

Background paper prepared for the  
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4  
*Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality*

# **Progress to universal primary education in southern Sudan: a short country case study**

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2003

This paper was commissioned by the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* as background information to assist in drafting the 2003/4 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: "Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4, The Leap to Equality*". For further information, please contact [efareport@unesco.org](mailto:efareport@unesco.org)

## **BACKGROUND**

Over the past decade there has been significant progress in the development of education in rebel-held areas of southern Sudan with most of this work being carried out at the local community level. Support from the international community for education has been very limited. Despite the fact that progress has been made, it would be unrealistic, however, to suggest that southern Sudan will meet EFA objectives by 2015.

The education system in Southern Sudan has always been under resourced. Immediately prior to the current civil war there was a shortage of qualified teachers and a lack of school equipment and textbooks. (*House of Nationalities 2002*). Between 1985 and 1990 the breakdown in education accelerated as teachers and pupils were recruited into the different armies and militias.

However, with the progress made since the earlier nineties, after eighteen years of civil war and regular famine there are now more schools functioning and more children enrolled in schools in southern Sudan than there were before the outbreak of war. The Government of Sudan Statistical Abstract for 1980/81 shows that there were 903 primary and intermediate schools in southern Sudan with a total enrolment of 165,956 pupils (*Yongo-Bure B 1993*). In contrast in 2003 the School Baseline Assessment (SBA) study identified over 1,500 schools with an enrolment of around 325,000.

Between 1990 and 1999 there was almost a complete absence of accurate information about the state of schools in southern Sudan. Estimates of the number of schools varied from 800 to 3,000. The information that was available was widely regarded as being inaccurate and unreliable. It was generally accepted that there was a tendency amongst local education officials “to provide incorrect information or inflate figures as a means of gaining more materials or funds from the donor community” (*Secretariat of Education 2001*).

Three recent studies, however, allow what most people consider to be a reasonably accurate view of the current situation in schools. These studies were:

- (1) the School Baseline Assessment (SBA) project (*AET/UNICEF 2002*),
- (2) the UNICEF MICS Household Survey (*UNICEF 2000*) and
- (3) the SPLM Rapid Assessment Data for Primary Education survey (*SPLM 2003*).

## **PRIMARY EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN SUDAN TODAY**

Given the security situation, the number of internally displaced and the pastoralist livelihoods of many people, it is difficult to get an accurate estimate either of the total population or of the school-age population in southern Sudan. Using figures from Polio Campaign and information from the a Survey of 5,000 households conducted in UNICEF/OLS estimated that there are approximately five million

people in southern Sudan of whom 1.06 million are children of school age (7-14). The Household Survey reports that only 30% of school-aged children are enrolled in schools.

The School Baseline Assessment (SBA) programme was established in October 1998 specifically to try to obtain accurate and reliable information about the state of schools in southern Sudan. A detailed standardized assessment procedure and manual were prepared and forty local educationalists (mainly teachers trainers and school supervisors) were trained to use the manual and follow the procedures in a systematic way. The assessment involved each assessor spending a minimum of two days in each school collecting statistics first hand, observing classes being taught and interviewing samples of teachers and students. Discussion forums with Parent Teachers Associations (PTA) were later included in the assessments. Between October 1998 and May 2002 1,126 schools were assessed by the SBA assessors .

The results were published in May 2002 and included statistics for 1096 schools in the three main regions of Bahr El Ghazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria and for 30 schools in Nuba. They are based on assessments carried out in schools across all areas of southern Sudan controlled by the SPLM / SRRA and the other factions including RASS and FRRA but they do not include schools in towns and cities in the south under Government control, such as Juba, Wau and Torit.

### **School Enrolment**

The May 2002 SBA report shows a total enrolment in the 1,096 schools in the three main regions of 227,899 pupils. Over a two month period in November and December 2002, The SPLM Education Secretariat's carried out a "Rapid Assessment of Primary Schools" which obtained statistics from 1,451 schools. This reported a total enrolment of 508,082. The SBA estimate for 1,500 schools would be 325,000 pupils. While it is generally accepted that there has been an increase in school enrolment over the past two to three years, the SPLM figure does seem high. However, with either figure it is clear that in southern Sudan only a minority of school-age children are enrolled in school. The majority of children are still excluded.

