

Education for All in a Post-conflict Environment: The Case of Southern Sudan

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Introduction

Southern Sudan was established as an autonomous region within Sudan in January 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Southern Sudanese-led Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Khartoum-based Government of Sudan (GoS). Southern Sudan emerged at that time from decades of civil war and centuries of exploitation and marginalization as a region with the lowest social and economic indicators in the world (Collier, 2009; Deng, 2006; EPDC, 2010). Unlike many post-conflict countries in which destroyed physical and institutional infrastructure must be re-built, Southern Sudan had been so undeveloped in the past that there was almost no infrastructure to re-build. The challenges of building from the ground up have been staggering. The Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) formed in 2005 established education as one of its top development priorities, embracing the ambitious Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of enrolling all children in primary education by 2015 (SoE, 2004).

The Education for All initiative was born at the 1990 United Nations conference in Jomtien, Thailand, at which representatives from 155 countries and over 150 non-governmental organizations pledged to provide primary education for all children as a basic human right by 2015. The initial focus of EFA was on expansion of access although goals later shifted to include quality, calling for completion by all children of the basic cycle of education of an adequate quality. EFA goals were bolstered ten years later by the Dakar Framework that emphasized reaching marginalized populations and promoting education quality and the

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Millennium Development Goals of which Goal #2 promotes education for all children (UNESCO, 2000; United Nations, 2000; United Nations, 2010). While developing countries throughout the world are pledged to meeting EFA goals, this is especially complex for countries like Southern Sudan that are emerging from conflict.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the progress and challenges faced between 2005 and 2010 in building an education sector in Southern Sudan. The paper asks the question of how close Southern Sudan will come to accomplishing EFA goals in 2015. The paper briefly reviews the literature on the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction and then examines the context of conflict in Sudan. Following that, the paper addresses Southern Sudan's progress in pursuing Education for All goals, emphasizing the role of the GoSS Ministry of Education (GoSS-MoE)¹ in promoting the rapid expansion of educational access and the role of international donors in supporting these goals. The paper is not the report of a research study but is based on a review of the literature of education in post-conflict countries and in Southern Sudan and the author's knowledge from working in the education sector in Southern Sudan since 2006, a year after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended nearly half a century of civil war.

The Role of Education in Post-conflict Reconstruction

Many recent studies or descriptions of education in post-conflict countries start with a statement about the special difficulty these areas have in reaching the EFA and MDG goals of providing primary education for all children by 2015. The following statement, for example, opens a 2005 World Bank study, *Reshaping the Future: Education and Postconflict Reconstruction*, led by Peter Buckland:

Conflict constitutes a major obstacle to the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially the sector goals of universal completion of primary education and achievement of gender equality in primary and secondary education..... education has a key role both in conflict prevention and in the reconstruction of postconflict societies. Ignoring education, or postponing

educational response,... is not an option (World Bank, 2005, p. 1).

The extra difficulties of reaching EFA goals in countries emerging from conflict are clear, given the levels of displacement and destruction that must be overcome, the lack of trained education professionals to teach and manage the system, the lack of schools, and the limited resources that must be spread across all reconstruction needs. This brief literature review focuses on promising directions in education system reconstruction, although it must be read with a caveat in the case of Southern Sudan where the term “reconstruction” is not entirely accurate since there was little there in the first place. This point was made forcefully in the study of education in Southern Sudan before the CPA by Marc Sommers, *Islands of Education: Schooling, Civil War and the Southern Sudanese (1983-2004)* (Sommers, 2005).

....if education can be considered a general indicator of development, then southern Sudan is an unqualified disaster. For it has not just been war that has undermined support for education.....For most places where Southern Sudanese reside in the region, international and national support for education has been either scant and unreliable or, more likely again, virtually nonexistent (Sommers, 2005, pp. 23-24).

Despite Southern Sudan’s extreme condition of deprivation, the literature on reconstruction is still relevant, particularly its focus on the transition from a humanitarian to a development approach. This transition frames a study carried out by Dana Burde for USAID, *Education in Crisis Situations: Mapping the Field*, which outlines three approaches to education in conflict and post-conflict situations:

- humanitarian approach (emphasizes immediate protection to children with education as a stop-gap, usually applied to conflict and early post-conflict);
- human rights approach (emphasizes education as a human right and key element in peace building strategies); and

- development approach (emphasizes education as a long-term social investment, focusing on educational content, community participation, and education management, with an eye towards sustainability) (Burde, 2005, p. 10).

Many organizations working in this field, including the World Bank and USAID, presently advocate for a mixture of overlapping development and relief activities rather than the more traditional linear relief-to-development continuum: “Education reconstruction activities should begin concurrently with humanitarian assistance and be scaled up as political space, civil society support, administrative capacity and resources permit” (Burde, 2005, p. 11). We will see an example of this in the description below of the activities of the Secretariat of Education (SoE), a “ministry in waiting” formed about 11 years before the CPA to carry out education activities in liberated areas of Southern Sudan.

