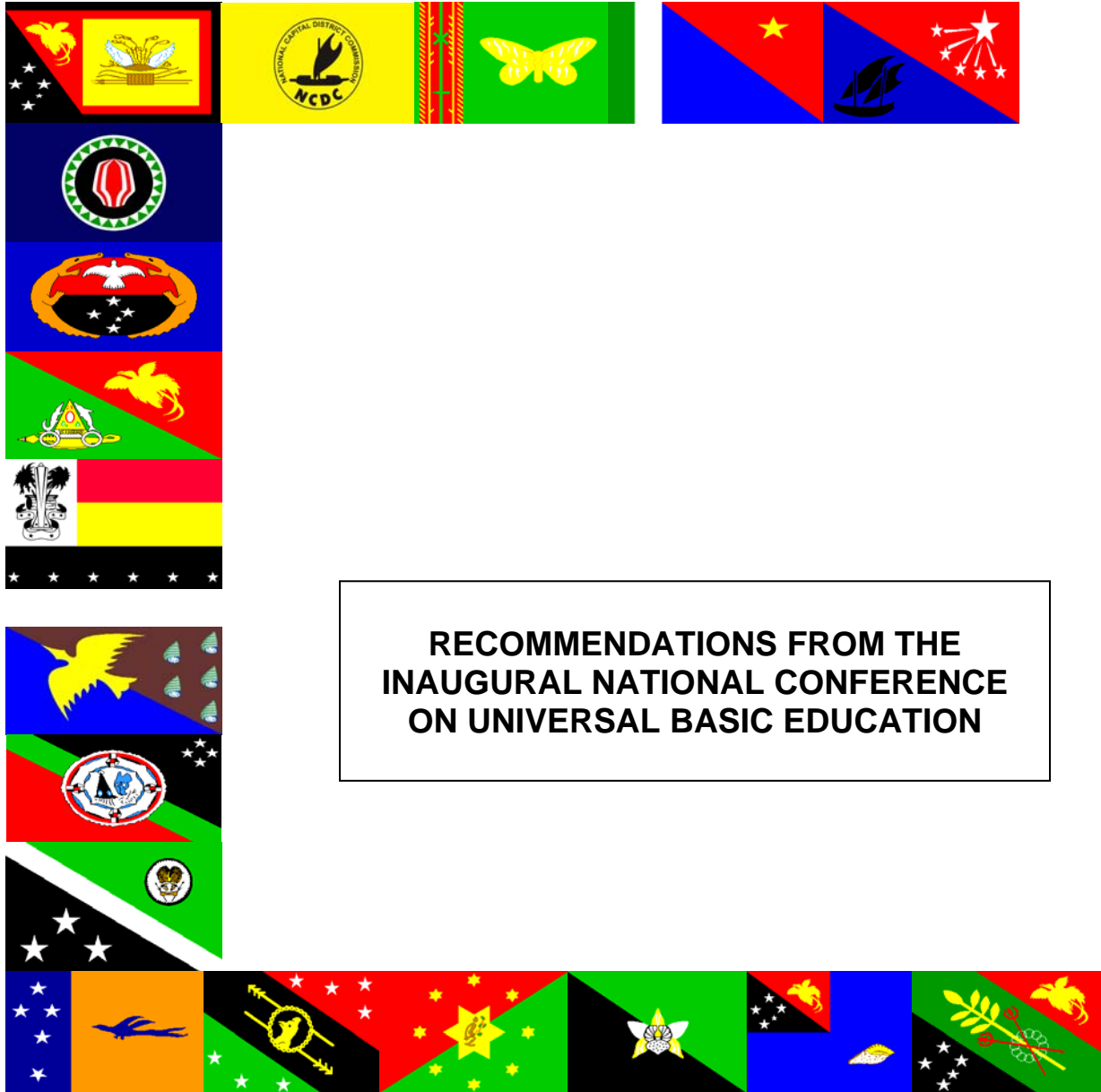


Inaugural National Conference on Universal Basic Education

Theme: *Universalizing Basic Education in Papua New Guinea: A Call for Increased Commitment and Action from All Stakeholders*



Background

The goal of Universal Basic Education (UBE) has been on the development agenda of successive governments since the colonial era. However, despite this, target dates for its achievement have been shifted over the years. In 2000, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and many other countries accepted and committed themselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), by 2015. These were adopted from the six Education For All Goals (EFAGs). These goals provide minimum development priorities for all countries committed to achieving them, by 2015. Goal No. 2 states explicitly that all countries should ensure that all children have access to free, compulsory, good quality primary education by 2015. PNG has since embraced this goal as a development priority and has included it in subsequent development policy frameworks, including the Medium Term Development Strategy, 2005-2010, the National Education Plan, 2005-2014, and more recently, the PNG Vision 2050, the Development Strategic Plan, 2010-2030, and the Medium Term Development Plan, 2011-2015. In addition, a Universal Basic Education Plan, 2010-2019 has been developed to enable PNG to fast track the achievement of the goal of UBE.

