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When reforms make things worse: school leadership responses to poverty, disasters, and cultures of crises in the Philippine education system

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the sense-making experiences of one specific stakeholder group in education reform – school leaders – who find themselves wedged by significant material challenges, on the one hand, and disparate reform efforts, on the other hand. The research draws upon experiences from the Philippines where reform efforts are significantly complicated by both poverty and disasters, as well as a sense of a 'culture of crisis' more broadly that has subsequently developed. Using the narrative experiences of two school leaders, this inquiry explores the issues and challenges school leaders encounter as they engage in what are described as 'custodian' and 'crisis' leadership practices, as they navigate an educational system typified by a dearth of resources, physical disasters, and a persistent discourse of impending disaster. The research reveals a need for a more circumspect approach to educational reform, particularly distributed leadership, that actually takes significant, material contextual factors seriously, and that is responsive to broader discourses of disaster more generally.

Introduction

The Philippine education system is beleaguered by debilitating challenges, including: rising dropout rates and out-of-school rates, worsening teacher shortages, and a chronic lack of resources. At the same time, the system is weighed down by an organizational structure that can be described as a dysfunctional bureaucracy (Reyes, 2016b). This situation is further exacerbated by systemic corruption (Reyes, 2010). On top of this, we would argue, there is a lingering discourse of disaster, stimulated by repeated natural and man-made calamities. As a result, equity goals in education, as represented by the mantra of 'Education for All' (National Education for All Committee, 2006), may remain unachieved in an education system impaired by both imagined and real dearth and disaster. This is a situation made much worse with the explosion of the Covid-19 global pandemic and the cataclysm it has caused on education.

In order to grapple with some of these protracted issues, fragmented waves of education reform initiatives have been enacted. The most far-reaching effort thus far has been the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA). The Department of Education (DepEd) through BESRA attempts to achieve functional literacy for all adults and to ensure that all school-age children enroll in and stay in school, toward completing basic education (Department of Education, 2006). One of the most important aspects of BESRA is the Republic Act 9155 (RA 9155) 'Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001' also known as the 'Principal Empowerment Act'. Rooted in the principles of School Based Management (SBM), RA 9155 adopted under BESRA was envisioned to 'help even out average school attendance across provinces' (Capuno & Kraft, 2011, p. 178) and to definitively address the lingering malaise of inequality in Philippine schools.

In this article, we explore the sense-making experiences of one group of stakeholders in education reform – school leaders – who find themselves wedged between systemic challenges to foster reform, on the one hand, and continuing resource constraints on the other.[1] This inquiry responds to emerging debates about leadership for social justice (Shields, 2004; Teoharis, 2007), in particular the notion that such an approach is 'dynamic and protean' and does not reside 'superhero leaders who inspire those around them to rise up against inequity' (Brooks et al., 2007, p. 403). We critique SBM and the purported promise of equity, using a narrow 'distributed perspective on school leadership' which allows a 'frame for studying leadership practice' (Harris, 2005, p. 85). We use learning narratives of education practitioners (Beattie, 2009) with a specific focus on school leaders' policy learning (Reyes, 2015) in exploring the issues and challenges they encounter while navigating an educational system typified by a dearth of resources and a persistent culture of impending disaster.

Philippine underdevelopment: dearth and disaster

With more than 100 million people, the archipelago of the Philippines is affected by material and discursive instances of dearth and disaster with respect to its economic resources, and from the perspective of social and geographic conditions. These conditions are outlined below.

Economic dearth: persistent underdevelopment with growth alongside poverty

Official accounts from different government agencies, complemented by media reports, have trumpeted how the nation 'posted solid growth', starting in 2015, indicating an impressive economic record for the country (Asian Development Bank, 2016, p. 220). Nonetheless, a closer examination of data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicates that the 'poverty incidence among Filipinos registered at 26.3%" at the end of 2016' (Bersales, 2016, p. 1). It should be noted that in 2006, the poverty incidence was 26.9% (Balboa & Yap, 2010, p. 9) revealing how high rates of poverty incidence have festered even as GDP per capita steadily increased during the last decade. Despite its noteworthy economic performance measured by GDP, the Philippines represents 'a concrete example of GDP growth that did not reduce poverty' (Schelzig, 2005, p. 85). The reality of underdevelopment has become a quintessential feature of the Republic of the Philippines.

