

# Education is my only beacon of hope

by Zechariah Suii

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Zechariah's mother, Esther Suii, attending a church service at Wingei Mt Zion Local Church, Papua New Guinea

*Photo Credit: Jacoberth Suii*

Growing up in a small community with limited lands, I quickly realised that education was my only way out of the cycle of poverty that entraps many of my fellow Papua New Guineans. My name is Zechariah Suii, and I am 23 years old. I come from a family of eight, including my parents, four brothers, and two sisters. As the third sibling, I had to work hard to ensure that I had a future beyond the struggles that many in my community faced.

My journey towards education began in the small community of Wingei, West Yangoru in East Sepik, where subsistence farming was limited due to scarce land resources. Education became the beacon of hope to escape the slumber that engulfed us. My parents are now self-employed, while my two elder siblings are working in the private and public sectors, respectively.

My educational journey commenced in 2005 when my dad retired from the PNG Defence Force and became an elementary school teacher. In 2007, I was enrolled in grade one at Wingei Central Elementary School, located at the heart of the village, requiring me to walk two hours every morning. Despite the distance, my mother never gave up waking at 4.30am to prepare breakfast and lunch, usually boiled banana with greens creamed with coconut milk.

In 2008, communal violence in the area caused tremendous tension between nearby communities, leading to the suspension of schools for a whole year in my community. Due to the suspension, I had to repeat grade two in 2009. I then continued with grade three at Wingei Primary School, which was closer to home, only a few hundred metres away, requiring me to walk for only ten minutes.

The fate of my educational journey was further challenged while I was in grade six, when my father and I were attacked by a group of robbers while on our way to Wewak town, leaving me with a deep cut on my right leg that required 50 stitches. Despite the injury, I persisted with my studies, facing three significant hurdles. Firstly, immobility required crutches or a wheelchair to get around, which was

uncomfortable, especially when navigating the school's hallways, stairs and classrooms. Secondly, the emotional impact of the injury, the pain, and the frustration of not being able to participate in activities that were once easy, affected my motivation. Lastly, maintaining the same level of focus and drive as before the injury was difficult in the face of such adversity. However, I never gave up on my education.

In 2014, after completing grade seven, I faced another challenge of accessing high school education. There are no high schools within reachable distance. Boarding schools have limited spaces and priority is given to students from their feeder primary schools. The only option was to transfer out of my community to another primary school to guarantee a space for my secondary education. Fortunately, my father secured a piece of land in Port Moresby, and I successfully transferred to Taurama Primary School in 2015.

Living in the city was a whole new experience as I had to live with my elder brother, who had just finished grade 12 and remained as the guardian of my dad's properties in Port Moresby. Most times, I had to attend classes without breakfast and was only given three kina to buy my lunch at school. Preparing dinner by ourselves took some of my study time, but I managed to study extra hours later in the evenings to make up for the lost time.

I successfully completed grade eight and proceeded to do grades nine and ten at KilaKila Secondary School in Port Moresby. My parents never let me down, providing me with financial support on a monthly basis, as everything in the city costs money. I managed to overcome the in-school challenges of bullying and school fights, and finally got selected to attend Port Moresby National High School for my upper secondary school in 2018.

I completed my grade 12 in 2019 and was selected to do my first year in business management at the University of Papua New Guinea in 2020. Despite all the challenges and setbacks, I continued to pursue my education journey with determination and perseverance. Currently, I am doing my final year in public policy management, and hoping to graduate with flying colours next year.

Education is one of the most powerful tools we can use to improve our lives and those of our communities. While pursuing education in PNG may come with challenges, the benefits are well worth the effort. Education opens doors for better job opportunities, higher income potential, and a greater sense of personal fulfilment. It also provides the skills and knowledge needed to make informed decisions and create positive change in our society.

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Despite any difficulties that may arise, remember that education is an investment in yourself and your future. So, stay motivated, work hard, and never give up on your dreams of achieving a brighter tomorrow through education.

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