



Face of Digital Divide: The Urban Poor Situation in the Philippines during the Covid-19 pandemic

A Thematic Case Study presented
by Save San Roque Alliance
together with the Computer Professionals' Union
and World Association for Christian Communication



Sitio San Roque is an urban poor settlement located in Barangay Bagong Pag-Asa, North Triangle, Quezon City in the Philippines. It is a property owned by the National Housing Authority, a government agency responsible for public housing in the Philippines. Before the threats of demolition, this urban poor community had about 100,000 residents. They are at risk of completely being eradicated in the area since the 256 hectare land is being converted into a “Mix-Use Community” for residential and commercial use. The ongoing construction of high rise condominiums is caving inch by inch at the difficult yet peaceful community.

The urban poor in the Philippines, the residents of Sitio San Roque included, are very vulnerable to the escalating cost of living in urban centers. Aside from the lack of opportunities and poor housing conditions, the urban poor are very vulnerable to uncertainties in income. In this sector of society, the digital divide is very prominent. The inability to utilize the available technology to access the digital realm, along with lack of access to the internet is a reality here. The P537 (\$10 USD) daily minimum wage in the National Capital Region barely supports the basic needs of a family in the Metro.

The problem of digital divide was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Aside from the economic lockdowns and health care issues, the sudden shift to remote learning for students became a major issue in Sitio San Roque. In mid-2020, DepEd launched its learning continuity plan to transition to distance learning in line with the national government’s COVID-19 mitigation response.¹ Instead of face-to-face learning, three other learning delivery modalities were put forth in this plan: distance learning (modular, online, television/radio-based), blended learning, and homeschooling.² The secretary of education, Briones, “maintain[ed] that education must continue, whatever the changes and even dangers [...]”

As of September 2021, 2 million students from public and private schools are yet to register even though 24.6 million are enrolled.³ The Philippines is among the last two countries that have not yet reopened or partially reopened schools⁴: a far cry from the victory against COVID-19 that DepEd makes out to be, as the past academic year highlighted the social inequalities including access to education. The unsystematic transition led by the Department of Education has negatively impacted students, and parents particularly in urban poor communities. As a response, *Eskuwela Maralita*, a grassroots and community-led initiative, was launched in Sitio San Roque to support students as they navigate the transition to distance learning. This initiative serves as a temporary community learning hub where volunteer-teachers within and outside the community act as para-teachers or learning support aides.

¹ Department of Education, “Learning Opportunities Shall Be Available: The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan in the Time of COVID-19” (NCR: Department of Education, 2020) https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DepEd_LCP_July3.pdf

² Ibid. (p. 36).

³ Bonz Magsombol. 2021. “2M students not yet enrolled as 2nd year of remote classes begins in PH.” *Rappler*. September 13, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/second-year-remote-classes-begin-philippines-enrollment-figure-2021-2022>.

⁴ Christian Deiparine. 2021. “Only Philippines, Venezuela yet to allow return to classroom learning.” *Philippine Star*. September 8, 2021. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/09/08/2125759/only-philippines-venezuela-yet-allow-return-classroom-learning>.

This case study looks at the efforts of Sitio San Roque and its allies in *Eskuwela Maralita*, including the lapses and challenges encountered in its implementation. It delves into the experience of students and parents in the community one year after the implementation of DepEd's learning continuity plan. Finally, it echoes the residents' calls for support to grassroots initiatives (for education during COVID-19), safe reopening of schools and ways to lessen the gap of the digital divide.



Figure 1. Mothers drop off accomplished modules at their children's school
(Photo courtesy of Gerimara Manuel)

Sitio San Roque's challenges in online education

Since October 2020, mothers from Sitio San Roque have raised their concerns about their children's education with distance learning. Gelyn Rosilio, a community leader, wrote about her and her child's challenges eight months into the school year,

Sobrang hirap po talaga kasi kami pa pong mga nanay ang kukuha ng module sa school at magpasa po nito. Hirap po at malayo. Nilalakad lang po namin kasi mahal po 'yung pamasaha. Para may pambili kaming ulam, nilalakad na lang po namin. Sayang po kasi [Php] 160 po balikan. May time pa po na gusto na po ng anak ko na sumuko sa distance learning. [It has been very difficult since it is us mothers who go to school to get the modules and pass them. It's difficult and the school is far away. We have to walk because the fare is expensive, and so we would have enough money to buy food for the day. The cost of the commute would be at Php 160. There are times where my child wants to give up on distance learning.]

