

Perspectives on the Distribution of Curriculum Materials to Papua New Guinea Schools

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Abstract

The unreliable distribution of curriculum materials to schools in Papua New Guinea has been an area of great concern and it was essential that the system be improved. The Curriculum Development Division, with assistance from the AusAID Curriculum Reform Implementation Project (CRIP) continues to initiate and produce materials to support and progress reform of the curriculum. Syllabuses and teachers guides have been, or are in the process of being rewritten for elementary, primary and secondary school levels. However, the time, cost and effort are ineffective if the materials do not reach their intended destinations. A national study was completed in 2001, funded by CRIP. It identified serious problems related to distribution. The response of the Department of Education was to develop a National Materials Distribution Policy. This paper attempts to capture some of the issues that arose during the 2003-2004 delivery of materials under this policy. The observations made are relevant to the delivery of education and other departmental services such as health, welfare and social development in Papua New Guinea.

Introduction

One of the major problems of governance in Papua New Guinea (PNG) lies in the state's inability to deliver services to its people. It is now generally acknowledged that inadequate service delivery in areas such as education, health, security and transport infrastructure causes hardship and instability. This paper looks at one important area of service delivery in the education sector, the poor distribution of curriculum materials to elementary, primary, and secondary schools in PNG during 2003-2004. It examines some of the causes of the problem of poor service delivery; and it assesses some of the possible reforms. In the process, the paper casts light on some major flaws in the current education system in PNG. These are flaws of vision, design, and implementation, which, to my mind, are reflected in many other parts of the service sector of government.

Having said that, it is acknowledged that the Government of PNG and the National Department of Education (NDOE) have a genuine concern for quality education for Papua New Guineans. The current education reform is its most significant undertaking to achieve this goal. It is equally important, for the success of the education reform, that curriculum materials are developed and put in the hands of students and teachers in the schools. According to my findings, there were irregularities in the method of distribution and delivery. It was this knowledge that motivated this critical review.

In order to understand the issues that will be discussed, the paper begins with some facts about PNG and events taking place in education in this country.

Background

Papua New Guinea has more than 1,400 islands spread over a sea area of 1,900,000 square kilometres, and a land area of 462,840 square kilometres. The mainland, which contains some of the most rugged terrains in the world, covers seventy-five percent of the land mass (National Department of Education, 2004). This, obviously, makes it difficult for government infrastructure and services to reach the country's entire population. By 1986 PNG had a total of 18,366 kilometres of road of which only six percent was sealed, mostly in national roads (Rannells, 1990, p.150).

According to figures obtained from the 2000 census, the country's population was 5,190,786, comprising 52 percent male and 48 percent female. The PNG annual growth rate is 2.7 percent (Gomez, 2003).

The education system in PNG is currently undergoing structural and curriculum change. After the 1990–1991 Education Sector Review, which was conducted by the Education Department, and aided by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), it was identified that there were 'problem areas' and 'basic weaknesses in the system' (NDOE, 1996, p.1). The Education Sector Review's recommendation was for basic reform of the education system. The recommendation has led to the education reform to solve some of the problems in planning and management, system structure, access and relevance.

The reform system is characterised by the two primary components of structural development and curriculum development. The reform structure has added a pre-primary school level, which caters for three years of elementary education, before continuing with six years of primary education from grade 3 to grade 8. The nine years of basic education before four years of secondary education will help in overcoming some of the problems of access, enrolment, retention and gender balance, particularly when there is an imbalance against girls. In general, the restructure of the system has helped to improve the primary school curriculum and development of the elementary curriculum in terms of their quality, relevance and contextual base. Unlike the previous system, primary school pupils now graduate at grade eight. It is expected that they now feel more capable and confident to contribute to their own lives and to the community.

Progress on the reform activities is still current and may take a few more years to complete. In assisting the education reform a number of sectoral projects are being funded and facilitated by overseas donor countries like Australia, Japan, China, and the European Union. These projects have been designed to address educational issues such as education for all, universal primary school,

curriculum development and implementation, training and in-servicing of teachers and school infrastructure development.

