



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**THE INAUGURAL NATIONAL UNIVERSAL  
BASIC EDUCATION CONFERENCE**

*Keynote Address and Official Opening*

*by*

**HONOURABLE. JAMES MARAPE MP**

**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION**

*DELIVERED BY*  
**HONOURABLE. DAVID ARORE, MP**  
*VICE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION*

*National Research Institute, Port Moresby*  
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## **SALUTATION**

- Lady Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development
- Dr. Thomas Webster, Director, National Research Institute
- Dr. Joseph Pagelio, Acting Secretary for Education
- Dr. Musawe Sinebare, Deputy Director, Research and Coordination, NRI
- Dr. Arnold Kukari, Senior Research Fellow, NRI
- Dr. Patricia Paraide, Senior Research Fellow, NRI
- Presenters and facilitators
- Invited Guests
- Ladies and gentlemen

## **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning everyone.

Before I continue I would like to convey Minister for Education, Honourable James Marape's sincere apologies for not being here to give the keynote address and officially open this Conference. He had a very important matter to attend to in his electorate and has asked me to deliver his keynote address.

I would like to thank the National Research Institute (NRI) for initiating this very important Conference. I also thank the NRI for giving me the opportunity to talk about Universal Basic Education which is a Millennium Development Goal that Papua New Guinea is a party to.

I commend the leadership of Dr Thomas Webster. This Conference portrays the excellent leadership and work being done by the Institute to assist the Government make informed decisions through research and analysis of various public policies and development-related issues and trends. The wider Papua New Guinea society also benefits through greater understanding and awareness of development issues that affect their lives thanks to the various research and analysis activities by the Institute.

As the Minister responsible for Education, I appreciate all the assistance from our stakeholders in implementing the Universal Basic Plan 2010 – 2019 which is the focus of this Conference.

## **VISION 2050 AND INTENTIONS OF GOVERNMENT**

The Government's Vision 2050 Plan is a long-term strategic document that maps out the future direction for our country and reflects the aspirations of the people of Papua New Guinea.

Under the vision 2050 the Government believes it can empower the people of this country with the right education and life skills and provide them with the opportunity to earn an honest living. The first of the statements relating to education in Vision 2050 calls for ***'Free and universal basic education for all school age children from prep to Grade 12'***. This is of course an extremely ambitious target and one that may not even seem to be a desirable one as we stand here in 2011.

We still have a lot of work to do for education in the country. We need to focus on improving infrastructure like classrooms, and houses in order to support inspectors' and teachers' in the districts to carry out their professional tasks.

In education, the objective of the government is to provide access to relevant quality education and training to support our social and economic development for our country.

Therefore the objective of the education system must be that all initiatives and interventions result in every citizen of Papua New Guinea being peaceful, productive and self reliant and having a positive outlook for life and living.

### **UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

I know that most of us are familiar with what universal basic education is all about however, let me share briefly with you some historical information to show where we have come from before Independence.

The Papua New Guinea Education System has been through several reforms since the 1940's and up until 1971, various churches and missions independently operated schools and educational institutions.

Over the years these groups joined together as part of the National Unified Education System. Bringing together both government and church agency schools has led to the increase in the number of enrolled students, number of teachers and educational institutions in the country.

The Department of Education is committed to achieving Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). PNG is also proud to have been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 and recognizes that education is a right for all children in the country.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is defined in the PNG context as education, which begins from the elementary preparatory class (and should include children starting at age 6) and through Grade 1 all the way to Grade 8. As part of UBE, all school-aged children should participate in and complete basic education with a 100% net enrolment rate (age specific for each class level they attend).

UBE is a key indicator for achieving EFA and PNG is now focusing on improving both enrolment (access) and retention as these are comparatively lower than other countries with similar socio-economic standings.

Consistent with EFA Goals, PNG aims to provide the opportunity for all children to complete nine years of basic education and the current National Education Plan (NEP) 2005 – 2014 outlines a number of strategies designed to improve upon and realize this goal. The plan also places particular emphasis on Provincial and District level Education Plans.

A review of literature and other research conducted both in country and in other locations, highlights three key issues related to challenges in primary education. These include low enrolment rates, limited retention of students and poor quality of learning (or engagement) in schools which are being addressed.

