Politicization of Allocation and the Persistent Problem of School Building Shortage in the Philippines

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Background

The Government Watch (G-Watch) of the Ateneo School of Government has been implementing a program called *Bayanihang Eskwela* (BayEsk) since 2005 in cooperation with the Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) and various civil society organizations. The program checks whether school building projects are constructed according to standards of time, quality, quantity and cost.

From 2005-2011, BayEsk was implemented in selected schools all over the country. The program claims as its success ensuring 133 classrooms amounting to Php122.8 million worth of contract built according to standards through the program's facilitation of community-based monitoring involving at least 706 monitors.

In its second round of implementation, BayEsk, due to its limited coverage, focused its monitoring on schools experiencing acute classroom shortage. In the Basic Education Information System (BEIS) of DepEd, these schools are categorized as Red and Black Schools[1]. BayEsk argued that monitoring would be most useful for this schools as they need the buildings more than the other schools. It is in this round that BayEsk encountered a question that was originally (as designed) not covered by its monitoring: the question of how school building projects are allocated.

On its second round, six (6) out of the 30 school building projects (SBPs) Bayesk II was supposed to monitor did not push through. G-Watch had to aid the monitors it mobilized and trained to follow up with DepEd and inquire the reason for the termination of the projects in their schools.

G-Watch, in its inquiry, found that the said SBPs have been realigned after a representative provided his own list of SBPs to be covered in his locality. While the original six SBPs covered by BayEsk II were all Red and Black Schools, half of the schools in the list of the congressman were NOT Red and Black Schools and hence were not experiencing acute classroom shortage.

This led G-Watch to inquire about the standard involving allocation. Is it a standard for a congressman to have his own list? Is it a standard for DepEd/ DPWH to follow the congressman's list? What are the criteria used in determining where to allocate SBPs?

[1] BEIS color codes: Blue: less than 46; Yellow: 46-50.99; Gold: 51-55.99; Red: more than 56; Black: no existing instructional rooms

What is the standard process of allocation? Is realignment part of the standard process? When can SBPs be realigned? And for what reasons should it be allowed?

Consequently, these questions raised issues of responsiveness of the School Building Program of the government: are we allocating SBPs where it is needed most? Do we have enough resources to respond to the needs of the schools? How bad is the problem of acute classroom shortage? Are the relevant policies and programs of the government effective in addressing this problem?

G-Watch, to date, had conducted several action research studies[2] that tried to answer these questions.

The first one was a post-construction monitoring of compliance to standards of 54 purposively-sampled SBPs in eight (8) randomly-sampled divisions all over the country constructed through different modes: DPWH-Implemented SBPs, Principal-Led SBPs (DepEd Implemented), KALAHI-implemented, LGU-implemented and private-sector-implemented. The objective of the study conducted from May-June 2010 was to compare the different modes of implementation according to standards of cost, time, responsiveness to need (allocation of project to schools with acute shortage), consistency with the program of works (POW) and quality (adherence to standards process and conduciveness to learning). The study was commissioned by The World Bank.

The second conducted from July to December 2010 was a policy study, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), that looked into the school building programs of the government and the policies that govern them. The study aimed to look at how the policies on allocation and implementation of school building projects are responding to the problem of acute classroom shortage in the country.

The third study, conducted in April to October 2011, zoomed into the actual performance of government in term of allocation—whether school building projects were indeed allocated according to need, which the study defines in relative terms, allocation where there is acute classroom shortage. After looking at SBP allocation in the 2009 budget, it developed case studies that elucidate why the government allocates according to need in some instances and why it does not in most of the instances.

This paper aims to synthesize the relevant salient findings of the last two studies (as the first one cannot be made available for public consumption yet) to provide empirical evidence of the situation of school building allocation in the country and how it is constrained by political dynamics in responding to shortage. The paper will hopefully inform decisions to be made in future allocations and implementation of school building projects in the country.

[2] Research conducted by the G-Watch education research team: Joy Aceron, Rafaela David, Toff Lamug, Rechie Tugawin and Krisna Parrera.

Big Need, Small Resources

The Department of Education reported that it faces a total of 152,569 shortage in classrooms this year (2011), if the ideal classroom-student ratio of 1:45 in single shift is to be followed.