Underdevelopment in the Philippines is a complex phenomenon, as it suffers from a 'low-level equilibrium trap': a mix of substandard physical capital, 'both productive and infrastructure', worsened by substandard 'levels of accumulation and Malthusian population growth' (Jesus. & Sipin, 2004, p. 42). In other words, poverty incidence is too widespread, preventing the impoverished from saving, let alone the possibility to invest. This has the effect of preventing the entire economy from growing. Undertaking educational reform initiatives without carefully considering the broader economic contextual conditions of underdevelopment can lead to dismal failure that 'precludes the mobilization of the resources necessary for a meaningful increase in the human capital base of the economy' (Verspoor, Adrian. & SEIA Team, 2008, p. 102).

The obstinate dearth of vital resources has had a continual and substantive impact on education. The most recent Functional Literacy and Education, Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) conducted in 2013,[2] found that 'one in every 10 Filipino children and youth 6–24 years old, or roughly 4 million people, was out-of-school' (Bersales, 2015, p. 32). This reinforces the sobering reality that the 'Philippines is still in the top ten countries with the highest out-of-school population' (Diola, 2014, p. 2). Worse still, at the start of the school year in June 2015 and with the roll-out of the K-12 reform as an integral part of BESRA (from the original 10 years of basic education), a 'shortage of more than 200,000 classrooms and 100,000 teachers' (Arcangel, 2015, p. 1) confronted young learners in elementary and high schools. The pernicious challenge of teacher shortages is aggravated by the fact that Philippine teachers, whose last pay raise was in 2009 (Carcamo, 2015) are perceived to be the 'lowest paid professionals in the country and are one of the lowest paid teachers throughout Asia' (Alcober, 2015, p. 2).

The lingering large-scale financial malaise from the late 1990s to the early 2000s is one of the most serious disasters to befall the Philippines. Walden. et al. (2004) contend that the state implemented a pro-market, anti-state development approach highlighted by trade liberalization policies under a neo-liberal ideology and represented by massive acquisition of foreign debt. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided loans as structural adjustment programs premised on 'the idea of encouraging economic growth and development by linking financial assistance to the adoption of a particular set of policies recommended by the World Bank' (Pender, 2001, p. 399). However, scholars and practitioners have critiqued these IMF and World Bank approaches, declaring that the 'programs are a failure' (Dreher, 2006, p. 781) and that 'structural adjustment did not succeed in adjusting macroeconomic policy and growth outcomes very much' (Easterly, 2005, p. 20).

Philippine geography: crisis and disaster

The unique geographical and cultural characteristics of the vast archipelago also pose formidable challenges in providing essential services. Scrutinizing the continual shortfalls troubling the Philippines reveals that 'it operates under conditions of extreme scarcity' (Quah, 1987, p. xiii). However, what is even more insightful is the nation's propensity for crisis and disasters. Its geographic location exposes it to a relatively large array of natural hazards, earning it the 'dubious distinction of rating the highest total number of disasters of any country during the twentieth century' (Bankoff, 2003, p. 4).

Perhaps not surprisingly, in such a context, commentators claim that the unremitting crises of poverty and frequent natural hazards in 'one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world' (Gaillard et al., 2008, p. 384) have given rise to a so-called 'culture of disaster' (Bankoff, 2003, p. 4). This is demonstrated in the continual development of 'specific coping mechanisms' Filipinos have engendered represented 'by historical records of architectural adaptation, agricultural practices and migration patterns' and, more specifically, through 'popular manifestations of calculated risk assessment, resignation, mysticism, self-reliance and reciprocity' (Bankoff, 2003, p. 178). At the same time, that the Philippines is characterized by actual calamity, it is penetrated by discourses that lament these events and their seeming intractability.

The promise of reform: empowering the school principals act and BESRA

Within this broader context, the Philippine educational bureaucracy has seen pendulum swings between moves toward populist education for all – most overtly expressed through UNESCO's initiatives to foster *Education for All (EFA)* – and education for those traditionally (exclusively) considered 'worthy and able'. The earliest efforts at education reform occurred through the controversial Monroe Report of the 1920s. At that time, the report was praised as it advocated education for all, and criticized political interference more broadly in Philippine education (Monroe, 1925). The historic report pointed out the austere resource constraints that would come to typify Philippine education. The 1936 Quezon Educational Survey Committee findings recommended that a 'moderate education for a greater number is better" than pursuing "quality education for a selected few' (Martin, 1955, p. 19).