Despite all the efforts and positive progress that has been made towards its achievement since 2007, it is increasing unlikely that the goal of UBE will be achieved by the targeted year of 2015. PNG's failure to ensure universal access to basic education for all school-aged children has been attributed to, amongst other factors, the lack of implementation and fiscal capacity, poor coordination, shifting education policy and priorities, and poor governance.

Definition of Basic Education

The definition of basic education in the past tended to reflect the perceptions of different stakeholders on what population age groups should be included or excluded from receiving an education in a particular education cycle or a type of education. For example, basic education is defined as "including only the primary school cycle by those formulating the MDGs and the Education for All Goals (EFAGs)". More recently, this definition has been extended to include secondary education and early childhood education. The United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines basic education as "the first nine years of schooling". The first five or six years are often identified as primary education and the rest as lower secondary education. The definition also includes basic education for those youth and adults who did not have the opportunity to complete a full cycle of primary education. Other organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines basic education as "including early childhood education, primary education, formal and non-formal education for basic life-skills, and literacy and numeracy training".

In Papua New Guinea, UBE is defined as "elementary and primary education". In order to complete a full cycle of basic education, children must complete a full nine years of

schooling. This comprises three years of elementary education and six years of primary education. However, this will eventually include the secondary education subsector.

The Inaugural National Conference on Universal Basic Education

Given the slow progress being made towards the goal of UBE, and the obvious need to fast track its achievement, the Universal Basic Education Conference was organized to bring together all stakeholders to examine the experiences of universalizing basic education up to 2011, discuss and document the lessons learned, identify the causal factors for the poor performance to date, and collaboratively craft effective, and more importantly, innovative and sustainable strategies for enabling the fast tracking of the goal of UBE.

The Purpose of the Conference

The purpose of conference was to identify impediments to the achievement of the goal of UBE and to devise concrete and implementable strategies with clear and attainable UBE outcomes for action by all stakeholders — particularly the governments at the national and decentralized levels.

Theme and Subthemes of the Conference

The conference was organized around the theme “***Universalizing Basic Education in Papua New Guinea: A Call for Increased Commitment and Action from All Stakeholders***”. The objective was to mobilize all stakeholders and create a supportive and collaborative environment for increased commitment and action which would drive efforts towards the full attainment of the goal of UBE. To guide the participants in their deliberations on UBE, six interconnected subthemes were provided. These subthemes encompass:

Subtheme 1: What have we done and how have we done it? An examination of past Universal Basic Education strategies and initiatives, and lessons learned

A number of country-specific strategies and initiatives have been developed and implemented since 2000 to achieve the goal of universal basic education. However, despite these efforts, PNG is unlikely to fully attain the goal of UBE by the targeted year of 2015. What strategies and initiatives have been developed and implemented? What can we learn from these efforts and how can we make measurable — and real — progress towards the goal of UBE?

Subtheme 2: Where do we go from here and how do we get there? Innovative and sustainable approaches to delivering Universal Basic Education in PNG

Previous approaches to universalizing basic education have not delivered the desired learning outcomes. If any progress has been made, it has been minimal and insufficient for PNG to fully attain the goal of UBE. What kinds of approaches, relationships, and arrangements will enable Papua New Guinea to fast track the achievement of the goal of UBE?

Subtheme 3: How do we know if we are making progress and if we have achieved the goal of UBE? Measuring progress towards the goal of Universal Basic Education

Research, monitoring, and evaluation of progress towards the attainment of the goal of UBE are a crucial part of the process towards the attainment of UBE. However, these processes have not been given prominence, despite the critical role that they play in the making of effective decisions, developing effective policy responses, and in planning. Effective policies with achievable outcomes are driven and informed by evidence which is generated from research, monitoring, and evaluation. How can we ensure that research, monitoring, and evaluation become focal points of the UBE agenda?

