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Education in South Sudan: Focusing on Inequality of Provision and Implications for National Cohesion

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CONFLICT
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The SSSA is a professional association of academics, students, activists and practitioners dedicated to the production, development, and promotion of knowledge on South Sudan. The SSSA has met on an annual basis since its founding in 2018 to consider various aspects of the research agenda for South Sudan, including the politics of humanitarianism, education and civics, the political and social implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, regional dimensions of the conflict in South Sudan, and priorities for the newly established unity government.

About the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme is a four-year research programme hosted by LSE IDEAS and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Our goal is to understand and analyse the nature of contemporary conflict and to identify international interventions that 'work' in the sense of reducing violence or contributing more broadly to the security of individuals and communities who experience conflict.

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Introduction

This article examines the provision of basic education services after the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War in 2005, focusing on the condition of the services and its implications for national cohesion during the period after the birth of the South Sudanese state. It argues that the way basic education services were provided after the Second Sudanese Civil War has contributed to the trajectory of inequality that characterised the period before the onset of this war. This trajectory significantly deviated from the vision the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) promised during its bloody armed struggle against Sudanese regimes based in the national capital, Khartoum.

The 2008 SPLM Manifesto espoused the "New Sudan" ideology, which ostensibly strived to establish a "political dispensation that provides equal opportunities for every Sudanese to develop and realize his or her potential" (SPLM 2008). It further expressed an unflinching belief in democracy "with a social content which includes: awareness of, an attention to, the needs of poor and economically disadvantaged individuals and groups, primarily with respect to healthcare, education, employment and social safety nets" (ibid).

Leaders of the SPLM/A stated their vision would replace the one pursued by the leaders of what they termed the "Old Sudan" if they came to power and would propel the country to peace, prosperity, and national unity. According to them, in the "Old Sudan" uneven development, especially unequal distribution of educational and other basic services, maintained people who identified themselves as Muslims and Arabs in privileged political, social, and economic positions (Roden 1994). They also argued that the "Arab" and Muslim elite, who politically dominated the "Old Sudan," repeatedly ignored demands from the politically, socially, and economically marginalised Sudanese from the south,

west, and east of the country for equality and justice, stoking the first armed rebellion, which began in 1955 and lasted for 17 years (de Mabior 1987 and Khalid 1990).

The period of relative peace, resulting from the conclusion of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement between the *Anyanya* (Southern rebels) and the Sudanese government in 1972, ended in 1983 when the Sudanese government reneged on the key terms of the peace deal. The country was subsequently engulfed in a second debilitating war. According to the leader of this rebellion, Dr. John Garang de Mabior, himself a veteran of the first rebellion, the underlying roots of the war, particularly exclusion of most Sudanese from socio-economic and political affairs, especially educational and other basic services, were no different from the causes of the first rebellion (de Mabior 1996). The impact of this war on Southern Sudan was catastrophic. Nearly 2.5 million died, at least 4 million were displaced, and most of the educational facilities and other infrastructure that existed before the onset of the fighting were left in ruins.

Following the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War in 2005, and the transformation of the SPLM from a rebel movement to the ruling party in Southern/South Sudan, politics and leadership performance did not dramatically change. In 2011, the new state of South Sudan was born. It had huge developmental potential, with land area of 644,330 square kilometres, population of 8.3 million (according to a disputed census conducted in 2008), and bountiful natural resources including oil and minerals, populous livestock, rich arable land, and Nile waters, as well as the goodwill of the international community which translated into billions of US dollars in aid (Maxwell et al 2018). Paradoxically, apart from oil resources, this potential went largely unexploited in large part because of perpetual conflicts in many of parts of South Sudan and poor governance. The country was dogged by heated political infighting, endemic corruption, tribalism, nepotism, proliferation of illegal arms, and war-related

trauma, all of which eroded public trust in leaders and governance institutions (UNDP 2016).

The way SPLM leaders managed Southern/South Sudan mirrored the manner leaders of the “Old Sudan” misgoverned their country with authoritarianism, endemic corruption, and other routine injustices. Indeed, it has been observed that South Sudan and Sudan followed a model of “two countries, one system,” after failure to develop along a “one country, two systems” paradigm (Deng 2019). Unsurprisingly, South Sudan failed to transition into a peaceful nation after its independence.

