

July 2025  
Number 15

## Accountability Note



# When Citizen Action for Accountability Boosts Legislative Oversight: The Multiply-Ed Experience in the Philippines

Joy Aceron and Abrehet Gebremedhin



## About Accountability Research Center (ARC)

The Accountability Research Center (ARC) is based in the School of International Service at American University. ARC bridges research and frontline perspectives to learn from ideas, institutions, and actors advancing strategies to improve transparency, participation, and accountability. For more, see [www.accountabilityresearch.org](http://www.accountabilityresearch.org).

## About ARC Publications

ARC publications serve as a platform for accountability strategists and researchers to share their experiences and insights with diverse readers and potential allies across issue areas and sectors. These publications frame distinctive local and national initiatives in terms that engage with broader debates about transparency, participation, and accountability. For more, see [www.accountabilityresearch.org/publications](http://www.accountabilityresearch.org/publications).

## Rights and Permissions



The material in this publication is copyrighted under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported license (CC BY 4.0). If you translate it, please add the following disclaimer: This translation was not created by the Accountability Research Center (ARC), and ARC is not liable for any translation errors.

Please cite this work as follows: Acheron, Joy and Abrehet Gebremedhin. 2025. "When Citizen Action for Accountability Boosts Legislative Oversight: The Multiply-Ed Experience in the Philippines." *Accountability Note* 15. Accountability Research Center. <http://doi.org/10.57912/29237507>

*Cover photo:* Student members of Multiply-Ed during one of their Malayang Edukasyon (free education) campaigns

*Credit:* Multiply-Ed

# Contents

Summary .....	5
Introduction .....	6
Education Situation During Covid-19 and a Civil Society Accountability Response.....	7
Formation of a Legislative Oversight Body as Government’s Response to the Education Crisis....	9
Engagement Between Multiply-Ed and EDCOM II.....	10
Comparing Multiply-Ed and EDCOM II Reports .....	13
Added Value of Civil Society Accountability Efforts.....	15
How Civil Society Accountability Efforts Can Reinforce Government Oversight: Enabling Future EDCOM and Multiply-Ed Synergy .....	17
Conclusion .....	19

## About the authors

**Joy Aceron** is Convenor-Director of Government Watch, a citizen action movement for accountability in the Philippines that aims to improve governance of public services and to deepen democracy. She has more than two decades of experience with civil society–government engagement for public accountability and has worked on education governance since 2004. Since 2017, she has also been an advisor and researcher at the Accountability Research Center (ARC). She also currently serves as social accountability advisor and coalition partner in Multiply-Ed, a youth-led, multi-level, and multi-sectoral initiative to advance transparency, participation, and accountability in education governance (supported by Education Out Loud). The Multiply-Ed coalition uses ‘vertical integration’ a policy monitoring and advocacy strategy which G-Watch and ARC have been developing together since 2016.

**Abrehet Gebremedhin** is a researcher at ARC and a PhD candidate at the School of International Service at American University Washington D.C. Her academic research centers on monitoring and evaluation, civil society engagement in education and health, transnational aid for education, and youth mobilization.

## Acknowledgements

The authors thank Multiply-Ed leaders and volunteer-monitors for sharing their experience; Professor Jonathan Fox and Karen Brock of ARC for their comments and guidance; Tanvir Muntasim of Global Partnership for Education and former Department of Education Undersecretary Diosdado San Antonio for their valuable comments and suggestions as reviewers; and Victoria Maglanque and Jai Cabarillos for research assistance and documentation notes.

# Summary

The Philippines has long been confronting an education crisis. This was exacerbated by Covid-19, which prevented tens of millions of public school students from going to school. As a response, the national government developed a new education system to enable learners to continue learning amid the global health emergency. Such drastic changes in the education system and long-standing systemic problems in education governance prompted accountability checks to be undertaken in state and society to ensure responsiveness to learners and effectiveness in bringing forth education reforms.

This Accountability Note on education reform in the Philippines presents an empirical pathway by which two distinct but complementary bodies have interfaced for a shared agenda of systemic education reform. These two parallel processes—an independent, citizen-led civil society organization, Multiply-Ed, and a congressional oversight committee, the Education Commission II (EDCOM II)—emerged with overlapping findings, actions, and agendas, showing the value of synergy between citizen-led action and government oversight.

We demonstrate that accountability processes within the state and society can converge and reinforce each other even when there is no formalized collaboration. Common issues are tackled, institutional interfacing paves the way for information and knowledge to be shared, and commitment to the overarching shared goal of education reform is reaffirmed. However, even beyond converging findings, independent citizen-led monitoring like that conducted by Multiply-Ed has a distinct added value for the education sector. Through its movement-based approach to accountability, Multiply-Ed has identified an action-oriented reform agenda overlooked by legislative oversight mechanisms, that can help advance and sustain the reforms.

This Accountability Note provides key takeaways for both social constituencies and government duty-bearers seeking to identify and address shared agendas through accountability.

- Independent accountability efforts of state oversight bodies such as EDCOM II and citizen-led monitoring initiatives like Multiply-Ed can produce shared agendas and findings that are mutually reinforcing and may lead to progress towards common goals.
- In the case of the interface between civil society accountability efforts and government oversight in the education sector in the Philippines, a shared agenda of enhancing the role of local governments, ensuring timely access to learning resources, ensuring teaching quality, and providing an adequate budget for education has been reinforced.
- By bringing in the perspectives of citizens through platforms such as school governance councils, independent citizen-led monitoring provides a distinct added value beyond state oversight, offering solutions that are action-oriented and systemic, and sustain accountability amid the dynamics of political elites.
- Mutually-reinforcing agendas and processes shared between civil society accountability actors and government oversight bodies can be key to harnessing state-society synergy, and pivotal in enabling progress towards powershifting reforms.

# Introduction

This Accountability Note discusses converging findings from a legislative oversight committee (EDCOM II) and an independent, citizen-led oversight CSO (Multiply-Ed) regarding education policy in the Philippines. The learning crisis in the Philippines, and the way that these two distinct but complementary bodies have interfaced, is an empirical case of a pathway for a shared agenda between a congressional oversight body and a citizen monitoring and accountability initiative.

