

Examining the Status of the Universal Primary Educational in Rural Area (South Sudan)

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This paper discusses the status of universal primary education (UPE) in rural areas of South Sudan by focusing on the forms of rural schools and the factors that hinders access to UPE. It will therefore start by describing the context or background description of the primary education system and situation of schools in South Sudan. It will also discuss the achievement and weakness and how the objective of universal education impacts the life of the rural people in terms of quality and equity in enrolment between boys and girls, academic achievement. Finally, it proposes some policies recommendation on further improvement of the UPE in rural areas of South Sudan.

Keywords: forms of rural schools, access to universal primary education, South Sudan

South Sudan Education Context

South Sudan is a land lock country of 619,745 square kilometers with a population density of 13 people and it is bordered by Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda. South Sudan is divided into 10 states and into Counties, Payams, and Bomas.

According to 2008 census, South Sudan has a population of 8.3 but this figure has been debated with the approximate figure estimated to be between 11 million and 13 million and still rising rapidly and it has 64 tribes based on the Interim Constitution. Approximately, more than half of the population is under the age of 18 years and 72% under the age of 30 years. This has clear implications for the education system, which already faces additional demographic pressure from the many returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

After South Sudan gained independence on the 9th July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan entered a process of transformation into a constitutional democracy that involves building of the education institution from the scratch and including establishment of a new constitution and introducing reforms that aim to reduce economic poverty, overcome historical legacies, and current tensions within society.

The current challenges facing South Sudan's emergence as the world's newest nation are so many. The country has suffered from decades of neglect and the effects of two long-lasting civil wars (the first from 1955-1972 and the second from 1983-2005). Among the significant issues arising from the decades of conflict are the impact of unequal distribution of resources, political marginalization of certain ethnic groups and the lack of development as a whole (particularly those states affected by their proximity to the North). This many years of war fought have led to the loss of 2.5 million lives and destroyed all the education infrastructures including educational opportunities. For example, school buildings were burned down; teachers and students

became either freedom fighters or refugees; and teacher training institutes and universities were forced to close. Generations have been deprived of their basic human right to education.

Again in December 15, 2013, the new youngest nation started another fresh conflict just after two years of independence living an estimated number of at least 866,000 school-aged children displaced, often in remote and rural areas without access to safe and protective learning spaces, or where education resources are non-existent or overstretched. An estimated 400,000 children have dropped out of school. Most of the 1,200 schools in the conflict-affected states of Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile are closed. Schools are no longer safe havens as they have been damaged, destroyed, used as shelters, or occupied by armed groups. This prolonged and recurrent conflict once again exposes children and youth in South Sudan to high risk.

The political crisis in December 2013 has affected 1.9 million children, youth, and adults who have been displaced from their communities. This is concretely translated to little or no effective learning opportunities for them and another generation who will miss out on any education or training.

Even before the current conflict began, South Sudan's economic poverty and development indicators were some of the worst in the world. South Sudan's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013 was 13.8 billion USD, and per capita 1,275 USD according to estimates from the International Monetary Fund. Approximately, half of the country's people still live below the poverty line; only 8% of women are literate; one child in three has stunted growth due to malnutrition; 2,054 out of every 100,000 mothers die in childbirth; only 27% of adults are literate; and approximately 20% of the population faces food insecurity. Despite these major political, economic, and social challenges, South Sudan is committed to reaching the education for all (EFA) goals. The severe educational crisis has historical roots and continues to be undermined by the conflict that began in December 2013. South Sudan signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005; six years after the EFA goals were launched. Independence was officially gained in 2011. As a result, reporting on the EFA goals will start on 2011 until 2013, with anecdotal evidence included since 2005. Due to the state of the country's insecurity and lack of infrastructure, reaching the EFA goals by 2015 will not be possible. The first ever plans and policies have been set in place by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) toward meeting all six EFA goals.

Primary Education

The south Sudan government affirmed the importance of education in national building with much emphasis of free and compulsory primary education since South Sudan gained statehood in 2011. In 2012, the government of the republic of South Sudan passed education act that states clearly that, "Primary education shall be free and accessible to all citizens of South Sudan without discrimination on basis of sex, ethnicity, race, religion, and health states, or disabilities". Though by law, primary education is free and compulsory, the reality on the ground is different. South Sudan has made great strides towards achieving EFA Goal 2, "Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free, and compulsory primary education of good quality".

