

“Education Cannot Wait for the War to End”¹

The role of education in saving lives and averting the loss of another generation in South Sudan

Context

Education indicators in South Sudan were extremely concerning prior to the outbreak of the current civil war. According to the South Sudan Ministry of Education’s 2011 Statistical Yearbook and 2013 Education and Management Information System (EMIS):

- **73% of men and 84% of women above 15 years of age were illiterate.**
- 60% of teachers were untrained or their qualifications were not known.
- Three out of five school-age children were not enrolled in primary school.
- The pupil-classroom ratio averaged 100.

As a result, South Sudan has the lowest schooling coverage for education in all sub-sectors (pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical vocational education training) in the region. South Sudan lags behind 1.5 times and 2.5 times for primary education compared to CAR and Rwanda respectively.²

Impact of Three Years of Conflict on Education

Since the current civil war began in December 2013, the already struggling education sector has been further impacted by fighting and displacement. In a country where **children represent 47.75% of the total population**, the brunt of the immediate impact and long-term effects of conflict and violence is borne by them.

The November 2016 national assessment conducted by the Education Cluster shows that:

- **31% of primary schools have suffered at least one or more attacks** by armed forces or groups since December 2013.
- **25% of primary schools** which were open at any point since 2013 were found to be **non-functional** in late 2016.
- Compared to the number of teachers registered at the start of 2016, **teacher presence** during the last month of the school year had **decreased by 31%**.
- **Lack of food** is one of the **main reasons for student drop out** and is primary cause for non-attendance.

Short and Long Term Impact

The interruption of education has short and long term consequences for the stability and development of South Sudan:

- **Children** who are not in school **will lack the structure and stimulation for healthy cognitive, social and emotional development** that they require.
- Another **entire generation is at risk of being illiterate when they reach adulthood potential**; this will affect communities and the country as a whole, stunting national development and impeding the realisation of the SDGs.
- The education crisis risks **fueling new conflicts** as an estimated 17,000 children are already recruited into armed groups. The longer children stay out of school, the more likely it is that they **are recruited into armed groups**.

Education Cluster Members Action

In 2016, the Education Cluster reached more than **375,000 children and 15,500 teachers and parents** by:

- Providing access to safe learning spaces to children and adolescents, which gives a sense of normalcy to their lives.
- Reducing risks and improving the development of children through their training and that of adults on life-saving messages, peacebuilding and life skills (coping mechanisms, refusal and negotiation skills, working and living alongside others).
- Strengthening cognitive skills of children through formal education, training of teachers on teaching methodology, provision of teaching/learning materials and textbooks.
- Supporting exams for end-of-primary and end-of-secondary IDP students.

Education Cluster members work closely with development actors, especially Girls Education South Sudan to: 1) ensure continuation of learning by handing over support responsibilities for those schools in areas that have become peaceful, 2) Harmonize the value of teacher incentives to mitigate the risk that emergency programming support is more financially appealing.

¹ Emergency meeting called by the Ministry of Education and attended by humanitarian and development partners, February 2014.

² UNESCO IIEP database. Prepared using the latest 2014-2016 EMIS data available for South Sudan Joint Education Sector Review.



What do South Sudanese People Think about Education?

Research conducted for the South Sudan Education Cluster impact evaluation in 2013 found that **education is a major priority for internally displaced and host populations**, second only in importance to improved national security and freedom.³

In addition to being a priority during emergencies, **education is an entry point to local communities** for other sectors. For example, WFP and its partners provide meals in ca. 600 schools, thus **reducing hunger and malnutrition, and increasing attendance and learning outcomes for ca. 224,000 children**. Schools also provides a platform for services for children at risk of disease, trauma, and recruitment into armed groups.

Does Education in Emergencies Work?

The effectiveness of EiE interventions can be evaluated through the results of end-of-primary exams, which take place in Protection of Civilian sites (PoC) and in schools supported by Education Cluster partners. In 2015, the **pass rate of IDP students supported by cluster members was 4.6 points higher than the average pass rate at the national level** (72.84% vs. 68.15% of students sitting for end-of-primary exams). This shows that the programming strategy promoted and facilitated by the Education Cluster effectively contributes to IDP children's learning and development.

Priority Interventions

- **Payment of teacher salaries:** salary payments have been disrupted since the start of 2016. The issue of salaries is the main reason for teacher absenteeism across the country, superseding even insecurity. The lack of salary payment is also a commonly reported reason for schools becoming non-functional. The continued payment of salaries and/or incentives is a must to ensure continuity of learning.

- **Food for Education to prevent drought impacting education:** throughout South Sudan, lack of food is the top cause of boys dropping out, while for girls it is the second most common cause, after early marriage.⁴ Children who leave or are pulled out of school because of lack of food will lose learning gains made in the past years and will lose access to the protective factors of education.

Emergency school feeding in the areas most affected by food insecurity **will reduce risk of death, disease and cognitive underdevelopment**. It will protect currently enrolled and out-of-school children through incentivized enrolment and attendance in schools. It will also create time and space for parents to pursue livelihood activities without concern about their children's safety.

- **Teaching and learning materials** are considered as the highest priority by county and school level key informants.⁵ Teaching aids and learning materials help learners improve reading comprehension skills, illustrating or reinforcing a skill or concept, differentiating instruction and relieving anxiety or boredom by presenting information in a variety of ways. More generally, they are important in ensuring retention of both teachers and learners in schools.
- **Providing youth with alternatives to violence:** the impact of unoccupied and disengaged young people has an immediate negative impact on the wider community. Engaging displaced youth in basic education, recreational activities, technical and vocational training will create an enabling environment for their critical development and positive engagement with local communities.

³ <http://docs.southsudanngoforum.org/node/185>

⁴ South Sudan Education Cluster national assessment of the status of education, November 2016.

⁵ *Ibid*

Safeguarding the right to education must be an integral part of our response to all crises. [...] displaced children cannot and must not be excluded."

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