With their livelihoods impacted during COVID-19, it was often impossible to pay for internet subscriptions. In her writing, Gelyn stated, “Sa ngayon sobrang hirap po ang naranasan namin sa distance learning na programa ng gobyerno dahil hirap po kami dahil wala naman po talaga kaming kakayahan para magpakabit ng wifi. [The government’s distance learning program has been very difficult for us because we could not afford to pay for a Wi-Fi connection.]” Aside from internet expenses, Line Nalangan, a home-based worker and resident in Sitio San Roque, said that the weak Wi-Fi signal also made it difficult for her child to access Google Classroom and Messenger, which contains their resources and assignments.⁵ Having a weak internet connection also impacts one’s school attendance. Gelyn shared her child’s concerns,

Mama, gusto ko na mag-stop na lang po. ‘Di ko na po talaga kaya ng ganito, kasi ‘di naman kami sobrang talino e bigyan lang ng gawain o sasagutan ay magagawa namin agad. Walang lecture, mai-absent si Sir kasi due to internet connection daw po. Paano na kaya kami nito, Ma? Matapos na lang ‘tong taon na wala kaming alam. [Mama, I want to stop (distance learning). I can’t do this because we’re not that smart that when given assignments, we would finish it immediately. There are no lectures because the teacher can’t connect to the internet. How could we do this, Ma? The year will end without us learning anything.]

Gelyn’s and Line’s experiences reflect the community’s concerns. Findings from the initial research by SSR in October 2020 show that a large proportion of families were not prepared for the transition to distance learning.⁶ From the data, 53% of respondents state that they do not have the prerequisites for distance learning, while 41% answered that they do not have the necessary skills (know-how in using apps such as Zoom, guardian present to guide students) and resources (gadgets available to be used by students, extra space available for studying, and fast internet for attending video). Of the families who have responded, more than 75% of their children are enrolled in public schools. These difficulties are reflective of the everyday challenges of the 6,000 families living in Sitio San Roque, the majority of which are low-wage workers who have felt the brunt of the pandemic: laborers, construction workers, drivers of public utility vehicles, and those who are in precarious employment.

Conceptualizing Eskuwela Maralita

From these challenges, the Sitio San Roque community, SSR and AGHAM Educators, a chapter of AGHAM - Advocates of Science and Technology for the People, launched Eskuwela Maralita.⁷ This grassroots and people-centered initiative aims to bridge the following gaps: 1) the availability and ability of parents to teach their children, 2) the difficulties brought by distance learning, and 3) the limitations to learning for urban poor communities. The community promptly mobilized as they experienced the challenges and inadequacies of distance learning.

⁵ Gerimara Manuel. 2021. “Pinagtatagpi-tagpi — a photo essay”. *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism* <https://pcij.org/article/5822/gerimara-manuel?fbclid=IwAR0c8iBqqCgtFmVQWBjpdvjhcM3ttL21C06-aElqfZPGSao8ZCJWpMcGIY>.

⁶ Nanoy Rafael. 2020. “Eskuwela Maralita: Buod ng rekomendasyon para sa pagbubuo ng pansamantalang pansuportang eskuwelahang pangkomunidad sa Sitio San Roque”. *Save San Roque Alliance*. <https://tinyurl.com/eskuwelamaralita>.

⁷ Advocates of Science and Technology for the People or AGHAM is a non-governmental science advocacy organization based in the Philippines. <https://www.facebook.com/aghams.org>.

AGHAM Educators, SSR, and community leaders began a series of discussions on this initiative in November 2020. Consultations with different parents residing in various areas of the community were also conducted. Findings from these reaffirmed the initial research conducted by Save San Roque.