The World Bank study cited above identifies a framework of four overall factors that facilitate rapid expansion of primary education to achieve EFA and MDG targets in post-conflict situations:

- sound policies, committed leadership, effective budget execution and good governance;
- adequate operational capacity at all levels and incentives to translate policies and leadership into action;
- financial resources to scale up programs that work to service delivery level; and
- relentless focus on results and accountability for learning and outcomes (World Bank, 2005, p. 30).

Margaret Sinclair in a 2003 UNESCO/IIEP study, *Planning Education in and after Emergencies*, outlined four specific principles that could be used to approach reconstruction of education systems. Despite the wide variety of conditions and starting points in different countries, the principles upon which reconstruction of education can be based are:

- access—rapid access to education followed by steady improvement in quality, coverage and gender equity;
- resources—include community participation, youth/adult educators, and teacher development plus incentives to avoid rapid teacher turnover;

- activities/curriculum—curriculum policy should support long-term development of individual students and of society including consideration for refugee populations, curriculum should include life skills for conflict resolution and citizenship as well as vocational training programs linked to real workplace opportunities; and
- coordination and capacity-building—government and assistance agencies should promote a coordinated approach; assistance should include capacity-building that includes transparent, accountable and inclusive system management at all levels (Sinclair, 2003).

The factors contained in these two lists are mirrored in many of Southern Sudan's planning documents, such as the *Education Handbook* of 2007 and the *Education Act* of 2008, although implementation has been uneven especially in the area of adequate operational capacity and incentives for action. Limitation of resources is an overall problem, although funds available have sometimes not been spent because of lack of absorptive capacity and system coordination. People in local communities throughout Southern Sudan, therefore, have not seen as much expansion of education as they might have.

The 2005 World Bank study emphasizes the necessity of sequencing interventions appropriately, although it acknowledges that prioritization is difficult in the context of multiple urgent needs:

The factor that makes analysis of sequencing so critical in postconflict situations is the urgency to take some action on almost all fronts: textbooks from the preconflict era may be unacceptable, guidance may be needed on managing community tensions in schools, local contributions to schooling may call for some mechanisms for community input to school management, schools may need to be built before there is agreement on construction and other standards (World Bank, 2005, p. 36).

Given these conflicting demands and overlapping priorities, the study suggests the following sequencing of interventions:

- focus on basics to get the system functioning and children and youth to

school;

- provide bold symbolic actions (such as purging textbooks associated with a previous regime);
- build recognition that reform of education is long-term and incremental that must be led from within the country as consensus develops on the wider development vision of the society; and
- focus from the beginning on building reform capacity including participation of communities, local authorities and other stakeholders (World Bank, 2005, p. 36).

The point made above to “focus on basics to get the system functioning”, demonstrating the early and visible impact of the newly functioning education system is extremely important and relevant to conditions in Southern Sudan (World Bank, 2005, pp. 63-81). From a political point of view, the notion of a “peace dividend”, local populations receiving clear benefits following a long period of sacrifice, is powerful (World Bank, 2005, p. 38). Building schools, the most wide-spread and visible of all social institutions, and providing education for rapidly increasing numbers of children is among the most powerful of “peace dividends”.

Another argument for early and visible implementation of programs is less frequently made—that is, the value of working backwards from action to system, or using implementation of small, focused programs to inform wider system planning. In many newly formed ministries of education such as Ministry of Education in Southern Sudan, planning overshadows implementation as the new ministries are often encouraged to engage in extensive planning before starting program implementation, or extensive sector planning according to varying formats which is made a condition of receiving donor support. While sector planning is important, implementation of basic programs must proceed quickly and not wait for thorough planning, thus providing quick, visible benefit to local communities called for in the “peace dividend”. Quick action thus provides implementation lessons to inform forward planning and system building—working backwards from action to system. The 2005 World Bank study concludes with the statement that “lessons from experience show the value of focusing on the basics

while making a commitment to address the full range of issues over time and in a clearly prioritized sequence” (World Bank, 2005, p. 86).

Several important publications emphasize the opportunity for reform that can accompany the building or re-building of an education system. A collection of studies edited by Susan Nicolai for UNESCO/IIEP, *Opportunities for Change: Innovation and Reform during and after Conflict*, focuses on the point that, despite violent disruption, crisis can also be a breeding ground for social change; opportunities for reform and positive change can arise during and after conflict (Nicolai, 2009). Focusing on how access, quality and system management can be improved following conflict, the Nicolai document contains a chapter on Southern Sudan entitled “No Looking Back: The Creation of a New Education System in Southern Sudan” that addresses some of the initiatives after the CPA that are described below in this paper (Echessa et al., 2009).