In December 2013, South Sudan again plunged into war, which has caused immense destruction of schools and other basic services, but this damage was not uniform across the country (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack 2018). Another significant consequence of the war was the dwindling of huge resources donors had previously poured into state building, including support to basic services, as their focus shifted to humanitarian assistance (Maxwell et al 2018). This further weakened the capacity of the government to provide basic education to its people, many of whom had been driven into refuge in other countries or Protection of Civilians Sites (PoCs) set up on United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) bases.

This article is based on information acquired from a variety sources. Firstly, relevant literature on provision of education going back to the Sudanese war from 1983 to 2005 was consulted. Secondly, attention was paid to reports on education by UN agencies and other organisations that had been active in providing education in Southern/South Sudan. Thirdly, the study benefited from data generated in 2018 using Rapid Education Risk Analysis (RERA), a distinct and uniquely valuable methodology combining disaster, risk, resilience, and conflict analytic frameworks to generate evidence of how education and conflict interact. USAID has used this approach to provide snapshots of education provision in several other countries. In essence, the RERA is a mixed-methods approach, which captures the perceptions of learners, teachers, parents, and other community

members about education provision. In South Sudan, it captured the perceptions of more than 900 informants across 27 learning sites in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Unity, Western Equatoria, and Central Equatoria. Quantitative activities included math and reading assessments with Grade Three and Four learners, secondary data forms documenting enrolment and other key educational statistics for learning sites, and surveys with community-level informants on topics such as education access, facilities, and quality. Qualitative activities included interviews with religious and traditional leaders, youth and women’s group leaders, community members, children, teachers, and other stakeholders such as Ministry of General Education and Instruction officials, and international NGO as well as donor representatives.

Section 2 discusses relevant literature for the article, especially on the role education can play in national cohesion, with a focus on Southern/South Sudan and Sudan. Section 3 traces the unequal education provision after 2005 and its implications for equality and hence national cohesion. The trajectory of inequality of service delivery became even more pronounced after the outbreak of war in December 2013, when many people fled to other countries and UNMISS bases, where communities are often ethnically segregated, and education and other services extended to mono-ethnic communities. Section 4 mainly deals with views of learners, teachers, parents, and other community members on quality of education and implications for national cohesion. Section 5 delves into funding for education by the government and external actors and its links not only to economic progress but also national cohesion. The last section concludes the article.

Education, peace, and rebellion

Education can cause individual, group, and societal progress. Oftentimes, however, it generates inequalities, with those enjoying higher educational achievement having more opportunities for advancement and those having less opportunities feeling

disadvantaged. In fact, it has been observed that education “is strongly connected to future economic activity and well-being and plays an important role in national identity and social cohesion” (The World Bank 2018: 113). The inclusion of shared history and culture in the national curriculum across a country is one way of bringing about social cohesion.

Whether educational opportunities favour or discriminate against some groups is, to a great extent, contingent on the choices made and actions taken by public authorities. No wonder South Sudanese, particularly leaders of armed struggles in Southern Sudan, persistently blamed the British colonial administration in Sudan (1899-1955) and regimes of post-independence Sudan for the poor educational outcomes and other deprivations in their part of the country. For example, Peter Adwok Nyaba explained that the British surrendered education in Southern Sudan to missionaries who “did not have any capacity apart from proselytization” (Nyaba 2019: 18). Moreover, he argued that education provision was deliberately tailored to “instil in southern Sudanese extreme hatred of the northern Sudan in general, and the Arabs and Islam in particular.” In addition, he claimed that education “[instilled] in southern Sudanese an inferiority complex and a fear of authority,” and rendered them “apolitical” as their substandard education “efficaciously diverted their attention from their backwardness to hatred of the northern Sudanese.”

The hatred culminated in the resumption of all-out war in 1955, causing the destruction of the meagre educational activities in Southern Sudan initiated by missionary groups. In 1964, the Sudanese government expelled Christian missionaries from the country and embarked on an aggressive drive to propagate Arabism and Islam in Southern Sudan as a way of uniting the country, which they had labelled as Arab and Muslim (Biel 2003). It used education as one of the vehicles to achieve this, which further alienated the non-Arab and largely non-Muslim Southern Sudanese. An aspect of this government policy was a spirited push to Arabicize teaching in schools all over the country, which contributed to lowering

of standards, particularly in the Southern region, where schools had operated in local languages and English during the British-led colonial regime (Tingway 2006: 84).