The Papua New Guinea Universal Basic Education Plan 2010 - 2019 outlines and includes perspectives, goals and strategies proposed by the government to address the increasing number of school aged children who are either not in school or leaving the educational system prior to completing nine years of basic education. Development of a specific plan on UBE was intended to serve a number of purposes:

- To highlight the current situation and numbers of children enrolled in school (also highlighting gaps) and whether or not they complete nine years of basic education;
- What may happen within the country if these issues are not improved;
- Strategies the government plans to use in order to address these issues; and,
- To guide provincial administrations in preparing programs and plans based on local contexts.

The UBE plan is linked to and complements a number of other existing education plans and policies that the government has endorsed either formally or supports on an informal basis with regard to basic education including the National Plan for Education (2005 -2014), the Gender Equality in Education Policy (2003), Medium Term Development Strategy, and national goals and directive principles related to the Millennium Development Goals.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION**

The goal of UBE has been on the development agenda of successive governments since the colonial era yet the target dates for its achievement have been shifted over the years.

The current National Alliance (NA) led Government has however been serious and vocal about universal basic education. It issued a National Executive Council (NEC) Decision No: 197/06 that foreshadowed long term planning and financial implications hence it directed the Department of Education to consider the effects that might arise from the policy.

This prompted the need for the formulation of a Universal Basic Education Plan. Work on the formulation of the plan began in late 2006 with the formation of a Taskforce and a Technical Working Committee chaired respectively by Dr. Joseph Pagelio and Dr. Thomas Webster (Director for NRI). The plan was finalised and approved by Cabinet in September 2009 and officially launched in October of the same year.

The implementation of the UBE Plan 2010-2019 began in 2010 with the introduction of Fee Free education for the elementary sector.

The successful implementation of UBE depends on the cooperation and participation from all stakeholders which include the different levels of government, community, parents, churches, non-government organizations, private sector and donor agencies.

The Ministry of Education maintains a very good relationship with all of our stakeholders. We have been continuously working at and finding ways to strengthen the partnerships we currently have with our stakeholders.

The Universal Basic Education Plan, which was approved by the National Executive Council in 2009, is being supported by Australia and the other development partners, who have endorsed the plan and committed to continuing provision of financial and technical assistance.

I would like to inform this forum that Papua New Guinea has made strong progress in recent years towards the achievement of UBE. This is particularly true in terms of increased enrolment and retention. It is more difficult to effectively measure the quality of education, specifically learning achievement but there are indications that there has not been a deterioration of learning achievement which can come about with increases of enrolment.

The equitable provision of education has continued to be elusive with little change in the percentage of girls enrolled. Finally, there has been some improvement in the management capacity in the education system particularly at the national and school levels.

### ***Access***

Access to education has improved significantly over the last years. Admission rates have been increasing steadily over the past few years. The net admission rate (NAR) has increased every year since 2006, both for boys and girls, from a total of 11.5% in 2007 to 34.1% in 2010. Similarly, the net enrolment rate (NER) has also been increasing steadily from 52.9% in 2007 to more than 70% in 2010. The increase in enrolment has meant that in 2009, there

were 1,459,118 students in elementary and primary schools compared to 973,822 in 2006, or an average increase of 10.7% per year. This increase can be attributed to the successful expansion of elementary education, the introduction of fee free education at the elementary level in 2010 and a greater awareness of the importance of education.

### ***Retention***

Retention has also steadily increased over the last years. The DoE has worked towards ensuring that the children stay in school. There are many factors which impact on retaining pupils. One is the size of the class. The DoE has set a target of a maximum class size of 45 for elementary and primary schools.

In 2007, 8% of the classes had more than 45 pupils, mainly in the urban areas. There have been successes in increasing the number of pupils who complete the full cycle of basic education. 45.3% of enrolled students completed grade 8 in 2007 while this went up to 57.5% in 2010. This represents an average yearly increase of 5.8%. This has already exceeded the 2015 target for the completion rate. Also during this corresponding period the average transition rate into the secondary level was 59%. These national figures on enrolment and retention hide important discrepancies between and within provinces and they are still relatively weak compared to other developing countries and education sector targets.