From 2002-2009, the number of schools in the country experiencing shortage has hardly changed with about a fourth of the total number of schools in the country consistently experiencing shortage as shown in the table below. In some years, the number has even increased, like from 10,326 (23%) in 2006 to 11,992 (27%) in 2010.

	Black Schools	Red Schools	Gold and Yellow Schools	Blue	TOTAL	Schools with shortage	Percentage of Schools with shortage
2002	821	4643	4473	33987	43924	9937	23%
2003	1111	5132	**4280**	32307	42830	10523	25%
2004	1189	5168	4154	32737	43248	10511	24%
2005	1015	4902	3976	34233	44126	9893	22%
2006	1049	5168	4109	33733	44059	10326	23%
2007	874	5283	4325	33835	44317	10482	24%
2008	1010	6600	**4627**	32461	44698	12237	27%
2009	1055	6169	4768	32721	44713	11992	27%

G-Watch, 2010

From 2002-2005 and 2007-2009, the total budget for school-building projects under the Regular School Building Program (RSBP)[3] was Php 2 Billion per year. In 2006, the budget was Php 1.76 Billion. The number of projects covered by this budget, at an average of 3,149 RSBP projects per year from 2002-2009, had been insufficient to address the shortage of classrooms during these years, which averages at 10,576 schools (those in Red and Black Category) every year.

This is consistent with the findings of another study of G-Watch that closely looks at the allocation of SBP in 2009. G-Watch research computed that only 19% of the total schools with shortage were given school building project allocation.[4] 81% of the schools experiencing acute classroom shortage (Red and Black Schools) did not receive any allocation.

[3] The Regular School Building Program (RSBP) is the program of the government for the procurement and implementation of school building projects (SBPs). The program is the implementation of the RA 7880: Fair and Equitable Access to Education Act otherwise referred to the "Roxas Law." 90% of the SBPs covered by the RSBP is implemented by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH); while 10% is implemented by DepEd.

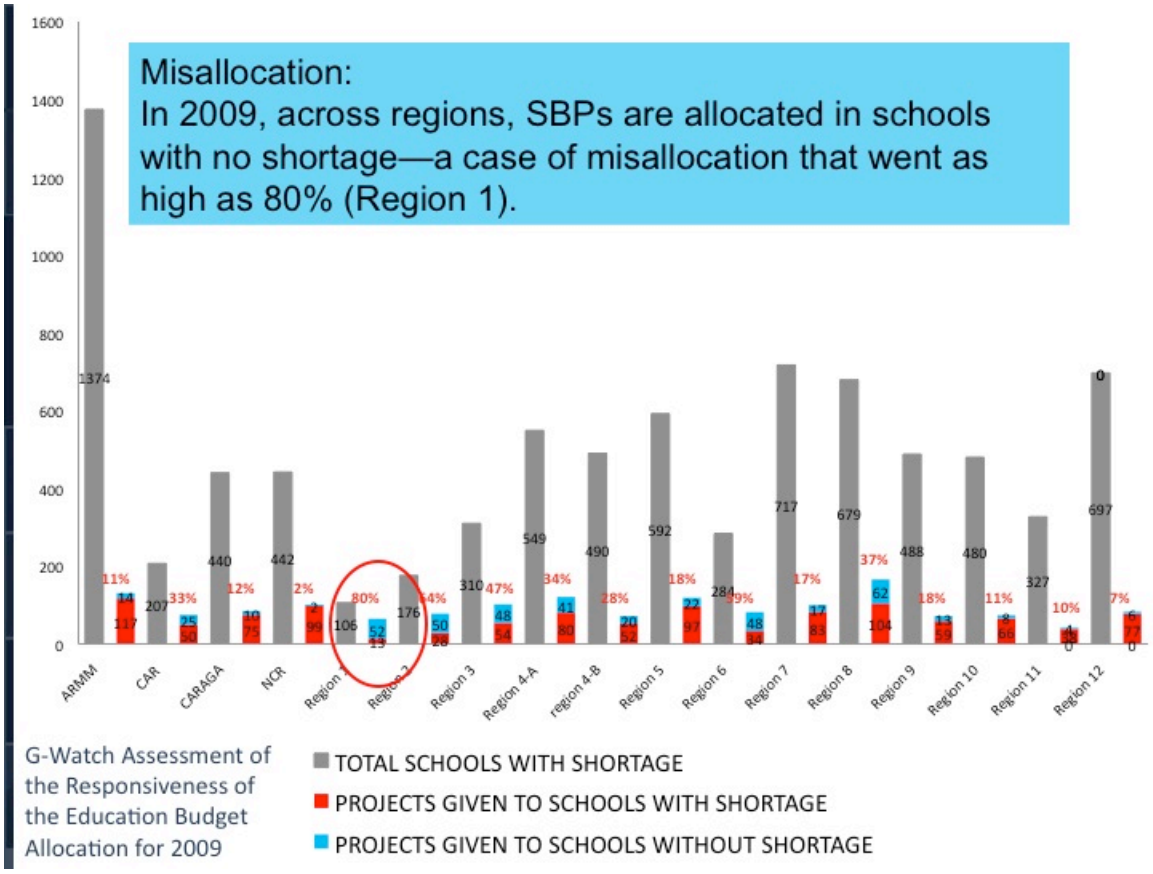
[4] Allocation refers to both allotment in the budget (as per General Appropriations) and constructed school buildings (as per accomplishment report of DepEd).