Similar to the notion of “opportunities for change”, UNICEF endorses the basic premise of “building back better” as part of its seven guiding principles for work in post-crisis situations (the seven guiding principles are: partnerships, national ownership, capacity development, bottom-up approach to programming, building back better, participation of children and young people, and gender sensitivity). UNICEF sees the necessity of “placing a premium on rehabilitation of services, systems and institutions through the application of improved standards, methods for rehabilitation and policies” (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2006).

Two organizations have been particularly active in giving support and guidance to the practical dimensions of developing education systems after conflict. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is an open network of UN agencies, NGOs, donors, practitioners, researchers and education professionals from affected populations working together to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction. INEE has produced a wealth of material to support re-building education systems including various sets of minimum standards and toolkits such as “Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery” (INEE, 2010). The other organization, UNESCO/IIEP, is a member organization of INEE and also produces important

practical materials for re-building systems such as the *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction* (UNESCO/IIEP, 2010). The work of both INEE and IIEP draws together a widely used compendium of experience of both academics and practitioners.

The INEE “Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery” includes minimum standards, key indicators and guidance notes that inform action in the context of education, from the development of educational programs to their implementation and continuity, emphasizing government and community support. The minimum standards cover a wide range of factors but focus on areas that constitute a general framework for critical action in education reconstruction:

- general areas: focuses on areas of community participation and the use of local resources, basing emergency education responses on an initial assessment that is followed by an appropriate response and continued monitoring and evaluation;
- access and learning environment: focuses on partnerships to promote access to learning opportunities and inter-sectoral linkages with, for example, health, water and sanitation, food aid / nutrition and shelter, to enhance security and physical, cognitive and psychological well-being;
- teaching and learning: focuses on critical elements that promote effective teaching and learning: (a) curriculum; (b) training; (c) instruction; and (d) assessment;
- teachers and other education personnel: focuses on the administration and management of human resources in the field of education, including recruitment and selection, conditions of service, and supervision and support; and
- education policy and co-ordination: focuses on policy formulation and enactment, planning and implementation, and co-ordination (UNESCO/IIEP, 2010, p. 7).

The INEE minimum standards are sometimes criticized for over-complexity and setting goals that are beyond the reach of many countries in the reconstruction phase following conflict. While the standards represent a coherent set of

goals towards which to work, there is a danger that their complexity might encourage the phenomenon of planning crowding out action in the early days after the conflict when quick action is critical.

As we will see in the section later in the paper that reviews the efforts of the newly formed Southern Sudan Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (GoSS-MoEST) to reach EFA goals, many of the principles and guidelines above have been incorporated in policies and plans. But first, the next section briefly reviews the historical context of conflict in Sudan followed by a review of educational provision in the south up to 2005.

The Context of Conflict in Sudan

Sudan is the largest country in Africa in physical size and contains extreme geographic and social variations. The north is mainly arid while much of the south has abundant water through seasonal rains and the “Sudd”, a vast swamp formed by the White Nile. The total population according to the 2008 census is around 42 million, with the population of Southern Sudan officially at 9 million, although this number is disputed as a significant undercount.² The north is predominantly Muslim and a significant proportion of the people identify themselves as “Arab”. Arabic is the lingua franca and international language of the north. The south is mainly Christian and most people identify themselves as “African”. English is the official language and language of international communication in the south (Jok, 2007).

For centuries the south had been a source of resources and plunder for the north—water, grazing land, timber, and slaves—in a relationship often characterized by violence and always by lack of development and marginalization of the south. During the British/Egyptian colonial administration of Sudan between 1899 and 1956 there was some reduction of slave raiding, but little was done to develop the south (Collins, 2006; Deng, 2006; Jok, 2007). Recognizing the insoluble differences between the north and the south, the British made half-hearted attempts to join Southern Sudan with their Kenya or Uganda colony in the decades before independence.³ With this effort failing, Sudan became independent in 1956 and the Khartoum-based government proclaimed the country Arab and

Muslim, with Arabic as the official language for the whole country, north and south.

The First Civil War started even before independence, with resistance and guerilla action based on southerners' mistrust of incorporation into a country characterized by centuries of northern economic, political and social domination. The First Civil War lasted from 1956 until 1973 when the Addis Ababa Agreement ushered in a decade of relative but restive peace with a semi-autonomous Southern Sudan government headquartered in Juba. The southerners started to develop a system of governance during that time, including the establishment of English as the language of government and education. A fateful event during this period of time was the discovery of significant oil reserves in the 1970s in the south, providing an additional southern resource for the north to exploit. The period of uneasy peace that started in 1973 came to an end and hostilities resumed in 1982 when the Khartoum government imposed Sharia law, Islam, and the use of Arabic on the south (Jok, 2007).