For those children who do manage to get to school the likelihood of completing the eight year primary school cycle are extremely low. Both the SBA and the Secretariat results agree that 60% of all pupils are in the first two grades. Only 12% of pupils reach the upper grades and less than 1% of pupils are in Grade 8 classes.

Taking the UNICEF estimate of 1.06 million school-age children and the SBA estimate of a 30% enrolment rate indicates that currently only 0.3% of school age children in southern Sudan complete the eight year primary school cycle. Only of 12% of children proceed past Grade 2 and less than 4% progress past Grade 4.

## **Gender Equality in Schools**

In southern Sudan there is still a bias against the education of girls. In spite of a number of attempts to promote gender sensitization there remains a widespread belief that when sending children to school, girls should have a lower priority than boys. In large measure this is due to the practice of the prospective husband paying a “bride price”, usually in cattle, for his wife. Parents, especially fathers, are concerned that by allowing their daughters to go to school they expose them to the attentions of male students and teachers. If a girl is pregnant before marriage the family will receive few if any cattle for her. Girls have a further economic value in terms of their labour, such as carrying water, cooking, cleaning and minding babies and younger children. Keeping the elder daughters at home releases a mother either to work in the fields or to sell in the market. Boys while they may help by looking after the cattle are rarely called on to perform household chores. Additionally girls, once married are seen as belonging to the husband’s and so not worth the economic investment in education. The results of this bias are clearly seen in the schools.

The SBA report found that only 26% of school pupils were girls. The proportions varied between the three regions with girls making up 37% of pupils in Equatoria, 27% in Upper Nile but only 16% in the Bahr El Ghazal Region. Generally the higher the grade level the lower the percentage of girls enrolled. So that while girls made up 29% of pupils in Grade 1 it was only 21% in Grade 8. In terms of the Relative Gender Gap overall there are 2.8 boys for every girl enrolled, 3.8 boys for every girl in Grade 8. The Absolute Gender Gap across the three regions is 47 points. One of the difficulties in encouraging the enrolment and retention of girls is the very low proportion of female teachers, less than 7% of teachers are female.

In spite of the efforts of both the local authorities and a range of international organizations the results of the Education Secretariat’s Rapid Assessment exercise would appear to indicate that the proportion of girls enrolled in schools may have fallen from the 26 % reported in SBA to 23.6% in the more recent exercise. However the apparent decline may be due to the Secretariat’s assessment taking place while the cease fire was in operation and so included a greater proportion of schools in Upper Nile.

## **Quality of Education**

In addition to the problem of the low enrolment and retention rates any attempt to achieve a primary education of acceptable quality in southern Sudan will be faced with the problem of the extremely low level 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, (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 “out door 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 ever 200 pupils. 46% 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. 30% 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 SBA assessed schools were trained and had at least one year of college (or pre-service) training. 45% 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 neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Uganda. Many schools have no text books. The SBA study reports that in the 1,096 schools assessed there was an overall total of 72,850 library and text books to be shared between 165,956 pupils.

## NATIONAL POLICIES AND POTENTIAL FOR UPE

Sudan has been independent for almost 47 years. During that period the country was involved in two civil wars, has had six constitutions and 12 constitutional decrees and order (*Alier 2003*). The first civil war began with a mutiny of the Southern Corps of the Sudan Defence Forces in Torit (Eastern Equatoria) in August 1955 and lasted for seventeen years. The second civil war started with mutinies in Bor and Ayod which led to the formation of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in July 1983. This second civil war has lasted for almost 20 years. 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 between 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 percent so that the objective of universal primary education is achieved ten years after the end of the war. Alongside and on par with increased enrolment is improvement in quality of education" (page 24). The report also noted the SPLM view that "increase access to education of girls and skills training for women" was critical. (*Ibid*)

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 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 under served 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 costings 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 5 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 universal primary education. 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-age children amongst the estimated 4 million IDPs in the North and 400,000 refugees in neighbouring 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 through these policies will ensure substantial progress towards improving the enrolment and retention of girls in primary education.

## **The Past and Future role of International Assistance in achieving UPE**

### **International Assistance in the Past**

Over the past eighteen years there has been limited international assistance for education in southern Sudan. Ironically this was due in part to the poor human rights record of the Government of Sudan. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of European governments and the European Union (EU) suspended co-operation with Sudan because of the Government's lack of respect for human rights and democracy. EU funds earmarked for development were frozen (*EU 2003*). As there was no official recognition of the SPLM and other movements in southern Sudan the suspension applied equally to the north and the south.

In addition to the Government of Sudan's human rights record over the years a variety of other reasons have been given for the lack of international support for education.

- For example, Sudan's failure to service its debt to the World Bank, and also the view that funding long-term development would reduce the demand for peace in the South (*Whiting 2001*).
- One suggestion has been that since one of the underlying causes of the civil war was the Government's policy of Islamisation and Arabisation of education then agencies which supported education could be seen as abandoning neutrality and taking sides in the conflict. If they supported the national curriculum and the Arab language they would be siding with the Government. If they supported any other curriculum and any other language they would be opposing the policy of the Government and hence siding with the southern rebel movements. UNESCO has attempted to solve this problem by organizing a series of meetings between education officials from the North and the South with a view to harmonizing the curriculum.

- Continued fighting and a general lack of security were also seen as a barrier to investing in schools and primary education.
- One other major cause for the lack of financial support for education was the prevailing belief within the international aid community in the early nineties that relief, rehabilitation and development were separate stages in the aid process and that education belonged to the development stage. The idea of relief, rehabilitation and development as a continuum and of the need for education at all stages, especially in on-going emergency situations only began to gain widespread acceptance in the late 1990s. An additional factor was that the agencies working in southern Sudan were predominantly relief oriented and their field staff rarely had any knowledge or experience of educational development.

The result was that throughout the 1990s the majority of international and bi-lateral donors were unwilling to support education in southern Sudan. There were a few exceptions. The Norwegian Government, for example, provided support through UNICEF and through NGOs such as Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and the Africa Educational Trust (AET).

A survey of educational needs and services conducted in 1996 found a very limited number of international agencies were engaged in supporting education in southern Sudan. The most prominent were UNICEF/OLS, SCF(UK), SCF(Sweden), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), The New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) and ACROSS. (*Kenya 1996*).

UNICEF was the agency which provided the largest amount of support throughout the nineties. It provided educational materials for primary schools and supported in-service training of primary teachers throughout the South. ACROSS participated in in-service training and through its Sudan Literature Centre (SLC) produced primary school textbooks and teacher's guides. Other organizations tended to concentrate on in-service training and the provision of school materials and supplies within specific defined geographic areas. NCA, for example supported teacher training and schools in Eastern Equatoria. International Aid Sweden (IAS) and NSCC did this in Western Equatoria, Similarly SCF (Sweden) worked in lower Bar El Ghazal and SCF(UK) in Central Upper Nile and Northern Bar El Ghazal. The zonal approach continued to be the pattern for the involvement of most international agencies throughout the 1990s. In 2002 UNICEF while continuing to provide across the south also decided to concentrate or give funding priority for work in two counties (Rumbek and Yambio). Since 1996 a few smaller organizations, such as AET have worked across the different regions but on limited and more specific areas of work such as baseline data collection and training of head teachers and parent teacher associations.

### **International Assistance and Local Structures**

During the 1990s, often out of necessity, UNICEF and most other international agencies and NGOs worked on a day-to-day basis with representatives of the different southern

movements such as SPLM/SRRA, RASS and FRRA. However, due to pressure from funders especially bi-lateral government agencies and the need for maintaining neutrality very little support was provided for the education departments or sections of these different movements. At times this has led to a concern about the possibility of incompatible programmes and systems being established within the areas which fell under the spheres of influence of different NGOs. For example, with schools following different curricula and textbooks from different countries such as Kenya and Uganda.