In this Accountability Note, we demonstrate that accountability processes within the state and society can converge and reinforce each other even when there is no formalized collaboration, as common issues are tackled and institutional interfacing happens, paving the way for information and knowledge to be shared. This shared agenda is based on common findings and overarching issues, which in this case provided mutual reinforcement and planted the seed of subsequent synergy. This case shows how mutual reinforcement in the early stage of the relationship came in the form of shared recognition of evidence and issues, which helped to build the credibility of reform proposals and highlight the importance of those issues. In the case of EDCOM II and Multiply-Ed, such shared recognition reinforced evidence that was further leveraged to build a broader constituency that aimed to generate responses from duty-bearers. This resulted in a tighter and more structured collaboration between the two entities.

A convergence between citizen monitoring and congressional oversight is a key step towards (eventually) fostering state–society synergy (Fox 2015). Our Note provides an example of how legislative oversight and citizen monitoring of government service delivery can reinforce each other to enable synergy in public accountability. It also endeavors to surface the key elements that make citizen monitoring work, and how exactly this helps support the strengthening of public accountability.

This Note also shows that as advocates of transparency, participation, and accountability confront the challenge of getting the state to respond to citizen voice, especially in the context of constrained civic spaces, one feasible pathway is to identify synergy between state-led oversight mechanisms and civil society accountability efforts.



# Education Situation During Covid-19 and a Civil Society Accountability Response

The Philippine education sector was in a state of crisis even before the Covid-19 pandemic due mainly to government under-investment and inefficiencies in education governance (Multiply-Ed 2022; Orbeta Jr and Paqueo 2022). Covid-19 exacerbated the already existing lack of sufficient classrooms, teachers, and learning resources. At the end of one of the longest lockdowns in the world, 27 million Filipino public school students were still out of school and were thus at risk of becoming an uneducated and marginalized “lost generation” (De Guzman 2021).

It was this crisis, like no other, that necessitated the fast development of a new education system to enable learners to continue learning amid the global health emergency. Citizen action for accountability in education was crucial to ensure that such drastic changes would serve the interests of learners.

Multiply-Ed—a youth-led, multi-level, and multi-sectoral initiative in the Philippines—was created in response to the imperative for citizen action. It was formed by two organizations: Government Watch (G-Watch), a citizen accountability movement and action research organization working on transparency, participation, and accountability; and the Center for Youth Advocacy and Networking (CYAN), a youth-led and youth-serving non-governmental organization (NGO). It is supported by Education Out Loud (EOL), part of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE),<sup>1</sup> a global fund dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries through a unique, multi-stakeholder partnership that “provides support for civil society to become active and influential in shaping education policy to better meet the needs of communities.”<sup>2</sup>



Multiply-Ed members during the E-Skwela forum that called for a greater role for local governments in education.

*Credit: Multiply-Ed*

Multiply-Ed works primarily with youth and student organizations at all levels. The Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (SCAP), the biggest coalition of student council organizations in the country, is one of its major partners. Engaging youth and students has been crucial to scaling up education accountability. Young people are the immediate stakeholders of education; they are organized at all levels; and they have the interest, passion, and energy to engage on education issues in the context of today's world.

Multiply-Ed aims to enhance transparency, participation, and accountability at different levels of education governance to advance a resilient and inclusive public education system. Phase 1 of Multiply-Ed (2021–23) focused on accountability in the Department of Education's (DepEd) implementation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) (Department of Education 2020), the government's policy response to the challenges to basic education brought by Covid-19. Multiply-Ed also works with school governance councils (SGCs) and local school boards (LSBs) as spaces for student representation in improved education governance.

Passed in July 2020, the BE-LCP aimed to “(1) protect the health, safety, and well-being of learners, teachers, and personnel, and prevent the further transmission of Covid-19; (2) ensure learning continuity through K-12 basic education curriculum implementation adjustments; (3) facilitate the safe return to schools; (4) endeavor to address identified inequities; and (5) link and bridge the BE-LCP to DepEd's pivot to preparing for the future of education” (Department of Education 2020).

Multiply-Ed conducts volunteer-led monitoring at multiple levels, from school to international. Phase 1 covered 53 schools in ten divisions all over the country, mobilizing around 250 students and education stakeholders to monitor and assess learning continuity standards. Phase 2, which started in 2024, continues the advocacy of Phase 1 and is conducting another round of multi-level monitoring, focusing on how the public education system serves marginalized learners.

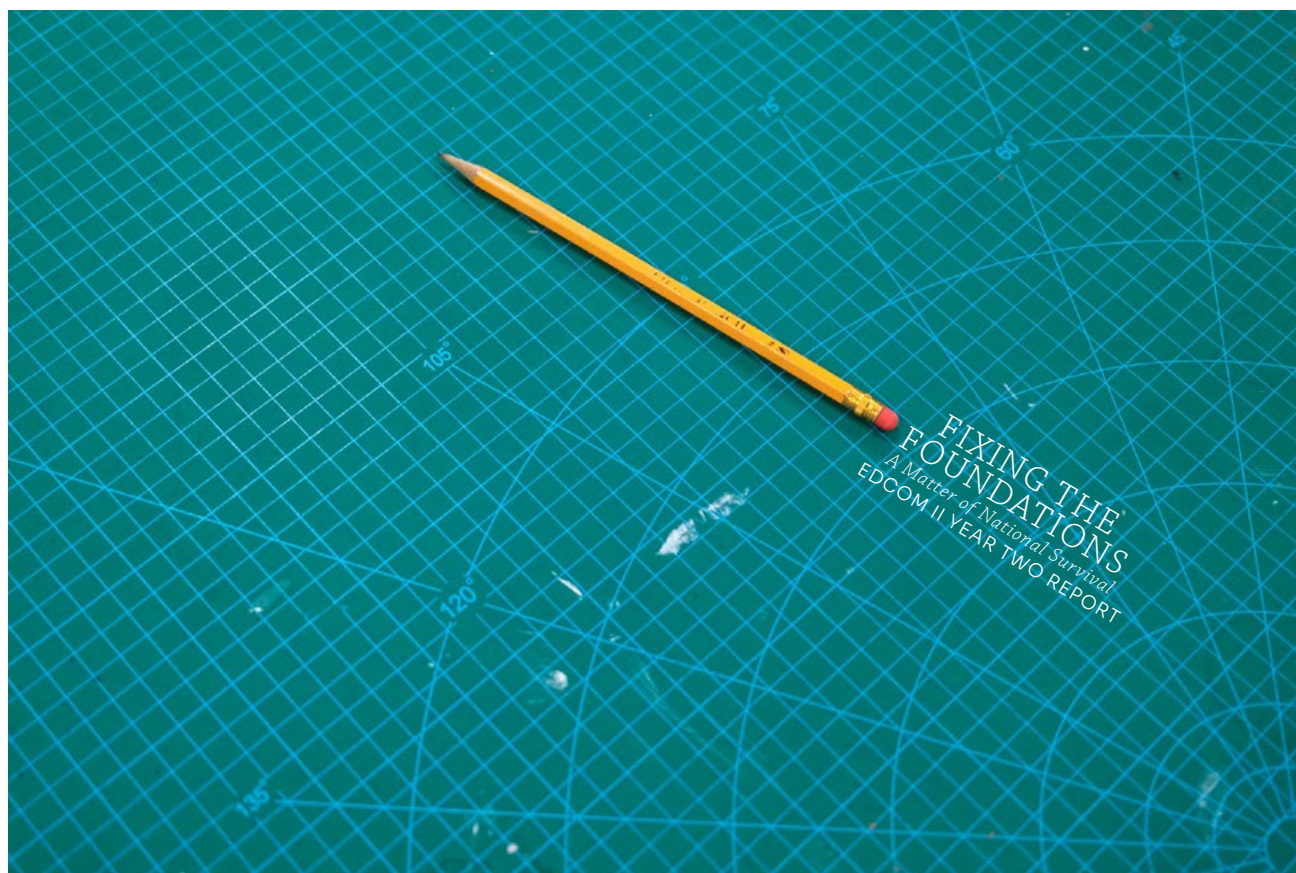
As part of these two phases of multi-level monitoring, Multiply-Ed's activities have included organizing and network-building, and conducting monitoring and advocacy, communication, and engagement at school, city/municipality, division/regional, national, and international levels. The work has produced a baseline report (Multiply-Ed 2022) and a monitoring report (Aceron, Maglanque, and Bueno 2024), as well as a manual (Aceron et al. 2023) that presents the processes it has undertaken to put forward its eight-point education reform agenda.<sup>3</sup>



# Formation of a Legislative Oversight Body as Government's Response to the Education Crisis

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is a congressional oversight body created in July 2022 through Republic Act 11899 “to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector to recommend transformative, concrete and targeted reforms in the sector with the end in view of making the Philippines globally competitive in both education and labor markets.” Its predecessor, the First Congressional Commission on Education, was established in June 1990 by a Joint Resolution of the Eighth Philippine Congress, underscoring “the need to make the Philippine Education Sector more responsive, efficient, equitable, competent, and effective.”

After conducting various studies and consultations, EDCOM II published a 300-page report in 2023 entitled *Miseducation: The Failed System of Philippine Education* (Second Congressional Commission on Education 2024), which presents a rather critical look at the public education system, putting forward 27 priority areas. This was followed in January 2025 by its second report, entitled *Fixing the Foundations: A Matter of National Survival* (Second Congressional Commission on Education 2025).



An illustration from EDCOM II's second report, *Fixing the Foundations: A Matter of National Survival* (2025).

Credit: Jamie Bauza and Harry Monzon for EDCOM

# Engagement Between Multiply-Ed and EDCOM II

The work of Multiply-Ed has been closely intertwined with the formation of EDCOM II from the start. SCAP led the call for the declaration of an education crisis in early 2021.<sup>4</sup> It resulted in the passage of Resolution 901 in September 2021 “urging the Executive Branch to declare an educational crisis and calling on the public education sector ... and other important stakeholders to band together in formulating and implementing a targeted emergency plan for the education crisis” (Senate of the Philippines: 19th Congress 2021). SCAP’s call was further iterated in a year-long campaign that put forward a 12-point education agenda.<sup>5</sup> The campaign, as well as Senate Resolution 901, arguably sped up the passage of Republic Act 11899 in 2022, which established EDCOM II (Senate of the Congress: 18th Congress 2022).

Former SCAP Chairperson Ken Paolo Gilo remarked that SCAP’s calls for the declaration of the education crisis “contributed to the civil society pressure to create a body to address the education crisis, while there was ongoing internal lobbying for it” (online communication, December 3, 2024). He added:

*Internally, we consider the creation of EDCOM as a win because it was created when Senator Risa Hontiveros adopted exactly our call to declare an education crisis and create an emergency plan for the education sector ... after Resolution No. 901 was passed.*

**Ken Paolo Gilo, former SCAP Chairperson, December 3, 2024.**

*Translated into English from Taglish<sup>6</sup>*

The government’s recognition of the education crisis and the creation of EDCOM II validated the significance, relevance, and urgency of the agenda shared by SCAP and Multiply-Ed.

From the outset, Multiply-Ed has supported SCAP in its education crisis campaigns. In fact, Multiply-Ed’s core leaders were from SCAP. SCAP’s 12-point education agenda is informed by Multiply-Ed’s monitoring findings. Since its creation in July 2021, Multiply-Ed has interacted with EDCOM II to coordinate activities, share monitoring results, and undertake joint efforts to advance shared monitoring. In its scanning and analysis of stakeholders for its advocacy and engagement after monitoring, Multiply-Ed identified EDCOM II as one of its target national policy actors.

Multiply-Ed initially held several small meetings with EDCOM II, during which Multiply-Ed introduced itself and got to know more about EDCOM II. In an online meeting on June 27, 2023, EDCOM II staff who attended said proposals, policy papers, and position papers were all being taken into account by the Commission in its assessments, encouraging Multiply-Ed to submit theirs.

In the meeting with EDCOM Co-Chairperson, Congressperson Roman Romulo on July 28, 2023, Multiply-Ed presented its reform agenda. Generally, Congressman Romulo was supportive, though he wanted clarification on how the proposed student representative in the local school board would be selected (Zarah Navarro, CYAN Deputy Director and one of the core leaders of Multiply-Ed, online communication, December 4, 2024).



Multiply-Ed members present their agenda to EDCOM Co-Chair Roman Romulo.