### ***Quality***

It is difficult at present to measure learning achievement. PNG is using the Curriculum Standards Monitoring Test for this purpose but the latest reports are still being finalised. However, preliminary results show that over half of the grade 7 pupils have writing and reading skills below the required level.

The pupil:teacher ratio and the qualifications of the teachers are often used to determine the quality of learning taking place in the classrooms. PNG has had consistently low pupil:teacher ratios over the last years. This can be attributed to the large increase in enrolment in 2010.

Another indicator is the quantity and quality of educational materials in the schools. At present there is no data on the number of materials available but from 2010 the annual school census will also gather data on textbooks. This will be reflected as a textbook: pupil ratio. The DoE has set a target for 2015 of one textbook for every four pupils for elementary schools, one to two for primary schools and one to one for secondary.

### ***Equity***

Despite the overall increase in enrolment and better retention, girls still face more barriers to education and the gap between girls' and boys' participation has not narrowed. For example, girls continue to be less likely to complete grade 8 than boys with no significant change made in the gender index for completion rates. There are also fewer female students who continue on to secondary and tertiary sectors. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) has remained relatively constant at 0.91 at the national level over the last three years. The target for GPI is 1, meaning that the enrolments rates for girls are equal to that of the boys.

The situation is better in elementary education with a GPI of 0.96 in 2010. Certain provinces are more affected by a lack of gender equity and the situation becomes of greater significance in secondary and tertiary education.

### ***Management***

The management of education continued to improve in 2010. The DoE implemented its 2010 Annual Operational and Financial Plan (AOFPP) with regular Quarterly Budget Reviews (QBRs) in which all the DoE divisions reported on activity progress. This is a significant improvement from previous years when QBRs sometimes didn't occur or not well attended.

The DoE produced a draft Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for the National Education System, showing total needs for the three coming years, projected sources and levels of funding, and the remaining financial gap. The four Technical Working Groups, established jointly by the DoE and donors in 2009, continued to progress their work in 2010 in the areas of planning, financial management, procurement, joint institutional framework and performance assessment framework.

## **CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION**

Now I would like to highlight some of the important challenges that impede the successful achievement of UBE if we do not address them.

### ***Attrition rate of teachers***

We do not have enough number of teachers graduating each year to teach the students. The numbers of graduates each year are simply filling in the vacancies left by teachers who have left the system for various reasons.

### ***Infrastructure***

The Department of Education lacks the capacity to build infrastructure on a timely basis to cater for the growing number of enrolments.

### ***Quality of education***

The quality of education at the primary level leaves a lot to be desired. The expected outcome at this level is that the student must be able to read, write and speak confidently and have acquired some skills to be able to make a living at the end of grade 8. This depends on the level of the teacher to adequately prepare the students.

### ***Decentralised functions***

National and provincial government priorities on spending on education are different. Many provinces have different priorities that are not consistent with national government priorities. As a result less is being spent on education which affects access, retention, quality, equity and management of education in provinces. You will have noticed in the media lately which provinces are heavily investing in education for their people.

### ***Collaboration between stakeholders***

The current partnerships with our stakeholders must be strengthened far more than what it is now. We cannot achieve UBE and other government policies alone. We need the support of all our stakeholders.

## **WAY FORWARD**

We have a well thought out Universal Basic Education Plan 2010-2019 focusing on improving access, retention, quality, equality and management. In order to achieve the objectives of UBE Plan, all our stakeholders are encouraged to continue to work together.

On this note, I would like to appeal to our stakeholders including the different levels of government, community, donor partners, churches, NGOs and not forgetting the teachers and parents to continue to support us in our efforts to implement the UBE Plan.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, I would like to thank the NRI for organising this inaugural conference on UBE. This conference will go along way in helping us to implement the UBE Plan successfully. I also thank all the presenters who will present their ideas on how we can best achieve UBE in Papua New Guinea.

With these remarks, I wish you all a successful three-day conference and I look forward to receiving the recommendations from this workshop.

With that I now declare the National Inaugural Conference on UBE officially open.

Thank you.

**HONOURABLE JAMES MARAPE, MP**  
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION