Papua New Guinea

Donor Endorsement of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Plan, 2009 - 2018

The local education development partners (DPs) in Papua New Guinea (PNG) have reviewed PNG's Universal Basic Education (UBE) Plan (2009-2018) and consider the Plan an important statement of Government of PNG (GoPNG) commitment in addressing access, equity, quality and capacity building issues in PNG's education system. The UBE Plan makes significant progress in translating the 2005 National Education Plan (NEP) 2005 - 2014 into an operational plan for achieving universal basic education. The UBE Plan also improves on the NEP by providing an indication of the domestic and external funding that will be required to achieve universal primary education (UPE) goals.

The Education for All (EFA) – Fast Track Initiative (FTI) calls for DPs to endorse a comprehensive education sector plan. Because the UBE Plan covers only basic education (the first nine years of the education cycle in PNG), the DPs consider it to be an "interim plan" for the purposes of EFA-FTI endorsement. The GoPNG has already put in motion the process for reviewing and updating its comprehensive NEP by 2011. The DPs in PNG have committed their support for the process.

The DPs have identified the most important achievements in PNG's pursuit of universal basic education to date, as well as areas that we believe will continue to present challenges as PNG pursues its UBE goals.

This document reflects a shared intention between the GoPNG and DPs, and does not constitute a legally binding instrument.

Achievements on which the UBE Plan is expected to build include the following:

- **Improved strategic planning:** the UBE Plan has been developed on the basis of statistical evidence, estimated program costs, quantified baselines and targets for specific goals. While there is room for improvement, the UBE Plan represents a major step forward in strategic planning from the 2005 NEP.

- **Eliminating fees for basic education:** the UBE commits the GoPNG to implement school fee abolition (SFA) in basic education. This commitment represents a significant step forward in removing obstacles to achievement of universal basic education. The DPs acknowledge the abolition of fees for elementary education (the first three grades of basic education) in 2010 and the increase in subsidies paid directly to schools as a significant achievement that will positively impact on access to basic education during the Plan period and beyond. The DPs also note that the GoPNG has made funding for school subsidies available to schools within two weeks of the start of the 2010 school year, which is a significant improvement over its performance in past years.

- **Improved school-level planning and management**: the development of School Learning and Improvement Plans (SLIPs) is an important innovation in PNG that will empower school officials to improve school management and strengthen community involvement in schools. This innovation represents a crucial building block for the achievement of UBE, and will continue to be supported by DPs.

- **Curriculum reform:** new primary and elementary school curricula have been developed and are being implemented. The DPs are supporting implementation of the new curriculum with the requisite teaching and learning resources.

- **Teacher training output:** teacher training colleges have significantly increased their output capacity. The pre-service training of primary school teachers nearly doubled as a result of a reduction in the length of training from three years to two years. In-service training is also expanding to support introduction of the new curricula. The DPs are committed to supporting continuing efforts to improve the quality of teacher training.

The **challenges** that have been identified in the UBE Plan are the following:

- **Financing UBE:** the current financing framework in the UBE, while capturing the essential cost components for Plan implementation, are not detailed enough. The DPs and the Department of Education (DoE) have agreed to continue supporting the preparation of a separate detailed financing framework that will identify funding gaps for each intervention proposed, and link up these with the annual operational and financial plans. The overall financing gap needs to be broken down across the investment components/interventions within each pillar so as to give a clear picture of what aspects of the Plan might require more funding. Those that are not funded at all like libraries also require being identified/isolated.

- **Monitoring and evaluating system performance:** Despite recent progress in terms of measuring access, the DoE continues to lack capacity to collect and analyze system performance data in a timely manner. The school subsidies program will require better performance in the reporting of enrollment data. The UBE Plan is also particularly weak in terms of baselines for monitoring the quality of student learning. The DPs are committed to continuing their support for improving the DoE's information systems and its capacity to undertake assessments of student learning.

- **Focusing on quality in the early grades:** the UBE Plan calls for significant investments in quality improvements for the primary level, such as pre- and in-service teacher development, textbooks and libraries. The DPs recommend that in addition to these, the DoE should equally consider providing a greater focus on improving quality at the three elementary grades. The DPs are ready to support this effort.

- **Improving the quality and deployment of teachers:** the UBE Plan identifies the need to improve teacher management, including but not limited to upgrading teacher skills and improving the deployment of qualified teachers to isolated rural schools. A new

teacher policy paper has been prepared and the DPs stand ready to assist PNG with its implementation.

- **Improving the effectiveness of school subsidies:** the provision of subsidies directly to schools shows much promise, but more needs to be done to tie these funding flows to school planning and community participation and to ensure transparent management of funds and proper acquittals. The PNG government acknowledges this challenge that is expected to be a major focus of donor support.

- **Focus on capacity development:** developing capacity in tandem with UBE implementation remains a risk area in executing the Plan. The DoE has requested, and donors have endorsed, the imperative of providing resources and support to help strengthen capacity for better policy analysis, for improved management of financial resources and personnel, for improved monitoring and evaluation, and for improved procurement and financial management at all levels. The DPs will support the DoE to carry out a capacity needs assessment that will form the basis for a sector capacity development plan.

Endorsement

The DPs view the UBE Plan as evidence of the GoPNG's commitment to the achievement of the MDGs in education, and are committed to working with the DoE to provide support for implementation of the plan, to continue to develop DoE's capacity, and to support preparation of an updated national education plan by 2011. The DPs in PNG endorse the UBE Plan as an interim plan in view of the fact that it is not a comprehensive education sector plan.

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