

Challenges with the tuition fee free education policy implementation in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) Government introduced the Tuition Fee Free Education (TFFE) policy in 2012. The implementation of the TFFE policy has had some positive impact on the enrolment of school age children especially at primary level of education. Kukari (2015) reported that student enrolment increased from about 771,727 in 2012 to about 942,998 in 2013. This is an increase of 22.2%. . Kukari also pointed out that the female students enrolment increased by 41.2% while the male students enrolment increased by 32.3%. Walton, Swan and Howes (2014) also reported that there are some indication of success in quality and equity in education as a result of the implementation of the TFFE policy.

However, concerns have been raised regarding the implementation of the TFFE policy in PNG. While this policy is needed to improve basic education access for a wider PNG school-age population, its implementation has challenges. For example, the quality of education can be compromised when planning for increased enrolment is not undertaken well before implementation. Past and current media reports indicate that class sizes have increased since the introduction of the TFFE policy. This is because schools did not have the time to properly plan for and prepare well for the increase in students enrolment. Consequently many schools do not have adequate school infrastructure such as classrooms and teachers' houses, teaching and learning resources, ablution facilities, appropriate staffing and teacher professional support to cater for the increase in enrolment in elementary, primary and secondary schools.

This paper discusses how the provision of quality education can be compromised when increases in student enrolments are not properly planned for and its implications for teaching and learning support for students. It also presents literature on similar experiences faced by other countries during the implementation of their fee free education policies.

Key words: universal basic education, misappropriation, fee free education policy, school infrastructure, boards of management, financial sustainability, overcrowded classroom, quality education, access, retention, elementary schools, primary schools, secondary schools.

Goal of Universal Basic Education

Universal Basic Education (UBE) has been a focus for the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) before and after Independence. This is because UBE has and continues to be perceived as the foundation for developing PNG's human resource. Therefore, it has been accorded prominence as a development goal and included in development policies and plans. The most notable policies include the Medium Term Development Strategy 2005-2010, Papua New Guinea Vision 2050, Universal Basic Education Plan 2010-2019 and the PNG Strategic Development Plan 2010-2030. These documents provide the strategic frameworks for collective national actions to achieve the access, retention and quality outcomes of UBE (Kukari, 2012).

Some of the well-known benefits of universal basic education discussed by (Fredrikson, 2002:2) are that:

- individuals are empowered to make informed personal and social choices to improve their lives;
- it promotes gender equity;
- it improves productivity level for those who work the land;
- it provides functional literacy for individuals which is crucial for nation building;
- it builds the foundation for economic, educational, social, political, spiritual and environmental understanding and responsibilities;
- it has a positive impact on mortality, nutritional and general health levels; and
- it sustains economic growth.

Fredrikson also called attention to the fact that “historically, advances in literacy and learning through universal basic education have done more to advance human conditions than perhaps any other human policy” (Fredrikson, 2002:11).

PNG needs a sound basic education foundation for its younger generations and for developing its manpower resources so that they are on a par with the global community. Access, retention and quality are the core UBE domains that need to be addressed in the journey providing a basic education to all school aged children in PNG. The UBE targets captured in the National Strategic Plan 2010-2030 are - Net Admission Rate (70%), Retention Rate (70%), and Completion Rate (70%). These targets are to be achieved by 2030 (Kukari, 2012). The achievement of these targets is and will be challenging. However, the development and implementation of new interventions such as the TFFE policy has had an enormous influence on progress towards the achievement of the intended UBE targets, particularly access to schooling by school aged children.

TFFE policy implemented in other developing countries aims to improve access, retention and the quality of teaching and learning. The main aim of this

strategy is to ensure that most school age children, including orphans, children with disabilities and those from poor economic backgrounds, are given a chance to receive a basic education. Local PNG researchers with their international counterparts have drawn attention to the fact that parents' inability to pay for their children's school fees is one of the major hindrances to students' access to basic education (Guy, Paraide & Kippel, 2001, Paraide, Kukari, Kippel, Agigo & Irima, 2010, Fredrikson, 2002 and The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank, 2009)

Student retention at elementary, primary and secondary schools is vital in order to ensure that students master functional numeracy, literacy and life skills by the completion of basic education. Apart from inability of parents to pay for their children's school fees, other reasons for students' withdrawal from school before the completion of the basic education cycle also hinder access. Reasons often cited for children's withdrawal from school include: illness, teacher absenteeism, all forms of abuse in the home and school environments, boring lessons, long distances travel to school, hunger, security, bullying in school environments by both teachers and students, peer pressure to stay away from school, formal education not valued by parents and students, drug and alcohol abuse, family problems, child labour and weak community support (Guy, Paraide & Kippel, 2001, Paraide, Kippel, Kukari, Agigo & Irima, 2010, Paraide, 2013a & b). All these issues are interrelated and need to be addressed appropriately in order to improve students' retention at the basic level of education. This will ensure that the majority of students are able to graduate from primary and secondary school with the required levels of numeracy, literacy and life skills.

Quality teaching and learning is also vital at the basic level of education. In order to achieve quality learning, students need to attend school regularly for the full cycle of basic education to minimize gaps in their learning. Regular attendance at school may ensure that children master sufficient basic numeracy, literacy and life skills, which they can apply in their own communities if they are unable to advance to higher levels of education. Those who continue with formal education will have developed a sound knowledge base which they can build on during advanced learning. Teachers must also attend school regularly in order to support students well in their learning of basic skills. Support teaching and learning materials must also be available to all children in schools to enhance their learning. Children's health must be maintained through healthy diets to enable them to attend school regularly. School age populations who suffer from chronic hunger are susceptible to various illnesses and therefore may miss school regularly. Their health status can hinder their interest in learning and therefore they may perform poorly in school (Paraide, Kippel, Kukari, Agigo & Irima, 2010 and Paraide, 2013a & b).

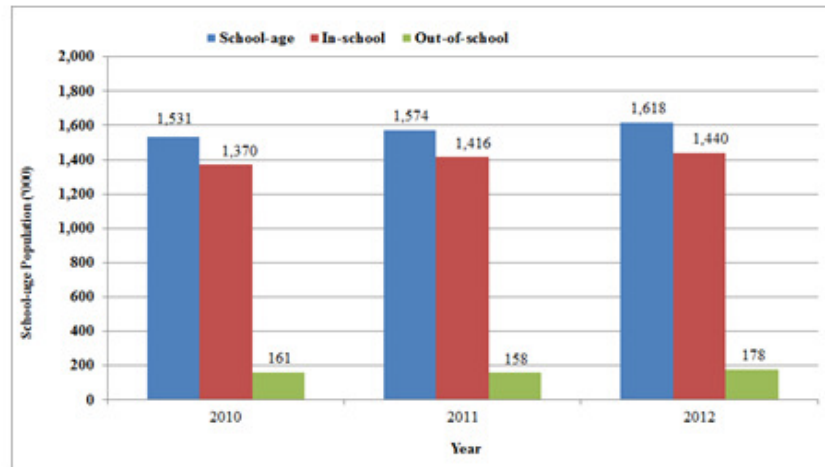
Parental and community support is vital to ensure that children are healthy and protected from all forms of abuse so that they can attend school regularly and participate well in their learning. Bullying is becoming a common problem in learning institutions which has resulted in schools fights. Students' absenteeism and eventual withdrawal from school are consequences of school ground

bullying and school fights (Paraide, 2013a & b). This hinders education access for some school-age children.