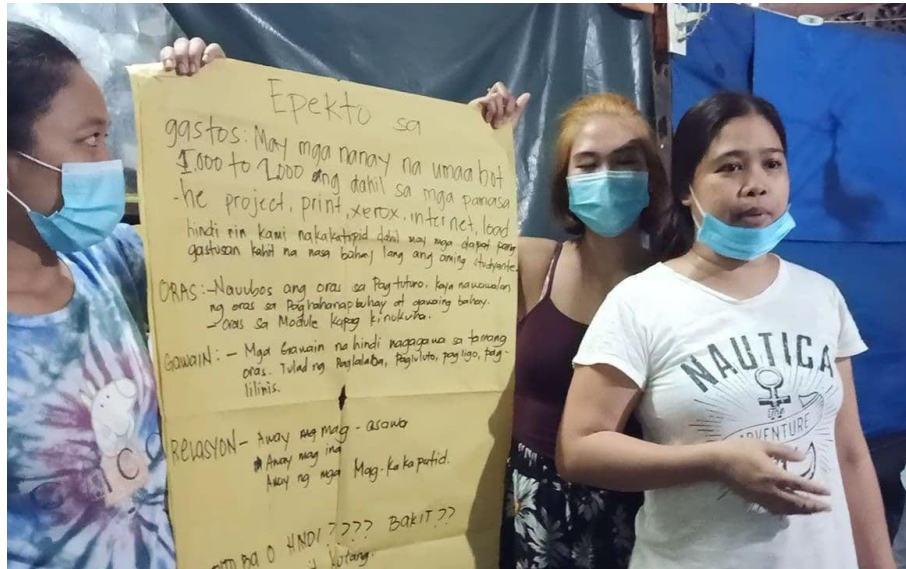


Figure 2. Mothers discussing how distance learning has affected their household
(Photo courtesy of Save San Roque)

Recruiting volunteers as para-teachers and learning support aides for *Eskuwela Maralita* was the priority identified from these discussions. SSR conducted a training needs and capacity assessment for community volunteers, while AGHAM Educators created an ad hoc committee focused on *Eskuwela Maralita*. The latter also formulated an *Urban Poor and San Roque* situationer to gain more context on the community's circumstances.

To build on the praxis of already-existing community-based and context-responsive alternative learning schools such as the Bakwit School and the Lumad School, organizers of SSR also consulted with volunteer teachers of the Save Our Schools Network regarding their Nationalistic, Scientific, and Mass-oriented framework of critical pedagogy.

Recognizing the potential of the community initiative to be scaled-up and supported, the community even before proceeding and mobilizing has submitted the concept note for the *Eskuwela Maralita* and communicated with relevant government bodies for an exploratory meeting for a partnership. Community leaders and organizers from SSR then attended a dialogue with the Quezon City Local Government Unit's (QC-LGU) Education Affairs Unit, and DepEd Schools Division Office of Quezon City (DepEd SDO-QC) in November 2020.⁸ While officials of the QC-LGU demonstrated interest and enthusiasm towards the idea of a

⁸ Save San Roque. November 8, 2020. <https://twitter.com/SaveSanRoque/status/1325098887703490560>.

community learning hub, DepEd SDO-QC did not show an inclination to compromise. While the community has communicated its readiness to collaborate with education and government agencies, the commitments made in the dialogue, sadly, did not materialize. Despite this, community leaders pressed on with planning the *Eskuwela Maralita*.



Figure 3. A community leader addresses attendees of an *Eskuwela Maralita* meeting
(Photo courtesy of Maro Enriquez)

Since November 2020, the community with AGHAM Educators and SSR was able to work on 1) formulating a vision for *Eskuwela Maralita*, 2) identifying pilot areas for the initiative, 3) creating committees for the implementation and creation of curricula, and 4) enrolling at least 200 parents with their children for each of the three pilot areas.

Within December 2020 and January 2021, committees have been created, a volunteer training curriculum was formulated, and volunteer orientations and capacity training have been conducted. *Eskuwela Maralita* consists of 11 committees namely: Administration, Committee for Parents, Committee for Parents, Committee on Education, Committee on Learning, Committee on Health, Committee on Resource Generation, Committee on Campaign, Committee on Food, Security, and Paralegal Concerns, and the Volunteer Relations Committee. Community leaders, members of AGHAM Educators, SSR organizers, and *Eskuwela Maralita* volunteers became members of these committees. Before implementing in different areas of the community, they also initially identified three pilot areas, Area J, Dubai, and Balikanta. These three areas were chosen by parents in the community because of the availability of open spaces in these areas to conduct learning activities.



