TFF budget cut would have adverse impact on basic education

By Jeremy Goro, Research Fellow, Universal Basic Education Research Program

One of the main aims of a Tuition Fee Free (TFF) is to increase the literacy rate of a country, which is one of the development indicators. However, the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) reduced the TFF budget by almost thirty-seven percent.

The TFF budget cut has the potential to reduce school access and retention rates especially for girls. This will certainly diminish PNG’s literacy rate. The budget cut means that, parents whose children are in the public school would pay almost thirty-seven percent of the total value of their children’s school fees.

Parents, especially those that belong to the low-income group that are struggling to make ends meet would be hit harder. Some of them may not be able to afford the school fee, which means that they would not enrol their children in school, whereas others may withdraw some of their children from school.

If the TFF fund has been mismanaged by some government officials as claimed by GoPNG, it is the responsibility of the Government to provide an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to tackle the problem.

Achievement of the TFF policy

Some notable achievements of TFF in PNG are the following:

- The implementation of TFF resulted in an increase in enrolment rates of school aged children in basic education.
- The TFF resulted in a reduction in number of children that drop out from basic education.
- TFF provided opportunity for an increase in the enrolment of girls in schools and it helped them to complete basic education.
- The increase in school enrolment and retention rates as a result of TFF has the potential to increase PNG’s literacy rate, which contributes to human development.

Potential impact of TFF budget cut

The potential impacts of the TFF Budget cut include the following:

- A reduction in school enrolment rate. Some parents may not be able to pay school fee for all their school aged children. Thus, they might consider enrolling some children in school
whereas others might be asked to engage in other activities such as agriculture or household chores.

- A decrease in school retention rate. Some parents who have several children in the school might find it difficult to pay school fee for all their children and might consider withdrawing some of the children from the school.

- A reduction in school enrolment and retention rates for girls. Most parents in PNG especially those in rural areas prefer to enrol the boy child than girl in school. Thus, TFF budget cut might hit the girl child harder.

- Potential decrease in human capital development. A reduction in school enrolment and retention rates has the potential to reduce the number of students that make it to colleges and universities. This could have adverse impacts on manpower development in the country.

- Reduction in literacy rate. PNG has one of the lowest literacy rates (about 65 percent) in the Oceania continent. The reduction in the TFF budget might result in a reduction in the country’s literacy rate.

- Paying fees will create barrier for children whose parents are unemployed and those living in the rural areas where there is little economic activities to generate income. This might create a situation where basic education is a luxury for the poor.

Potential strategy to manage TFF budget cut

If intention of GoPNG is to improve accessibility to basic education, improve literacy rate and human development in PNG, it should consider the following:

- Review the current TFF budget cut.

- If there is a need for budget cut on TFF, the implementation should be gradual. 2020 should be used to inform parents about the plan. Implementation should in instalments such as 10 percent in 2021; 12 percent cut in 2022 and 15 percent cut in 2023.

- Effective and efficient mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of TFF should be established.

Conclusion

TFF has contributed toward increasing school enrolment and retention rates for school aged children in PNG. However, an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be provided to tackle the incidence of mismanagement of TFF fund. More facilities and teachers should be provided to improve quality of education under the TFF. In general, TFF is good for PNG’s economy, the main problem is associated with its implementation.
LINK: https://pngnri.org/index.php/blog/157-tff-budget-cut-would-have-adverse-impact-on-basic-education