School fees - a hindrance to students' school enrolment

School fees have been identified by literature on children's access to schooling as one of the major hindrances to access and retention of students at the basic level of education as identified by the Mi Lusim Skul (2001) and follow-up retention studies (2010). The PNG Government's decision to abolish school fees at the basic education level will make an enormous contribution towards the attainment of the goal of UBE. However, for UBE to be achieved, the abolition of school fees must be implemented in coordination with other reforms targeting access, retention and quality (Carceles, Fredriksen, and Watt, 2001). Also, PNG has to be mindful of the fact that providing tuition fee-free education for all the school age children will incur great costs for the system. However, the long term benefit is that it will foster an increase in student enrollment. The greatest challenge though is student retention for the full cycle of basic education, and enrolment of the school-age population. In 2012, an estimated 178,000, which is approximately 10% of the total school-age population of 6 to 14 year olds, were still unable to access a basic education (Department of Education, 2010). This trend has been consistent for the last three years as shown in Figure 1. This information should be read with caution because the calculation was based on the 2000 National Census therefore, the information is most probably an underestimate of the school-age population who are in school, and those who are out of school.

In-school and Out-of-school-age children in Basic Education, 2010 - 2012



Source: Department of Education Statistics, 2010 - 2012.

Figure 1: In-school and out-of-school children in basic education, 2010-2012

The GoPNG took a bold stand in re-introducing the TFFE policy in 2012. A World Bank and UNICEF study (2009) found that the school fee-free policy is a key factor in the increase of enrollment rates in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique. Equally, it was important for equity and access. It also allowed more vulnerable children who were often unable to attend or complete primary school because of financial constraints to do so. The bold initiative required to abolish school fees may provide the catalyst for further educational reforms and improvements.

However, caution must prevail with the abolition of school fees, because school fee abolition cannot be viewed as a stand-alone policy. For the TFFE policy to be successful, it must be implemented in conjunction with a number of other reforms. The particular reform that is critical for fee abolition to generate positive outcomes is financial sustainability.

Financial sustainability - Economic stability and government commitment to manpower resource development in all economic climates is vital for the achievement and sustainability of quality basic education. For example, if PNG cannot sustain the provision of TFFE policy for elementary, primary and secondary schooling in all economic circumstances, the TFFE policy initiative is likely to lose its momentum. Careful financial planning is required to ensure that sufficient educational resources are available to sustain schools, even in an economic crisis.

Challenges during Implementation

Strains on existing resources can be experienced when student enrolments increase. The strain on and shortage of existing resources because of increased enrolments, as a consequence of the abolition of school fees, can have an adverse effect on the provision of quality education. Quality teaching and learning is compromised when proper planning for expansion is omitted before strategies for increased enrolment are implemented. Therefore, it is imperative that any abolition of fees must be accompanied by initiatives that specifically target and offset these losses to ensure that quality is sustained (World Bank and UNICEF, 2009:72). Quality teaching and learning at the basic level of education can ensure that students who graduate from primary and secondary school master basic numeracy, literacy and life skills, which they may use with competence when they advance to secondary school or return to their own communities. Therefore appropriate curriculum, good school leadership, continuous teachers' professional development, purchase of adequate teaching and learning resources, adequate school infrastructure, healthy children and teachers, teachers' basic needs being adequately met, teachers being appointed on merit and good community support, all contribute to the provision of quality education.

The implementation of any education policy worldwide has challenges. In Papua New Guinea, the TFFE policy became the focus in the last four years to address the access, equity and retention targets. In the PNG UBE Plan 2010-2019, it advocates for increases in the net admission rate, gross admission rate,

net enrolment rate and gross enrolment rate (Department of Education, 2010). It also advocates for increase in the retention and completion rates.

The abolition of school fees is viewed as one of the strategies to improve the enrollment and participation rates at the basic education level. School fees and other private costs of educating children are barriers for many children to access and complete primary and secondary education. They are especially burdensome where poverty forces tough choices on families who have to make tough decisions on which children to send to school, and for how long they should stay in school. The abolition of school fees allows families from low economic environments to allow their children to receive at least a basic education. This will allow them to learn the basic knowledge which they can apply to improve their lives if they do not advance to higher levels of education.