The notion of nation-building predicated on Arabism and Islam did not instil in Southern Sudanese the feeling of belonging in “the sense of the ‘we’ in relation to the ‘others’” in Sudan (Majeed et al 2008: 10). Instead, Southern Sudanese perceived the move as a threat to their identity, and as such should not only be rejected but opposed by all means. Consequently, the *Anyanya* or Southern-based rebels waged war against Sudanese regimes for a state of their own in the south of the country but agreed to a peace deal in 1972 that gave their region local autonomy and recognised their unique cultures.

17 years of war caused schools in Southern Sudan to close, and learners and teachers to flee, some ending as refugees in neighbouring countries where educational opportunities were dismal. With the return of peace in 1972, conducive conditions prevailed for restarting robust educational activities at all levels. Schools were rehabilitated or built, and teachers were recruited and trained, and so gradually the educational environment improved for learners and teachers. The University of Juba was founded in 1977 to train personnel, including teachers, particularly for the autonomous Southern region as “a sign of redress of Southern grievances,” and also “to be instrument of social integration” as “different people from various parts of Sudan collected” (Tingwa 1993: 39 and 45).

Albeit positive and significant, the progress in rebuilding the education system in Southern Sudan was painfully slow. As a result, many Southern Sudanese failed to access educational opportunities. For example, Southern Sudanese students found it very hard to compete for places at the universities in the country, including the University of Juba which was supposed to produce skilled manpower for their region (Tingwa 2006: 50).

The positive trend in the country, however, only lasted for 10 years as hostilities resumed in 1983 after the abrogation of key elements of the Addis Ababa Peace

Agreement by the then president, Jaafar Nimeiri, who was the very architect of the peace deal. Again, schools were targeted for destruction in Southern Sudan, and learners as well as teachers fled to relatively secure regions of the country or to other countries for refuge. The gains of the short period of peace brought about by the conclusion of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement were quickly lost.

Ironically, the leaders of the new rebel movement, SPLM/A, did not prioritise education in areas they controlled, but continued to lambast Khartoum-based regimes for marginalising Southern Sudanese in the provision of educational and other basic services. Peter Adwok Nyaba pointed out that “the first thing SPLM/A leadership did was to denigrate education and knowledge” (Nyaba 2019: 88). He stated that at one point, Garang told SPLA recruits in a training camp to tell former officials and students to throw their certificates away as they had no use for them (Nyaba 2019: 88).

As Garang concentrated on building a formidable army to confront the Sudanese army, his compatriots in the SPLM/A recruited thousands of mostly Dinka and Nuer youth, often enticing them with the promise that they were being taken to Ethiopia for education. To an extent, the success of the SPLM/A in recruiting these young people was helped by the high value communities attached to education. Unfortunately, many of them perished after the Ethiopian leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, was ousted from power in 1991 and the SPLA had to make a hurried exit from its bases on Ethiopian territory. Some of the survivors became the famous “Lost Boys” of Sudan, a group of about 10,000 boys who trekked to Kenya in 1992 seeking refuge (Biel 2003). They were settled in Kakuma and some found their way to the USA for resettlement.

The SPLM/A did pay some attention to education after its First National Convention, held in the Southern Sudan area of Chukudum in 1994, during which it sought to consult the local population in the territories it controlled on the way forward for the liberation struggle following its deadly split in 1991 that nearly led to the demise of

the struggle. As a public authority in the territory it controlled, the SPLM/A strived to improve its relations with people to repair its image, which had been tarnished by the split in its ranks and continued government army onslaught. At the conference, a number of resolutions on education were adopted, including education as a key factor in the Movement’s struggle to liberate the individual and society from political, economic, social, and natural constraints (Biel 2003). However, the SPLM/A did not do much to implement the resolutions.