Australia's contribution to development in PNG through AusAID Projects is quite large and extensive, covering many government sectors and different aspects of all levels of the education system. The National Department of Education has been a beneficiary of AusAID projects through its various programs. One of the AusAID programs is the Commodity Assistance Project (CASP). This program has had an involvement in providing curriculum materials to PNG primary schools and secondary schools since 1995 (NDOE, 1999)

Already in 1999, it was planned that 'CRIP will be a major [AusAID funded] project to support the review and revision of curriculum initiatives under the reforms, ... [to] be extensive in its implementation phase' (NDOE, 1999, p.59). By 2000, the Basic Education Infrastructure, Curriculum and Materials Project (BEICMP) had already started to provide textbooks and other equipment, as well as upgrade and maintain the existing infrastructure at elementary, community and primary schools. It was initially intended that it would 'use existing PNG systems to achieve desired outcomes. This [would] mean that there [was] a need for a large amount of training at the provincial, district and community levels' (NDOE, 2001, p.101). When the CRIP began its operations in 2001, it took over the curriculum component from BEICMP.

Curriculum Reform Implementation Project

The Curriculum Reform Implementation Project was a 'major project [designed] to support the review and revision of curriculum initiatives under the reforms' (NDOE, 2001, p.100). The total value of this project was in the vicinity of thirty million kina. It commenced in October 2000 and expected to be completed in November 2005. It was anticipated that it would carry out an extensive implementation program according to five components, namely to:

- assist the development of relevant curriculum for prep to grade 8
- assist with the development of new teaching and learning materials and the distribution of these materials to schools
- train teachers to use the new curriculum through inservice
- monitor the effectiveness of the new curriculum
- manage the project in a cost effective and sustainable manner.

(NDOE, 2003, p.100)

In 2002 a review, funded by CRIP, was carried out on curriculum materials storage and the distribution and delivery systems that were used in the past. The findings of this study were used as the basis in the formulation of a new national policy for distribution and storage. This is contained in the 2003 policy document entitled 'National Policy for Procurement, Distribution and Storage of Curriculum Materials' and it replaced the previously used 'Secretary's Circular 29/2001' (Department of Education, 2003, p.1). The new policy was

'the basis for major curriculum materials distribution in 2003 and 2004' (NDOE, 2003, p. 23).

It is on the subject of the 2003-2004 distribution and delivery of curriculum materials to elementary, primary and secondary schools that we turn to in the section that follows.

Distribution and delivery of curriculum materials

AusAID through CRIP, a project under its Development and Implementation of Education Standards program, funded the major distribution and delivery of curriculum materials to schools throughout PNG. Following this distribution, a study of its impact was carried out in the four provinces of the Eastern Highlands, Western, East New Britain and Madang. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of the distribution and delivery of materials to elementary, primary and secondary schools in PNG. The study began in late 2003 and was completed in early 2004. It was from informal conversations with head teachers and teachers, and interviews with the data collectors and a primary school inspector that the observations presented here were recorded.

It is reiterated that the observations made relate only to arising from the distribution and delivery of curriculum materials and not the impact *per se* of the distribution and delivery.

Method of delivery

The packed materials were dispatched from Port Moresby to all the country's provinces and delivered to schools by private contractors, who liaised directly with CRIP officials based in Port Moresby. There was very little involvement by officers at the provincial education offices in coordinating the delivery of the curriculum materials. In some instances the Education Advisor, as head of education in the province played the figurehead role for the distribution and delivery program. The distribution and delivery of curriculum materials was contracted to local companies.

In accordance with policy guidelines, the curriculum materials would be delivered door-to-door to the schools by local companies or firms as this was 'the preferred option wherever feasible' (Department of Education, 2003, p.5). Consequently, the curriculum materials were dropped off at several major locations, usually primary schools, where the surrounding smaller schools were expected to pick up their materials.

The national distribution policy, which was in effect from 1st October (NDOE, 2003), included the responsibilities for pre-delivery publicity and disseminating information about the distribution to all schools. It was expected that the same information would have been sent to all districts and provinces. The schools received information about the distribution through the primary school inspectors and teachers from the schools who attended workshops organised by CRIP or during the planned in-service week in July. Another source from

which information about the distribution was obtained, was the print media, but this did not reach the rural and remote schools in many parts of the country.

Evaluation of distribution and delivery of curriculum materials

Views expressed indicated that many schools preferred that information to schools be delivered through their Provincial Education Office. A large number of schools was not informed and expressed surprise when the materials arrived, often times, in the absence of the head teacher. Often, there was no information on the time of arrival and the method of delivery. There were numerous reports of unscheduled deliveries being made on weekends when head teachers were unaware of delivery times and were out of the school attending to their own affairs.

In one province, the schools did not know the name of the company that was sub-contracted to make the deliveries because of lack of pre-delivery information. In another province, the education authorities were aware of the distribution of curriculum materials to schools, but did not have direct involvement in the delivery process.