The Second Civil War devastated Southern Sudan from 1982 until the CPA was signed in 2005. It was Africa's longest and most destructive war. It left an estimated two million southerners dead and four million displaced. What little infrastructure existed in Southern Sudan was almost entirely destroyed. Relative peace came with the 2005 CPA that had strong international backing and contained complex provisions that called for "one country, two systems", with an autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) based in Juba functioning as part of a Government of National Unity (GNU) based in Khartoum. Ten states were established in Southern Sudan and a Legislative Assembly based in Juba was created to control all internal affairs.

Although the CPA brought relative peace to Southern Sudan, the region emerged from war with the lowest social and economic indicators in the world and a severe lack of physical and institutional infrastructure (Collier, 2009; Sommers, 2005). Much has improved since 2005, but the development indicators for Southern Sudan were still dire in 2010, including the following from a 2010 UNICEF Southern Sudan background paper:

One out of every seven children will die before their fifth birthday.

Many indicators in the south are worse than even in Sudan's troubled western region of Darfur. Half the people do not have access to improved drinking water, while only 10 per cent of births are attended by skilled health personnel (UNICEF, 2010, p. 1)

The environment for reconstruction could not be more difficult, given Khartoum's incentive for creating and maintaining instability. The peace in Southern Sudan since 2005 has been fragile and insecurity continues as fighting flares up from time to time. The relationship between the Government of Sudan and the Government of Southern Sudan since 2005 has been an uneasy one and much of the inclusion in decision-making and sharing of resources promised in the CPA goes unfulfilled. By far the most important factor shaping the relationship is the upcoming referendum. The CPA expires on 9 July 2011 and it calls for a referendum to take place between 9 and January 2011 through which the people of Southern Sudan will decide whether they will secede from Sudan to become a new independent nation or remain part of a unified Sudan.

For both sides, the stakes for the referendum outcome could not be higher. For the north it means the dissolution of the nation and removal of prized resources, especially the oil. For the south it means freedom from centuries of oppression and marginalization, but it also means that the southerners face an uncertain future being only minimally prepared for the challenges of nationhood. By the time this article is published this decision will have been made, the referendum will have gone forward or not, the result will have been accepted or not. If the vote for independence is successful, one of the new country's main strategies for accelerating development will be the rapid expansion and improvement of the education system which has already seen phenomenal growth since 2005.

Education before the CPA

The Southern Sudanese always knew that education was critical to their development and planning for an education system started well before the 2005 CPA. Limited schooling had been available to a small percentage of children in Southern Sudan since the late 1800s, with some estimates that it reached only

one per cent of children during the decades of the war (Deng 2006; Sommers, 2005). The few schools functioning in Southern Sudan before 2005 fall into four periods of time:

- Colonial period (1890s to 1956): schools established mainly by missionaries in the late 1800s and the early part of the 20th century and a few government schools established in the latter two decades of the colonial era, with great imbalance between north and south in education investment by the colonial administration.
- Post-colonial period (First Civil War) (1956 to 1972): schools maintained during the First Civil War period by the Khartoum-based Government of Sudan that used Arabic as the language of instruction and a curriculum in which Southern Sudan was largely absent, with little investment in education in the south compared with investment in the north.
- Brief period of peace (1972 to 1983): English was established as language of instruction by the semi-autonomous government in Southern Sudan, but investment in education was minimal because of inadequate funds transferred to the south during this period of time, proclamation of compulsory use of Arabic in all schools in Sudan was part of the reason for return to war in 1983.
- Second Civil War period (1983 to 2005): schools were established in liberated areas, many of which were supported by the United Nations Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) and several Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), especially after the mid-1980s (Deng, 2006); the Secretariat of Education was established as a forerunner of the Ministry of Education.

Education provided in the south by the Khartoum government following independence has been a highly contested area in the relationship between the north and the south before the CPA (Breidlid, 2010). One of the triggers of the second civil war had been the re-imposition in 1983 of the curriculum from Khartoum and the use of Arabic as the medium of instruction in all schools including “pervasive Islamization and Arabization in the classroom” (Breidlid, 2010). A government minister once indicated that “the educational marginalization of

Southern Sudan was one of the issues that led people to take up arms”, deeply rooted in the constitution of the old Sudan which created a number of historical imbalances (Echessa et al., 2009).

