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WHO PAYS FOR WHAT UNDER THE TUITION-FEE-FREE EDUCATION?

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Key Points

- It should be noted that education is the responsibility of governments at various administrative levels, development partners, communities and parents.
- While the Government contributes to the children's education through the tuition-fee-free education, education cannot be free of cost.
- In practice, parents finance their children's education through payments (indirect costs) made outside of schools for items such as project fees, uniforms, lunch, transportation, sports equipment and other expenses.
- The responsibility of the Government to make education free means that the Government has eliminated financial barriers from parents in order to ensure all children, regardless of their situations, must complete their education.

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By Peter Magury

Introduction

The introduction of the Tuition-Fee-Free Education (TFFE) shows some misunderstandings by many parents in Papua New Guinea (PNG). For many, they think that when the Government introduced the TFFE, it pays for all the requirements for educating a child while parents are excluded from their responsibilities. This statement is partly true because under the TFFE, the Government funds the tuition fees while parents take care of many outside fees or indirect costs ranging from project fees, textbooks and stationery, uniforms, lunch, transportation and other school-base activity fees. TFFE is consistent with the Government's view that education must be a shared responsibility between governments at various administrative levels, communities and parents.

The birth of 'free' education policy in PNG

According to Ivarature (1995), the costs of running schools began to come out very clear as an issue which requires major policy shift in the early 1980s. This is due to the fact that more children were enrolled in schools and the demand for parents to enrol their children increases. In the early days, parents were required to pay two fees. These were the school fee and trust account fees of K1.50 per year to buy basic classroom materials and a School Board of Management fee to fund the administration of the school (Bray, 1983).

In support of the policy review (Ivarature, 1995), it was reported that the Late Mahuru Rarua former Member for Port Moresby North West moved a motion in parliament in 1981 that says; "education be made **compulsory** for all the children of PNG origin who reach the age of six at the commencement of 1982 primary or community school year and to continue studies up to Grade 10".

This motion gain a lot of support from the Members of Parliament because they were convinced that education is a constitutional right in which access to education has to be expanded for all Papua New Guineans (Ivarature, 1995). Consequently, there was a long debate over the wording of the motion. After a long debate, the full

motion was eventually passed in 1982. But the word '**compulsory**' was replaced with the word '**free**'. This was the birth of free education policy in PNG. Some years later, the policy was changed to Education Subsidy, where the Government paid certain portion of the school fees that are normally paid in full by parents. Then in 2012, it was changed to "TFFE" Policy.

Tuition-fee -free

Under a "tuition-fee-free education policy", only tuition fees are funded by governments at different administrative levels, donor agencies and other parties other than parents (Ministry of Education Policy Submission 1/2011). However, parents still have major roles to play. They contribute in the form of buying school uniforms, paying approved project fees (Table 1) and providing services in kind and deeds to assist with the school needs (Walton et al., 2017). This commitments support the notion that TFFE is consistent with the Government's view that education must be a shared responsibility between governments at various administrative levels, communities and parents (National Department of Education, 2011).

However, the fees paid by governments under a TFFE does not always reflect the actual costs of delivering an education. This is common in PNG where the maximum fee set by the National Education Board (Table 1) are set based upon the required average ability of parents to pay and not exactly upon the actual unit cost of education (Ministry of Education, 2022). Therefore, schools may still need to generate funds to develop and maintain school infrastructure or purchase supplementary learning materials.

Table 1: The National Education Board Fee Limit, 2022

Sector	2022 School Fee Tuition
Elementary	K110
Primary	K297
Secondary and NSoE	K1,089
Vocational	K990
FODE	K100/subject
Special Education	K200

Source: Ministry of Education, 2022

What is free?

The fundamental question surrounding the TFFE Policy has been “what is free?” It is true that tuition may be free, but tuition alone is not the only requirement for education. There are other costs that parents can bear and these include the costs of uniform, school bags, daily transportation, lunch, shoes, exercise books, pens and pencils.