However, it is imperative that, fee-free education policies must not only take into consideration the abolition of school fees but also take into consideration the other costs for households such as project fees charged by schools, textbooks, uniforms, transportation, and school lunches. Families in lower economic environments may still not be able to provide bus fares, provide breakfast and lunch, pay for project fees and buy school uniforms for their children, and therefore might not encourage their children to receive a basic education. At the beginning of 2015, a directive was issued by the PNG Government that schools should not charge project fees anymore (Walton, 2015). While this may have removed this burden from parents, it is not certain how schools will cope with the abolishment of project fees, because such fees have sustained schools in the past especially when shortfalls were experienced by the schools.

Tuition fee-free education policies should also be embedded in a larger policy framework in collaboration with other institutions. For example, increased enrollment at the bottom end of the education scale must be catered for in tertiary institutions in terms of increased lecture rooms and accommodation, infrastructure development, teaching and learning resources, and appropriate professional support for staff. In PNG such development has not kept pace with the increase in enrollment in primary and secondary school enrollments in the last ten or more years, and this has now been compounded further by more enrollment increases, resulting from the tuition fee-free education policy implementation. This scenario has had an impact on enrollment of children in elementary, primary and secondary schools. Parents and students may not value formal education when they perceive no benefit at the end of basic education, and therefore may not be motivated to participate in basic education (Paraide, Kippel, Kukari, Agigo and Irima, 2010).

Financial sustainability

In 2004, the Government of PNG adopted the Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS) which was aimed to focus on investment in export driven economic sectors and human resource development as strategies for rural development, poverty reduction and empowerment, and in governance (Bellew, 2010). The current priority focus on human resource development is at the basic level of education.

While the abolition of schools fees is needed to support parents of low economic background, financial sustainability for TFFE policy is a critical issue which needs to be addressed by the GoPNG urgently. Sustainable strategies need to be considered carefully so that the TFFE policy is financially supported in the long term in order to achieve and maintain universal basic education at the 90 to 100% achievement level. Financial support for the TFFE policy implementation has to continue even during periods of economic crisis in order for PNG to maintain the 90 to 100% UBE achievement level.

In some countries, the implementation of the fee-free education policy resulted in increased enrolments because the financial burden of school fee expenditure was removed from poor families. This enabled children to attend formal school. However, some countries were unable to accommodate the enrolment surge because of inadequate funding resulting in severe deterioration in learning conditions, disillusionment among parents and students, and high dropout rate (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

The surge in enrolments meant needed increases in infrastructure, teachers and teacher salaries, and teaching and learning resources, which some of the African countries had not examined thoroughly before the implementation of the fee-free education policy. Past experiences have also shown that the fee-free education policy is difficult to maintain during economic crises. For example, some countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa who had reached and maintained a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) 100% during the 1965-85 period with the introduction of the fee-free education policy, GER dropped well below 100% by the mid-1990s. This is because the countries were unable to sustain the fee-free education policy when economic declines were experienced. This clearly showed that the high priority given to basic education in the 1960s and 1970s was not sustained when economic problems started in the early 1980s (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

Strong progress was made towards universal primary education (UPE) in many African countries during the 1960s and 1970s when school fees were abolished. However, what was not considered well before the implementation of such a policy was the countries' financial ability to sustain the policy long term. Therefore good progress gained in UPE achievements from earlier school fee abolition policy were weakened by lack of financial sustainability. In four of the African countries – Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, deterioration of

economic conditions, reduction in education budget and the reintroduction of school fees, resulted in the reversing of UPE gains during the earlier fee-free policy implementation (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

Papua New Guinea can learn from the Sub-Saharan Africa countries' fee-free education policy implementation and its implications on access, retention, quality at the basic level of education, and ensure that the TFFE policy must be sustained even during economic declines in order to maintain high access, retentions and quality education rates.

This can be done through additional financial support for the:

- development of additional infrastructure;
- increase in student teachers' enrolment at teachers colleges;
- increase of teacher salary allocation for additional teachers each year;
- provision of professional support for current teachers to better manage their classroom environments;
- purchase of additional teaching and learning materials;
- purchase of additional classroom furniture
- government to ensure that a policy is in place to allow financial commitment to support the implementation of the fee-free policy long term even during economic challenging periods.