The Secretariat of Education (SoE), the precursor of the present ministry, was established in 1994, first located in Nairobi and in 1998 moved to Rumbek, a liberated area where the Southern Sudanese pre-CPA government was established. In the years leading up to the CPA, the SoE had several major accomplishments including development of the first four grades of the Southern Sudan primary education curriculum, establishment of a system of non-formal education, and the *Education Sector Plan for 2004-2007*. The first large bilateral donor-funded program in education in Southern Sudan was the USAID Sudan Basic Education Program initiated in 2003 which worked with the SoE to support education in liberated areas before the CPA.

After 2000, SPLM and SoE policies and plans focused explicitly on Education for All goals (Deng, 2006). The first priority was to increase enrolments and the second to provide more learning spaces which would be filled by the rapidly increasing numbers of students. The SoE enrolment goals were to raise overall primary attendance to 40% by 2007, and to raise girls’ enrolment to 30%. Another important goal was to increase by 20% adults’ participation in literacy and non-formal education programs, critical in a country with minimal adult literacy and anticipating an eventual population of demobilized soldiers who had never attended school. When the SoE sector plan was developed in 2004, immediately before the CPA, over 85% of schools were in the open air (under trees or in any available outside space, but without any kind of school building). The second priority therefore was rapidly building new learning spaces.

Education since 2005: Building a System

After the CPA was signed in January 2005, the new Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) quickly started to build a government based on structures established in liberated areas near the end of the Second Civil War. The Interim Constitution introduced in 2005 established free and compulsory education. The ministries of the new government, including the GoSS Ministry of Education,

Science and Technology (MoEST) were established within a year. GoSS-MoEST and UNICEF initiated the “Go to School” campaign with the goal of enrolling two million students by 2009, directly in response to EFA goals and the aspirations of communities throughout Southern Sudan. An important activity in the early years following the CPA was completion of the Southern Sudan primary curriculum to replace the curricula and textbooks of Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda used in some areas of the country and the “Arabic pattern” curriculum from Khartoum used in former garrison towns and some northern areas of Southern Sudan.

Step by step a system has been built. Several documents defined the policy, planning and administration of the education sector in the years immediately following the CPA. The GoSS-MoEST *Policy Handbook* completed in 2007 emphasized EFA and MDG goals and laid out the basic functions of MoEST and the State Ministries of Education. The *Education Act* completed by GoSS/MoEST in early 2008 contained a General Act, Teaching Service Act, and Schools Act and provided the legal framework for the development of a comprehensive education system. An *Examinations Act* was completed in the same year.⁴

Southern Sudan adopted policies of decentralization of major government functions to state and local levels in 2006. An important area covered in the *Education Act* is the definition of roles and responsibilities of the MoEST and the state Ministries of Education in accordance with decentralization policies. In general, the role of MoEST was defined as making overall policy, developing budgets, designing curriculum and textbooks, preparing teachers, giving technical assistance to the states, and coordinating donor activities. The State Ministries of Education (SMoEs) were charged more directly with implementing activities at the school level through County, Payam and Boma Education Offices.

While government structures—those at central and decentralized levels—were quickly put in place, development of both a comprehensive sector-wide approach and, especially, the capacity to run the system lagged behind. Resources were a problem, but resources available to fund education programs were not always used because of low absorptive capacity. For example, the budget for education expanded rapidly between 2005 and 2006 (\$17 million to \$136.5 million), but

then dropped in 2007 (\$111.7 million) because the ministry had not been able to spend all of the funds available to it. In addition, little of the significant funding made available to the education sector through the Multi Donor Trust Fund (a consortium of European donors) was spent because of a combination of complex donor requirements and insufficient organizational and implementation capacity of the ministry.

Capacity, both institutional and individual/professional capacity, has been a major problem in building the education sector in Southern Sudan as in other post-conflict countries. While there are some ministry officers with experience and educational qualifications, many are working in positions for which they have no background and training. Between 2005 and 2010 a growing number of technical advisors has worked in MoEST to build ministry capacity. In some cases, this work has been very beneficial and the advisors have been able to work together with ministry officers in a form of on-the-job training, such as the JICA work in the Department of Teacher Development. In other cases, either the advisors have been badly matched to ministry needs or they have taken over the work of ministry officers, thus preventing rather than encouraging the growth of capacity and accountability. Lack of capacity at the central ministry level prevents funds and programs from flowing down to decentralized levels where capacity is also not strong.

One program, the State Advisors Programme, has worked with capacity building, mainly at the decentralized State Ministry of Education level. The capacity of the state ministries is a barrier to the expansion of education to local communities and the improvement of education since implementation of all programs in the sector—running schools, hiring and supervising teachers, distributing textbooks, paying salaries, building new schools, etc.—is controlled by the state ministries. If they are not functioning, the schools do not function, making them a critical point for intervention and capacity building.

The State Advisors Programme is a MoE program that places a support team of two - a senior advisor (usually international) and a program officer for education (all Southern Sudanese). The program is funded by USAID and, to a limited extent by the MDTF and implemented by AED. The USAID/AED

Technical Assistance Program supervises the program along with the ministry. This is the only program that has assigned senior- and mid-level education specialists to work full time to build capacity in the ten state ministries. This program builds the capacity of state ministry officers to plan and implement programs at the school level. For example, they build the capacity of the planning unit, work with financial management and payment of teachers, work closely with the programs that collect, analyze and use educational data, build skills in monitoring and evaluation, and carry out basic training in the use of technology such as computers and the internet.

Despite continuing capacity challenges, by 2010 there was strong evidence of strengthened institutional/system capacity and individual/professional capacity as a result of increasing GoSS-MoEST systems in place and increased accountability for transparency and program implementation. This, combined with increased capacity at the state level, has provided the platform for much more rapid expansion of the system and better attention to system quality.

Education since 2005 Progress towards EFA Goals

What is the result of building an education system and enhancing the institutional and individual capacity to run the system? What progress has there been towards EFA goals? From the point of view of increasing enrolment at all levels, the Southern Sudan education system has been extremely successful since 2005. The demand for education is very high and parents are sending their children to school in record numbers. Gross enrolment in primary education nearly tripled between 2005 and 2009, the last year for which statistics are available, increasing from well under 500,000 to over 1.3 million in formal primary schools in 2009 (GoSS/MoEST, 2010, p. 7).⁵ The increase between 2007 and 2009 is shown below using the first reliable statistics gathered and published by GoSS-MoEST Educational Management Information System (EMIS):

2007—1,127,964 primary students

2008—1,284,252 primary students

2009—1,380,580 primary students⁶

Therefore, by 2009, six years before the EFA 2015 “deadline” for achieving universal primary education, Southern Sudan had already achieved a 72% Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in primary education, including 85% for males and 57% for females (GoSS-MoEST, 2010, p 19).⁷ These numbers demonstrate lack of equal access for females and mask significant variation among the ten states with some states having total GER at or above 90% (Western Equatoria, Unity, Upper Nile), and some states as low as 50% (Eastern Equatoria). There are now around 3,200 primary schools in Southern Sudan and 1,000 Alternative Education System Centers.

This outlines a proud achievement of Southern Sudan which is often held up as an example of a region emerging from conflict that has succeeded in establishing a viable and sustainable education system at a particularly rapid pace (EPDC, 2010, p. 1). But the emphasis has been overwhelmingly on system expansion since the CPA and in the race to reach EFA goals quality of education is becoming a concern. Little is known in a comprehensive manner about what actually happens in Southern Sudan classrooms, how teachers teach and how and how much learners learn. Most people who have worked in education in Southern Sudan, like the present author, have anecdotal evidence that little teaching and even less learning may be taking place in many schools. But in the absence of a comprehensive classroom study and learning assessments, the level of learning is unknown.

Despite the achievements in system expansion since 2005, this success is accompanied by several serious challenges all of which are associated one way or another with insufficient quality of education. The challenges are summarized below.

High dropout rate

The most serious problem is the high dropout rate, with the majority of students dropping out as early as grade one. For example, in 2009 there were 439,000 students in grade one but only 18,000 students in grade eight, the final year of primary education.⁸ Overall, completion rates for primary education are

only 12%, with the highest dropout in or just after grade one. The figures for 2009 reflect, in part, the very low initial enrolments in primary school for that cohort of students before the CPA, but it also reflects significant dropout within the cohort of students in grade eight in 2009.

The dropout rates are in part related to the low number of children entering school at the “correct age” of around six years. The net intake rate (NIR - total number of children, aged 6, enrolled in primary 1 relative to the population aged 6) was only 21% in 2009. Accompanying that is the very high apparent intake rate (AIR - total number of children, regardless of age, enrolled in primary one relative to the population aged 6) of 146% (172% for males, 118% for females). This demonstrates both the high demand for education and the intake of the “backlog” of learners who could not enter school because of the war. This phenomenon explains, at least in part, the high dropout rates. For the most part, parents want to send their children to school but see no economic benefit to the family because of lack of jobs in the stagnant formal employment sector. Other factors prompting dropout are lack of learning and education quality due to the few resources in the schools, large unruly classes often in the open air, and insufficient numbers of trained teachers.

Low transition rate to secondary and higher education

With a completion rate of only 12% for primary education, there are very low transition rates to secondary education and not nearly enough students receiving this level of education for the needs of a developing economy. Southern Sudan has 158 secondary schools and rapidly increasing secondary enrolments, almost doubling from 25,000 to 44,000 students enrolled in just one year, 2008 to 2009. But the GER for secondary education in 2009 was only 6% (8% male, 4% female), with an AIR of 5% and NIR of 0% indicating that almost no children of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary schools.