Figure 4. Eskuwela Maralita's Registration Form
(Photo courtesy of Save San Roque)

Challenges in implementing the vision for *Eskuwela Maralita*

The initial plan was to conduct tutorial sessions with students to provide support in accomplishing their modules. Due to the high volume of students, the limitations brought by the pandemic, and the harassment of armed authorities towards the community, the focus of *Eskuwela Maralita* has shifted from enrolled public-school students to out-of-school youth. Through a differentiated and contextualized approach, AGHAM Educators has been creating and implementing a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum. As of September 2021, AGHAM Educators has conducted several in-person sessions while following public health guidelines. Participants for each session range from 12 to 20 students. In an interview with two teachers from AGHAM Educators, Teacher Jona, and Teacher Paulo, they said that they have observed the program's positive impact on the participants. While *Eskuwela Maralita* in its current form has generated a positive impact on participants, community leaders and members, SSR, and AGHAM Educators continue to encounter obstacles with its implementation.

In implementing *Eskuwela Maralita*, AGHAM Educators raised their concerns, particularly on the lack of manpower and resources and logistical and coordination issues due to the pandemic. The number of volunteer teachers who can go to the community and conduct in-person classes is limited. While conducting tutorial sessions online is an option, the necessary resources are unavailable to the community and hence, would not be appropriate. The inconsistent COVID-19 mitigation policies from both national and local governments have also hindered the implementation of *Eskuwela Maralita*.

Reflecting on the first pandemic school year

After the first academic year during the pandemic, the same challenges are still experienced by students and parents. “Yung schedule lang ‘yung mahirap kasi ‘pag nagsabay [ang klase ng mga kapatid ko], kailangan pa naming manghiram ng ibang cellphone. [It is difficult when my siblings’ class schedules overlap because we would have to borrow other cellphones.],” stated Joshua Pangilinan’s, a 21-year-old resident in the community, as he discussed his family’s distance learning challenges. Having been out of school for four years, he added that he does not feel motivated to return given the current situation of education in the country, “Parang nakikita ko rin kasi ‘yung hirap ng mga kapatid kong mag-aral. [I see how difficult studying is for my siblings.]”

Joshua also shared his family’s financial struggles, which drove him to quit school and work as an electrician even before the pandemic, “Kaya ko rin naisipang mahinto kasi ‘di naman ako nagkakapera sa school. Parang mas inuna ko muna ‘yung diskarte. Kaya tinulungan ko muna yung magulang ko. Naghanap muna ako ng trabaho. [I stopped school because I would not earn from it. I put earning first to support my parents which is why I looked for a job.]” Had he continued schooling, Joshua would have been in college. Given the chance and that face-to-face learning returns, he emphatically said he would like to go back to school. When asked why, Joshua answered, “Oo siyempre para maituloy rin ‘yung nasayang na panahon. [...] Parang mas gusto ko talagang mag-aral ngayon para magkaroon na rin ng diploma, para hindi na rin hirap medyo sa trabaho. [Of course, so I could make the most of the time wasted. I want to study now to get a diploma, so it’s not too difficult to get a job.]”

Joshua’s narrative reflects the story of the country’s youth. They have had to bargain with their circumstances, having to choose between studying and earning. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues. It has given more reasons for Filipino youth to postpone their education until restrictions ease. In the school year 2020–2021, there was a 9% decline in enrollees compared to the previous year.⁹ In a survey conducted among 802 students in the Philippines, 51% answered that they want to postpone their schooling until face-to-face classes are implemented.¹⁰

Parents also experienced these challenges in a different manner. In an interview with an SSR volunteer, Line discussed her family’s experiences with the modular learning modality. She talked about her difficulties with supporting her child, the expenses involved with distance learning, and the parents’ concerns about their children’s learning. “Iba na ang turo ngayon. [The lessons are different nowadays.],” said Line as she remembered the content of her child’s Grade 6 Math and Music modules. She found it difficult to help her child with her modules as

⁹ Athira Nortajuddin. 2020. “More School Dropouts In A Pandemic”. November 3, 2020. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/more-school-dropouts-pandemic>.

¹⁰ Bianca Angelica Añago. 2021. “Half of PHL students consider putting off school amid pandemic”. June 23, 2021. <https://www.bworldonline.com/half-of-phl-students-consider-putting-off-school-amid-pandemic>.

she herself is unfamiliar with the topics. This experience is common among parents, especially mothers in the community.

Another issue is the costs involved with distance learning. Through the QC-LGU, students can avail of a free tablet if they wish to enroll in online or blended learning delivery modalities. However, upon provision of the tablet, parents must sign a waiver stating that they will be required to pay Php 6,000 should the tablet not be returned in pristine condition. Line mentions that one parent shelled out Php 2,000 to have the tablet fixed to get her child's school documents upon graduation. Amid these difficulties, the most urgent concern for parents is their children's learning. "*Walang natutunan ang mga bata. [The children are not learning anything.]*," added Line after sharing how children have been spending most of their time on mobile games. On top of these distractions, the increased expenses and logistical challenges impede children's access to education and ultimately, drive them to drop out of school.



Figure 5. A mother from Sitio San Roque assists her child with modules
(Photo courtesy of Gerimara Manuel)

It was also common for the mothers to do the modules themselves. On-the-ground interviews with mothers in the community revealed that they have found it difficult to teach their children because of unfamiliarity with the topics themselves. Tina Espinosa, a working mother in the community, said that mothers with children from Grades 3 and lower found it hard to convince their children to accomplish modules. Because of this, mothers resorted to doing the modules for their children. She joked that the parents are the ones learning and being graded by teachers. Accomplishing these modules has also interfered with their daily activities. "*Kailangan umaga palang tapusin mo na yung gawain mo [sa bahay] kasi haharap ka na sa module. [We need*

to finish doing house chores early in the morning because we also work on the modules after.],” mentioned Tina. She added:

Samin kasing mga nagtatrabahong mga nanay, sagabal yun sa amin e. Siyempre, hindi namin pwedeng iasa ‘yun sa kapitbahay ‘yung pagtuturo namin sa anak namin. Kasi mahirap e. Kung face-to-face na siyempre, [...] teacher yung kaharap nila. Kaya kahit magtrabaho kami at uuwi sa hapon, at least alam naming na pumasok yung mga anak namin. [It is a nuisance for us working mothers. We can’t entrust teaching our children to our neighbors. It’s hard. If classes were face-to-face, their teachers will be there. Even if we work and once we arrive home, at least we know that our children went to school.]

As explained by Line and members of AGHAM Educators, there is still much work to be done in the education sector, especially in the ways in which learning during the pandemic was carried out by the government.

It is also important to recognize the disproportionate burden of educational support childrearing, and household work on women. Alma shared the difficulties of having to teach and care for children from 8 o’clock at night after selling *balut* and peanuts.¹¹ She used to work as a janitress but commuting became more difficult and expensive during the pandemic. She, her husband, and daughter decided to take turns in vending. Alma’s experience is shared by other Filipino women who have decided to leave their jobs to prioritize their childrearing and household duties instead. Line lost her job at the start of the pandemic. However, like Alma, she postponed looking for employment opportunities to help her child adjust to distance learning. Worldwide, women’s burden has increased significantly as they juggle with duties at work and at home, and often, institutional support is unavailable.¹² In the Philippines, while men’s gender roles have shifted during the pandemic because of unemployment, women’s unpaid domestic work also increased significantly.¹³ These reflections show how the government’s policies remain insufficient in supporting children as well as their parents, particularly mothers, during COVID-19.

Looking at the bigger picture

This case study discussed problems specific to education; however, the dominant issue of land and housing has proved to be a huge factor in dampening *Eskuwela Maralita*’s implementation and success. The Sitio San Roque community has long endured the harassment of armed authorities and threats of demolition, which has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴

¹¹ Arry Asiddao. 2021. “‘Flexible’ and stretched too thin: How mothers deal with work and family in a pandemic. *Bulatlat*. May 9, 2021. <https://www.bulatlat.com/2021/05/09/flexible-and-stretched-too-thin-how-mothers-deal-with-work-and-family-in-a-pandemic/>.

¹² Kate Power. 2020. “The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families”. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561>.

¹³ UN FPA. “Gender and Inclusion Assessment of COVID-19 Pandemic on Vulnerable Women and Girls in the Philippines”. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gender_report_v09.pdf.

¹⁴ Save San Roque Alliance. 2020. “Human Rights Situation in Sitio San Roque”. <https://tinyurl.com/HRReportOctDec>.