So, the perception that the Government pays for all the school requirements is partly true. The Government should also be mindful that public education is most certainly not about TFFE, even in countries committed to free and compulsory education. Parents are charged a variety of outside fees ranging from project fees, costs of textbooks and stationery, uniforms and other school-base activity fees. Schools in rural and remote areas in PNG also incur high travel costs in collecting and spending the tuition fees. Moreover, prices of goods in urban areas are normally significantly lower due to greater competition and lower transport costs. These costs seem too high, particularly for rural and remote schools. The cost of goods in remote locations was significantly higher than in urban areas.

The Government should reconsider indirect costs such as project fees, uniforms, lunch, transportation and sports equipment. If it is unable to cover the costs of textbooks and reading books for all students, then it can seek assistance from aid donors and other development partners to supply them to schools. The Government may also reconsider policies on the need for uniforms or provide subsidies for those students who cannot afford them. It has to make it clear that the inability of parents to pay project fees, uniforms, textbooks, shoes and other private costs should not be a barrier for students to attend school.

Role of governments, development partners and parents

Provincial Governments

Provincial Governments and District Development Authorities are the immediate authorities responsible for the education of students in the general education sector (Kukari, n.d). This is consistent with their responsibilities as outlined in the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local Level Governments, 1995 (LPGLLG).

The Economic and Fiscal Commission (2010) also reported that Education Function Grants (EFGs) are provided also to all provinces (except NCD and ARoB) every year. These funds are to be used to assist in paying for the recurrent goods and services costs of education.

Data is not readily available as to how much each province is directing to basic materials/school grants. However, we know that a number of provinces have deemed education a top priority and have, from time to time, declared a ‘free education’ policy. New Ireland and Enga provinces being the two that implemented the TFFE with a lot of successes over the years. Any National free education policy would need to determine the role that the provinces would play and what they would be required to pay from their EFG.

National Government

The National Government’s financial investment of K632 million demonstrates that education is one of its top priorities (Ministry of Education, 2021). In order to ensure access to basic education, the Government plays its part towards the shared responsibility by providing 100 percent tuition fees in basic and secondary education as the platform for all other development objectives. As a result, in 2022, the Government provided 100 percent tuition fees in general education compared to 67 percent in 2021. The Government wants to apply the increasing tuition fees that are provided in the education budget to get children into school, including those with disabilities who normally have severely limited educational opportunities, and to give the opportunity for as many children as it can in PNG to have a quality education that gives them a chance in life.

Development Partners

AusAID has always played an important role in making additional commitments since the introduction of the TFFE Policy in 2012. In 2013, AusAID made a

commitment of K25 million to cover the cost of basic education to ensure that access to education are within reach and continues to do so over many years. In 2021, the policy was further supported by the AusAID with an allocation of K80 million to support the basic education in PNG, according to Education Secretary, Uke Kombra (Post Courier, 2022).

Parents

While all children in PNG have a right to free education, education cannot be free of cost in theory or in practice. If Government cannot provide sufficient resources to schools, then schools should raise resources through fees. These fees are justified to offset government failure to provide services (Walton, 2015). Parents finance their children education through payments (indirect cost) made outside of schools for items such as project fees, uniforms, teaching materials, sports equipment and other expenses. This increases the involvement of parents in schools and their children's education.

Conclusion

While the Government of PNG requires education to be free from elementary prep to Grade 12, education cannot be free of cost in theory or practice. For the Government, it is one of the major priority areas in its budget to meet the cost of tuition fees. Parents contribute to their children's education through payments (indirect costs) made outside of schools for items such as project fees, uniforms, lunch, transportation, teaching materials, sports equipment and other expenses. These parental financial contributions depend on their ability to pay, not only their willingness to do so. Therefore, the Government must ensure that the inability of parents to contribute to their children education should not be a barrier for students to attend school.

Recommendations

- Major awareness has to be made to inform the public that tuition-fee-free education is consistent with the Government's view that education must be a shared responsibility between Governments at various administrative levels, communities and parents.
- If the Government is unable to cover the costs of textbooks and reading books for all students then it can make a compromise with donor agencies to supply them to schools.
- The Government has to make it clear that the inability of parents to pay project fees, uniforms, textbooks, shoes and other private costs should not be a barrier for students to attend school.

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