Retention of students for the full cycle of basic education

Experience from Sub-Sahara Africa shows that generally more than 90% of children enter school, however, only two thirds complete the primary school cycle. Half of these children do not complete primary education. Children who drop out before the end of the primary education cycle are from poor families. Most of these children are girls, disabled and orphans (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009). Poor school retention defeats the purpose of providing a fee-free education support if children are unable to stay in school to complete basic education for various reasons.

Access to education is vastly different within countries when access is influenced by family income, geographical location, and gender. Therefore those who are denied access to basic education are the most vulnerable from an economic and social perspective. Such children are susceptible to exploitation of various forms such as child labour and the sex trade (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

Papua New Guinea can learn from the challenges of Sub-Sahara African nations and must have the political leadership and willpower to ensure that the demand and supply factors that hinder access for all school age children (boys and girls, economically advantaged and disadvantaged, rural and urban, orphans, disabled) and their school retention and quality education are addressed appropriately so that children are able to complete the full cycle of basic education.

A 2010 World Bank report showed that the youth literacy rate in Papua New Guinea was only 66.5% in 2008 and 67.5% in 2009. Youth literacy rate in this case is clarified as the percentage of people who are 15 to 24 years old who can, read and write with understanding a short, simple statement on their everyday life. This information shows that over 30% of PNG youths are not literate. The 30% of youth in this case, could be the children, who had never been to school at all or those who were regularly absent from school. Youths have to be functionally literate in order to critique social, political, economic, educational and spiritual information they may be presented with in order to apply it to their advantage. A more recent study from the 2009-2010 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (National Statistical Office 2010) shows that the youth literacy rate has improved as shown in Figure 2. The 14-25 year olds' literacy rate is 79% (male= 83 and females = 75%). The 25-50 age group is 68% (male= 75% and females = 57%). The 25-50 age group is 68% (male= 75% and females = 57%).

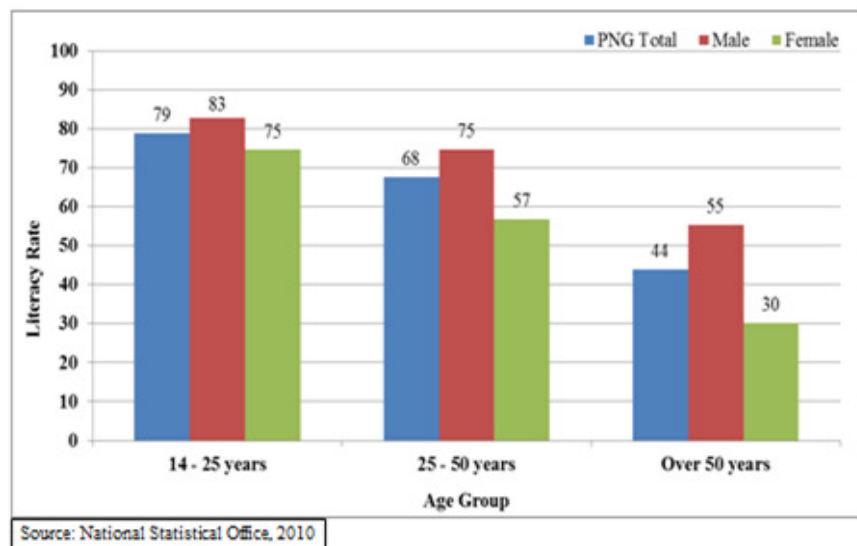


Figure 2: Papua New Guinea literacy rate by age and gender

Literacy competency for Papua New Guinea's youth can be achieved at the basic level of education if:

- education is made accessible to the majority of school age children in the rural and urban areas;
- children are healthy and protected from all forms of abuse to ensure regular school attendance;
- appropriate strategies are in place to motivate students to complete the basic education cycle;
- regular professional support for teachers is maintained at the school level;
- appropriate strategies are in place to support quality teaching at elementary, primary and secondary levels of education; and

- teachers' welfare issues are catered for appropriately by relevant authorities.

