

Papua New Guinea



Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2022



I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest, most populated country in the Pacific region, and the most ethnically diverse in the world, with over 850 spoken languages. A rugged geography in the mainland and multiple scattered islands makes service delivery very difficult and expensive. Poor service delivery capacity and the challenging environment are coupled with problems of corruption and lack of good governance. PNG ranks 124 (of 180) countries– the lowest in the Pacific– in the 2021 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

PNG is also the least urbanised country on the planet, with only 13% of the population in urban areas.¹ Rural communities have little or limited access to basic government services, and rural infrastructure is in a poor and deteriorating condition. This despite increased funding to district and provincial governments. The 2022 national budget of PGK 22 billion (USD 6.2 billion)² is the country's largest ever.

There is a lack of provincial understanding of the current education agenda, a disconnect from the capital. This is problematic, as large development grants, around PGK 10 million (USD 2.8 million) per annum, are disbursed to 89 parliamentarians to spend as they see fit. These grants are equivalent to 4.5% of the recurrent budget. Thirty per cent (30%) of these development grants are earmarked for education. Provincial governments also have PGK 5 million (USD 1.4 million) available for each district through the Public Sector Improvement Programme (PSIP), and again 30% of that is for education. The remaining can be spent on infrastructure, including schools infrastructure.

Climate change has affected the country with the increasing sea level and weather changes has greatly affected the traditional food crops in the lifestyle of people in rural communities. More than 3,000 people in Crete's Island in Bougainville have been relocated to mainland Bougainville by the government. Also the villages along the coast line that depended on marine life have also been affected and also increasing sea level has endangered the food source as well as breeding marine lives and endangered it.

1 CIA World Factbook, 2022

2 The currency converter used for the PGK figures in this document was XE Papua New Guinean Kina to US Dollar conversion, Retrieved Jul 5, 2022, 08:00 UTC, from <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=22000000000&From=PGK&To=USD>

II. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Challenges

The current COVID-19 pandemic has affected about 2.4 million students throughout the country. Vulnerable groups, including girls, learners with a disabilities, the poor, and those living in remote and hard-to-reach areas are the most affected. The World Bank and UNICEF recently carried out a household survey³ and found that 40% of Papua New Guineans who are at the bottom of the socio-economic scale are in danger of being left behind. Thirty-three per cent (33%) of that group are severely affected by the impact of the outbreak.

When COVID-19 took hold, the government closed all schools for up to two months. After this time, the government has tried to re-open schools, but many remained closed for much longer, especially in rural areas. In lieu of schooling, the government used TV and radio for home-schooling. Large numbers of students in remote areas couldn't access these broadcasts, marginalising them further. The government digitalised some lessons (using a USD 70,000 grant from the Global Partnership for Education), but access to the internet is even lower than radio and TV, and bandwidth narrow. In any case many living in rural areas are unable to pay for data, or even android phones.

There remain challenges related to access. PEAN member the National Research Institute reported that the Tuition Fee Free (TFF)⁴ policy

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improved enrolment and retention rates especially for girls and the poor. The success of TFF led to increased numbers and revealed inadequate school facilities, and high and growing student teacher ratios of 50:1, far above the maximum standard of 25:1. In 2021, the government's response to enrolment pressure and declining revenues was to reduce the grants for TFF and move to a Tuition Fee Subsidy (GTFS) Policy. However, in 2022 the government reversed direction again, declaring its concentration on basic education, and calling for a return to TFF. Australian DFAT funded PGK 316 million (USD 89.7 million) in grants in March 2022 to make this happen.

The rollout of the Early Childhood Care Development (ECCD) policy with education system reform 1:6:6 (1 year of elementary, 6 years primary and 6 years of secondary) will have a big impact on parents'

views of students early learning preparedness. Also the quality of education in PNG is not assessed comprehensively.

In recent years the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) Report in both 2015 and 2018 have found students in primary performing worse than any peers in the Pacific. There are multiple reasons, including poor quality initial teacher training; poor in-service teacher education and system administration; difficulties of inspecting and supporting schools and teachers in remote areas and shortages of well- trained specialist teachers.

Challenges in gender and inclusion remain large. PNG has the largest gender parity gap in the Pacific⁵ and the provision of disability services is still left to the NGOs and churches. Whilst the government mentions disability inclusion in the National Education Plan 2022-2029, it provides no funding support.

Organisational capacity and networking of main stakeholders remains weak- the main actors, especially the Department of Education (DoE), Department of Higher Education Science and Technology, Provincial Governments, Districts, and schools are not coordinated, poorly managed, and unable to implement education sectoral plans.

