

PAYING the PRICE

by Leti Boniol

Shiela has been teaching for seven years at the oldest private college in a province south of Manila. This year, she has to start her masteral studies, as the college where she teaches is being evaluated to meet minimum standards for quality education, a process called accreditation. She was told that college teachers should have at least a master's degree, or be kicked out.

Some of her co-teachers have been asked to take a leave, only to be replaced by part-time public high school teachers with master's degrees. "It does not matter if they know how to teach in college, as long as they have the degree," she gripes.

With no financial subsidy for her advanced studies, Shiela has to shell out P300 (US\$10) per unit at the State University and at least P2,000 (US\$67) a month for transportation and school expenses. She has to travel four to five hours to Quezon City on Saturdays to attend classes.

Her attention is now divided among her teaching, her studies and her family, a triple burden she has to carry for the next two to three years if she wants to stay in the teaching profession.

"I'm a victim of globalization," Shiela says, carrying school books and a backpack like a college student. Her school has to compete in the era of globalization, but this is happening everywhere, she assures.

Not only she is affected, but the students as well. The college

curriculum is being revised these days to include more courses in basic English grammar, world and Asian literatures, natural science and information technology. This is another burden on the students and their parents, who have to spend thousands of pesos a year for their children's education.

Indeed, droves of students in Manila and other Philippine cities have been restive this year as tuition fees, dormitory fees and other school expenses are being hiked by twice their current rates. With the prices of oil and basic commodities rising due to the peso devaluation, more students may be deprived of access to education, the Filipinos' passport to better jobs and progress.

POLE-VAULTING

Global competitiveness is the Ramos government's call on Filipinos in its bid to quickly attain "tiger" status like its neighbors Singapore, Korea and Taiwan. The government's grand vision contained in its Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (1994-98) or Philippines 2000 has earned so much flak.

During the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit of leaders in Manila last year the Ramos government promised to liberalize ahead of member economies by the year 2005 and to do so, change more laws to conform to the new global free market economy.

With the medium-term plan ending by 1998, President Ramos'

economic planners are drafting a sequel plan for 1999-2004 and a long-term plan (1999-2025) in which they hope to surpass other Asian countries' economic performance by year 2006. This early, Mr. Ramos talks of "pole-vaulting to the 21st century." He envisions the Philippines becoming the "knowledge center in the Asia-Pacific," the "food basket for east Asia," the "energy exporter in east Asia," the "medical center in east Asia," the "shopping paradise in east Asia," the "financial center in east Asia" and the etceteras of Asia.

In the same breath, the president says his government is pursuing a "responsible deficit-reduction and revenue-raising program" which only means trimming down government personnel and expenses, selling government-owned and -controlled corporations, and asking the people to shoulder the costs of social services. Health and education spending are thus just enough to make Filipinos technically and physically capable of producing goods and services that will earn dollars and pay foreign debts.

Among those targetted for reforms is the education sector, which should be improved in terms of quality and responsiveness to the demands of globalization. The Philippines was rated as having the second highest illiteracy rate in Southeast Asia with 4.6 million Filipinos aged 15 and above unable to read and write. Of 100 children enrolled in Grade 1, only 56 make it to Grade 6, while 23 will finish high school and 14 will earn a college degree.



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Can the tide be turned?

With a budget allocation this year of P72.6 billion which is P15 billion higher than last year's P57.4 billion, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) is expected to prioritize "quality" basic education. But with most of the funds going to salaries or personnel services, only P6 billion goes to "upgrading science laboratories and upgrading teacher skills."

Also set aside this year is P5 billion for school buildings. Over 12,000 of 43,000 Philippine villages have no elementary schools and 11,000 of 33,000 public elementary schools do not offer the full six grades of elementary education. No wonder 33 percent of the children drop out. There are now about 3.6 million out-of-school youth, many of them trying to eke out a living in hazardous working conditions including prostitution, if not roaming the streets and sniffing dangerous drugs.