Looking at the budget for 2011, in order to address the shortage of classrooms which numbers at 152,569, G-Watch approximates that Php 91 Billion should be allocated for school building projects. The current budget of Php 8.9 Billion for school-building projects only responds to about 10% of need.

Big Shortage, Yet Allocation Irrespective of Need

Consistently from 2002-2009, there have been varying levels of need/ shortages across regions.

In 2009, for instance, (as shown in the table below), the classroom need across regions drastically varies with ARMM having the highest need at 1,374 classrooms and Region 1 needing 106 classrooms, about 1,300% difference.



G-Watch, 2011

However, allocation does not seem to correspond to need with ARMM (region with the highest need) getting 131 projects and CAR (region with the lowest need) getting 65 projects, only a hundred percent (100%) difference in allocation.

In fact, the allocation across region in 2009 hardly varies. Given the big differences in need, this clearly shows that allocation does not follow the pattern or trend of need. This seems to be true for all the other years from 2002 to 2009. Although the responsiveness vary between the RSBP and the Red and Black SBP.

Furthermore, the government has been allocating school building projects in schools without shortage. In 2009, 28% of the SBPs were allocated to schools without shortage (Blue Schools), despite of the 8,358 of all schools in the country facing shortage.

Checking at the division level, almost 50% of the divisions constructed more than half of their SBPs in schools with no shortage.