In 2002, as peace talks in Kenya between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A progressed towards a comprehensive agreement, the Secretariat of Education of the New Sudan, the body of the SPLM mandated with tackling educational issues, adopted an educational policy, the mission of which, among other things, was to provide lifelong quality education to enable beneficiaries “to be responsible and productive citizens” (SPLM 2002). Among its goals and principles were to “foster nation building through integration, peace, self-reliance, patriotism and promoting respect and tolerance for the other cultures, traditions, opinions and belief.” Its implementation guides included: “inculcation of conflict resolution mechanisms, overcoming the culture of violence through avenues such as debates, drama, games and sports, visits, et cetera.” Quite clearly, the policy was informed by the then prevailing political climate in which the government was pressing on with *Sharia* and other measures to impose Islam and Arab culture on the country as well as the deadly South-on-South violence.

A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Nairobi in 2005 ending the war, opening the door to rebuilding the education sector, and initiating other developments in the devastated Southern Sudan. With substantial oil revenues and goodwill of the international community, the future of education looked promising. The birth of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011 further raised the expectations of citizens for an end to poverty and speedy access to basic services, especially quality education that would help to heal the divisions caused by the war.

Disparities in education provision and social cohesion

The decades of war left all facets of life in Southern Sudan, including educational opportunities, in shambles (The World Bank 2012). The return of peace in 2005, and willingness of donors to finance recovery of the education sector, led to a rapid progress in the reconstruction and maintenance of old schools and the construction of new ones; recruitment and training of teachers; and the institution of regulatory systems, especially in rural and other locations that were badly left behind. It was apparent that the intention was to quickly provide suitable conditions to enhance access to quality education and exploit the full potential of education as a unifying factor after years of war had torn apart the social fabric binding Southern Sudanese together.

The Government of South Sudan adopted the 2012 General Education Act (GEA), a significant milestone that provides for “the establishment of a regulatory framework and structures for general education system in South Sudan” (South Sudan General Education Act 2012: 3). The GEA and Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011) stipulate that primary education is “free and compulsory,” which is clearly aimed at improving access to education. After its independence, South Sudan produced two general education plans: General Education Strategic Plan I (2012–2017) and General Education Strategic Plan II (2017–2022). These regulatory frameworks set the direction that all actors in the educational sphere are to follow to achieve the overall vision of education in the new country.

In September 2015, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction launched a comprehensive national education curriculum for South Sudan to be implemented from 2018. This curriculum is competency-based and includes peacebuilding, which reflects the desire of the government to address the turmoil caused by persistent violence in the nascent country.

Despite the efforts to improve teaching and learning in the country, much needs to be done because of the very poor state of the education sector when the war ended in 2005, and the resumption of fighting in the country shortly after its independence. Consequently, educational outcomes have continued to be poor. Based on the National Baseline Household Survey of 2009, 72 percent of the adult population of South Sudan is illiterate, of which 44 percent are females, and 43 percent are aged 15–29 (Ballon and Duclos 2016: 134). It is estimated that 70 percent of South Sudanese are aged below 30 years. Moreover, the figures show that illiteracy rates are not uniform. Warrap is among the states with the highest rate (*ibid*). Indeed, it has been noted that education is unequally accessible in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in conflict-ridden countries such as South Sudan (Shimeles and Verdier-Chouchane 2016: 164).

As noted earlier, unequal delivery of services, including educational services, is linked to conflict. This was clearly the case in pre-independence South Sudan and remains the case. A study conducted by a team of researchers from various universities, led by University of Sussex, clearly confirmed the education-conflict nexus in South Sudan (Novelli et al 2016). After analysing available data, the team found that “states with the highest occurrence of conflict events since 2011 (Unity, Upper Nile, Jonglei) have the lowest provision of educational resources and the lowest percentage of students in upper primary, reflecting the relationship between the occurrence of conflict and inequalities in educational resources and outcomes” (*ibid*: vi). Poor and unequal education does not lead to national cohesion.

The resumption of hostilities in December 2013 had the most negative impact on education in the county. The conflict caused a huge upheaval with over 4 million people forced from their homes. A large number of learners were forced out of schools, many of which had been destroyed, abandoned, or occupied by armed people. UNESCO carried out a study in 2018 which revealed that of 3.7 million school-aged population (6 to 17 years), about 2.2 million were out of school – nearly 60 percent (UNESCO 2018).