The necessity to protect quality

As stated earlier in the discussion, quality can be compromised when enrollment in schools is increased without adequate planning and preparation for additional infrastructure development, school classroom furniture, teaching and learning resources and staffing. Classroom overcrowding and shortages of teaching and learning materials, classroom furniture and staffing will be experienced, if preparations are inadequate for anticipated school enrolment increases.

For example, Zambia's education service was hit hard when the country experienced an economic crisis. As a result the primary level of education experienced difficulties in maintaining access and standards. During the economic crisis, the state could only afford the teachers' salaries and a few books. Zambia's teachers' salaries took up 77% of the education budget in 1977, 88% in 1980, and 96% in 1985 to the current period (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

Increased enrolments experienced in Zambia schools resulted in an increase in class sizes (90 or more students in one class). Multiple shifts and shortened period of contact time had to be employed to cater for the unplanned increase in student enrolments. The quality of teaching and learning also suffered because of inadequate textbooks and other learning materials, inadequate teacher in-service training, low teacher morale, physical dilapidation of classrooms, lack of professionalism and managerial experiences of head teachers (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

The education sector had to also devise other coping strategies to cater for the increase in enrolments caused by the implementation of the fee-free policy. The government encouraged private initiatives at all levels and the reliance of parental contribution to school fees. The reintroduction of parental contribution to their children's school fees had an impact on poor families because they could no longer send their children for a primary education. This resulted in the decline of the country's GER in recent years (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2009).

Papua New Guinea has to be better prepared to make the implementation of the fee-free policy successful, in order to sustain the provision of a quality basic education to the majority of school age children. The policy has to be financially supported well during economic prosperity and also during economic challenging periods. The sustainability of this policy implementation is vital to maintain a quality basic education that can promote the mastery of basic literacy, numeracy and life skills for the majority of PNG's school-age population.

PNG Government's TFFE subsidy grant policy commitment to UBE

The Government of Papua New Guinea allocated K602 million to implement the 2012 tuition fee-free education policy. The PNG funding allocation for this policy was supported by AusAID with an additional allocation of K32 million which targeted the basic level of education in Papua New Guinea. This added up to a total of K634 million for the implementation of the fee-free education policy in 2012 (Department of education, 2013). This money was held at the Department of Treasury (DoT). A trust was formulated which directed the DoT to deposit the money in a trust account with the Bank of PNG. A subsidiary account was later opened with Bank South Pacific (BSP) Port Moresby branch to facilitate payments. The Bank paid each school's portion into their schools' bank accounts. The TFFE subsidy grant was distributed to schools in two tranches. A service fee of 50t was paid to BSP for every transaction made.

In 2012 eligible schools received a tuition fee-free education subsidy grant calculated as the portion of the maximum National Education Board fee limit determined by the Education Subsidy Committee multiplied by the enrolments number. This was distributed to schools in two tranches. In the first part of 2012, elementary, primary and vocational schools received 50% while secondary schools received 67%. In the second part of the year, elementary, primary and vocational schools received 50% while secondary schools received 33% (Department of Education, 2013:1).

The distribution of TFFE subsidy grant varied according to the levels of education. The basic levels of the education sector (elementary and primary) received the highest proportion of money- 53.6% (elementary-12% and primary 41.6% = 53.6%). The secondary sector received 41% while vocational schools received 5%, national high schools 1% and others less than 1% (Department of education, 2013).

The total amount of money allocated to basic education was K135 million. The calculation for individual school's portion was based on school enrolments with K55 per child in elementary and K149 per child in primary school. Unfortunately, no geographical or economic weighting was used in the formula to calculate fee disbursements (Department of Education, 2013). Therefore remote schools received the same amount as schools in urban and more accessible schools if they had the same student enrolments.