In 2011, 1,391,704 students were enrolled in primary schools, a net enrolment rate (NER) of 42.9%. This figure slightly fell in 2013, when 1,311,467 students were enrolled, a NER of 41.5%. The decline could be as a result of improved data collection reflecting the reality or as a result of the mounting instability that occurred in 2013. Additionally, comparing the gross intake ratio (GIR) with the net intake ratio (NIR) shows the vast number of overage learners entering primary school in South Sudan. In 2011, the GIR was 89.8% compared to

a NIR of only 13.8%. Of the 264,427 students entering primary 1,223,741 (or 84.6% of the incoming class) were not aged 6. As of 2013, the GIR was lower, only 68.0%. However, the NIR was 11.9%; 107,218 of the 129,993 new students were overage, 82.5% of the incoming student body. This remains consistent throughout primary school. The percentage of overage learners was 86.7% in 2011 and 87.3% in 2013. Gender parity in primary education still leaves room for improvement in South Sudan. In 2011, 38.8% of primary students were female, and 61.2% were male. These rates have barely changed for 2013, 38.9% were female and 61.1% were male. The quality of education also leaves some room for improvement. Teacher qualification is one good indicator of the quality of education. Since 2011, the percentage of trained teachers has declined from 43.7% to 39.8%. However, there has been an improvement in the rate of teachers being paid. In 2011, 39.9% of primary education teachers were volunteers, compared to only 25.8% in 2013. The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) has also improved over the past few years, from 52.4 in 2011 to 47.3 in 2013. One of the reasons for decline in many primary education indicators may be the rush for education immediately after independence in 2011. The President of the Republic of South Sudan decreed that all children must go to school. In response to this decree, concerted efforts to enroll children, such as the Go to School Initiative, the school based girls' education movement (GEM), and community based promotion and advocacy for girls' education (PAGE) resulted in enrolment demand far beyond what the system could effectively accommodate. As a result, overcrowding and lack of materials in relevant national languages, in line with the Education Act 2012, may have caused many children to leave the education system.

The Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) set a NER target in the primary system of 63% by 2017. This will be achieved through the improvement of educational infrastructure, aiming for all primary schools to offer the full primary cycle, and channeling overage learners into alternative education programs. This is an optimistic target given the current context in South Sudan.

The commitment in the 2012, General Education Strategic Plan (GESP) to introducing a capitation grant system to offset the operating costs of schools to improve access to education for those children who cannot attend school for financial reasons has begun. In 2013, 3,000 capitation grants were applied for within primary education and 2,718 were approved. Due to the conflict in the Greater Upper Nile region, 223 primary school capitation grants have been unable to receive their capitation grants. In the year's post-2015, the GRSS has put in place a set of priorities, which will continue to improve the quality of primary education and increase access for all, particularly the most vulnerable. Girls are the priority group for the MoEST going forward. The MoEST will focus on girls by providing boarding schools for those who cannot easily access education facilities, providing learning materials, and strengthening school governing bodies and parent-teacher associations. There is a major focus on increasing the provision of education materials, including textbooks. Until 2015, there has been little emphasis put on the transition from primary to secondary school as a result of the nationally low provision of secondary school. By 2017, the end of the current GESp, the GRSS aims to increase the primary NER to 63%, GER to 92%. Universal primary enrolment should be met by the year 2022, barring any major crisis or conflict.

Gender Parity and Equality in Education

There are many disparities and inequalities in the education sector in South Sudan, in particular the gender disparity among students and teachers and especially children with special needs. These are some of the most serious issues in South Sudan that prompted the government to develop Education Act 2012 immediately

after its independence from the Sudan. In the Education Act 2012, Chapter 2, Section 7 (Goals of Education) (a) and (b) stipulated that equitable access to education for all citizens and gender equality in education and also that “the gender equality on the teaching force through equal opportunity during teachers recruitment.

However, limited numbers of girls have access to education and great number of girls that endeavored to start schooling dropping out of schools before they complete either stages of learning, such as primary or secondary. This is due to many factors ranging from:

1. Economic barriers particularly at the household level leading to dropouts as children become contributors to household economies, or families can no longer afford to send children to school due to high school fees;
2. Cultural barriers driven mainly by attitudes and traditions about the girl-child, including early marriages;
3. School-based barriers, such as sexual harassment, early pregnancy, and child-to-child violence;
4. Psycho-social barriers, such as age-lapse among the pupils and the challenges of maturation for teenage girls;
5. Inadequate numbers of qualified teachers—especially female role models—and other human resource limitations;
6. Inadequate physical facilities and infrastructure, particularly latrines, of schools.

Encouraging support of children with special needs and disabilities through accessibility and child-friendly school environment in all types of education through inclusive education policies has become a focus of the government. The GESP states that although MoEST is committed to inclusive education by using a child-friendly school approach, as such accessibility standards are not part of the work of most education managers. Few teachers are trained to address special needs, and very few schools are able to provide a safe and accessible learning environment for children with special needs. The requirement to deliver education services to those children and youth who have physical and mental challenges is seen as important to attain an inclusive education system. The special needs of these citizens can be addressed by the effective delivery of learning that nurtures their talents and provides what is necessary. This process can turn those who have been considered a burden on society in the past into contributing citizens of the nation. For this reason, education for children with special needs has been identified as a special programme for the South Sudan education sector.

South Sudan adapted the principle of universal primary education (UPE), and therefore, the Education Act 2012, Chapter 2, Section (a) stipulated that, “Primary education shall be free and accessible to all citizens in South Sudan without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, and ethnicity, health status including HIV/AIDS, gender, or disability”. Now, the government of South Sudan is spending about 60 million South Sudan pounds (SSP) on capitation grants to not for-profit primary schools.

Capitation grants remove registration fees, encouraging parents to send their children to school. The Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Girls’ Education South Sudan (GESS) programme includes a cash transfer component. All girls in P5-P8 and S1-S4 who are regularly attending school are eligible to receive one cash transfer of 125 SSP per year. This money will encourage girls to stay in school and attend regularly, as doing so qualifies them to receive the same amount in the next year. The money helps girls to buy items they need for their education, such as uniforms, pens, notebooks, or shoes. The cash also contributes to poverty reduction in the family and the community. The GESS programme aims to improve girls’ enrolment, retention, and learning in primary and secondary schools. In 2014, 67,167 girls were set to benefit from the

cash transfers, though some are still pending, as an incentive to continue in school.

Additionally, awareness campaigns have been run on the importance of the education of girls. Community awareness has been increased through community forums, a radio programme “Our School” that broadcasts weekly on 12 radio stations nationwide, television, and newspaper. The establishment of the Community Girl Schools (CGS) target only the girls but boys are benefiting from the programme. They are able to learn in the same classrooms. The Alternative Education System (AES) Directorate of the Ministry of Education targets youth and adults who did not have access to formal education due to wartime displacement, early marriage or having no schools in their areas. As a result, all vulnerable populations including girls, demobilized soldiers, and children with special needs are addressed by education programming of the MoEST.

Quality of Education

Since the education system in South Sudan is relatively new, it has been difficult to measure the longitudinal quality of the education system. Quality is considered as part of the right to education which is enshrined in the National Education Act and General Education Strategic Plan Documents.

South Sudan education quality is faced with a lot of challenges in any attempt to achieve a primary education of acceptable quality and this includes problems of resources, services, facilities, and teaching in the schools.

Facilities

In southern Sudan, pupils are taught in one of three typical locations: (a) classrooms in permanent buildings, for example, classrooms made of brick or stone; (b) classrooms made of local materials, such as bamboo and thatch; and (c) classes taught outside without any roof or building, usually under a tree. Currently, 43% of all classes are taught outdoors. Only 12% of pupils are taught in permanent classrooms. In Bahr El Ghazal region, almost 60% of classes take place out of doors. In general, these “outdoor classrooms” consist of little more than a homemade blackboard nailed to a tree with the pupils sitting on the ground or on branches slung between two forked sticks. Teaching takes place when the weather permits and frequently has to be abandoned because of rain and afternoon heat.

There are also major deficiencies in the general facilities of schools. Overall, only 33% of schools have latrines. However, this falls to 11% in the Bahr El Ghazal region and to 13% in Upper Nile. Even where latrines do exist it is liable to be at the level of one latrine for every 200 pupils. Forty-six percent of schools have no source of clean water (72% in Bahr El Ghazal). If and when schools do receive equipment or teaching materials, 66% do not have storerooms.

Teachers and Teaching Materials

The vast majority of teachers in Southern Sudan are poorly educated and untrained. Almost 70% have only a primary school education. Many have not completed the full eight year primary school curriculum. Thirty percent have secondary education and less than 2% have a diploma or higher certificate (SPLM, 2003). Almost all of those who have completed secondary school and diploma courses will have done so prior to 1984 and so the proportion of younger teachers with secondary or higher level qualifications is even smaller.

Only 7% of the teachers in the school base assessment (SBA) assessed schools were trained and had at least one year of college (or per-service) training. Forty-five percent were totally untrained and 48% were reported as having received some in-service training, although this could be as little as two weeks of in-service training. From observations, which were conducted on over 5,000 lessons, over 60% of the teachers were

assessed as doing a satisfactory job, given their lack of training and the teaching conditions in the school. The main teaching weaknesses were in the use of relevant visual aids, poor questioning technique, and in the use of child centered teaching methods.

The availability of text books and teaching materials varies significantly from school to school. Missionary supported schools have the highest level of provision, although often these are texts taken from the curriculum of neighboring countries, such as Kenya and Uganda. Many schools have no textbooks. The SBA study reports that in the 1,096 schools assessed, there were an overall total of 72,850 library and textbooks to be shared among 165,956 pupils.

National Policies and Potential for UPE

Following extensive pressure from the international community, a protocol was signed at Machakos in July 2002 between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. It is hoped that the protocol and the resulting talks will lead to a lasting cease fire followed by the establishment of a plural democratic system of governance and eventually self-determination for the people of Southern Sudan to decide on their future status. While acknowledging the unity of the Sudanese State, the protocol envisages that pending a referendum, there will be an interim administration for the whole of Sudan with the division of power among different levels of government. This will include a national government and two autonomous regions, one in the North and one in the South. The people of Southern Sudan will have the right to manage their own affairs and to participate equitably in the National Government. Amongst the powers of the Southern Government will be authority over basic education in the South.

During the interim period the main policies and guidelines for education in Southern Sudan are likely to be those which have been established by the SPLM Secretariat for Education. The first steps in devising, these policies were taken at an economic governance workshop held in Yambio (Western Equatoria) in 1999. The results of which were published as "Peace Through Development" (SPLM, 2001). This document was set out as the blueprint for "socio-economic development of the New Sudan and provision of services to the civil population in areas under its control". In reference to policies on education, the report specified that in the foreseeable future, the focus would be on the provision of basic education and noted, "It is envisaged to steadily increase enrolment of children of primary school age from the present low level of some 18%, so that the objective of UPE is achieved 10 years after the end of the war. Alongside and on par with the increased enrolment is improvement in quality of education" (p. 24). The report also noted the SPLM view that "increase access to education of girls and skills training for women" was critical (p. 24).

Peace through development was followed in June 2001 by a "national" symposium on education which was also held in Yambio. The symposium was designed to provide a broad-based forum for developing a long-term vision for education for all and to help establish a Five-Year Plan for Education and Targets for the year 2015. During the symposium, a Technical Committee on Education was set up and established four education targets for the year 2005 and six for 2015. Included in these were the targets that "all children between the ages of six and seven and all adolescents should have access to quality primary education" and that "gender disparities should be eliminated from all primary and secondary schools".

Based upon the targets identified by the Technical Committee on Education the SPLM Secretariat for Education has subsequently produced a detailed document entitled "Education Policy with Implementation Guidelines". Goal 2.1 in this document states that, "Education shall be the right of every child regardless of

ethnicity, culture, gender, religion and socio-economic status”.

Goal 2.4 states, “Emphasis should be placed on girls’ education in order to achieve equality of education”. (SPLM, 2002)

It is clear, therefore, that the SPLM education policy demonstrates a commitment to developing quality education for all. It is not clear, however, how the Secretariat intends to achieve these goals. The policy, for example, states that, “Primary education shall be eight years” even though the consultative Education Symposium recommended that it should be reduced to five or six years. The policy also states that education should receive 10% of the social service tax collected by the civil authority. However, the policy document also states that communities should contribute at least 50% of the resources necessary to provide basic education and that “Each community shall raise the necessary funds to meet the cost of financing its learning institutions”.

The difficulty is that although local communities have helped to build and fund their local schools, the level of funding available from community resources is many times lower than what will be needed to achieve the SPLM and EFA targets. A study on the costing and finance of primary education in Southern Sudan conducted for United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2000 has estimated that the average indicative cost for providing a minimum standard of education will be US\$26.25 per pupil per year (Schwarz, 2000). The study notes that this estimate is a basic budget which has been kept low “in order to promote the expansion of schools and to increase access to basic education in poor and underserved areas”. The estimate allows US\$2 per pupil per year for the construction of simple “tukul” classrooms, US\$10.29 per pupil per year for staff salaries, US\$4.41 for textbooks and materials, US \$2 for stationery, and US\$6.06 for institutional support.

Based on these costing, the authors estimated that the annual cost of a primary education system for a population of 100,000 people, assuming that 25% were of school age would be US\$656,250. Accepting the general estimate of a population of five million people in Southern Sudan would give an estimated school-age population of 1.25 million and so would an estimated budget in excess of US\$32 million per year to achieve UPE. This does include costs for training of teachers needed nor does it allow for children in the government controlled towns nor the probable return of school children amongst the estimated four million internal displaced people (IDP) in the North and 400,000 refugees in neighboring countries (Sommers, 2002).

The SPLM policy of requiring the community to contribute at least 50% of the resources necessary to provide basic education and to raise the necessary funding to meet the cost of financing, its institutions will clearly mitigate against the possibility of achieving UPE (SPLM, 2002).

However, the Secretariat’s policies towards girls’ education should help to increase access and retention for girls. A special department for girls and for female teacher education has already been established. The Secretariat is also committed to reducing entry age for girls, affirmative action programmes, such as quotas, encouraging boarding schools for girls, especially at upper primary level, the provision of scholarships for girls, and female teachers and the sensitization of the community with regard to gender equity. If fully implemented and carried, these policies will ensure substantial progress towards improving the enrolment and retention of girls in primary education.

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