Unequal Need, Yet Equal Allocation

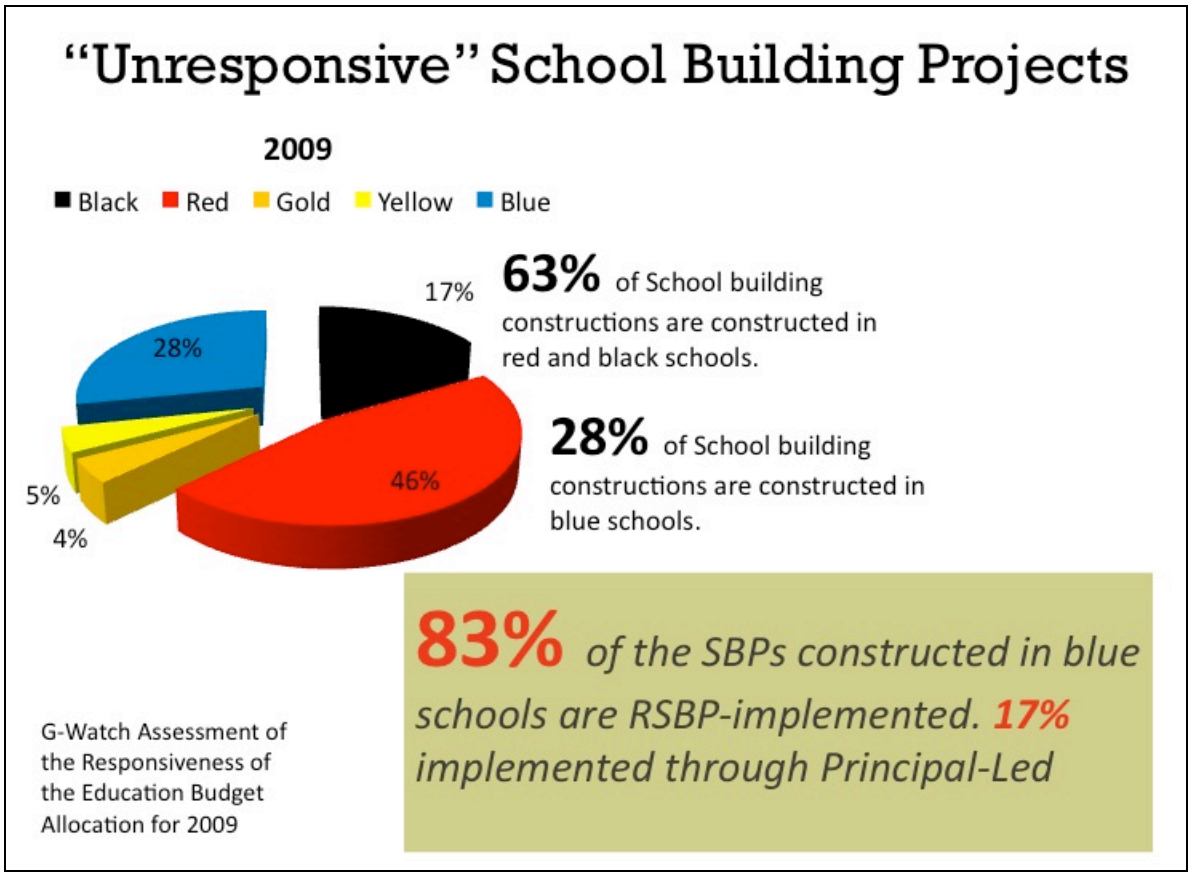
The government is implementing two programs to respond to the classroom needs of the country: the Regular School Building Program (RSPB) and the "DepEd School Building Program for Areas Experiencing Acute Classroom Shortage" or the Red-and-Black School Building Program.

The RSBP is based on RA 7880: Fair and Equitable Access to Education Act otherwise referred to the "Roxas Law"; while the Red and Black SBP that started in 2005 serves as a "supplemental program" to the RSBP to focus on schools with acute classroom shortage (Red and Black Schools).

The RSBP, which is mainly implemented by the DPWH, follows the Roxas Law formula for allocation of SBPs that "equitably" allocates 50% of the total SBPs to all districts.[5] Only 40% is allocated according to need/ shortage. The allocation of the remaining 10% is determined by DepEd.

It is highly likely that because of this allocation formula, the RSBP has consistently allocated in schools with no classroom shortage. As shown in the table below, in 2009, out of the 28% SBPs allocated in Blue Schools, 83% of the SBPs were RSBP-Implemented.

[5] This is computed in terms of the number of student population of the district over the total population of the country, regardless of the number of school buildings already present in the school.



G-Watch, 2011

The Red and Black SBP also shares its problems in allocating in schools with no shortage. 17% of SBPs in 2009 that got allocated in schools without shortage was under the Red and Black SBP, which was mainly for schools experiencing acute classroom shortage.

For this year (2011), the Red and Black SBP is getting a much higher allocation for SBPs. This is perhaps in recognition of the need to address the shortage. Looking at the SBPs under the Red and Black School-Building Program this year, 93% of the SBPs are expected to be constructed in schools with shortage.

Process Vulnerable to Pressure

Looking closely at the implementation of the SBPs and the factors contributing to its "unresponsiveness[6]" to need, another critical factor that stood out, which spells the difference between the RSBP and the Red and Black SBP, is the process of "consultation" required in RSBP.

[6] Means allocation/ construction in schools with no classroom shortage.

For the RSBP, during the process of allocation, the Roxas Law requires the conduct of "consultation" with the representative concerned. Hence, even though the allocation list prepared by DepEd takes into account the shortage or need as per its standards, this is easily overturned by the representative of the district simply by invoking the Roxas Law. While the Roxas Law only requires "consultation," in practice, this has turned into requiring "approval" or "concurrence" of the representatives.