The conflict, however, did not cause the same repercussions on education throughout the country. According to statistics produced by the Ministry of Education and Instruction, the number of students recorded in 2013 was 976,225, in 2015 was 1,192,381, and in 2016 was 1,407,669 (Ministry of General Education and Instruction 2017). Reportedly, the greatest number of primary and secondary schools were recorded in the now defunct Yei River State, which was sucked into the violence. These schools were destroyed or abandoned as this area was largely emptied of its people, many of whom are still in Ugandan refugee camps. The large number of South Sudanese learners in Uganda are following the Ugandan system of education, which is tailored to the needs of Ugandan learners, and will have to adjust to the South Sudanese system on return home when peace is achieved.

According to a study carried out by the Education Cluster, a key cause of dropout from school is lack of food (Education Cluster 2016: 5). Greater Bahr el Ghazal has been affected by seasonal food shortages, though many parts of it are spared the violence between government forces and armed opposition groups. Another serious problem compounding the impact of conflict on education is seasonal floods, which are connected to climate change. The Education Cluster study reveals that before the outbreak of violence, 80 percent of schools in Upper Nile, the worst affected state, were only accessible by foot, almost double the percent of those accessible in the dry season (The Education Cluster 2016: 6-7). The ongoing catastrophic flooding in South Sudan has likely had even worse impacts on access to schools, especially in the Greater Upper Nile region. In fact, most of Jonglei

state and Pibor administration area have been affected by the flooding.

The flood situation will complicate the internal displacement challenge the country has experienced since the outbreak of war in 2013. In fact, many South Sudanese remain in PoCs on UNMISS bases, where NGOs have provided some educational opportunities. The communities in these sites are mainly mono-ethnic, and their continued existence in urban localities goes against the vision of building a cohesive nation. Moreover, the hugely anomalous phenomenon of PoCs, which are refugee-like outfits in the capital and towns around the country, has attracted visibility and attention from the international community which has translated into assistance. This is often better than what is provided to other communities, especially those in neighbouring communities, which could generate grievances on the part of those who might feel unfairly treated by aid organisations.

Some analyses confirm the different treatment of PoCs and other communities in South Sudan. For example, RERA, which includes maths and reading tests for grade 2-4 students in PoC sites in Juba and neighbouring communities, found that PoC students had better performance. The math and reading tests results indicated that students in PoC sites scored higher than students in neighbouring sites, except for P3 male students in neighbouring communities who scored 1.5 percent higher on average than their PoC site counterparts in maths. For details on numbers of students who took the tests in learning sites in the PoCs and surrounding communities, and average percent correct items, see the following table and figures below.

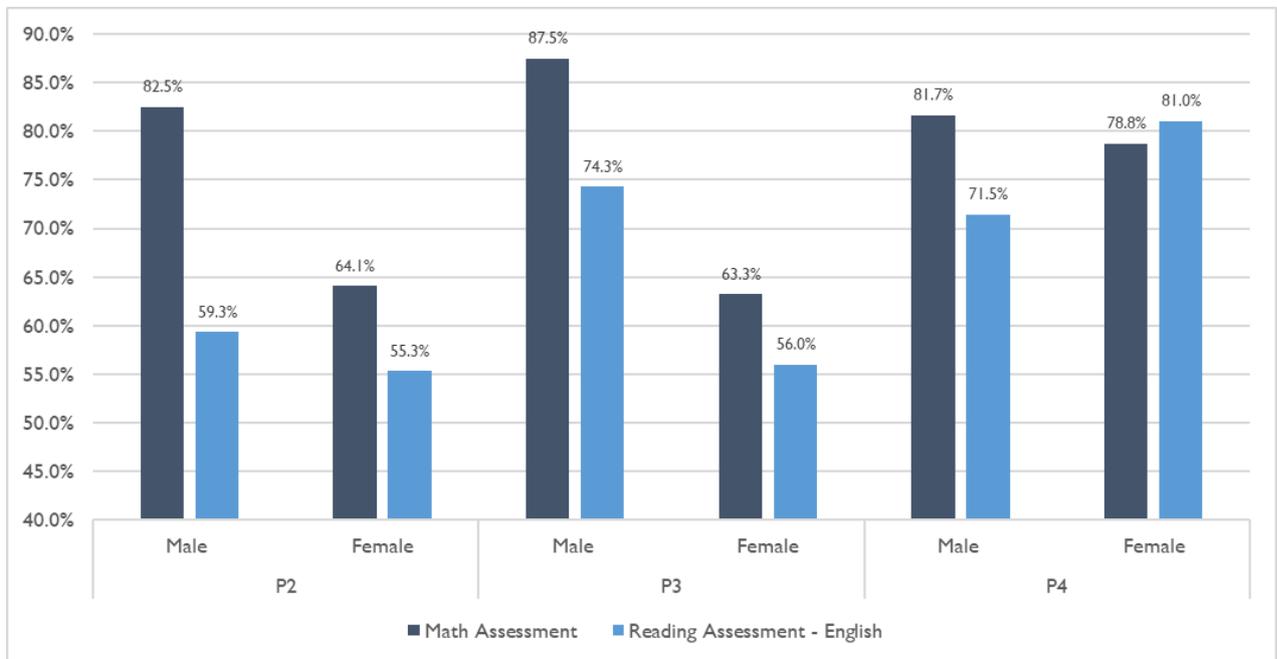
Number of math and reading assessments conducted by site type and grade