Earlier in the year, policemen from the Quezon City Police Department attempted to arrest four student artists in the community for painting a mural stating, “All cops are bastards.”¹⁵ Nanoy Rafael, paralegal and SSR volunteer, remembers the policemen saying, “*Aaraw-arawin namin kayo. Uubusin namin kayo dito.* [You will face us every day. We will finish all of you.]”¹⁶

Women in the community have also found it difficult to move because of the militarization in the community. “*Magulo siya dahil sa militar at pulis* [It is hard for us because of the military and police],” Line states as she talks about the challenges of organizing for *Eskuwela Maralita*. Similarly, Alma shares, “It’s difficult to move, difficult to earn. It’s so stressful. When I step out of the house, there are soldiers roaming around.”¹⁷

Overall, the increased presence of state forces in the community is reflective of the use of brute force in the national government’s pandemic response. There has been a “gradual assimilation of personnel from the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)” as they began to participate in collective activities and aid initiatives.¹⁸ Incidents as such show the barriers at play while the *Eskuwela Maralita* program is being planned.

Like *Eskuwela Maralita*, there have been other community-led initiatives around the Philippines to support students as they transition to new learning modalities. However, communities and organizations can only do so much to fill the gaps left by the Duterte administration’s inadequate pandemic response. In an earlier report, SSR has also highlighted the limitations of privately-funded community initiatives, since monetary and human resources are heavily dependent on public engagement.¹⁹

¹⁵ Rambo Talabong. 2021. “QC cops try to arrest teenage students for painting anti-police mural”. *Rappler*. January 18, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/quezon-city-cops-arrest-students-painting-anti-police-mural>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Arry Asiddao. 2021. “‘Flexible’ and stretched too thin: How mothers deal with work and family in a pandemic. *Bulatlat*. May 9, 2021. <https://www.bulatlat.com/2021/05/09/flexible-and-stretched-too-thin-how-mothers-deal-with-work-and-family-in-a-pandemic/>.

¹⁸ *Save San Roque Alliance*. 2020. “Human Rights Situation in Sitio San Roque”. <https://tinyurl.com/HRReportOctDec>.

¹⁹ Maxine Faminiano, Annelle Chua, Samantha Lopez, Nica Bolastig, Prestine Pajarillo, and Rafael Dimalanta. 2020. “Community-led response to the COVID-19 crisis: Initiatives of Sitio San Roque, North Triangle, Quezon City. *Save San Roque Alliance*. <https://tinyurl.com/sanroqueresponse>.



Figure 6. A child plays in Sitio San Roque beside a “Edukasyon, Karapatan ng Maralita” mural with towering condominiums in the background (Photo courtesy of Save San Roque)

These challenges on education are ultimately tied to discourse on access to land and housing rights. With the second school year opening during the pandemic, this documentation on *Eskuwela Maralita* has shown that the barriers to education persist. The Sitio San Roque community, with SSR and AGHAM Educators, will continue to work on the full realization of its vision for *Eskuwela Maralita* in the school year 2021-2022. Supporting students as they continue to navigate this transition to distance learning remains a priority for the community. Along with efforts on the ground, the community and SSR will continue to call for a more inclusive and synergized approach to the government’s pandemic response. The following recommendations are put forward to ensure that children and parents, in urban poor communities are included in the political discourse on educational governance in pandemic times:

- **Continue support for grassroots and community-led initiatives** like *Eskuwela Maralita*. *Eskuwela Maralita* and *Tanimang Bayan* will very much benefit from the support of the public through volunteering and monetary support. SSR also invites the relevant agencies to support alternative educational approaches like *Eskuwela Maralita*.
- **Formulate a concrete and timely return-to-school plan for the resumption of face-to-face learning** which prioritizes students and education workers. Echoing the unity statement put forth by 10 organizations, a roadmap to the safe reopening of

schools must be articulated by the national government and relevant government agencies.²⁰