Subtheme 4: Relevant and quality Universal Basic Education

Once they have been enrolled, children are entitled to receive a relevant and quality basic education. However, this continues to be a major challenge for the education system. What are the barriers to quality student learning outcomes? What strategies promote the quality of student learning outcomes and how can these be institutionalized to ensure quality education for all?

Subtheme 5: Equity and access: Providing an inclusive Universal Basic Education

The inclusion and mainstreaming of vulnerable and orphaned children, children with special education needs, children living in poverty, and children involved in child labour into the main stream education system is necessary, if the goal of Universal Basic Education is to be fully attained. How can we ensure equality of access and the participation of these children in our education system?

Subtheme 6: The bottom line: Financing of Universal Basic Education

The lack of fiscal capacity has often been cited as one of the constraints in the pursuit and attainment of the goal of UBE. What funding arrangements, partnerships, and commitments should be put in place to ensure that all school-aged children have access to, and receive, good quality education, regardless of their backgrounds?

Gaps and Factors Contributing to Slow Progress Towards the Goal of UBE

Paper presentations and deliberations over the three days of the conference identified a number of critical gaps and factors that have contributed towards the slow progress being made to universalize basic education in PNG. These relate to access, retention, and the quality of learning. Specifically these include:

- poor education coverage, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach communities;
- limited absorptive capacity of the basic education subsector to admit all children who are of official enrolment age;
- inadequate supply of the required number of teachers to meet teacher needs in the basic education subsector;
- teachers inadequately trained and unable to effectively teach, monitor, and assess the teaching of the curriculum;
- poor support for teachers' professional learning;
- limited opportunities for active and meaningful participation by all stakeholders, particularly the church agencies for education policy development and planning;
- poor achievement in literacy and numeracy;
- lack of emphasis on early childhood education, and acknowledgement of its importance for the intellectual and social development of children — particularly in the formative years;
- inadequate time allocation given to the teaching of religious and moral education in schools;
- inadequate attention and in-kind and financial support given to children with disabilities, children affected by HIV& AIDS, natural disasters, conflict, children living in poverty, children in child labour, and girls; and
- lack of an effective Inclusive Education Policy.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations were made by the conference participants to address the gaps and the causal factors that were identified, as a way to fast track the achievement of the goal of UBE. These are categorized according to the three pillars of basic education; that is, access, retention, and the quality of learning. Some of the recommendations are cross-cutting and should be considered for implementation, particularly where the impact is greatest or where there is likely to be a multiple impact.

Increasing Access to Basic Education

In 2010, some 80 percent of six-year-olds in PNG did not have access to basic education. The majority of these children were girls who may have had some kind of a disability, were affected by HIV&AIDS, broken homes, lived in remote and hard-to-reach locations, lived in poverty, were affected by child labour, or were affected by conflict and natural disasters.

All children have a right to an education regardless of their backgrounds. The Government of Papua New Guinea is obligated under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 148, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, as well as the *Constitution* of Papua New Guinea to ensure that all children receive an education without discrimination on any grounds.

Recommendation 1

That the Minister for Education establishes a National UBE Taskforce to oversee the implementation and systematic monitoring of the UBE Plan and recommendations arising from the inaugural UBE conference.

Recommendation 2

That the National UBE Taskforce ensures that there is effective coordination amongst all stakeholders in the implementation of the UBE Plan and the recommendations arising from the inaugural national UBE conference.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Papua New Guinea (GOPNG) takes immediate steps to make basic education free and compulsory for all school-aged children.

Recommendation 4

That the national Department of Education (DOE), in collaboration and partnership with all relevant stakeholders, including church education agencies, provincial divisions of education, the business community, and development partners takes immediate steps to provide increased educational opportunities for all school-aged children by building more schools or utilizing existing schools and community facilities, particularly to educate six-year-old children, in districts and local-level government areas where there is limited or no education coverage.

Recommendation 5

That the national DOE initiates and fosters a dialogue with all stakeholders, particularly the church education agencies, teacher education providers, universities and development partners to develop ways and strategies of educating and training the required number of teachers to teach in the basic education subsector.

Recommendation 6

That the national DOE in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, explores the viability and educational value of using alternative ways of teaching and learning, including the use of customized computer software, prerecorded teaching lessons, mobile phones, television and radio, in one-teacher schools, or in schools where it is difficult to deploy teachers.

Recommendation 7

That the national DOE, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, implements an effective Inclusive Education Policy.