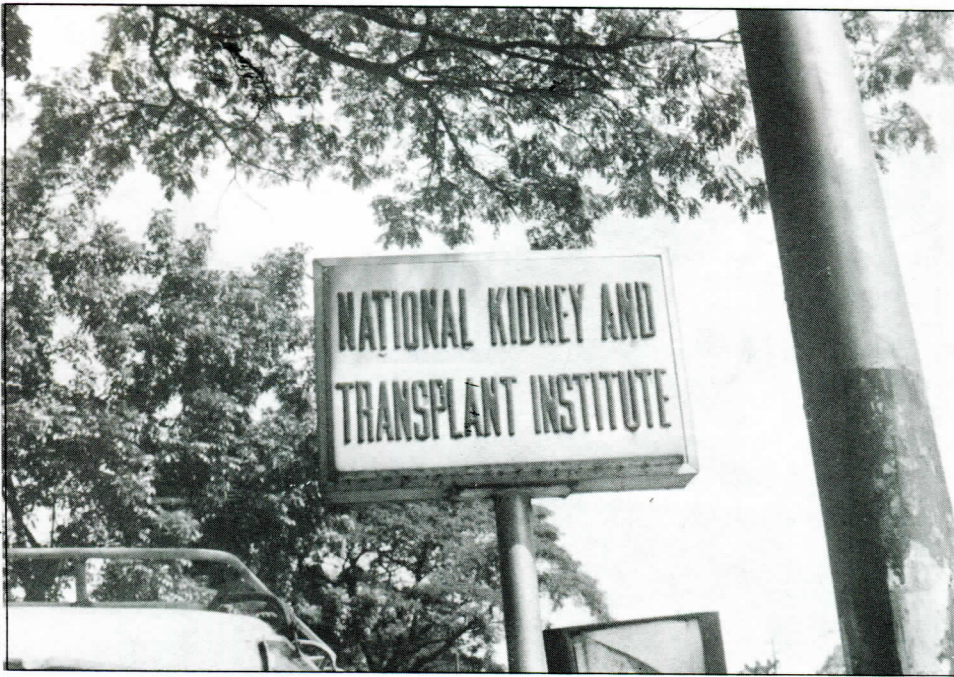
Some P214.8 million has also been allocated for "GATT-related adjustment measures," for agri-

cultural and nonformal education, contributing to "the capability build-up efforts needed to maintain the competitiveness of the country's manpower resources."

The state allocation for education has increased almost three-fold since 1986, the government boasts, accounting for the single biggest item in the budget, excluding debt service payment.

But this is deceptive, says Enrique Torres, chair of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT). The country has an accumulated shortage of 36,000 teachers. Per year, only 9,000 teachers are hired for elementary and secondary schools, he says. The DECS thus has to resort to remedial classes in farflung areas, oversized classes with as many as 50 to 55 per class, and going into three shifts for Manila and other big cities

Tertiary education remains tertiary in priority, getting 15 percent of the education budget, with P11.8 billion to be shared by 257 state colleges and universities (SCUs). These SCUs represent only



Even hospitals fall to the demands of the market.

20 percent of tertiary education institutions in the Philippines, as 80 percent of the country's colleges and universities are privately-owned, the highest number in Asia.

Torres explains: a blueprint for the country's educational system, called Education 2000, was drafted in 1993 to produce a vast pool of manpower for overseas employment. Originally envisioned as a stop-gap measure to bridge domestic unemployment, overseas employment for around 700,000 new entrants a year to the labor force has become permanent, Torres says. To ensure the global competitiveness of the labor force, the students should be equipped with English language skills, and trained in software development and even in overseas employment, he added.

Education 2000 is supposed to be the answer to what the Philippine Congress says is the "continuous decline in Philippine education," but University of the Philippines professor Edberto Villegas points out that it will in fact "ex-

acerbate this deterioration."¹

Education 2000, he explains, is part of the Ramos government's commitment to the International Monetary Fund to adopt austerity measures through the simultaneous policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization

Thus, financial assistance to public schools is to be deregulated through so-called fiscal autonomies, and government supervision of private schools and state colleges and universities liberalized to save on expenses. School principals are to be given more powers to "ensure the orientation of Filipino education to global competitiveness."

But while espousing the upgrading of institutions to improve the quality of education, Education 2000 calls for the organization of multigrade classes where teachers are made to teach more than one grade level at the same time. This will further burden Filipino teachers, the majority of them women, leaving them without time for research and socialization, Villegas says.

In fact, bills to increase the number of working hours of public school teachers from six to eight hours and school days from 180 to 220 days are set to be approved as laws of the land, Villegas said.

All these cost-saving measures of Education 2000, he explained, will mean more revenues for the government to service its foreign debt. The government has set aside this year P74.5 billion (US\$2.3B) or debt-service interest payments, higher than its budget for the education department.