An even smaller number of students are present in the nine institutes of higher education and universities in Southern Sudan. In 2009 there were a total of 6,591 students in these institutions of whom only 1,415 were females. Of the 6,491 students in higher education, 2,313 were preparing to be secondary teachers.

This total does not include students at Juba University which, although in the process of moving faculties back to Juba, is still under the auspices of the Ministry of Education in Khartoum. In addition, there is a critical need for vocational and technical education in Southern Sudan but very little is made available. The Dr. John Garang Institute in Bor is meant to be a leading institution in this area, but in 2009 had only 48 students.

Gender imbalance

At every level, girls are severely underrepresented in Southern Sudan's schools. Girls' enrolment in primary education is 28% lower than boys' (GER of 57% and 85% respectively). Girls' enrolment in secondary education is half that of boys' (2% and 4% respectively). In Northern Bahr el Ghazal there is an overall high GER of 84%, but females have only 54% while males are more than double that at 113% GER. Unity State with the highest GER of 102%, has 130% male GER while females are nearly half that at 71%. The state that most closely approaches parity between girls and boys in primary schools is Western Equatoria with 104% male GER and 93% female GER.

Many developing countries find that, as education expands, an overall gender gap of around 25% is difficult to overcome. Building schools closer to girls' homes, including smaller more local schools in which multi-grade teaching is carried out, is one strategy that would contribute to higher female participation in primary education. Community sensitization carried out by the central and state ministries about the importance of girls' education is important, including community initiatives to curb early marriage. Hiring more female teachers is also a strategy of the ministry to increase girls' attendance at school.

Insufficient learning spaces

At the time of the CPA over 85% of all primary schools were in the open air. By 2009 that number had dropped to 50% in the open air, that is, structures that were neither permanent nor semi-permanent. Despite the relatively rapid construction of classrooms, there is a need for many more adequate and safe facilities to be built. For years the construction of learning spaces has been the

among teachers is extreme. Of the total number of students in teacher education institutes, only 24% were female, with only 18% females in the government-run teacher training institutes. Lack of pre-service teacher preparation is one problem, but another problem is lack of a comprehensive in-service professional development program. A new in-service program is now being developed, but until recently in-service was offered on an *ad hoc* basis by various NGOs and does not reach a large percentage of teachers.⁹

Language of instruction

English is the official language of regional and international communication and the language of government and education in Southern Sudan. Government policy calls for the use of Southern Sudanese languages for the first three years of primary education with a switch to English as the medium of instruction in grade four. English is taught as a subject starting in grade one. This language policy presents several difficulties. One is that many teachers do not have strong English language skills and therefore are not able to teach English well or to teach in English.

Another problem, perhaps the most serious, is that many teachers, particularly in the northern areas of Southern Sudan and in former garrison towns including Juba, speak Arabic as their language of general communication and have been trained to teach in Arabic using the Arabic pattern curriculum of the north.¹⁰ On the whole, these teachers are even less able to teach English as a subject or to teach in English themselves. This group represents a reservoir of experienced Southern Sudanese teachers, but without upgraded language skills they will not be able to teach effectively using the Southern Sudan curriculum. In 2007, MoEST put together a program for providing intensive English language instruction for about 600 Arabic pattern teachers but found it prohibitively expensive and the program has not been implemented. Several smaller programs are attempting to promote the use of English among Arabic pattern teachers, primarily one run by Windle Trust and funded by UNICEF.

Learning achievement

As emphasized above, low quality of education is a growing concern. At the present time, very little is known about how teachers teach or how and what students learn. Although the ministry formed an Examinations Secretariat in 2007 and wrote an Examinations Act in 2008, until now most end-of-cycle examinations are written and administered by the State Ministries of Education. The overall pass rate on the grade 8 examination is fairly high at 80%, but it is unknown what level of learning this represents since each state examination is different. Sometimes the states examine only two subjects because of the high cost of conducting examinations. Standardizing both the curriculum and the examinations is one of the high priorities of the MoE in looking forward to the future.

Ministry of Education Priorities 2011-2013

The Ministry of Education started the planning process for the years 2011-2013 in June 2010. This was part of a yearly process led by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in cooperation with each of the separate ministries to plan for the upcoming year—in this case, for the following two years. The internal process within the education sector is participatory and this year started with all ten State Ministries of Education sending delegations to Juba in May to present the MoE with reports of the status of education in their states and their priorities for the next two years. Drawing on the priorities of the states, combined with national priorities represented by the MoE, the following are the overall goals and strategies for education in the period 2011-2013. These strategies recognize the importance of creating quality of education now that quantity is starting to expand and also take account of the vital role of teachers in creating this quality.