*Credit: Multiply-Ed*

Erika dela Cruz, former Communications Officer of Multiply-Ed who initially coordinated with EDCOM II, describes its reaction to Multiply-Ed as follows:

*There were general affirmations by EDCOM of our policy recommendations and monitoring findings that were similar to what was coming out in their monitoring—that is clear in the [EdCom Year 1] report that they released early this year.*

***Online communication with Erika dela Cruz, December 3, 2024.***

*Translated to English from Taglish*

EDCOM II has been present in all the policy convenings of Multiply-Ed at the national level. For instance, on March 23, 2023, EDCOM Technical Specialist Sue Quirante attended Multiply-Ed's eSkwela policy forum on the role of local governments. Sue Quirante acknowledged the shared agenda of looking into the role of local governments, particularly the utilization of the Special Education Fund (SEF).<sup>7</sup>



On August 7, 2023, at Multiply-Ed's National Multi-Sectoral Conference, Attorney Mari Leiozelle Sol Cruz from the office of Congressperson Roman Romulo representing EDCOM II shared the efforts of Congressperson Romulo's office on education, which responded to Multiply-Ed's reform agenda. This includes the institutionalization of the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines through Republic Act No. 11713 (Excellence in Teacher Education Act). He also noted that there were other bills that their office was working on, particularly for mental health (Mental Wellness Bill), teachers (Teacher Career Progression Bill), as well as school facilities (Public Schools of the Future in Technology Bill). For EDCOM, he provided updates on its activities (i.e. writing of the EDCOM II report), which would be used to propose bills to improve and strengthen the education system. He also encouraged the participants to join the discussions organized by EDCOM II. He acknowledged the importance of consolidating the efforts of EDCOM and Multiply-Ed so that the work of EDCOM would really target effective measures that could be implemented.

On August 16, 2024, in another eSkwela policy forum, this time on nutrition governance, Conchitina Enrile of EDCOM II acknowledged its partnership with Multiply-Ed, highlighting that EDCOM II's work has "a foundation, and is centered on, transparency, participation and accountability," similarly to Multiply-Ed. She confirmed that EDCOM II's findings in its Year 1 report were similar to Multiply-Ed's observations that while "nutrition-specific interventions in the Philippines generally adhere to global recommendations, implementation has been fragmented." She added that "data from the Department of Education School Based Feeding Program showed that at most, 30% of learners fall back to become wasted or severely wasted despite months of interventions."<sup>8</sup>

In general, both Multiply-Ed and EDCOM recognize their shared goal of achieving a systemic improvement of the public education system.



EDCOM Technical Specialist Conchitina Enrile (first from right) attends the E-Skwela policy forum on nutrition governance convened by Multiply-Ed

Credit: G-Watch

# Comparing Multiply-Ed and EDCOM II Reports

Legislative oversight and citizen monitoring of national government social policies can be mutually reinforcing in terms of their overlapping findings and shared agenda on the state of public education access, quality, and policy implementation in the Philippines. In addition, while there are overlapping and reinforcing agendas, the complementarity of findings also helps to identify the distinct value-added of citizen monitoring in uplifting other agendas as well.

In the case of EDCOM II's legislative oversight and Multiply-Ed's citizen monitoring reports, the two reports identified a number of overlapping findings, including on teaching and learning materials, learning outcomes, and education financing across the 27 priority areas. Foremost, however, was the importance of local governance in education.

Multiply-Ed's overall approach is based on participatory monitoring, premised on constructive accountability.<sup>9</sup> According to Multiply-Ed's most recent monitoring report on learning continuity and transparency, participation, and accountability in school governance, constructive accountability involves "affirmative and iterative processes that help citizens claim their rights and entitlements while helping government comply with their own standards, targets and plans" (Aceron, Maglanque, and Bueno 2024, 5).

The Multiply-Ed report described an "openness" to citizen monitoring among most of the local school boards (LSBs) they visited. The willingness of many of these LSBs, including those that were initially reluctant to support citizen monitoring, is encouraging. A few LSBs (Legazpi, Naga, and Pasig) were also found to have expanded their membership to include representatives from local elementary and secondary schools, a university president, and some CSOs. In light of these findings, the Multiply-Ed monitoring report recommended that LSBs continue to take a lead role in facilitating the participation of citizens and civil society in education programs at the local government unit (LGU) level, as well as in supporting participatory monitoring at the school level. Some technical specialists from EDCOM II in fact attended Multiply-Ed forums to discuss the importance of local governments in education governance. This was an early sign of the nascent synergy between EDCOM II and Multiply-Ed.

The two EDCOM II reports also highlighted decentralization and participatory governance as a priority, albeit the last in a list of 27 priority areas. The Commission's legislative oversight research observed that the DepEd structure was highly centralized and hierarchical, with much of the decision-making still taking place at the highest levels (Second Congressional Commission on Education 2025, 369). It also found that ordinary citizens face significant barriers to engaging in meaningful participation in education governance. EDCOM II cites at least 30 mechanisms for people's participation; however, "these often lead to dead ends, especially with scant information available to ordinary citizens on how and where they can engage or contribute to improving the education system" (Second Congressional Commission on Education 2025, 373). The Commission cited an internal 2024 study that did not find evidence that these mechanisms were available or accessible to ordinary citizens (Comia et al. 2024). The mechanisms surveyed included LSBs and SGCs.

It should be noted, however, that EDCOM II recently published a follow-on report focused on priority 27, decentralization, and participatory governance (Laguda et al. 2025). The deep-dive report largely echoes the findings of Multiply-Ed's citizen-led reporting regarding the need for greater decentralization and local decision-making. The report explains the historical basis for centralized governance in the Philippines more broadly, including in education. Despite state-led efforts such as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (R.A. No. 9155) and the introduction of school advisory councils comprised of school heads and community members, education decision-making and power remained highly centralized. The 2025 report calls for greater decentralization within

DepEd, arguing that centralization “hinders its ability to respond adaptively to varying needs” at the school level (Laguda et al. 2025, 29). However, citizen monitoring leaders argue that this recommendation falls short. Multiply-Ed calls for stronger efforts at decentralization by shifting reform leadership away from DepEd to avoid unintentionally reinforcing centralizing tendencies.

