air) and storage sector. In terms of education grants, the majority of projects fall under education policy and administrative management, mainly to fund fellowships, program development, capacity building, and deployment of volunteers. Education facilities and training

benefit the Philippines through the construction of school buildings and library.

In 2017, the Philippines ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in terms of aid in the region, receiving USD 10,967,000. Priority projects included efforts to respond to climate change impact, local development, transportation, and other engagement that contribute to poverty alleviation. Project grants for primary education include the support for the teacher exchange and volunteer dispatch. There were also eleven types of scholarship and training offered to Filipinos to study in Korea. The funded teacher training was intended for Korean language and culture experts, while funds for vocational training involved the establishment of tech-voc centers and the provision of equipment.

The 2018 KOICA education strategy focused on efforts to enhance education system, school attendance, and education access for all. The Philippines received a total of USD 13,168,000, equivalent to 10.5% of the total assistance to the region. Significant projects include those under regional development, smart city establishment, health services, and peace. Four standard loan projects were given funding this year, while 21 scholarship opportunities were granted. For grants in the education sector, majority of projects in the primary education domain support the dispatch of Korean volunteers. Vocational training focused on job creation for women and the persons with disability (PWD).

The 2019 total aid amount of KOICA pegged at KRW 683,745,000,000, in which KRW 169,236,000,000 was allotted for education projects: the highest among domains followed by health, public administration, and others. The Philippines received KRW 21,408 million to fund projects on local development, water and sanitation, health, and disaster management. Loans this year were utilized carry out projects on river basic development, road transport, and agricultural water resources. More than 50 scholarship types were awarded to Filipinos in the form of short trainings, graduate studies, and study visits. Most education grants are classified under vocational training (TVET, capacity building for women, and dispatch for volunteers) and basic life skills (establishment of child center, program for out-of-school girls, and dispatch of volunteer). At the primary level, the teacher exchange program has been continued, together with the dispatch of Korean youth volunteers.

In 2020, education was the top ODA priority with 20.4% of the total funds, amounting to USD 100,590,276. As an implementation strategy, grants under this domain push for quality and inclusive education, and technical-vocational training. Country programs for the Philippines were allotted KRW 16,144 million, mainly devoted for rural and coastal development, health services, and good governance. Five projects were funded through standard loans mainly for road and water transport, and COVID-19 response. Scholarship opportunities (in the higher education level) were provided in form of graduate studies and training

in the field of arts, meteorology, and Saemaul studies and other areas. At the on-set of the pandemic, it is noticeable that grants are funded in line with COVID-19 control. Education-related grants included vocational training and job creation program for vulnerable women. Educational policy programs were launched for PWD, along with the dispatch of volunteers. Filipino teachers were also trained on Asia Pacific communication and integration and Korean e-learning.

In 2021, Korea's total ODA for education accounts for 15.4%, manifesting strong commitment to SDG 4 amounting to USD 84,550,743. This is only next to the SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, which is the top priority with USD 87,541,422 allocation. In the Philippines, a total of USD 21,218,000 has been allotted in terms of grants, which makes the country the top recipient in the region, taking 4.8% of the total aid provided. Major projects include focus on rural development and resilience in Philippine cities. Additionally, health care and governance and leadership are also listed as priority areas. Standard grants continued to fund COVID-19 control measures as six loans were financed: road transport, water resource, river basin development, and infectious disease control. Most higher education grants were awarded in form of scholarships and trainings. Capacity building of teachers centered around enhancement of Korean e-learning, teacher exchange, and communication and integration in Asia-Pacific. Education policy (dispatch of volunteers and learning solutions) and facilities and training (ICT, policy,

and PWD advocacy) were also given prime attention for 2021. Furthermore, two primary education sector projects were funded, education access of the minority and pandemic learning experiences of students in Eastern Visayas.

#### IV. Observations and Inputs

Observations drawn from this paper provide clear implications for the discussion on sustainability of education expenditure sourced from ODA. Looking at the Philippines' PDP and AmBisyon Natin 2040 provides a clear-cut perspective at the aspirations of the Filipino people, serving as the main driver for budget prioritization and allocation. Directing the resources in the education sector does not just complement the Philippines medium and long-term plans, but also the global plan of action through SDG 4 (quality education). Aligning economic growth and development priorities and ODA as government aid promotes efficiency in education spending thus ultimately ensures overall growth.

The dawn of the Philippine K-12 curriculum manifests education reforms towards the Filipino learners' pathways for college education, skills development, and employment/entrepreneurship: domains which are instrumental to economic development.

Korea's ODA for lifelong learning and skills training to the Philippines resonates with the government's priority strategy, especially as Korean experts are dispatched to conduct volunteer activities on digital skills training. With

this, capacity and capability building measures are put in place across various education sectors linking with the labor market. This approach guarantees that skill demand aligns with the supply, therefore promoting productivity.