It is doubtful that provincial education authorities would have gone to the schools, as follow up, to establish that all curriculum materials had reached the schools. Generally, pre-distribution information and publicity were incompetently disseminated and did not reach the majority of the rural schools.

This paper asserts that the distribution and delivery were not effectively carried out and there was need for a thorough follow up on this. There was evidence of materials still sitting in warehouses and were yet to be delivered to schools. Some schools were holding on to materials that belonged to other schools. The head teacher of a school, at which the curriculum materials were delivered, had waited for a long time for the surrounding schools to pick up their materials, which were stored at his school. Other head teachers did not know about the delivery of materials.

Schools that did not receive materials did not know where the materials were. There were instances of boxes of materials delivered to the wrong schools. In a couple of schools not far from town, the curriculum materials were delivered to the school, but the teachers were not aware of the existence of these materials in their school.

The schools emphasised their preference for the familiar system of working through the Provincial Education Office, which was not used this time. Furthermore, they (schools) encouraged the use of a central place such as the Provincial Education Office for all communication, dissemination of information and distribution of curriculum materials. They did not want to create a new system of delivery, but to improve the mechanism of the existing system in order to make it more expedient and equitable.

Storage and use of curriculum materials

Most schools in the four provinces where data was collected, reported that they did not have suitable storage rooms for safe keeping of the curriculum materials. In these schools, the materials were either stored in the head teacher's office or in a section of the library. Teachers expressed concern about the safety of the curriculum materials when they were not kept in an appropriate storage room. When books had been left this way in the past, they had diminished in numbers.

Then there were cases where the materials were not used because they were kept in a place that was not convenient for teachers to have access to them. A good number of schools have yet to start using the new curriculum materials. The most common reason given was that teachers did not know how to use them and would only use them after they have been in-serviced on using the new materials.

Contract for delivery

CRIP has allocated a lot of funds for the distribution and delivery of the curriculum materials. This was a major activity, which the Department of Education admitted it had problems with in the past (NDOE, 2003). In assisting the Department of Education, CRIP had, in reality, taken over operationally and financially, the government's responsibility for the delivery of curriculum materials.

In the 2003-2004 distribution, CRIP contracted local delivery companies to collect the packed materials and deliver them directly to the schools. There was a process set for the delivery of materials but this was not always implemented. In one of the provinces, there was evidence that some curriculum materials were still sitting in containers waiting to be delivered to schools.

These were some grey areas in the processes that were employed to distribute and deliver the books to all schools. There were a lot of funds committed to ensure the success of this program even though the distribution policy emphasised its preference for a method that was 'economically viable and cost-effective' (DOE, 2003, p.5). Through its policy, the NDOE gave much consideration to rectifying a lot of the problems it encountered in past distributions.

With all the evidence shown, this effort was one more of many that have been tried before, but 'it [was] becoming more and more obvious that human beings [were] going to be affected' because careful considerations had not been given to the practicalities of the activity (*The Editor, Post Courier, November 11th, 2003, p.10*). The human beings in this case are students, the future generation of this country, who deserve better treatment. The questions asked now are: Have we learnt at all from our previous experiences? What aren't we doing right? What/Who have we left out in this program?

Perspectives on the distribution program

A number of points are worth making in regard to the distribution of curriculum materials as a nationally planned activity. The first area of consideration highlighted by this activity is the increased number of schools the NDOE has had to distribute curriculum materials to in 2003-2004. Unavoidably, the NDOE has created for itself a mammoth task to deal with, as a consequence of some of the policy decisions it has made concerning education in the country. It is committed to its policies on Education for All (EFA) and universal basic education. It aims to achieve this by increasing access, improving equity, improving retention, and simultaneously improving the quality of education in primary schools. Another of the NDOE's main concern in the education reform has to do with curriculum relevance, in order that Papua New Guineans receive an education that prepares them for life. These are assurances of a system that has a clear focus on the type of education for its citizens. Is the present reform policy right for PNG?

Even though approved, the universal education policy has not been totally accepted by members of the public as well as academics and politicians. Dame Carol Kidu, who is Minister for Welfare and Social Development in the present PNG Government, argues that 'universal primary education is not a relevant benchmark for all. It sometimes has a negative effect. It increases quantity and reduces quality' (*The National, Monday Sept 15th, 2003, p.7*). The effects alluded to by the Minister are recognised at the provincial level by education personnel, teachers and parents. These stakeholders continually remind the NDOE about difficulties faced relating to the financing of educational functions and the inadequacy of provincial authorities to provide education services accorded to the level required.