### **The Present and Future Role for International Assistance**

The talks leading to, and the signing of, the Machakos Protocol in 2003 have helped to bring about a major shift of policy by international donors and agencies. USAID has already committed US\$20 million over a five year period for the “Sudan Basic Education Program”. The main goal of this project, which is being managed by CARE is to increase equitable access to quality education. To achieve this the programme plans to support the establishment of four regional teacher training institutes, train 2,000 women teachers, rehabilitate 300 schools, provide non-formal education for 16,000 learners and increase the supply of school materials. (*USAID 2002*)

In January 2003 the UK Department for International Development (DFID) made a grant of £2 million to UNICEF for the delivery of “quick impact” educational initiatives to the north and south of Sudan. These initiatives are seen as being part of a “peace dividend” which will encourage the Government in the north and the SPLM in the south to continue to work together for a lasting solution to the war. DFID has also indicated that the UK Government intends to provide substantial medium and long-term funding for education provided the peace process is sustained.

The European Union is taking a similar approach to the UK and is planning a “quick response” three year Sudan Post-conflict Recovery and Rehabilitation (SPRR) Programme with Fifty million Euro of funding . The purpose of this programme is to “enhance opportunities for the rapid recovery of rural livelihoods at community/ local level” (*EC 2003* ). The EU programme will concentrate on eleven geographic areas some in the north and some in the south ( Upper Nile, Western and Northern Bar El Ghazal, Lakes, Unity, Warab and Jongli) and implementation will be through consortia of NGOs. The two main focal areas identified for what is referred to as a multi-track response strategy are food security and education.

A recent visit to Sudan by a World Bank-led mission to assess the status of education and to identify opportunities for the donors and the Bank to make investments in education also points to the likely involvement of the Bank in future support for education in both the northern and southern Sudan.

There is a great opportunity for the international community to help the people of Sudan in their efforts to achieving universal primary education. Unfortunately previous under-resourcing and a dearth of international assistance for education for more than a decade means that the base-line or starting point is extremely low. The sheer level of interest and potential commitment from the international community given a long-term peace

agreement, however, means that southern Sudan should be able to make major progress over the next twelve years in reaching the goals of UPE.

However, the lack of structures and human resource capacity within southern Sudan to co-ordinate, manage and work with the wide range of potential donors and agencies may limit the rate and the extent of progress. From having a small budget and two full-time headquarters staff only a few years ago, the SPLM Secretariat for Education is likely to find itself responsible within the next five years for co-ordinating and liaising with multiple donors and for funding totaling US\$100 million or more.

## **SUMMARY**

- The enrolment rate of around 30 % of school-age children in schools in southern Sudan is extremely low.
- The enrolment rate for girls is even lower with a number of studies showing that 7% or less of school-age girls are currently enrolled in schools.
- There are still significant social, cultural and economic biases in southern Sudan which constrain progress towards equality of education for girls.
- Mainly due to the efforts of local communities over 1,500 schools are functioning in the three main regions of southern Sudan.
- The quality of education provided by the vast majority of these schools is low due to the lack of resources, facilities and basic teaching materials along with an extreme shortage of trained teachers.
- The signing of the Machakos Protocol by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the main southern opposition group, has provided a major opportunity for progress to be made towards achieving UPE by 2015.
- The education policies of the SPLM which is likely to become the dominant or major partner in the proposed autonomous government for the South stresses the importance of achieving UPE. Its goals and guiding principles are compatible with a commitment to UPE.
- Over the past eighteen years there has been very limited international assistance to the education sector in southern Sudan.

- Major initiatives to support educational development are currently being implemented or planned by multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors such as USAID, DFID (UK), the European Commission and the World Bank.
- These have the potential to allow southern Sudan to make substantial progress towards UPE. However, given the low level of current enrolment, the continuing bias against girls, the lack of resources and facilities aggravated by the lack of trained teachers and educational structures it is unlikely that southern Sudan will be able to achieve a primary education of acceptable quality for all children by 2015.

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