The overall goal for the next two years is increasing access, equity and quality. The strategies for achieving this goal are:

- Teacher development—providing training opportunities for all teachers and paying teachers their full salaries and paying on time.
- Learning spaces—build schools according to a variety of standards and designs as decided by the states and communities.

- Curriculum—further develop and unify the Southern Sudan curriculum and make sure it is being used in all schools, adding civics education as an important element for unifying Southern Sudan. Unify examinations in accordance with the curriculum.
- Learning materials—develop and print textbooks; make at least the syllabus available to all teachers as a matter of urgency.
- Secondary education—provide more spaces for the large number of students now coming through the primary system.
- Higher education—provide more spaces at university for qualified students completing secondary education successfully, strengthen all universities in Southern Sudan, oversee the full return of Juba University to Juba.
- Technical and vocational education—provide more opportunities for technical and vocational education for students in accordance with the development needs of the country and the job opportunities that are likely to open.

Conclusion

Despite the great expansion of educational provision, Southern Sudan is unlikely to meet its EFA goals in 2015. It is not alone in this because many countries starting with far fewer challenges than Southern Sudan will not meet EFA goals. The following statement was made in the “Concept Note for the World Bank Education Strategy 2020”:

Developing countries have made significant progress at the primary level since 1999, particularly in the poorest countries and for girls, but not all countries will achieve the education MDGs by 2015. In Sub-Saharan Africa primary completion rates remain below 60 percent in more than one-half of countries (World Bank, 2010).

Southern Sudan has done extremely well in encouraging school entry, with a gross enrolment rate of 72% in 2009. However, if primary completion which is

the real intent of EFA is measured, Southern Sudan has a long way to go because of the heavy drop-out rates and low levels of primary completion—often the result of poor quality of education and very low transition rates to secondary education (only 6% GER).

How close Southern Sudan comes to universal primary education in 2015 depends on many factors, both internal and external to the education system. Internal factors will be the ability to increase capacity and transparency in all areas of education management and especially to increase the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Of the external factors, none is more critical than the outcome of the scheduled referendum for 9 January 2011 in which the Southerners will decide whether they want to remain part of a unified Sudan or become an entirely independent country. By the time this paper is published this critical issue will have been clarified. If the referendum is peacefully completed and the Southerners vote for independence, the fully independent Government of Southern Sudan will face immense challenges in all sectors, but will be under intense pressure to meet the expectations of its citizens of full access to an education of reasonable quality in order to build the foundation of a dynamic society, a sound democracy and -critically- an expanding economy that provides jobs for the increasing numbers of young people completing basic, secondary and higher levels of education.

Notes

- ¹ In June 2010, the GoSS Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (GoSS-MoEST) was divided into two separate ministries: the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Technology and the Ministry of Education (GoSS-MoE) which oversees all general education from early childhood through secondary education. This paper uses GoSS-MoEST when referring specifically to the ministry before June 2010 and GoSS-MoE when referring to the ministry in general and after June 2010.
- ² The census was part of the schedule set down in the CPA, led for the whole country by a census bureau in Khartoum. It was delayed, but carried out in 2008. Many charges were made that the procedures were flawed and the final count not transparent.
- ³ Collins, 2006.
- ⁴ Education Act and Examinations Act were delayed in a backlog at the Ministry of Legal Affairs for a substantial period of time. Although they have not yet been approved by the Legislative Assembly it is now a priority for the Ministry of Education to promote passage of the acts after the Referendum in January 2011.

- ⁵ All statistics referenced in this document are based on the Government of Southern Sudan, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2010). *National Statistical Booklet: Education Statistics for Southern Sudan 2009*, Juba: GoSS-MoEST.
- ⁶ The number of primary learners in 2009 would be 1.6 million if enrolments in the Alternative Education System are counted.
- ⁷ The GER is calculated by expressing the number of students enrolled in primary education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the population of official school age for this level.
- ⁸ The low number of students in grade 8 represents not only a high rate of dropout, but also the very limited opportunities for children of this age cohort to enter school around 2001, four years before the CPA. However, present statistics show a large drop especially between grades 1 and 2 (GoSS/MoEST, 2010, p. 39).
- ⁹ The ministry conducted a successful Fast Track Teacher Education and Training Program in 2007 through which it provided a six-week program in initial training for 1,229 new teachers, or teachers in practice with no preparation. This program and a certificate earning program for unqualified teachers were meant to be continued through MDTF funding, but the program stalled because of administrative and procedural problems within MDTF and within the ministry. The Fast Track program, conducted simultaneously in 20 centers around Southern Sudan, demonstrated considerable administrative and coordination capacity on the part of the ministry when well organized and working with purpose and commitment.
- ¹⁰ “Juba Arabic” is the *lingua franca* of the Juba area in addition to Bari which is the national language most widely spoken in Juba.

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