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Papua New Guinea

Improving Access to Education in Remote, Rural Communities Through Ward Development Planning

This brief document outlines how CARE International in Papua New Guinea (CARE PNG) through its Integrated Community Development Project has linked Ward Development Planning to improvements in access to education for remote, rural communities in Obura Wonenara District, Eastern Highlands Province. This approach centres on bottom up planning processes, strong partnerships, community mobilisation and participation, and modelling of service delivery and interventions.

What are the policies?

The Government of PNG has numerous policies relevant to improving access to and quality of education, including the National Department of Education's Universal Basic Education Policy (2009 2018), the National Plan for Education (2005 2014), and the National Literacy Policy (2000) aimed at out of school youth and adults. Other relevant policies include the Department for Community Development's Integrated Community Development Policy (2007), PNG's Medium Term Development Strategy (2011 2015), Vision 2050, and PNG's international commitments to the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals. There is also a clear structure of roles and responsibilities for planning and delivering educational services:

- **At the District level**, the Education Officer updates school census information and ensures that schools are in place and operating through visits and communication with school management.
- **At the Provincial level**, the Provincial Division of Education (PDoE) creates new positions, appoints new elementary, primary and secondary teachers, scopes for new school locations, reopens schools, and provides professional development to teachers.
- **At the National Level**, the National Department of Education (NDoE) registers schools, ensures professional development, and develops and distributes school curricula throughout the country. The NDoE is also responsible for the development of non formal education and literacy programs, curricula, and literacy trainers through the National Literacy Awareness Secretariat, which oversees the implementation of literacy programs.

What are the implementation issues?

Despite having policies and structures in place, the benefits and practical implementation of these often do not reach beyond urban areas to remote, rural communities. For example, in Obura Wonenara District, access to formal and non formal educational opportunities is severely limited and literacy rates are extremely low, particularly for girls. While boys may be permitted to make the often difficult, multi day walk to reach a classroom in serviced area, cultural norms and serious safety and security issues prevent girls from accessing these same opportunities. Further, although there are numerous school-age children in the district, there are serious shortages of schools and teachers. Women teachers are particularly lacking, which reinforces the predominant thinking that only men can speak with authority and knowledge, and be leaders. Local teachers (including school leavers that volunteer as teachers) number only a few, and most are not adequately qualified, nor can they access in-service professional development opportunities to further their knowledge and skills. In these remote locations, the experience has been that teachers coming from outside the community do not stay long due to cultural differences and lack of support, resources, and communication infrastructure. Moreover, those responsible for providing teacher support and establishing schools often do not have the budget to support these aspects in remote locations.

What is the approach?

In late 2009, CARE PNG began to pilot the Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP), which seeks to make lasting and measurable impacts on the lives of remote, rural communities, in close partnership with government, communities, and local organisations. It aims to strengthen communities and build a more enabling environment for rural service delivery. Under the ICDP, the approach to improving access to education has the following components:

- **Understanding local needs** – This is done through Ward Development Planning (WDP), a bottom-up planning process mandated by the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local Level Governments (1995) which devolves responsibility for service delivery down to the sub national levels of the Provinces and Local Level Governments (LLGs). The Organic Law stipulates that development priorities must be identified at the Ward level, through the WDP process facilitated by the lowest levels of government, the Ward Development Committees (WDCs), then communicated up to the LLG and District levels in the form of Ward plans for further prioritisation and budget allocation. To better understand local needs, WDCs, and LLG and District officers, are trained to be able to facilitate WDP processes and develop Ward plans with communities. In the case of Obura Wonenara, many Ward Plans listed teacher shortages, lack of schools, and low literacy as main areas for action.
- **Linking Ward plans to service providers, and establishing partnerships** – Once Ward plans are drafted and priorities made clear, linkages are made with appropriate service providers to work in partnership to develop and deliver the required services and interventions. In this case, it meant engaging with the Provincial Division of Education and a local NGO partner to develop programs for literacy, teacher training and certification, in service professional development, and building and registering schools.
- **Community mobilisation and participation** – The participation of local leaders and WDCs (and in this case, especially the Education Representative on the WDC) is key as they help to mobilise communities and their contributions towards development interventions, such as identifying land for schools, building classrooms and teacher houses, and selecting local community members to become new teachers.
- **Integrating CARE's Women's Empowerment Framework** – This means ensuring that women and girls are able to access education (Agency); focussing on support for all learners including women and girls to be able to attend classes and to have time for study (Relations); and supporting local women and girls to gain basic education with a view to eventually becoming teachers in their areas (Structures).
- **Modelling interventions** – This is the implementation phase where government, local partners and communities trial the interventions, provide feedback on their effectiveness, and modify as needed.

What is emerging?

- **Strengthened existing systems** – This approach works within the formal system with the relevant government agencies, using existing tools and processes (i.e. WDP). This is not about doing it for government, but doing it with government and helping government to extend its reach. This is key to developing programs that can be easily absorbed into government plans and budgets (e.g. school registrations and teacher salaries) and thus sustained.
- **Increased engagement** – This approach helps to reconnect communities and government, as WDP necessitates that District and LLG officers go down to the Ward level in order to facilitate, implement and oversee WDP processes. This re-engagement is rebuilding trust, as well as breaking down fears communities have had in government. Further, this approach also brings Provincial, District, and LLG levels of government together in the planning and implementation of interventions, and thus improves coordination and efficiency.
- **Growing community empowerment through community-identified development** – Communities are experiencing firsthand the benefits that the WDP process can bring, with every Ward plan activity that is implemented. This motivates communities to continue to participate in and support the process. However, WDP is not only about what the government can do for wards. As these communities are learning, WDP is also about what communities can do for themselves, such as building classrooms, schools, and teacher houses that can trigger and leverage other support.
- **Growing social accountability** – The WDP process is leading to increased social accountability, whereby Wards can monitor the progress of implementation against their plans. This is driving greater responsiveness at LLG and District levels to perform accordingly.
- **Increased opportunities for formal and non-formal education** – With the training and certification of new, local teachers, as well as the building, registration, and opening of new schools and literacy classes, access to formal and non formal education opportunities in Obura Wonenara has markedly increased. It has even been noted that learners from neighbouring districts are now travelling in to the district to attend classes.
- **Promotion of girls' education through improved access** – With more schools now located within communities, girls are able to access education more easily. Early enrolment and attendance rates show that girls' participation outnumbers boys' participation.
- **Ward plan-driven funding streams** – WDP is increasingly becoming an avenue for various government funding streams and donors to counterpart and match-fund District and LLG funds tied to activities in Ward plans. This pooling of resources from among government streams and other sources is helping to overcome rural service delivery barriers, as can be seen in the improvements in education access in Obura Wonenara.