The following tables present the allocation of total TFFE subsidy grant for each province for 2013. They present the disbursement of the first and second tranche of the tuition fee-free education subsidy grants to the provinces.

Table 1: Disbursement of first tranche of the tuition fee free subsidy grants

PROVINCIAL CODE	PROVINCE	TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOL	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS PAID	PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS PAID	TOTAL ENROLMENT	TOTAL (PGK)
51	WESTERN	323	290	90%	16,297	3,795,392.00
52	GULF	255	107	42%	11,033	2,456,719.00
53	CENTRAL	516	387	75%	66,278	11,456,553.00
54	MILNE BAY	632	580	92%	65,448	8,711,804.00
55	ORO	392	205	52%	34,119	8,227,950.00
56	SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS	1025	853	83%	139,658	20,073,993.00
57	EASTERN HIGHLANDS	683	600	88%	118,523	16,389,127.00
58	SIMBU	529	491	93%	71,639	16,250,484.00
59	WESTERN HIGHLANDS	599	549	92%	123,506	15,864,155.00
60	SANDAUN	497	400	80%	54,909	9,515,000.00
61	EAST SEPIK	704	501	71%	83,521	16,276,224.00
62	MADANG	716	573	80%	70,380	13,308,741.00
63	MOROBE	981	823	84%	134,433	24,072,346.00
64	WEST NEW BRITAIN	504	384	76%	62,056	9,268,041.00
65	EAST NEW BRITAIN	532	500	94%	63,728	12,991,655.00
66	NEW IRELAND	506	451	89%	42,399	7,395,414.00
67	AUTONOMOUS REGION OF BOUGAINVILLE	574	563	98%	68,388	11,898,087.00
68	MANUS	205	203	99%	16,723	3,534,580.00
69	NATIONAL CAPITAL DISTRICT	134	134	100%	76,013	13,484,478.00
70	ENGA	560	520	93%	87,282	14,191,553.00
71	KIUNGA LAKE MURRAY	278	136	49%	72,220	7,914,134.00
PNG TOTAL		11,145	9,250	83%	1,478,553	247,076,430.00

Source: Department of Education, 2013:7

Table 2: Disbursement of the second tranche of the tuition fee free subsidy grants

NO.	PROVINCE	TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOL	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS PAID	PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS PAID	TOTAL ENROLMENT	TOTAL (PGK)
51	WESTERN	323	126	39%	14,614	2,277,069
52	GULF	255	123	48%	17,711	2,697,037
53	CENTRAL	516	358	69%	53,411	7,755,474
54	MILNE BAY	632	548	87%	56,478	9,269,606
55	ORO	392	216	55%	35,231	5,269,722
56	SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS	1025	822	80%	163,002	19,225,674
57	EASTERN HIGHLANDS	683	604	88%	134,451	17,075,805
58	SIMBU	529	447	84%	79,818	10,493,348
59	WESTERN HIGHLANDS	599	543	91%	159,229	21,250,965
60	SANDAUN	497	326	66%	45,999	6,397,263
61	EAST SEPIK	704	430	61%	90,856	13,084,180
62	MADANG	716	501	70%	109,854	13,917,929
63	MOROBE	981	733	75%	156,859	21,549,754
64	WEST NEW BRITAIN	504	480	95%	72,575	9,279,559
65	EAST NEW BRITAIN	532	464	87%	80,996	12,849,666
66	NEW IRELAND	506	413	82%	42,462	6,013,221
67	AUTONOMOUS REGION OF BOUGAINVILLE	574	554	97%	69,606	9,233,931
68	MANUS	205	199	97%	14,430	2,225,143
69	NATIONAL CAPITAL DISTRICT	134	106	79%	115,754	11,336,345
70	ENGA	560	460	82%	101,986	11,868,932
71	KIUNGA LAKE MURRAY	278	138	50%	17,096	2,778,220
		11,145	8,591	77%	1,632,417	215,848,843

Source: Department of Education, 2013:9

The PNG Government acknowledges that the implementation of this policy will have challenges. However, beginning the process is worthy of commendation because the majority of the school age population will be given a chance to at least have a basic education. Research can inform the government and the people about the flow of TFFE funds from NDOE, to the banks and schools and how these funds are used and accounted for at the school level.

