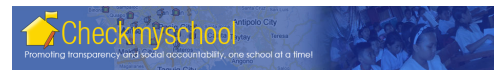


## Check My School (CMS)



**Published On:** 03 August 2015

**Organisation:** Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP)

**Country:** Philippines

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** Education

**Type:** Public Service

**Launched in:** 2011

**Overall development time:** 1 year(s)

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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Check My School (CMS) is a community-monitoring project that aims to promote transparency and social accountability in the Philippine education sector by tracking the provision of services in public schools. The project uses a blended approach, which combines on-the-ground community monitoring with the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

The innovation is a joint initiative of the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP) Foundation, Inc. and the Department of Education (DepEd).

CMS works on a blended approach by combining digital media and community mobilisation. The digital platforms include website, social media, and mobile technology, which allow people to share information and send feedback. Its community mobilisation approach involves partnership-building with different stakeholders such as the school communities, local government units, youth and community organisations, academia and other government agencies.

ANSA-EAP obtains from the Department for Education all its available data on public schools in the Philippines. These data are consolidated and published in a user-friendly format on the CMS website. Simultaneously, ANSA-EAP recruits and trains “infomediaries” - community leaders and socially active individuals. These infomediaries establish contacts with schools and local DepEd officials and mobilise volunteers from the local community.

Then infomediaries and volunteers visit the selected schools and validate the official DepEd data; that is, they gather new data, compare the official data to the actual conditions of the school, talk to school administrators, and finally encode the collected data. All validated data are then published on the CMS website, and discrepancies between the official data and the newly collected data are highlighted. This information reveals the needs and shortages experienced by schools and signals how service provision can be improved.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Part of the overall move of decentralisation in the public education system; delegating responsibilities to the local level by empowering school administrators, engaging school communities, and involving them in decision-making processes.
  - The programme supports the government’s transparency and accountability initiatives - following previous civil society efforts to provide third-party monitoring of government’s service delivery programs, like Textbook Count, Bayanihang Eskwela, and Bantay Eskwela.
  - One of the precursors to Check My School was a program called Text Book Count, where \$25m was spent on procuring textbooks each year. The program had to invest in mechanisms to schedule the delivery of textbooks and the scouts and local communities were drivers of this. School Watch, another \$25M project also used community members to monitor furniture availability in schools.
  - “Several great initiatives were happening independently, but there wasn’t one comprehensive way to scan the status of school systems in the country,” said Parafina, who was working with the Affiliated Networks of Social Accountability (ANSA). They decided to create the Check My School platform to fill that gap.
  - The innovation aims to improve the provision of services in public schools across the Philippines by pursuing three major objectives.
  - Data validation: enhance the integrity and accuracy of Department of Education (DepEd) school data by gathering information in schools across the country and comparing the data collected to official DepEd data.
  - Community engagement: increase community awareness and involvement in the provision of education services by monitoring the conditions of public schools and engaging community members in collaborative problem solving around issues of concern identified by schools.
  - Information provision: facilitate public access to accurate information about the public education system. As part of this objective, CMS aims to present educational data in a consolidated and easily accessible format on an online platform, enabling citizens to comment on the data and identify issues of concern.
  - Students – the standards and quality of their schools will improve.
  - General public and parents – the increased accountability restores faith in the public systems and ensures value for money.
  - Teachers – their requirements are met and school standards improve, without them feeling like a whistle blower.
  - Government – the government is made aware of slipping standards and is seen to be responsive and transparent.
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## Existing similar practices

### Checkmyschool (CMS) Project in Cambodia

In other countries’ public administrations

ANSA-EAP and KIND (in partnership with the Government of Cambodia)

Checkmyschool in Cambodia was a replication of Checkmyschool in the Philippines and was made possible through the Checkmyschool Cross-country Learning Program, based in ANSA-EAP in the Philippines. The project follows an almost identical plan as the Filipino version of the programme. The goal is to collect constructive feedback from communities on education. Partnership with Ministry of Education and other

stakeholders will be important to produce a satisfactory project result. The program is also being rolled out in Indonesia, and Mongolia, through the Cross-Country Learning Program.

<http://kindcambodia.org/check-my-schoolcms-project/>, <http://opengovindonesia.org/open-school-catalyst-education-indonesia/>

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## Results

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### Efficiency

- Reporting problems to the Department of Education and receiving a response was taking a year or even longer. “Sometimes a request could outlast a number of principals,” said one parent in Araullo High School. However once complaints had been submitted on the Check My School website complaints had been responded to by the Department for Education within a week.
  - Check My School (CMS) has received an array of international coverage, including references in the Guardian, a recent TEDGlobal talk, and many blogs related to development, technology, and innovation.
  - Caroline Anstey, former managing director of the World Bank, considers CMS to be a key example of how civil society organisations have innovated with technology to achieve better and more efficient service delivery (Anstey 2011).
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### Other improvements

- In Kalilangan, Bukidnon, as of 11 September 2014, Forty two (42) classrooms in twenty four (24) schools underwent repairs due to the efforts of the Local Government of Kalilangan, the Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Education and Abag Kalambuan; a local community-based organization in Bukidnon that works to encourage community-based development.
- In the initial six months since its launch, Checkmyschool has secured the GPS coordinates of 8,000 of the 44,000 public elementary and high schools in the country through its partners’ support, combined with local mobilization of community members. Geotagging is being explored in its system as another tool for citizen monitoring.
- In addition to this mapping exercise, CMS is also establishing a network of information intermediaries (“infomediaries”), capable and technology-literate volunteers drawn from the community who play a key role in helping to engage public on service related inquiries.