The EDCOM II report highlighted the importance of publicly available data and recommended that “by making education data publicly available, governments can empower communities to actively participate in improving learning outcomes and ensure that interventions are targeted and effective” (Second Congressional Commission on Education 2025, 376). This statement, however, implies that transparency is sufficient to encourage accountability, as the EDCOM II report made no specific recommendations to strengthen participatory citizen oversight institutions. The recommendation also did not specify the kind of education data that must be made available to public access, which is crucial to enabling citizen participation and accountability. This question has been better addressed by Multiply-Ed’s citizen monitoring efforts. For instance, the Multiply-Ed report recommended that information systems should be strengthened so that the public would “have access to public information, data, and documents about official acts, transactions, and government research data used as the basis for any program and policy development in the education sector” (Aceron, Maglanque, and Bueno 2024, 28).

Both the EDCOM congressional oversight reports and Multiply-Ed’s citizen monitoring reporting have highlighted concerns about the availability and lack of policy regarding teaching and learning resources. Prioritized by EDCOM II as one of the top five priority areas (priority area 5: learning resources), EDCOM II reporting over the past two years has found significant challenges around textbooks. These challenges include procurement, delivery, underutilization of allocated funds, and delays in commissioning new manuscripts with book publishers. Such delays in providing teaching and learning materials have hindered learning outcomes and recovery after school closures during Covid-19, heightening the urgency of the issue.

However, EDCOM is not the first to highlight such issues in the textbook procurement and delivery process in the Philippines. Dating back to the early 2000s, in response to the former Education Secretary Edilberto de Jesus’s Textbook Count program, G-Watch (a member of Multiply-Ed) initiated citizen monitoring of the procurement alongside the Department of Education. In Multiply-Ed’s most recent 2024 citizen monitoring report, it also found that textbook sufficiency was the most common standard that was not complied with.<sup>10</sup> Multiply-Ed found that, of the more than 170 student respondents surveyed, 66 percent reported that they did not have their own textbooks, and another 30 percent reported outdated or incorrect information being presented in the textbooks they did have access to. Errors were especially prevalent in locally produced materials (Aceron, Maglanque, and Bueno 2024, 21).

EDCOM II and Multiply-Ed have also both independently identified concerns regarding whether there are sufficient budgeting and financial resources provided at the school level. Multiply-Ed, from its position as grassroots citizen monitors, identified that only 33 percent of schools surveyed were compliant with learning continuity plans, budget, and communication standards. Echoing Multiply-Ed’s citizen monitoring concerns regarding school finances, the EDCOM II 2025 report highlighted that across the national education system, budget growth has not kept pace with global standards. It also noted the imbalance of budget increases in higher education compared with primary education, which continues to be the “least resourced despite its importance in ensuring strong foundations for learning” (Second Congressional Commission on Education 2025, 32). This alignment of EDCOM II and Multiply-Ed’s concerns regarding education financing—both from a congressional overview of structural challenges and a citizen monitoring approach to school-based issues—demonstrates the importance of overlapping and reinforcing findings.

The clear overlap in the findings of Multiply-Ed, an independent, citizen-led organization monitoring education, and EDCOM II, a national-level legislative oversight body, mutually reinforces the accountability efforts of both. However, it is important to note that although there are similarities in their findings and agenda, there was no direct reference to Multiply-Ed’s monitoring in the EDCOM II report.



# Added Value of Civil Society Accountability Efforts

Although there is an overlap in the monitoring findings, independent citizen-led monitoring such as that conducted by Multiply-Ed has distinct added value to the education sector. Multiply-Ed's monitoring identified additional concerns regarding policy implementation that are not easily identified by national-level government oversight.

Upon the release of EDCOM II's report, Multiply-Ed, in a statement posted on Facebook on February 23, commended EDCOM II and acknowledged the convergence of findings and shared agendas.<sup>11</sup> However, it also noted three areas it believed would need more emphasis: stakeholder engagement; transparency and accountability; and a holistic and systemic approach to reform:

... despite the report's comprehensive coverage of various thematic areas, a crucial aspect that both EdCom and education policy stakeholders must delve deeper into is navigating the intricacies of reform politics. Educational reform endeavors are only possible if we can navigate the political landscape surrounding them. The existing hegemony persists in a socio-political structure where power and wealth are concentrated among a select few. This perpetuates not only a flawed education system but also reinforces existing disparities, widening the gap between the privileged and the marginalized.

*Multiply-Ed Facebook post, February 23, 2024<sup>12</sup>*

The importance of delving into the 'politics of reform' was also pointed out by Mayor Vico Sotto, a member of the EDCOM II advisory board representing local government, in his speech in a Multiply-Ed forum (Sotto 2023). Mayor Sotto underscored an observation that the previous EDCOM I recommendations were hardly implemented.<sup>13</sup> He then proceeded to encourage all education stakeholders to look into how reforms can successfully be implemented:

*It is very important that we continue to study. It's very important that we continue to review the policies. It's very important that we continue to make proposals. What are our policies? What do we need to do? It's very important to talk about this.*

*But let's not kid ourselves. We need to identify what are our problems, what are our lapses .... Why did it reach 20 years, 30 years, when some of the recommendations were not even that complicated?*

*So, I think, really, that's the value of what we're doing here today—it's important to talk about why and what: what are the lapses.*

*Again, the question is, how are we going to change things? How are we going to improve things? And that's the value of us coming here, coming together.*

*Mayor Vico Sotto, Multiply-Ed Regional Multi-Sectoral Conference, May 20, 2023  
Translated into English from Taglish*

Mechanisms for transparency, participation, and accountability are crucial in realizing the recommendations put forward by both Multiply-Ed and EDCOM II to strengthen accountability. However, the status of existing accountability mechanisms is one key theme that Multiply-Ed identifies, but EDCOM II misses out. This demonstrates the added value of citizen monitoring efforts such as Multiply-Ed.