In more recent times, successive reform initiatives oriented toward a more inclusive approach have been instituted. These include reforms such as the EDCOM of 1990, the large-scale 1997 Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP) immediately followed by the Secondary Education Development Improvement Project (SEDIP), and the 1998 Philippine Education Sector Study (PESS), to name a few. Notwithstanding a steady deterioration in the Philippine bureaucracy's ability to manage its scarce resources, the government's position of ensuring broader educational investments has continued. Education as a percentage of the gross national income has been at around 2% from 2000 to 2014, with a marked increase to 3.4% in 2019 (Medenilla, 2019).

Here, we focus on one of the more recent reform attempts: RA 9155. Built upon School-Based Management (SBM). SBM, we argue, is one of the precursors of distributed forms of leadership. One of the earliest attempts to consolidate the disparate interpretations of SBM defines it as a 'form of decentralization that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvements might be stimulated and sustained' (Malen et al., 1990, p. 290). The SBM initiative is closely linked with the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) that acknowledges among its key priorities the strengthening of SBM as a mode to accomplish equity (National Education for All Committee, 2006). Initial results from the reform have been generally inconclusive: some say that significant improvements have occurred (Kimura, 2008; Nidhi. et al., 2010), while others indicate challenges still persist (Bautista et al., 2008; Caoili-Rodriguez, 2007).

RA 9155 offered a sea change in the way education was governed. It provided a new framework of support for authentic 'decentralization by empowering field officers and, especially the schools, to take a more active role in initiating and undertaking cost-effective innovations at the local level' (Caoili-Rodriguez, 2007, p. 4). RA 9155 was reinforced when DepEd launched the School First Initiative (SFI) from 2005 to 2010, which was designed to operationalize 'decentralized basic education management by empowering schools and making them more accountable to learning outcomes' monitored through indicators such as completion rates and other specific educational outputs (Caoili-Rodriguez, 2007, p. 5).

School-based management

One of our assumptions is that school stakeholders involved in the 21st Century neo-liberal inspired educational changes find themselves facing 'fundamental disjunctures' (Appadurai, 1990, p. 6) as they take on reform initiatives over and above their normal professional scope. These disjunctures confront educational stakeholders and in the process affect their evolving identities. Here, we elaborate on the sense-making experiences of school leaders as they find themselves at these disjunctures brought about by the push for global reforms, principles of equity represented by UNESCO's *EFA*, and local responses such as SBM (Reyes, 2016a).

The next section presents narrative accounts of two school principals navigating these disjunctures. As part of an evaluation of BESRA's SBM component, two school leaders, their middle managers and selected teachers participated in four interviews and three focus group discussion (FGD) sessions.[3] We reviewed DepEd documents and the official reports of the target schools were also used to triangulate the findings.

School leadership in the context of poverty, disasters and crisis in the Philippines

Two emerging identities of school leaders navigating the contextual challenges and the need to promote equity emerged in the Philippine context. These were custodian leadership and crisis leadership.

Custodian leadership and organizational reproduction

Conserje Elementary School (Conserje ES)[4] is one of the 26 schools located in Valencia, a first-class municipality[5] located at the southern tip of Negros Island in Western Visayas, the country's sugar basket, in which more than 50% of the available agricultural land is used to grow sugarcane (REAP-Canada, 2016, p. 2). Valencia with a population of 35, 000 people is the provincial capital of Negros Oriental (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015b). On the whole, its economy, similar to that of the entire Negros Island, is based on agriculture, with sugarcane plantations playing a very important role by employing 'five million Filipinos' in the Visayas region (De Boer, 2005, p. 29).

