

My education journey... from the Sepik River

by Judah Kutkue

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Summer School students with Development Policy Centre staff on the last day of their Canberra stay.

My name is Judah Kutkue. I am 23. I was born and raised in a family of seven sisters and three brothers. We are a big family and it is very challenging when the only source of income is subsistence-based. We grew up in Angoram District in the East Sepik Province, at least seven kilometres from the district station and the mighty Sepik River. My grandparents were originally from Maprik district – our home district – but had migrated in 1979 to settle in Angoram when the government of Papua New Guinea set up the Gavien Rubber Scheme and offered blocks for 99-year lease. My grandparents were lucky enough to be two of the successful applicants and got a block there. My father is a pastor and a subsistence farmer and my mother is a housewife who enjoys subsistence work as well. We have at least three hectares of rubber plantation and also grow cocoa, which is the main source of our revenue. We also grow rice and garden foods for ourselves.

Our main challenge is having access to education under the constraint of financial scarcity. I am the third born in the family and the eldest among the boys. In the early years of schooling, it was fun and interesting. But as years passed and I went into higher grades, I began to realise just how difficult it is for a subsistence-based family to pursue a good education.

When I began my schooling in elementary, our school did not have enough classrooms so we were taught underneath a rain tree. Passing from elementary to primary school grades, from grades three up to my grade six, my dad moved to pastor a church that was almost seven kilometres away from school. Therefore for three years, I walked three hours to the school and another three hours back home every schooling day. At the same time, we had to work hard to survive. But it was after completing my eighth grade at Gavien Primary School and moving into high school that things began to change and get tough. I love my parents and siblings and would do anything to be more independent and lighten the burden on my parents. In 2013 and 2014, I enrolled in Bamesaka Business Secondary in the

Wewak town of East Sepik Province to continue my ninth to tenth grade. My greatest challenge was to find money for bus fares and food every day. Usually, I just had one meal a day. Often I went from one meal a day to a meal in two days.

After completing my tenth grade, I was one of the privileged students to be selected to attend Passam National High School, which is just a 30-minute drive from Wewak town. Being selected for a national high school is a privilege as it covers tuition fees and accommodation. I successfully completed my twelfth grade in 2016 and got accepted into the School of Business and Public Policy at UPNG in 2017. Since 2018, I've been studying public policy.

In my first year at UPNG, I was on a scholarship under the Department of Higher Education Tertiary Scheme (DHERST). This covered my tuition fees and I could pay for boarding status with assistance from my elder sister and her spouse.

Unfortunately, there was drop in my academic performance and consequently, I lost my scholarship the next year. Over the 2017 holidays, I flew back home for the break and also to raise funds for my 2018 fees. By the grace of God and help from my parents, we managed to raise just a sufficient amount of money to cover my airfares and university fees. However, I couldn't afford to board. I had to look for a place to live within Port Moresby. Fortunately, an Assembly of God pastor allowed me to live with his wonderful family for 2018 and 2019.

Over the 2018 holidays, I again had to make money for my fees in 2019. With help from my big sister, I was able to successfully pay my compulsory fees and get registered for the 2019 academic year. Last year, I was elected as the president of the Public Policy Management Students' Association.

This year is my final year. Every child needs a good education to strive for a better tomorrow and to fulfil our dreams and ambitions in life. I thank God who by his grace helped me through my years of education despite all the challenges.

This post is the fifth in a six-part series of personal reflections written by ANU-UPNG Summer School scholarship students. You can find the full series [here](#).

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Judah Kutkue is studying Public Policy at the University of Papua New Guinea. He was one of ten students selected into the 2020 ANU-UPNG Summer School program.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/my-education-journey-from-the-sepik-river-20200514-3/>