Recommendation 8

That the national DOE, in consultation with key stakeholders, takes the necessary steps to strengthen and fast track the mainstreaming of special education into the education system.

Recommendation 9

That the GOPNG, through the national DOE and the Department for Community Development, takes the necessary steps to include Early Childhood Education as an integral component of basic education, and supports it with appropriate resources.

Recommendation 10

That the GOPNG, through the national DOE, formally recognises and encourages the value of parental and community best practices in early childhood learning and incorporates these into formal early childhood programs.

Recommendation 11

That the national DOE implements its policy on HIV and AIDS to create a safe and conducive environment for those teachers and students who are affected by HIV and AIDS.

Increasing Student Retention

Student retention rates have not improved significantly over the years. Ideally, all children who are admitted to Elementary Prep should remain in school and complete a full cycle of basic education. However, the reality is that many children drop out of school before they can complete Grade 8. There are many contributing factors to this situation, including the high costs of education, boredom, hunger and food shortage in the home, cultural and parental expectations and obligations, and a lack of interest in schooling. It is important that appropriate action is taken to ensure that all children are

given an equal opportunity to stay in school and continue to complete nine years of basic education.

Recommendation 12

That the GOPNG accelerates its payment of the school fee component to cover all grades, from Elementary Prep to Grade 8, by 2015.

Recommendation 13

That the GOPNG, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, examines alternatives for funding the school fee component of basic education, including the establishment of a scholarship scheme for Equity and Merit Scholarship awards.

Improving the Quality of Learning

Anecdotal evidence and records of pass marks obtained from students' Basic Education Certificates seem to suggest that the quality of student learning has not reached the desired levels. There is also evidence that the quality of student learning is being compromised as a result of cheating by some students, inadequate teacher education and training, inadequate support for teachers' professional development or lack of foresight in developing and implementing an effective student assessment policy at the basic education level. These factors, amongst many others, affect the quality of student learning outcomes. It is imperative that the factors contributing to poor student learning outcomes are effectively addressed to enable quality teaching and learning.

Recommendation 14

That the national DOE, the Teaching Service Commission, and the Papua New Guinea Teachers' Association, in collaboration and partnership with teacher education providers, devise and implement teacher education standards, including the required levels of competency for the education and training of teachers in the national education system.

Recommendation 15

That the national DOE explores the possibility of expanding Action Research into other provinces and districts and takes necessary action to institutionalize it as a teacher professional learning model.

Recommendation 16

That the national DOE explores the possibility of increasing access for Grade 11 and Grade 12 students to other institutions while converting four of the existing national high school institutions into teacher training institutions to increase the number of qualified elementary and primary teachers, and therefore address ongoing constraints in the supply of teachers at the basic education level.

Recommendation 17

That the national DOE takes immediate steps to safeguard the examination process, handling, and all related matters to ensure the integrity of examinations, and restores the confidence of the public in the value of school examinations.

Recommendation 18

That the national DOE develops and implements an assessment policy framework in line with that of lower secondary and upper secondary schools at the basic education level. The Grade 8 assessment for selection to Grade 9 must comprise 70 percent internal assessment and 30 percent from external assessment through a final examination.

Recommendation 19

That the national DOE, in consultation with the church education agencies, consider and devise options for increasing the number of periods allocated for the teaching of religious and moral education in elementary, community, primary, and secondary schools.

Recommendation 20

That the national DOE and the provincial divisions of education develop and put in place a policy requiring schools to spend a specific proportion of their school budgets on the procurement of reading materials, including books, that are relevant to the needs of the schools.

Recommendation 21

That a participatory partnership be developed for the development of a Community Education Certificate, which is attained through open learning, as a way to encourage a learning society that achieves inclusive education.

Recommendation 22

That mainstream school standard officers and the special education standard officers have a consensus on a common inspection checklist that will determine how they will monitor and evaluate the implementation of inclusive education.

Recommendation 23

That the national DOE, in collaboration with stakeholders, including church education agencies, NGOs, and other sectors, create awareness and workshops on self-respect and respect for others among both genders so that mutual respect for individuals is established and normalised among Papua New Guineans.

Recommendation 24

That the GOPNG through the national DOE allocates one standard officer to every four primary schools in order to improve the current ratio of inspectors to primary schools.

Recommendation 25

That the national DOE, in consultation with provincial governments, increases district teacher staffing, and logistical and administrative support.