Mrs Andanza has been the principal of Conserje ES, a relatively moderately sized school with close to 1,000 students, for almost 8 years. Asked about how SBM and BESRA had an impact on the way she managed the school, her response was highly informative: 'I think that I, like many other schools in Negros face structural and historical challenges

that not even SBM and BESRA can tackle' (interview, Feb 2014). She acknowledged that while additional resources were made available through SBM, the reality was that only maintenance and operating costs were sanctioned. Capital expenditure and personnel services were 'not included in the powers that local school leaders have under BESRA's SBM,' (interview, Feb 2014). She referred to the highly uncertain status of her school, which was considered a 'squatter, on the land which we occupy and we are really at the mercy of the landowner, in my case, the *hacienderos*[6] who own most of the land' (interview, Feb 2014). Mrs Andanza touched on one of the most vexing issues in Philippine education where 'thousands of public schools across the country exist, but with no land of their own' (Mayuga, 2015, p. 1). In the case of Negros Island, with more than half of the agricultural lands in the lowlands devoted to sugarcane planting, the phenomenon of *hacienderos* owning huge tracts of land is not unusual:

> The *haciendas* have long formed the backbone of the sugar industry: small plantation enterprises (many between 50-150 hectares) owned by planter families or family corporations, worked by landless families that live on its premises and form tightly-knit communities, and by seasonal migrant cane-cutters. (Rutten, 2010, p. 207)

Mrs Andanza brought up an even more pernicious issue: 'I think more than the fact that the school does not own the land, the more disturbing issue we face is *tiempo negro*[7] (interview, Feb 2014). This phenomenon is best described as the regular and seasonal large-scale absences of young students in schools, when they help their parents, usually seasonal farm workers in the large haciendas, to undertake paid menial labor. This is a tragic reality existing in regions that have powerful hacienderos living alongside impoverished seasonal agricultural farmers – also known as *sacadas*. Not only are they oppressed, their families and more importantly, their children, are implicated too in what is clearly illegal child labor: 'Weeding and harvesting times are the busiest times for children, when many of them drop out of school to perform farm work' (De Boer, 2005, p. 29). Mrs Andanza's statement is a surprising revelation, particularly when the Philippine government declared that it had categorically stamped out child labor. But the pernicious practice persists:

> [T]he study showed that child labor in sugarcane plantations continues to exist despite the government's efforts to mitigate it. Their parents have allowed them to work at an early age for them to contribute to the family coffers. However, child labor cases are not discussed in the open due to the existence of child labor laws and policies. Thus, children working as *sacada* have remained hidden, undocumented and unprotected. Although child labor is not allowed, some sugar mill industry focal points and *barangay*[8] officials showed tolerance towards it. (Caragay et al., 2015, p. 13)

Other teachers from Conserje ES commented on the profound cultural and structural problems that they faced: 'Honestly, I don't know if we can stamp out *tiempo negro*,' a senior teacher stated. 'It's been around for centuries' (interview, Feb 2014). Mr. Estrada, a veteran teacher for more than 20 years, shared his insights: 'BESRA and SBM, I believe, are good policies, but with the hard realities that we face here, they may not be truly responsive' (interview, Feb 2014).

Mrs Andanza considered that 'balancing the disparate needs of the school with the very real community challenges' and more importantly 'trying my best to keep students in school while ensuring that the *hacienderos* are happy' were her top priorities as a school leader (interview, Feb 2014). BESRA's SBM to her did not really help address

the historical and cultural challenges that she faced; rather it was an at-a-distance policy initiative that she saw as irrelevant to her context. Her leadership role can be seen primarily as maintaining and 'preserving the status quo' (Whitney, 2005, p. 734). In the situation that she faced, a school located deep in an agricultural province with its host of unique problems, her leadership can be described primarily as custodian-oriented, 'defined as someone who is responsible for looking after something important or valuable' (Sthapit et al., 2013, p. 10) at the same time she maintains a form of organizational reproduction. This 'custody' arrangement, as the term also suggests, is one characterized by uncertainty about what the future will hold for those involved – particularly the most marginalized.

Crisis leadership and reform isolation

Apremiante High School (Apremiante HS) is one of the 21 public schools (10 high schools and 11 elementary schools) of Navotas City in Metro Manila. The city has a population of roughly 250,000 people (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015a) and is popularly known as the 'fishing capital of the Philippines' due to the fact that '70% of its population' derive their 'livelihood directly or indirectly from fishing and its related activities' (Philippine Tourism Authority, 2009, p. 1). A perennial issue that has dogged the school and the entire Navotas City is the fact that 'of the 21 public schools in Navotas City, 19 are in flood-prone barangays' (Tiongson-Mayrina, 2011, p. 1). The crises of flooding that have besieged Apremiante HS and other schools in the area have a long history:

> Navotas City and the neighbouring municipality of Malabon which are low-lying coastal and river areas are two of the most flood-prone locations in Metro Manila, Philippines. From the 1950s till the year 2015, these two areas have been flooded especially during the annual monsoon season. The situation worsened especially beginning in the 1960s and 1970s when informal settlers 'mushroomed along the banks of the *esteros* [open-canals] and rivers and in other marginal locations' and became especially vulnerable to floods that occurred 'several times each year.' (Zoleta-Nantes, 2002, p. 248)

Mr Altercado has been principal of Apremiante HS a large school with 2,500 students for 10 years. In relation to the influence of BESRA and SBM, Mr Altercado was circumspect: 'The policy is good on paper', he stated. 'But when you carefully take a look at the current state of schools – like ours – who experience yearly crisis, BESRA and SBM put us at a terrible disadvantage' (interview, Mar 2014). He was referring to the big change that BESRA, through SBM initiated, the removal of the tasks of reforming school systems and addressing crises as a national priority, and instead the transfer of these responsibilities to local bodies. Some commentators incisively pointed to this weakness of SBM 'with most of the country being at a disadvantage compared to the more affluent urban areas' (Poblador, 2010, p. B3). As a result, schools that are in trouble are denied the preferential options they should receive and that would be more readily identifiable if reforms were considered at a genuinely national level.

   The troubles that Mr Altercado spoke about in regard to his school were not only severe; they were chronic. With the yearly flooding, he estimated that 'almost 90 per cent of students and teachers are unable to attend school'. What is worse, he added, is the damage to school property and resources that happens during these times

that 'prolongs the forced closure of the school' and in the long run 'pushes a lot of the Students at Risk of Dropping Out (SARDO) to discontinue schooling' (interview, Mar 2014). He lamented: 'Apremiante HS and schools in similar dire and critical situations, have been abandoned after BESRA' (interview, Mar 2014). Senior teachers echoed his observations: 'Our biggest issue is the regular floods', bewailed a veteran teacher. 'And if our school is always flooded, students no longer come' (interview, Mar 2014). The solution to our 'problem is outside of our control', another senior teacher pointed out: 'The national and local government need to address the flood problems of Navotas' (interview, Mar 2014).

The situation confronting Apremiante HS can be classified as 'long-term crises: ones that develop slowly and then bubble along for a very long time' (Smith & Riley, 2010, p. 54). Thus, on top of crippling resource constraints (typical of most schools in the Philippines), the school also suffers recurring crises. Statements made by DepEd officials, saying that BESRA through SBM offers the best reform solutions by addressing local problems through local resourcing, can be argued as being patently misplaced. Boin and Hart (2003), in analyzing the nature of crises, indicate that the popular notion of crises as opportunities for reform is 'not only naïve, but also logically unfounded' (p. 549). One can argue that Mr. Altercado exercises crisis leadership by referring to 'dealing with events, emotions and consequences in the immediate present' (Smith & Riley, 2012, p. 69) without regard to medium and long-term forward planning. He also explained how reforms isolated him and the school. Consequently, for Mr Altercado, the promise in the rhetoric of BESRA through SBM, rings hollow.

Reflections: when reforms make things worse

Consequently, as we have argued previously, 'In a 21st century setting typified by uncertainty and complexity, one can argue that the model of SBM and particularly the powerful mantra of linking it with school effectiveness needs to be critically questioned' (Reyes, 2018, p. 58). SBM should not be seen strictly as a formula for school effectiveness but should instead be seen as something of a dynamic space within which the work and labor of school leaders and other community and national policy and political stakeholders need to be more substantively forged. Such associations need to be deeply grounded in concerns about context (Reyes, 2018, p. 59).

The inquiry provided two illustrative cases of school leaders, describing how each navigated the disjunctures – the clash between the required changes of the reform represented by SBM, and the very real dearth and disaster that they face – in their respective contexts – and the ongoing culture of concern generated in response to these circumstances. These illustrative cases point to the impact of SBM, and how one leader, wedged between structural and cultural challenges and the demands of reform, made sense of her experiences by electing to maintain the status quo and practice a type of custodian leadership. Weighed down by crippling and chronic crises, another leader expressed how reform initiatives exacerbated his situation. Collectively, such processes have the effect of isolating these school leaders. Instead of making them part of the entire reform initiative, they are made targets of 'policy dumping' (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016) and are expected to deliver on reforms regardless of local and contextual challenges. Not

surprisingly, leaders who find themselves in these challenging scenarios also demonstrate cynical beliefs and behaviors at times. In light of the global pandemic, the challenges and cynicisms experienced by these school leaders have become much more problematic.