Vico Sotto, a member of EdCom II, delivers his solidarity message during the Multiply-Ed NCR regional conference in 2023

*Credit: G-Watch*

Based on the findings of Multiply-Ed's monitoring, SGCs, as a school-level participatory, consultative, and accountability mechanism, and LSBs expanded with student representation are key mechanisms that could make or break efforts to realize improved education governance. The SGCs are multi-sectoral consultative and feedback mechanisms at the school level, and LSBs are the multi-sectoral education policy-making bodies at municipal/ city/ provincial levels. The Department of Education itself reiterated the importance of the functionality of the SGCs as part of strengthening the effectiveness of school-based management that the Department has again underscored through Department Order 7 Series of 2024 (Department of Education 2024). Both have oversight mandates over education governance. Following its monitoring reports, Multiply-Ed is pushing for student representation on the LSBs and to strengthen SGCs. The key role of students in decision-making was also overlooked in EDCOM II's report, including the major gaps in student and principal representation on LSBs.

In general, the EDCOM II report omitted the activation, enabling, and mobilization of institutional stakeholders or existing participatory mechanisms for implementation. Since multi-level stakeholder engagement is crucial in the politics of reform, existing groups and bodies can be engaged for this purpose. Multiply-Ed underscored student organizations, SGCs, and LSBs as the groups and bodies with the greatest potential for this.

# How Civil Society Accountability Efforts Can Reinforce Government Oversight: Enabling Future EDCOM and Multiply-Ed Synergy

There are strengths of independence in civil society accountability efforts that can reinforce government oversight and vice versa. This is the foundation for potential synergy that Multiply-Ed and EDCOM II can harness to push for their shared agenda to address the country's education crisis.

There are four ways in which the strengths of independent civil society accountability efforts can reinforce government oversight: (1) providing independent, citizens' eye information about the performance of public services to policy-makers in order to broaden policy reform agendas to include issues or processes that may not be visible from above; (2) bringing policy-makers' agendas closer to the people to broaden reform constituencies; (3) protecting accountability efforts from partisan squabbles of political elites; and (4) identifying immediate opportunities for gains, and building reform infrastructure in the long term.

The foundations of the collaboration that grounds the organizations involved in Multiply-Ed are complementary strengths in youth network-building, monitoring, advocacy-based strategizing, and research and knowledge production. To varying degrees, these organizations employ movement-building and strategic approaches. They all organize constituencies and advocate for reforms across communities, collectives, and spaces at different levels.

One core element of movement-building is that 'the people' are both the means and ends of the cause. The Multiply-Ed accountability approach puts citizens (in this case, students) front and center of reforms. Multiply-Ed is 'youth-led' as it endeavors to enable young people to lead change processes. Given that young people constitute a large proportion of the population, and given their energy, passion, and historical significance, mobilizing youth can enable the scaling up of accountability. Multiply-Ed can consolidate the ground-level perspective of the youth and other key stakeholders on issues that are overlooked by government policy response. This enables critical introspection on the gaps and missing links in governance that perpetuate systemic problems from the perspective of those who are affected most.

The involvement of students in education reform efforts can also multiply messages and actions manifold so that they reach more citizens and spaces. This also means that civil society initiatives, such as Multiply-Ed, can help bring the reform agendas and policy recommendations of congressional oversight agencies such as EDCOM II closer to the people. Multiply-Ed can help EDCOM II build and broaden its constituencies, helping to push for reforms in the education sector.

Another key to movement-building is political analysis—understanding the context, the opportunities and threats it poses, the key actors, and one's own strengths and limitations. Multiply-Ed's strategic approach to accountability recognizes that accountability exists in a context of power and politics. As such, it emphasizes the need to engage and build bases at all levels of decision-making, while being cognizant of the political situation at each level and the whole. As part of its movement-building, Multiply-Ed undertakes a constant collective analysis of the political conjuncture at different levels, which sharply grounds its actions in political realities, while anchoring itself in long-term organizing and base-building beyond current political opportunities. This is a crucial component of state-society synergy as it enables movements and civil society to have an independent analysis of the situation and a solid hold of their own agenda amid the changing political context.

For example, when the new President appointed Sara Duterte in 2022 as DepEd Secretary, education stakeholders were confronted with the dilemma of having to deal with a politician who did not have any background in education, and whose appointment appeared as much political as anything else (Montalvan II 2024; Sta. Ana II 2022; Valderama 2024). Multiply-Ed kept a healthy distance from the Office of the Secretary.

Fortunately, Multiply-Ed had already created an opening at the national level even before Sara Duterte assumed office. It engaged the office directly responsible for learning continuity, the Office of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instructions. That office, under then Secretary Loenor (Liling) Briones, was headed by Dr Diosdado San Antonio, a career civil servant who rose from the ranks. Appreciative of the initiative from the onset, Undersecretary San Antonio's office released a memo endorsing Multiply-Ed to the divisions.

Multiply-Ed's 'political awareness' therefore enabled it to navigate the sticky political context of the Central Department of Education from 2022 to early 2024 by engaging DepEd while maintaining its independence. It successfully collaborated with state authorities while remaining independent in checking the government's claims about its accomplishments, and it protected member movements from backlash when in mid-2024 Sara Duterte faced corruption charges concerning confidential funds in the 2023 education budget.<sup>14</sup>

Although some education policy actors ended up in a compromising position when corruption allegations hounded DepEd for being congratulatory and positive<sup>15</sup> towards Sara Duterte, Multiply-Ed maintained its integrity and independence. When Sara Duterte was called out for corruption, Multiply-Ed joined the calls for accountability as it continued its monitoring and advocacy work. In June 2024, Sara Duterte resigned as DepEd Secretary. She was replaced by Edgardo Angara Jr, a legislator who used to be part of the EDCOM II. Multiply-Ed welcomed the development as a response to calls for accountability, and expressed its intent to explore engagement with the new secretary.

Agendas for government accountability can be protected from partisan political squabbles and can even take advantage of openings that result from elite in-fighting to enable accountability. The investigation into Sara Duterte for alleged corruption, which came after the division between the Dutertes and the camp of the incumbent President, Bongbong Marcos, shows how contestation among political elites can open up accountability involving high-profile personalities, critical especially when civic space is limited. The Multiply-Ed case demonstrates how a citizen accountability effort navigated such a tricky political situation in a way that enabled it to maintain its course; to not be distracted by the political dynamics yet informed by them to ensure sustainability and expansion of its work.

Citizen-led monitoring—anchored in long-term organizing and base-building across multiple levels—can produce strategy-oriented and actor-based recommendations focused on making changes happen, based on independent analysis and agile navigation of changing political contexts.