It is noticeable that a large chunk of assistance received by the Philippines goes to infrastructure projects and development, as reflected in Korean ODA's Loan and Grant Strategies recognizing the need for infrastructure development and industrialization. The education sector receives a significant amount of grant award, but these are mostly attributed to higher education, being one of Korea's brand ODA programs as mandated by the implemented New Southern Policy. Locally, these funding sources have strengthened the Duterte government's "Build, Build, Build" program towards poverty alleviation, decongestion of Manila, and respond to the country's infrastructure needs.

Digital partnership, being another flagship program, has been manifested through the dispatch of Korean volunteers to conduct digital training programs in the Philippines. Peace community programs became a forerunner advocacy in Mindanao, especially for the rehabilitation of Marawi. In terms of standard loans, inclusive transport is achieved through the allocation for various roads, air, and water transport projects all over the Philippines.

Launched in 2017, Korea's Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for the Philippines (2016-2020) is mainly anchored on AmBisyon Natin

2040, which desires the realization of a middle-class Filipino society. CPS' priority cooperation areas and support plans include rural development, health and sanitation, transport, and disaster prevention and preparedness. This clearly outlines Korea's directions and motivation in contributing to the Philippines' inclusive and sustainable development: the Philippines' needs and Korea's comparative advantage and experience.

**W**ith 70% of total amount of assistance for development cooperation, education is given minimum intervention in the Korea–Philippines' cooperation, when in fact, this sector fundamentally establishes the groundwork for PDP and AmBisyon Natin 2040.

**T**he Philippine government continues to strengthen the country's education landscape as manifested in the recent year's General Appropriations Act. In 2020, the education sector (across all levels) received the largest portion of the budget worth PHP 692 billion, which then increased by 16.7% in 2021 totaling PHP 751.7 billion, then a 4.9% additional in 2022 which brought the total amount to PHP 788.5 billion. Still, the allotment is insufficient and these are being augmented by other sources such as Korean ODA.

**D**evelopment cooperation funds must be channeled in education projects which translate into economic growth and development. Basic education and skills development need to be given prime attention. ODA allotment for basic education builds strong foundation

for education development. Programs and projects as offshoots of grants must particularly target student's skills and academic performance. Technical and ICT training by Korean experts among Filipino teachers, along with pedagogical content knowledge, will surely be beneficial in the long run. Teacher training must address the need to strengthen teacher competencies in preparing students to becoming lifelong learners and global citizens (as desired by PDP, AmBisyon Natin 2040, and CPS).

**P**utting a premium on education spending through official development assistance contributes to human development dimensions, thereby promoting sustainable and long-lasting reform. These efforts impact income, labor market participation, health, and well-being. ODA supporting human development, particularly the education sector, generates support towards socio-economic development.

## V. Conclusions

**T**he findings of the current inquiry are practical insights for donor and receiving countries in planning and designing aid and assistance mechanisms. Harmonizing aid grants and target informs effective outcomes. The labor market, local or abroad, requires skilled and competent Filipino individuals who contribute to economic development. Public financing of education is sustained by government funding and other support through official development assistance from agreements in forms of loans and grants.

The focus on budget allocation and priority, with great attention to the provisions and mandates of PDP and Ambisyon Natin 2040, puts a premium on the improvement of the quality of basic education, creating cumulative impact on higher education and ultimately, the labor force and productivity that sustains growth and development.

The last three years of the Philippine General Appropriations Act (GAA) showed the Philippine government's expenditure policy on education towards realizing the expected gains of investments in education. Beyond the issue on budget, the absorptive capacity of the education sector in implementing projects need to be considered. The sector's performance in executing projects and programs have an impact on the succeeding year's budget.

Government spending on education clearly resonates with country development roadmaps in the medium and long-term period. The K-12 basic education curriculum has just been launched in the Philippines in the last 10 years, and while the system is relatively in its infancy, greater gains and long-term outcomes are expected to manifest and be observed in the coming years as its graduates start to participate in the labor force and become productive. Resources appropriated on human development domains of the education sector boost spending efficiency and eventually warrant all-inclusive development.

Korea's development assistance in technical-vocational training is an evident commitment in human capital investment through skills enhancement and capacity building. As the Philippines has identified strategies and pathways prerequisite to economic development in terms of skills and competency, the education landscape is gearing towards producing competent graduates who are responsive to the demand of the labor force.

President Yoon Suk-Yeol administration's Strategic Plan for Official Development Assistance seeks to fulfil Sustainable Development Goals, to which quality education is a priority area. This direction leads Korea's development assistant efforts towards promoting global values. Moreover, as the Korean ODA branding showcases the country's development experiences, the partner country's needs and landscape are also given attention to. From this end, the education sector surely aligns the donor-recipient synergy on the practical impact for development.

It is imperative that the Philippines enhances government allocation to education as endorsed by drivers and agencies such as the SDGs and Education 2030 Framework for Action. The receipt of development assistance must also be coupled with commitment to pursue accountability and transparency while promoting stakeholder involvement and participation whenever needed. **KIEP**

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