One of the greatest challenges with the fee-free education policy is that funds are generally not received by the schools on time for operational purposes. For example, in 2012, a total of K59,462,175 was allocated as the education function grant. By September 2012, only K35, 855,175 (60%) of this grant had been released (National and Economic Fiscal Commission, 2012).

Another challenge involves money being deposited into the school accounts. For example, in PNG the school fee subsidy grant was deposited into the BSP bank. The Bank then paid each school's portion into their school bank accounts. However, some schools did not have bank accounts and therefore they were encouraged to open bank accounts so that BSP could deposit their portions into them. Those who bank with other banks had their portion banked into those accounts by Bank South Pacific. Schools that had easy access to

banking facilities were able to access the school fee subsidy grant and some spent it according to their school budgets.

An additional challenge is the banking services to the remotes areas of Papua New Guinea. The schools in remote areas had difficulties in accessing their portions of the school fee subsidy grant. For example, head teachers in a remote District had to travel to National Capital or provincial capital to access their school fee subsidy grant. One head teacher visited during the second week of term four in 2012 reported that because of the possibility of being stranded in provincial capital or National Capital, she decided not to travel to National Capital to access her school's school fee subsidy grant. Four other head teachers from schools also visited in the same remote district were still away in National Capital on visits related to the access of their school fee subsidy grant. Teachers who have to travel to an urban area or station where banking facilities can be accessed spend more time and money for travel than those who have easy access to the banking facilities.

In the former school fee subsidy grant distribution strategy, bank cheques were delivered to central places in the districts. The NDoE officers travelled to these locations to deliver them to head teachers. Head teachers from remote schools had to travel in to collect these cheques from a central location. Boat, plane and PMV fares from remote schools to the district headquarters are expensive. Additionally, the former delivery strategy was costly because portions from the school fee subsidy grant covered overhead cost for NDoE officers' travel expenses. This amounted to a serious leakage in the flow of fund to the schools. Although, the current strategy of delivering the TFFE subsidy grant addresses the leakages of the previous system, it also has its own challenges.

Another challenge is the awareness on the TFFE subsidy grant to the general public. Misunderstanding occurred when the media and the school information to parents were contradictory. This was generally the result of inadequate awareness of the implementation of fee-free education policy and what was expected of the school administrations in preparation of this policy implementation.

Conclusion

The government initiative to implement the TFFE policy is worthy of commendation. It will allow school age children from families in low economic environments to receive a basic education. This may mean that the majority of the school age population are given a chance to learn basic literacy, numeracy and general knowledge which they can apply in their everyday life if they do not progress to higher education. A number of investigations done in PNG and elsewhere have found that the inability to pay children's school fees is one of the main reasons for non-enrolment in formal schooling. With the introduction of the TFFE policy, more school age children are now in school especially at the primary level of education. However, because increased enrolment had not been well prepared for by many schools especially in terms of additional classrooms, teaching and learning resources, teachers' houses, and teachers,

class sizes have been increased and in some cases, they have increased to unmanageable proportions. The provision of quality can be jeopardised in such classroom environments because teachers may be unable to give individual support when needed and students may not work to their full potential.

Additionally, to be able to achieve goals set for increased enrolment and retention, improved literacy rates and the provision of quality education by the year 2050, the TFFE policy must be financially supported by successive governments during good and poor economic environments. PNG can learn from the other countries that had not taken into account the implications of increased enrolments, and financial commitment for the continuation of TFFE support during the country's good and also poor economic times and plan appropriately to cater for such financial environments. Discontinuation of financial support for TFFE can result in a decline in school enrolment, retention and a drop in quality education that had built up during prosperous economic environment.

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