# Conclusion

Multiply-Ed's multi-level engagement allows it not only to have a more holistic and strategic view of education governance, but also to claim results and gains at different levels depending on where there are convergences of allies in government and its mass base, while avoiding spaces that are politically risky.

Movements aim for systemic change in societal conditions and in people's lives. Being people-powered, people-centered, and people-led, Multiply-Ed's approach is bottom-up and participatory at all levels. This has enabled it to fill some gaps in the assessment of the education situation by congressional oversight bodies such as EDCOM II (even when there are some overlapping findings), and to identify forward-looking agendas that are key to the implementation of reforms. This is particularly important for prioritizing how reforms are actually achieved and sustained.

Multiply-Ed's experiences show that government allies can be found at different levels depending on where there are opportunities. By perennially searching for openings while being mindful of the big picture, Multiply-Ed has been able to identify possible institutional actions that can bring the government and citizens together to drive service improvements right now, and build constituencies and reform infrastructure in the longer term. Specifically, Multiply-Ed's greatest added value is supporting the strengthening of existing participatory oversight bodies at school (SGCs) and sub-national (LSBs) levels that provide potentially broad-based and sustainable constituencies for education reform.



# Notes

- 1 The Global Partnership for Education is a multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to strengthen global education. Hosted by the World Bank, GPE is the world's only partnership dedicated solely to funding education in developing countries. See: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/>.
- 2 Education Out Loud is GPE's fund for advocacy and social accountability. It provides support for civil society to become active and influential in shaping education policy to better meet the needs of communities. See: <https://educationoutloud.org/>.
- 3 Multiply-Ed Philippines. "Multiply-Ed Philippines Officially Launches #Malayangedukasyonph: X-Ed 8-Point Education Reform Agenda." Facebook post, July 10, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/MultiplyEdPH/posts/pfbid02WQAnNGKtuXUFRhmHfpTrxXyQJSTs3RHR7YD7VxxBcuyZrMKoHK9iuFF3CiUcfVWWI?rdid=XcmmZW3Gl6vGoldX#>.
- 4 Student Council Alliance of the Philippines. "Youth Leaders Call for the Declaration of an Education Crisis and Roll Out of an Emergency Plan for a 4-Point Education Agenda." Facebook post, September 3, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/100064500287673/posts/4558484444191434/?rdid=BXH2Qy0XJk4sroK0>.
- 5 Student Council Alliance of the Philippines. "*Isang dakilang kabayanihan ang pagtindig para sa kapwa Pilipinong estudyante.*" Facebook post, August 29, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/100064500287673/posts/5667222379984296/?rdid=Bpf3uC5pZREIAmtX>.
- 6 Taglish is a term Filipinos use when English and Filipino languages are combined in a sentence.
- 7 Special Education Fund is an additional 1% tax levied on Real Property Tax to fund education.
- 8 See also G-Watch (2024).
- 9 Constructive accountability refers to joint efforts of civil society and government to enhance public accountability with the focus on improving governance and delivery of public services, instead of fault-findings or witch-hunting. It is different from constructive engagement as it underscores the importance of accountability as a means and a goal, instead of simply sustaining engagement. For more on this, see Acheron (2022).
- 10 Multiply-Ed monitoring checks whether standards (expected/ planned quantity, time, quality, process, and cost) were complied with (referred to as compliant) or not (referred to as non-compliant) by duty-bearers. For more on Multiply-Ed's monitoring processes, see Acheron et al. (2023).
- 11 Multiply-Ed statement on EDCOM II's Year One report, Facebook post, February 23, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=408773808375003&set=a.177313291521057>.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAVketUqt2k> for a recording of a forum that looks into EDCOM I recommendations. See <https://wordpresscom59389.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/curriculumdevelopment-report.pdf> for a presentation of the EDCOM I report.
- 14 The first-ever confidential funds in the 2023 education budget amounting to Php150 million sparked calls for accountability on Sara Duterte. During the congressional deliberations on the 2024 budget, charges of irregularities and corruption against Sara Duterte involving confidential funds came out. It was also around this time that tensions between the Dutertes and the camp of the President, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, were heating up.
- 15 In the Basic Education Report forum (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZKO6oOWO68>), for instance, many key international organizations gave high praise to the Vice President, then DepEd Secretary.



# References

- Aceron, Joy. 2022. "Constructive Accountability: Sandwich Strategy for Textbook Delivery in the Philippines." Case Study. Accountability Research Center. [https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Case-study\\_1\\_Joy-Aceron-8-21.pdf](https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Case-study_1_Joy-Aceron-8-21.pdf).
- Aceron, Joy, Victoria Maglanque, and Anna Bueno. 2024. *Multiply-Ed Monitoring Report on Learning Continuity and Transparency, Participation and Accountability in School Governance*. Quezon City, Philippines: G-Watch. <https://g-watch.org/sites/default/files/resources//final3x-ed-monitoring-report-annexes.pdf>.
- Aceron, Joy, Jedidiah Sarmiento, Victoria Maglanque, and Anna Bueno. 2023. *A Guide to Civil Society Monitoring: The Multiply-Ed Philippines Experience*. Quezon City, Philippines: G-Watch. <https://g-watch.org/sites/default/files/resources//x-ed-manualdraftv3compressed.pdf>.
- Comia, Riz Supreme Balgos, Kenneth Isaiah Ibasco Abante, Jeshamar Calinao Villasis, and Hamiñia Charlothe Garcia De Leon. 2024. *Kakayanin Natin: Empowering Citizens to Participate in Improving Education Governance in the Philippines*. Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines, Center for Integrative and Development Studies. [https://cids.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Abante-et-al\\_UPCIDS\\_Kakayanin-Natin-Empowering-Citizens-to-Participate-in-Improving-Education-Governance-in-the-Philippines.pdf](https://cids.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Abante-et-al_UPCIDS_Kakayanin-Natin-Empowering-Citizens-to-Participate-in-Improving-Education-Governance-in-the-Philippines.pdf).
- De Guzman, Chad. 2021. "The Philippines Still Hasn't Fully Reopened its Schools because of COVID-19. What is This Doing to Children?" Time, December 1. <https://time.com/6124045/school-closures-covid-educationphilippines>.
- Department of Education. 2020. *Learning Shall Be Available: The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan in the Time of COVID-19*. Metro Manila, Philippines: Department of Education. [https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DepEd\\_LCP\\_July3.pdf](https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DepEd_LCP_July3.pdf).
- Department of Education. 2024. "Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Revised School-Based Management." Metro Manila, Philippines: Department of Education, May 16. [https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/DO\\_s2024\\_007.pdf](https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/DO_s2024_007.pdf).
- Fox, Jonathan. 2015. "Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?" *World Development* 72, 346–361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.03.011>.
- G-Watch. 2024. "Strengthening Accountability in Nutrition Governance." G-Watch news release, August 22. <https://www.g-watch.org/news-release/strengthening-accountability-nutrition-governance>.
- Laguda, Reynaldo, Attorney Gil Aquino, Linda Cangayao, and Ria Tagle. 2025. *Realizing Shared Governance: Decentralization of Philippine Basic Education*. Pasay City, Philippines: Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II). [https://EDCOM2.gov.ph/media/2025/04/27\\_LAGUDA-et-al-Realizing-Shared-Governance-Decentralization.pdf](https://EDCOM2.gov.ph/media/2025/04/27_LAGUDA-et-al-Realizing-Shared-Governance-Decentralization.pdf).
- Montalvan II, Antonio. 2024. "[The Slingshot] Blunders and Mess Sara Left Behind at DepEd." PIDS News, June 24. <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/the-slingshot-blunders-and-mess-sara-left-behind-at-deped>.