For example, a first year student training at one of the seven primary teachers' colleges reported that there were two grade 5 classes at a school where she was doing her practical teaching experience. The two teachers had to schedule their Maths classes at different times in order to have the use of the limited number of books available to them. This is a present reality when trying to make education more effective.

The universal education policy has contributed to a significant increase in enrolment by 57 percent (*The National, July 3rd, 2003*) over the last seven years. The NDOE lauds this as an important achievement towards its national goal. It is expected that enrolment will continue to increase and more schools will have to be opened. The NDOE is well aware of the consequences. From the perspective of the majority of students and parents in the remote parts of PNG, who may not have the curriculum materials to learn like those in urban schools, this is not pleasing and encouraging. The bottom line is that the Government of PNG is not financially capable of sustaining its education policies. The NDOE does not appear to have the financial capacity to fund UPE nor to effectively sustain the implementation of the reform curriculum. It is uncertain that the goals of achieving equity and quality education will ever be achieved in the time frame set.

The UPE policy has clearly impacted on the distribution and delivery through the increase in the volume of materials and cost of the delivery. It is certain that the provinces would not have the financial capacity and technical ability to provide this service after CRIP has completed its term. With implementation of UPE, more schools would be established, more students enrolled and more books and teachers would be needed. It is fair to suggest, therefore, that the risk factors involved in distributing curriculum materials would increase. There is a strong possibility that many curriculum materials would not reach the schools, particularly in the remote parts of the country. Most importantly, attempts at improving the quality of education would not be achieved within the timeframe expected if the schools continue to be under-resourced. For the education reform to achieve its goals, resources to support learning must be provided. This leads to the next subject that is of concern in the program.

The second point related to the distribution of curriculum materials concerns the NDOE's dependency on overseas donors to fund the country's education system. CRIP assisted the education department in funding the development, packaging and distribution of the curriculum materials. Millions of kina have been provided for this activity. Papua New Guineans must not accept, as a matter of convenience, our dependency on foreign aid to fund our education system.

To make a case, the NDOE has stated that in the last seven years 'the government has provided 70 percent of all funding to the education sector' (*The National*, July 3rd, 2003). At a glance it looks like the education sector is adequately financed. But if this claim is genuine, it really underlines the enormity of the task of implementing the education reform policies. When, the issue on the UPE policy was raised by the Minister for Welfare and Social Development during the June 2003 parliament sitting, the parliamentarians showed little interest in debating it (*The National*, Monday September 15th, 2003). This could be interpreted as a public declaration of not wanting to deal with an issue too big for them to solve. The other interpretation was that they lacked appropriate knowledge on the education policy.

It is proposed, therefore, that to lessen the country's dependency on outside donors for education functions, the NDOE has to take on the challenge to find alternative orientations to achieve its national education goal. This leads to the question about other methods of distribution: Has the NDOE undertaken an extensive exploration into the most economical and practicable way(s) of distributing curriculum materials?

It must be emphasised that the Government of PNG and the NDOE should not rely heavily on foreign aid, but must take full financial responsibility for the education of all Papua New Guineans. If the Government and NDOE rely heavily on outside donors, this can have adverse effects on the type of education system that is needed in PNG. What the NDOE should do is to turn inwards to locate its sources of support from within the country.

The following paragraphs will address the issue of working collaboratively with other education agencies.

The third area of concern has to do with working and sharing collaboratively with other partners in education to provide for the education of Papua New Guineans.

An examination of the process in which the distribution and delivery of curriculum materials was conducted revealed that the NDOE and the contractors operated independently of other agencies, and of the community who, if they were included, may have contributed effectively to the program. It is believed that the involvement of other core groups such as NGOs, churches, women associations, head teachers, communities and key persons in the provincial education authorities, would have made a strong positive difference in the 2003-2004 distributions. The NDOE is aware of the contributions made by these partners and has requested for continuation of this level of commitment from its partners (*The National, Monday Sept 15th, 2003*). If they were not involved this time the NDOE should think seriously about utilizing them in the future.

After more than three decades, the national education authorities should strengthen cooperation and close partnership in the delivery of education services including distribution of curriculum materials. It follows that when there is collaborative teamwork, the members realise their potential to cause things to happen for themselves. This brings about the spirit of independence instead of the long tradition of dependence.