- **Provide financial assistance for students and education workers** along with a “genuine academic ease”.²¹ The BE-LCP and its implementation must undergo a thorough evaluation informed by the experiences of students, parents, and teachers from the previous academic year. The DepEd Central Office, including division and regional offices, must publicly acknowledge these lived experiences as truths, and hence must continue to welcome inputs from community and grassroots organizations for the betterment of the education system.
- **Improve pandemic response** by conducting free and equitable mass testing and expediting vaccination programs from the barangay to the national level. SSR as an organization has been rallying for the improvement of the government’s pandemic response since last year.²² With the surge in cases due to the Delta variant, the end is far from sight and will continue to be without a timely shift in institutional health governance. Ultimately, issues of health and education are integrated, so policies from both ends must be aligned and approached holistically.
- **Address the root causes of the digital divide** by democratizing and making more accessible to the public digital infrastructures, services and artifacts. Every Filipino deserves equitable access to affordable, if not free, quality Internet services. The state must consider Internet connectivity as a public service and therefore regulate it. Otherwise, there will be no impetus for the oligopoly of Smart and Globe to improve the quality and lower the price of their services. The Philippines must also work towards having its own Internet infrastructure—which includes but is not limited to Internet cables, cellular towers, servers and data centers. Lastly, the Philippines must maximize and mobilize its Engineers, Scientists and Technologists to design and manufacture its own laptops, tablets, cellphones, and other devices which can be used to access the Internet. Relying on imports makes purchasing and repairing such products less accessible to the people
- **Support accountability measures** conducted by independent government bodies and non-government agencies to ensure that public funds for education are coursed through appropriate challenges in a timely manner. For instance, the Commission Audit (COA) flagged the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for obligating only Php 59.97

²⁰ Panay News. 2021. “Safe school re-opening”. *Panay News*. September 10, 2021.

<https://www.panaynews.net/safe-school-re-opening/>.

²¹ Anjo Bagaoisan. 2021. “Protests calling for return of face-to-face classes mark school year opening day”. *ABS-CBN News*. September 13, 2021. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/13/21/protests-look-return-of-face-to-face-classes>.

²² Maxine Faminiano, Annelie Chua, Kristhel Montalbo, Prestine Pajarillo, Emi Santos, Jay Serrato, Geo Duque, Isa Rodrigo, Tara Ramirez, Tin Araneta, Averill Amor, Dominic Gutoman, Samantha David, Bernard Dones, Iah Solidum, Kevin Castro, Vea Lalas, Deji Eclarin, Bryle Catamora, and Rafael Dimalanta. “Grassroots Perspective on the Government COVID-19 Response: Assessment and Recommendations from the margins of Sitio San Roque”. *Save San Roque*. <https://tinyurl.com/grassrootscovid>.

billion or 82% of its Php 72.83 billion allotments; CHED claims that this report is “inaccurate” and “misleading”.²³ On September 10, 2021, CHED Chairperson J. Prospero De Vera retracted his statement from the day before that there were no funds for financial assistance.²⁴ This behavior from national offices and their senior management must continue to be scrutinized and made public.

- **Enact a moratorium on demolitions and empower community-based housing initiatives** like SSR to ensure that vulnerable communities are protected from homelessness that inevitably cuts their access to education. Research shows that COVID-19 spreads quicker in homeless communities.²⁵ This also means that the militaristic approach and use of brute force in communities like Sitio San Roque must be halted altogether. Access to education and health cannot be separated from issues on land and housing rights.

It is an injustice to deny the experiences of Filipino students, parents, and teachers during these difficult times. Line said “*Hindi naiisip ng gobyerno ang impact [ng policy]. [...] Dapat gumawa sila ng konsultasyon pero walang nangyayaring ganun.* [The government does not think their policies’ impacts. They should have consulted the people, but this did not happen.]” Ultimately, this case study has shown the disconnect between national-level policies and the experiences of communities on the ground. It has also highlighted the urgency of the problems in the country’s education system. Seemingly speaking on behalf of parents in Sitio San Roque, a home-based worker and mother who requested not to be named said, “*Gusto naming bumalik na sa [...] regular.* [We want to go back to regular classes.]” Tina reaffirmed this, “*Kung pwede lang mag-face-to-face na, mag-face-to-face na.* [If we could go back to face-to-face classes, we should do so immediately.]” The national government and relevant government agencies must acknowledge these lived realities, listen to the community’s pleas, and turn their promises into actions.

²³ Kurt Dela Peña. 2021. “COA red flags reach nearly every corner of Duterte bureaucracy”. *Inquirer*. August 17, 2021.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1474972/coa-red-flags-reach-nearly-every-corner-of-duterte-bureaucracy>.

²⁴ Conseulo Marquez. 2021. “No pandemic aid for students in 2022 proposed budget —CHED”. *GMA News*. September 9, 2021.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/802743/no-pandemic-aid-for-students-in-2022-proposed-budget-ched/story/>
<https://mb.com.ph/2021/09/10/twisted-ched-belies-circulating-claims-on-student-financial-aid/>.

²⁵

<https://globalhealth.washington.edu/news/2020/05/01/studies-show-covid-19-can-spread-quickly-homeless-communities>