- Multiply-Ed. 2022. *Ensuring Learning Continuity in a Resilient Public Education System in the Philippines: Mapping of Standards and Baseline of Current Practices*. Quezon City, Philippines: G-Watch. <https://g-watch.org/sites/default/files/resources//standardsmapping-20-report-final-09232022.pdf>.
- Orbeta Jr, Aniceto and Vicente Paqueo. 2022. *Philippine Education: Situationer, Challenges, and Ways Forward*. PIDS Discussion Paper Series No. 2022-23. Quezon City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/document/pidsdps2223.pdf>.
- Second Congressional Commission on Education. 2024. *Miseducation: The Failed System of Philippine Education. EDCOM II Year One Report*. Second Congressional Commission on Education. <https://EDCOM2.gov.ph/media/2024/02/EDCOM-II-Year-One-Report-PDF-022924.pdf>.
- Second Congressional Commission on Education. 2025. *Fixing the Foundations: A Matter of National Survival. EDCOM II Year Two Report*. Second Congressional Commission on Education. <https://edcom2.gov.ph/media/2025/01/EDCOM-2-Year-2-Report-Fixing-the-Foundations-2025.pdf>.
- Senate of the Congress: 18th Congress. 2022. "Republic Act No. 11899: An Act Creating a Second Congressional Commission on Education to Review, Assess, and Evaluate the State of Philippine Education and Recommend Innovative and Targeted Policy Reforms in Education, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes." July 23, 2022. [https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2022/ra\\_11899\\_2022.html](https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2022/ra_11899_2022.html).
- Senate of the Philippines: 19th Congress. 2021. "Senate Resolution No. 901: Emergency Plan for the Education Crisis." September 8, 2021. [https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lis/bill\\_res.aspx?congress=18&q=SRN-901](https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lis/bill_res.aspx?congress=18&q=SRN-901).
- Sotto, Vico. 2023. "Solidarity Message During the Multiply-Ed Regional Multi-Sectoral Conference." G-Watch, May 20. <https://www.g-watch.org/think-piece/solidarity-message-during-multiply-ed-regional-multi-sectoral-conference>.
- Sta. Ana II, Bernardo. 2022. "Under New Management: Sara Duterte on Education." Media Times. <https://mediatimes.cmfr-phil.org/under-new-management-sara-duterte-at-the-helm-of-education>.
- Valderama, Tita. 2024. "Commentary: Marcos Values Friendship with Duterte Over Her Competence." VERA Files, April 29. <https://verafiles.org/articles/marcos-values-friendship-with-duterte-over-her-competence>.



## Latest ARC Publications

### Working Papers

- Gearhart, Judy, and Connor Moynihan. 2025. "Upwelling: Fishers Organizing for their Rights and Fishery Sustainability." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper 19*.
- Parra Bayona, Mauricio. 2024. "Tejiendo vínculos entre autoprotección y protección colectiva: la experiencia de ACADESAN en Colombia." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper 18*.
- Fox, Jonathan, Brendan Halloran, Alta Fölscher, and Rosie McGee. 2024. "Disentangling Government Responses: How Do We Know When Accountability Work Is Gaining Traction?" Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper 17*.
- Abhishek, Shriyuta, and Samir Garg. 2023. "Community Health Workers as Rights Defenders: Exploring the Collective Identity of the Mitanins of Chhattisgarh, India." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper 16*.

### Accountability Notes

- Freeman, Scott, Lani Inverarity, and Megan Pearson. 2024. "After the Agreement: Implementing Remedy for Displacement in Northern Haiti." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note 14*.
- Parra Bayona, Mauricio, Elizabeth Barco Moreno, and Jonathan Fox. 2024. "Collective Protection for Communities and Rights Defenders at Risk: Lessons from Grassroots Advocacy in Colombia." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note 13*.
- Fox, Jonathan, and Carlos García Jiménez. 2023. "Farmer Movement Oversight and New Approaches to Government Agriculture Programs in Mexico." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note 12*.

### Learning Exchange Reports

- Cepeda Villareal, Mariana. 2025. "Collective Human Rights Protection in Colombia: Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Experiences in the Pacific Region." Accountability Research Center. *Learning Exchange Report 7*.
- Fatai A. Aremu, Owoseye Oluwayomi, and Maymunah Adeyemo. 2025. "National Dialogue on Independent Monitoring of Nigeria's National Social Investment Program." Accountability Research Center, *Learning Exchange Report 6*.
- Mendiburu, Marcos. 2021. "Citizen Participation in Auditing in Latin America: The Future Agenda." Accountability Research Center, *Learning Exchange Report 5*.

See all publications at <http://accountabilityresearch.org/publications/>



American University  
School of International Service  
4400 Massachusetts Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20016  
[www.accountabilityresearch.org](http://www.accountabilityresearch.org)