Recommendation 26

That the national DOE increases the length of a Primary Teacher's Diploma Education Program from two years to three years to improve the quality of primary education teaching.

Financing of Basic Education

The achievement of the desired access, retention, and quality of learning outcomes in UBE is not entirely dependent on adequate levels of funding. Most importantly, its achievement requires the effective spending of funds on goods and services that directly support and contribute to increasing access, retention, and the quality of teaching and learning. While the increased level of funding from the national budget towards education is acknowledged, there are serious concerns about the process and how efficiently these funds are being released. Issues of concern include school fee subsidies and the lack of transparency and accountability in the management, disbursement, and acquittal of such funds.

Recommendation 27

That the national DOE, the Department of National Planning and Monitoring, the Department of Finance, and the Department of Treasury work together to develop and put in place financial procedures to enable funds which are earmarked for school subsidies to be released at the beginning of the school year.

Recommendation 28

That the national DOE carries out a financial analysis on the cost of implementing UBE and mobilizes support from the Government and development partners to allocate appropriate funding to increase access, retention, and the quality of education.

Recommendation 29

That the national DOE, in collaboration with the National Economic and Fiscal Commission, determines and enforces, by way of legislation, a specified proportion of provincial and district budgets to be appropriated for the delivery of basic education.

Recommendation 30

That the GOPNG, through the national DOE, conducts a review to improve the terms and conditions of elementary and primary school teachers in order to retain them.

Recommendation 31

That the GOPNG monitors and evaluates the administration of Educational District Functional Grants to determine how they are being used, and that fundraising involving students, which is conducted in schools for the purchase of school infrastructure, is also monitored.

Delivering Basic Education through Partnerships

The achievement of the goal of UBE will require a comprehensive, multi-level stakeholder approach. Without this, it will be impossible to attain full UBE, by 2015. It is incumbent on the national DOE to enter into partnerships with different stakeholders and providers of basic education, and most importantly, to be committed to these partnerships and ensure that partners are actively and meaningfully involved in educational policy development, and the planning and development of practical strategies for the delivery of basic education.

Recommendation 32

That the national DOE strengthens its partnership with different stakeholders, including church education agencies and special education service providers, and actively and meaningfully involves them in education policy development and planning and other matters of interest that are relevant to the delivery of basic education.

Recommendation 33

That church education agencies, as key providers of education, be supported with adequate resources, including financial resources, to better support the achievement of the goal of UBE.

Recommendation 34

That a participatory partnership be encouraged for the development of a Community Education Certificate, which is attained through open learning, as a way of achieving inclusive education and the goal of UBE.

Recommendation 35

That the national DOE in collaboration with other stakeholders, plans and implements workshops concerning educating both male and female leaders on the strengths and weaknesses of both genders, nationally, beginning with the national leaders.

Recommendation 36

That the GOPNG, through the provincial governments, assesses the possibility of establishing primary school teachers' colleges in provinces that are willing to provide land for such development.

Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation

To ensure that the goal of UBE is achieved in a timely manner, the development and implementation of enabling policies and plans must be informed by research-based evidence. The effective use of research-based evidence in policy and practice can help policy makers and planners identify problems, understand their causes, develop effective policy responses, improve policy implementation, and monitor existing strategies and performance. The sustainable and effective use of research-based evidence can lead to improved policy and practice, and subsequently to the full attainment of the goal of UBE.

Recommendation 37

That the National Research Institute, in collaboration with Callan Services and other research institutions, conducts research into effective learning interventions for children with disabilities, as a means of increasing inclusive education in PNG.

Recommendation 38

That the GOPNG provides adequate levels of funding, on an annual basis, to enable the National Research Institute to carry out research on various issues relating to the achievement of the goal of UBE.

Recommendation 39

That the national DOE, in consultation with the provincial education divisions, develops and puts in place a Provincial Education Management and Information System for collecting, managing, analyzing, and reporting data in each province so that performance and progress towards the achievement of the goal of UBE can be measured provincially.

Recommendation 40

That the national DOE disseminates the DevInfo software to the provinces and builds up their capacity on the use of that software for monitoring progress on various education indicators so that the data can be used for planning and improvement purposes.

Recommendation 41

That the National Research Institute assists the Ministry for Community Development to conduct research through integrated partnerships into Interactive Mobile Learning which will include learning modules for safe motherhood, women, nutrition for families, and gardening, as a way forward for Education For All (EFA) and the achievement of the goal of UBE.