Opportunities

There are opportunities with the GPE funding under the Boosting Education Standards Together (BEST) programme. The new Education Sector Plan 2022-2026 (ESP) will be a roadmap to guide and provide connectivity with basic education (primary and secondary) and with technical education and university for the first time. The

3 UNICEF. (2021). World Bank-UNICEF Survey Finds Inequality Has Likely Increased in PNG, with Bottom 40% Hit Hardest by Latest Outbreak. Retrieved 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/png/press-releases/world-bank-unicef-survey-finds-inequality-has-likely-increased-png-bottom-40-hit>.

4 Honga, T (2020) NRI Spotlight Volume 13, No. 13 https://pngnri.org/images/Publications/Benefits_of

[the Tuition Fee Free policy as perceived by Port Moresby residents.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/png/press-releases/world-bank-unicef-survey-finds-inequality-has-likely-increased-png-bottom-40-hit)

5 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS?locations=PG>

ESP will be coordinated by the Department of National Planning to ensure alignment with PNG Vision 2050.

By July 2022, PNG will see the formation of a new government. This will be the start of another five years of delivering key development agendas. PEAN will leverage this opportunity to find credible politicians to advocate for Inclusive education on the floor of Parliament. PEAN will push for parliamentarians to partner and support existing organisations like Cheshire Disability Services and Callan Services that support special schools. The partnership could see local members allocating funding for teachers' training in disability, school screening in rural primary schools, and assistive infrastructure and materials.

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III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4'S ROLE IN THE SDG FOR REVIEW

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education is deeply interlinked with the other SDGs. Understanding the integrated nature of the SDGs is important in the creation of policies and programmes that will make well-defined, effective, and positive impacts that contribute to the development of PNG (UN, 2020). The most interconnected goals are those between education (SDG 4) and poverty (SDG 1), gender (SDG 5) and economic growth (SDG 8).

The localisation and alignment of SDG 4 articulated under the PNG Medium Term Development Plan III to the new National Department of Education Corporate Plan (2020 – 2029), to the Provincial Education Plans and down

to the District Education Plans. The new Sectoral Education Plan 2022–2026 currently addresses the key indicators of SDG 4.

Other stakeholders are educating people on responding to the effects of climate change. For example, the National Agricultural Research Institute promotes alternative and resilient varieties. The government is also promoting some programmes on a small scale to communities. Skills programmes continue as usual in secondary schools, much as they have done for decades. However, there is little funding for infrastructure, equipment or teacher training in Technical secondary schools that were intended to teach life skills.

IV. KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness of SDGs and attempts to implement them. The Department of Planning should seek to implement the SDGs at all levels of government in PNG. This should be coupled with awareness and training of relevant decision-makers at the District and Provincial levels. An SDG focal point is recommended.

Education for Sustainable Development. The University of PNG has a degree programme for Sustainable Development; - units could be taught to all graduating teachers and in all tertiary institutions. Primary schools already have a curriculum called 'Community Living', this could be modified and updated to incorporate the latest information on climate change. Skills for life should be incorporated into secondary and technical secondary schools.

Domestic Financing. The development budget grants and handed out to members of parliament to follow their own ideas. These grants should be tied to implementing policy objectives, such as infrastructure to accommodate the increasing demand for places or to improve the quality of education, and not handed out to members of parliament.

Teacher training and inspection. The teachers' inspection functions



■ PEAN Project Officer Participates at the GPE Workshop in Port Moresby

that were transferred to the provincial government and with officers posted to the provincial level need to be properly funded so that they can carry out inspections. Teachers' in-service must be closely monitored by the provincial as well as national standards divisions.

Inclusion. The government is still working out the framework for disability inclusion, but the process appears very slow. PEAN sees disability inclusion as taking place in a number of steps- starting to collect data on disability in schools and out of schools is an essential first step. The government needs to support the screening process early in a person with a disability

so that the education system can follow the learner and plan for their education. The government should also encourage the mainstreaming of inclusion in public schools by piloting one or two in each of the 22 provinces.

Gender. Integrate and align the Gender Strategic Plan into the future National Education, Provincial and District Education Plans to utilise the latest research findings and interventions on building proper girls' toilets, improve water and sanitation at the school level, strengthen security, create awareness of the importance of girls' education, and prevent early child marriage. •



The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

Unit 106 Sterten Place Condominium, 116 Maginhawa Street,
Teachers Village East, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
Tel/Fax: 63 2 8441 4594
Email: aspbae@gmail.com | Website: www.aspbae.org

ISBN: 978-621-95859-0-3



Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN)
PO Box 648, Gordon's, Port Moresby Sec 64, Lot 3, Gabaka Street,
Gordon's, National Capital District, Papua New Guinea
Phone: (+675) 7198 1106
Email: davidk.pean@gmail.com
Website: <https://pngean.org/>

The Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN) was established in 2003 by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to advocate for basic and adult education policy and key education program issues in Papua New Guinea in line with EFA and now Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Education 2030. The organisation has been advocating and promoting lifelong learning and increased levels of literacy opportunities for all citizens, including disadvantaged groups, such as poor people, women, and girls. PEAN is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).