Not only that the representative could allocate without referring to the BEIS, hence resulting to allocation that is unresponsive to need, this pre-requisite also results to delays in the implementation as difference in the allocation list prepared by DepEd and the representative, if not reconciled, would almost always result to another tedious process of realignment.

The other justification for realignments is the insufficiency of the budget allotted to construct SBPs in far-flung schools due to a higher cost for transporting of materials. This makes it worse because it is usually the schools in remote areas, those with no access to roads, that need school-buildings.

On the contrary, SBP allocations that were responsive to need would be those without intervention of politicians and those with supervisors and principals aware and informed of the standards and are active in ensuring adherence to standards and plans. Community participation was found to be critical in ensuring compliance to standards and in preventing mistakes in implementation.

What Do We Have Here?

In a nutshell, the situation we have in school-building allocation is regressive. The "equitable" allocation system automatically results in school building projects allocated in schools without need—a case of unresponsive governance that ultimately leads to unmet needs and hence growing shortage. In other words, the policy makes the misallocation structural, with far-reaching and consistent ill-consequences.

The situation is also a case of having a weak bureaucracy which has difficulty withstanding pressures from particularistic, in this case parochial interests. The intervention of politicians in what supposedly is a "rational" process of allocation by the bureaucracy (based on standards of effectiveness and efficiency) further aggravates the problem of structural misallocation of SBPs. Even without the law that requires consultation, which in practice becomes a requirement of concurrence, bureaucrats find themselves in a bind to comply.

G-Watch took note of two avenues where representatives flex their political muscles to twist the arms of bureaucrats: appointment and budget.

As observed, representative may pressure department secretaries to relocate or sack a district engineer/ division supervisor that refuse to concur with the representative's

preferred list of schools. If resisted, the representatives would likely take their vengeance against a department during the budget deliberation.

A regressive law implemented by a weak bureaucracy (due primarily to perennial pressures from politicians) is a recipe for disaster. In this case, the result is the worsening problem of acute classroom shortage.

This is sadly a typical story of Philippine governance.

What To Do Now?

The age-old governance reform agenda is to strengthen the bureaucracy, particularly build its capacity to implement programs and provide services according to basic good management standards of effectiveness and efficiency. This may sound simple but in the Philippines it is one of the toughest things to do and explaining why would require going back to how public institutions were manufactured during our colonial past as means for colonizers to control power that were later taken over by a privileged few leaving public/ political spaces inaccessible to many, etcetera, etcetera. Simply put, to achieve this agenda, there is a need to break free from the bondage of our history and enable and inspire people to reclaim politics and government.

Since that is a long-term political reform agenda, what can be done now?

The Roxas Law's provision on allocation of SBPs will have to be amended to an allocation formula that gives primacy to need, to addressing the shortage. The reality is we have inequalities everywhere, we have unequal needs across all levels—schools, districts, divisions, regions—hence allocation of resources cannot be equal; it has to be proportional to need.

Representatives will have to be made aware that while their districts and/ or particular constituencies (usually, their supporters) have need, the need of others may be much greater. Ordinary citizens and constituents of particular government actors and offices will also have to be made aware of this.

Red and Black SBP seems to be a more promising mode of implementation with its strength in community participation and its relatively higher level of insulation from political intervention, as it is not subject to any law requiring consultation with representatives, unlike the RSBP.

The argument is valid that DepEd must focus on learning, hence the wisdom of leaving infrastructure to DPWH. However, as shown repeatedly in cases documented by G-Watch, the latter seems to have a hard time insulating its process from politicians' intervention and mobilizing and involving education stakeholders.

Meantime, minor reforms can easily be done now. SBP costing, for instance, will have to take into account access to schools to remove this as a possible reason for realignment. The BEIS should be beyond refute and all stakeholders must be informed of this to encourage all concerned to use this as basis of decisions and actions. Community stakeholders (principals, teachers, students, etc.) informed of standards and are capable of checking on and asserting compliance to standards are found most crucial in ensuring quality and responsive SBPs. Mechanisms and initiatives to ensure this has to be supported and enhanced further.