# Development

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## Design

The programme was established as a joint initiative of the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA—EAP) Foundation Inc. and the Department of Education (DepEd), the branch of government that is responsible for regulating and managing the Philippine system of basic education.

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## Testing

- The mechanisms to assess the feasibility of the programme included the following mechanisms: scanning and mapping of the local country context of education service delivery; and consultation with key stakeholders from the citizens and government.
  - The roll-out to Cambodia involved learning field visits in the Philippines, and continuous mentoring and coaching sessions with partners from CMS country partners.
  - A year -long pilot of Checkmyschool in the Philippines was undertaken January 2011 to May 2012.
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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- Tools included the use of GPS, SMS, and an online mapping platform. The platform uses Google Maps to map schools.

### Resources used:

- Grant of \$750,000 was provided from the World Bank. The operations of Checkmyschool are coordinated through a secretariat at the local city/municipality level. The Chapter Coordinator serves as anchor in the operations and engagement with key community stakeholders.
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## Diffusion

- The concept of Check My School has been adapted and adopted to many other country contexts by ANSA-EAP working in partnership with in-country Governments.
  - This is done through the scanning and mapping of the local community's context of education-related issues; consultation with key stakeholders from the citizens and government; and continuous mentoring and coaching sessions with partners.
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## Challenges and solutions

- The major challenge is ensuring support and buy-in from the partners about how social accountability can be used as an approach to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services. This was mitigated through documentation of results that showed the effectiveness of the programme.
  - Other problems have been technology based. Internet penetration in the Philippines is estimated at around 30 percent, and the general technological literacy is relatively low.
  - Given this reality, the extent to which local communities—the targeted audience of such a platform—would be able (and willing) to effectively use the platform to voice their concerns and whether the information provided on the platform would satisfy their needs and demands were not fully clear.
  - Because ANSA-EAP was aware of this challenge, it incorporated the ICT component into the project in anticipation of the eventual increase and spread of the Internet in the Philippines, thus aiming to prepare local communities in the use of ICT tools for social accountability purposes.
  - In light of the difficulties encountered with the CMS website, ANSA-EAP encouraged infomediaries to take advantage of the CMS Facebook page, which was more convenient for providing updates.
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## Partnerships

### Manila Department of Education, ANSA, WBI

#### Other Public Sector

Checkmyschool.org is an example of collaboration between government, private sector and civil society. They have developed a positive working relationship between the Department of Education in Manila and the Affiliated Networks of Social Accountability (ANSA), an initiative supported by the World Bank Institute (WBI) to strengthen and scale up social accountability efforts of grassroots organizations. They are also working in partnership with Google and making use of the Google Maps technology and mobile phone messaging to facilitate citizens' monitoring of schools. Part of the Department of Education's commitment in the agreement on Check My School is to receive and act on verified issues and concerns reported through the website.

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# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- The 'constructive engagement' between the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP) and the Philippine's Department of Education (DepEd) encouraged government to share its data on public schools with ANSA-EAP, and even help build relations with schools.
- The Check My School project complements the Philippine government's own efforts in encouraging school administrators to involve community organizations and parents in school affairs.
- The project's innovative approach in experimenting with different ICT tools, including the use of its official website--[checkmymyschool.org](http://checkmymyschool.org)--and social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter shows promise for effective monitoring.
- Working with institutions such as the Ateneo School of Government and its own partners allowed the project to tap into local networks of civil society organizations, youth groups, and socially active individuals.
- The mobilization of networks of committed volunteers complemented by leadership and skills training empowered volunteers to conduct validation activities.

## Conditions for success

- Dynamic, young composition of the team; strong support from the communities and partner organisations of Checkmyschool; and technical guidance from ANSA-EAP on how social accountability can be used to help improve social accountability practice.
- In addition, other key elements supported the successful delivery of the programme. Simple design. Because CMS validations are led by decentralized local networks, their design should be simple and easily transferable, yet rigorous. Despite the concerns expressed by DepEd, CMS seems to have accomplished this objective and developed a validation system that can be both easily followed by volunteers on the ground and monitored by the CMS team and DepEd officials.
- Flexibility. The ANSA-EAP team effectively adjusted to a variety of unforeseen developments and took advantage of new opportunities during the pilot CMS implementation. When the website did not perform as expected, ANSA-EAP turned its attention to the Facebook page. When infomediaries identified problems that schools had been struggling with, ANSA-EAP launched and provided support to the Operation Thank You program.
- Self-assessment. During the pilot year of CMS implementation, ANSA-EAP was constantly engaged in self-assessment, attempting to learn from mistakes and improve the system for future validations. Although the CMS project (in particular, its online component) did not perform fully as expected during the pilot year, the flexible and open-minded approach endorsed by ANSA-EAP is likely to substantially improve the project for its subsequent iterations.

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