The Education International Conference held in Malaysia in July 1997 discussed the education challenges for teachers in the 21st century, and approved a resolution assailing the World Bank-IMF's structural adjustment program of privatization, liberalization and deregulation, to make Third World countries pay for their debts. As a result, over 403 million children 6 to 17 years old are out of school, 225 million of them girls, and there are some 885 million illiterates aged 15 and over, 565 million of them girls.

HEALTH FOR NO ONE BY YEAR 2000?

If students and their parents are made to bear the cost of their education, so are most of the poor patients made to pay for the skyrocketing costs of their hospitalization and medication.

The government has allocated this year P12.9 billion for health, or 2.7 percent of the total appropriation. With over 70 million Filipinos, the per capita expenditure is only P184 per year or 50

centavos a day, that is, if the money doesn't wind up instead in the pockets of some corrupt government officials. Health used to receive an average of 3.45 percent of the national budget in 1980-85, but this decreased to 3.2 percent in 1986-89 and 2 percent in 1993.²

Government hospitals are so few that they could not possibly serve the rapidly growing population. Most hospitals in the Philippines are privately-owned (65 percent).

Dani Beltran, secretary-general of the non-government Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD), says that the most concrete sign that the government is abandoning health service for its citizenry is the privatization of specialty hospitals like the Lung Center, the National Center for Mental Health, the Kidney Transplant Institute, the Heart Center and the National Children's Medical Center which service mostly poor patients. District hospitals in the different Philippine regions, those devolved to the local government units are also being planned for privatization.

Over 4,000 mentally ill patients will have to go back to their respective provinces where the local government units are expected to provide for their treatment. More than 300 lung patients will have to go on their own to private hospitals. Over 2,000 patients are being discharged from the Tala Leprosarium despite their sickness.

Majority of the 60,000 government health professionals and workers will also have to find new jobs as they face displacement.

The government is crazy, the Alliance of Health Workers (AHW) said during a rally last September against the bidding-out of the mental hospital. Without government support, psychotics and lep-

ers may soon be roaming the streets of Manila and other urban centers, as many of them are now seen doing.

Over P500 million a year is expected to be saved by the government from these hospitals' operations, and many millions more from their sale. The property on which the mental hospital stands, to cite just one example, will fetch more than a billion pesos which, apparently unaware of the irony, the government says is intended for abused children.

SURVIVAL OF THE SMARTEST

There is no doubt that whoever is the smartest, will survive this age of globalization.

The challenge is to take advantage of technological advancement to improve the quality of education and yet avoiding the pitfalls of commercialization and market-oriented education, says the *Ibon Facts and Figures: Education and Development Quarterly* (1996).

Shiela says she and her fellow teachers are counteracting the effects of globalization by inculcating the appropriate values in the school curriculum, teaching the importance of sustainable development and not promoting multinational corporations in the natural science courses.

ACT advocates the regulation of tuition fee increases and a stronger subsidy program for colleges and universities; provision of adequate school facilities, laboratory equipment, teaching aids, textbooks and library materials, etc.; humane compensation for teachers, ensuring quality contact time to include nonclassroom activities such as exposure/field trips and visits to learning centers, among other measures, to improve access to education as well as ensure the quality of instruction.

Different sectors are mobilizing so that foreign debt servicing

could be rechanneled to education, health, housing, employment and other social expenditures.

As Harry Sawyer, the Ghanaian minister for education, has said: "Worldwide, if just US\$3 billion to US\$6 billion of the estimated US\$680 billion currently spent on the military per year could be diverted to education, most experts believe that every child would have a place in a decent school."³

"With enough pressure from their citizens as well as the international community, governments will learn that they cannot remain indifferent to the most fundamental of human needs," said Akhtar Hameed Khan, director of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development.⁴

Indeed, the *Progress of Nations*, a United Nations Children's Fund publication (1997), says: "The day will come when nations will be judged not by their military and economic strength nor by the splendor of their capital cities and public buildings, but by the well-being of their peoples; by their levels of health, nutrition and education; by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their labors; by their ability to participate in the decisions that affect their lives; by the respect that is shown for their civil and political liberties." ☺

Leti Boniol is a freelance journalist based in Manila who has been writing on development issues for the past 10 years.

¹ In "Philippine Education 2000 - A Sell-out to Foreign Corporations," *Education for Development Quarterly*, October 1996.

² *Ibon Facts and Figures*, 31 August 1997.

³ *Progress of Nations*, UNICEF, 1997.

⁴ *Ibid.*