Does reform necessarily mean that the changes are good?

We suggest that there seems to be an almost automatic inclination to look upon reforms as something inherently good. Reforms may be borne of careful studies among policy-makers and politicians to come up with the best solutions to address problems. Nonetheless, most of the time, the final version of educational policy reforms are, in reality, the result of compromise between various stakeholders championing their respective agendas (Taylor et al., 1997). Consequently, reforms – and in this particular case – education reforms, need to be problematized. In the context of the United States of America, Gabbard (2000)argues that concerns about equity and inequality are central to the goals of educational policy reform but in much more problematic ways than are typically associated with the discourses that surround these terms:

> (t)he official line in educational discourse and educational reform rhetoric serves a dual function. First, it diverts public attention from the real issues behind the growing disparities between the haves and the have-nots . . .. Second, it manufactures a sense of false hope in people that increasing the nation's educational performance will enhance people's economic opportunities. (Gabbard, 2000, p. vi)

Problematizing education reform within the broader physical/material and cultural circumstances in which it is located becomes urgent, particularly in a context where neoliberal policies and processes legitimize a situation where 'a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit' (McChesney, 1999, p. 2). Such reforms are deployed to justify the sorts of 'local' decision-making that appear on the face of it to be somehow more democratic, but that actually serve as a vehicle to ensure the continued disenfranchisement of those with the fewest resources, and hope. The dangers of market-driven educational policy are not easy to detect. Material improvements and physical infrastructures may appear, intuitively, as signs of positive development occurring. However, changes in education undertaken under the guise of neo-liberal reforms also often give rise to 'systems of inclusion as simultaneously systems of exclusion', necessitating that education reforms 'be made problematic' (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 40). Scholars, practitioners and students of transformations in the field of education policy and practice must problematize reform.

We have attempted to problematize educational reform in the Philippine context that sought to achieve equity through the global *Education For All* reform initiative but which did not take context into account. This was represented by the enactment of BESRA and specifically the critical component of SBM, consistent with the notion of localized leadership for social equity. The experiences of two school leaders informs debates about how leadership for social equity is indeed 'dynamic and protean' (Brooks et al., 2007), but not necessarily in ways intended or needed. More importantly, distributing leadership, such as interpreted in the BESRA enactment as forcibly localizing approaches – without due consideration of the very real dearth in capacity of local

units to address critical national crises – rings hollow, and becomes irrelevant for local school leaders. In very real terms, such reforms make the most vulnerable disappear. Those associated with such schools and communities no longer become a national priority. As a result, the vital resources needed to address the dearth and disasters that befall them, and efforts to challenge the discourses of disaster that characterize these very real events, also disappear. The goal of SBM enactment to champion localization efforts by building capacity paradoxically disadvantages the most vulnerable, as they become increasingly disempowered. The 2019 global pandemic and the widespread chaos that made marginalised leaders 'disappear' have pushed them to the point of being forgotten. As a result, whole scale reforms sometimes simply make things worse and need to be actively challenged to ensure they take actual physical/material and economic circumstances into account.

Notes

1. We, as authors, declare no financial or (non-financial interests) in relation to the conduct of this inquiry and its subsequent publication.
2. The 2013 FLEMMS is the fifth in a series of literacy surveys conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in coordination with the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) and the Department of Education (DepEd).
3. Informed consent and ethics guidelines were fulfilled in this inquiry
4. All identifiers have been anonymized.
5. In the Philippines, municipalities are classed according to six categories based on annual income generated in the last five years. 1st class municipalities earn gross incomes of at least 55 million pesos (USD$ 1.05 million).
6. The haciendero is a neologism adapted in the Philippines and in other Spanish-colonized regions in South America. It is derived from the term Hacienda, a Spanish word that means large farm estates. Haciendero is commonly known to mean elite landowners of large farm estates.
7. Tiempo negro is a Spanish phrase that literally mean 'black time'.
8. The barangay is the most basic and grassroots local government unit in the Philippines.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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