The final point that is brought out by the program is the issue of inequitable distribution and inequitable access to education generally. The education authorities know that there has been an inadequate effort in equalising the distribution of educational resources between the urban and remote schools. The ensuing phenomenon is that the remote schools continue to be disadvantaged, while the urban schools advance further and experience growth in academic performance. Often the inequality is a result of the differences in the schools' financial capabilities. Another aspect in the inequality of the distribution is that the remote and urban schools are treated the same so that differences in their financial standing, and accessibility to learning resources and opportunities to learn are not considered. It could also be noted that the NDOE has had limited resources to cater for the education of disadvantaged groups, such as those with disabilities. Learning resources for educating the disabled have been provided by NGO's who, on many occasions, struggle without government assistance.

Some can argue that the government is doing all it can to address these areas of concern. However it can do more. The following section attempts to suggest ways of improving the methods of distributing curriculum materials and delivering education services.

The way forward: Towards satisfactory curriculum materials and education service delivery

The task of distributing curriculum materials is complex. It has not been easy to find a workable solution, and it will probably remain as it is until the final impact study by CRIP is concluded. However, in contributing to the pool of ideas towards the methods for the best-fit solution, the following suggestions are made.

For the National Department of Education to carry out its responsibility of making curriculum materials available to all schools, it is obligatory that all national and provincial education personnel who have roles and responsibilities in the distribution of curriculum materials familiarize themselves with the areas of responsibility that are clearly spelt out in policy documents.

On many occasions, curriculum materials and other education services do not reach the rural parts of the country because of the inadequacy of the education authorities to deliver. Provincial education authorities have to undertake management training to learn the skills appropriate for the delivery of education services to remote areas.

It is another of the government's challenges to control the grip of corruption in public offices. Education in PNG cannot move forward with optimism when the system is controlled by corrupt bureaucrats and school administrators. The cost of education in PNG has risen drastically and this is felt very deeply by more than 82 percent of the country's population. 'At the same time, there are some signs of rash spending which good planners and bureaucrats should not be permitting' (*Post Courier, November 11th, 2003 p.10*). This needs immediate attention.

Both the Minister for Education and Secretary for Education have called for all beneficiaries of education in the country to be involved in sharing the cost of education (*The National, Monday September 15th, 2003; Post Courier, Tuesday November 4th, 2003*). It is all very well to be asking the support of NGOs, Churches, Women Groups or Youth Groups. They too, need to gain from it and be recognised and appreciated for what they do for education. Most of them run very successful educational institutions and have very creative ideas, from which the education department can learn. The Minister for Welfare and Social Development advocates the notion of 'policy linkage' to tap into the resources, and wealth of knowledge available in the country (*The National, Monday June 30th, 2003*). This is a sensible idea, which will help to move Papua New Guinea forward independently. The government must honour its partnership in education with other partners and meaningfully involve them.

Authorities must work together with the school community. Most importantly, school communities must be allowed to have their say and be listened to. The concept of a school community refers to the head teacher and staff, Board of Management members, the agency and the parents who work together for the good of their school.

The issue of equitable distribution of curriculum materials and other learning opportunities must become one of the government's next targets in its educational concerns. Remote schools should receive proportionately more subsidies than urban schools to help them invest and expand in new and different learning opportunities.

As education authorities contemplate the future of education in the country, the goal of EFA must be inclusive of 'all' Papua New Guineans. For example, the provision of learning materials printed in Braille for students with visual impairment, learning opportunities provided for students with hearing impairment when they are taught by a teacher who is trained in sign language, and a learning environment that caters for all types of learners.

Conclusion

There has been about ten years of AusAID involvement in providing materials to schools. Large sums of money have been provided for this program. The distribution of materials remains an enormous and complex undertaking, especially when there has been a large increase in the number of students and schools since the start of the reform in 1994. Nevertheless, it is a task that must be done. In implementation, the effectiveness of the time and cost of engagement in the distribution must be evident in every school in the country.

The geographical nature of the country makes it a huge challenge to deliver educational services for formative education. The country's financial constraints create further difficulties to a program that is still looking for a best-fit solution. The country's ailing economy means that PNG maintains its dependency on foreign assistance. However, PNG must balance foreign aid received with the country's own resources.

This paper makes the point that the distribution and delivery of the curriculum materials program had failed to meet its goal. It suggests two areas of consideration which include: 1) the involvement and utilization of partners such as NGOs, churches, schools and the community; and 2) improving the old system with greater improvement of the human and physical capabilities and resources at the provincial education level.

It must be reiterated that even though this paper has focused on the issue of delivering educational services, the points raised are applicable to other government service deliveries.

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