Site	P2	P3	P4	Total
PoC	19	10	11	40
Surrounding community	19	17	24	60
Total	38	27	35	100

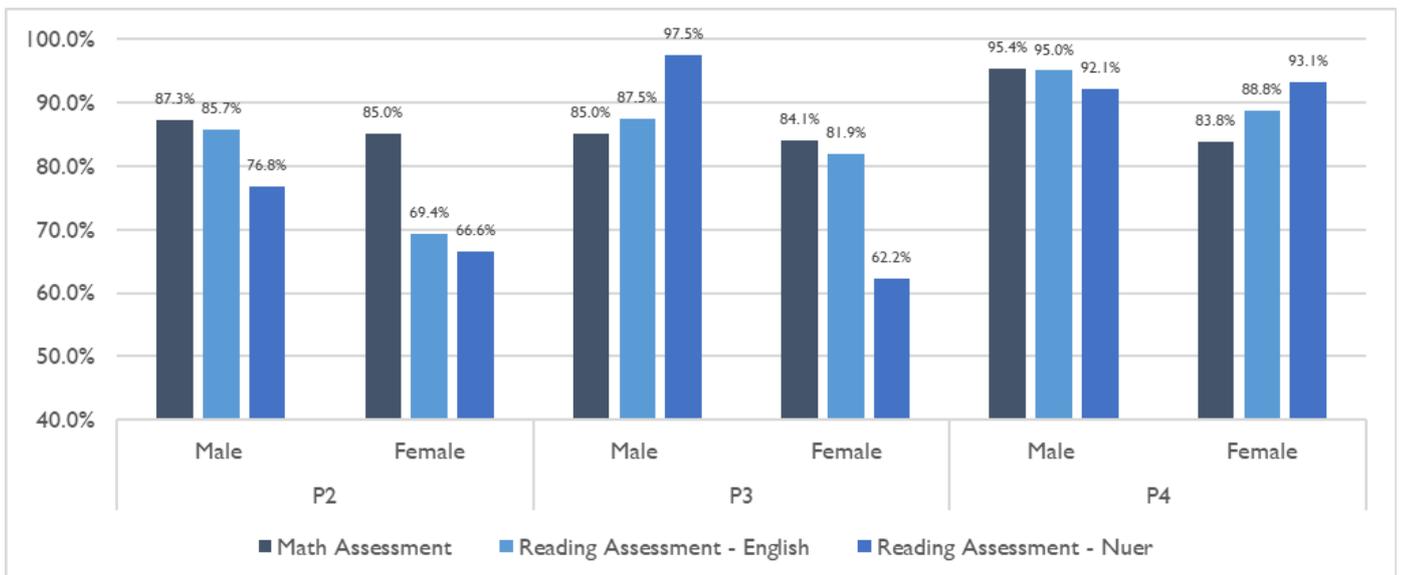
Student Assessment Average Correct Items, surrounding communities and PoCs



Student Assessment Average Percent Correct Items, Surrounding Communities



Student Assessment Average Percent Correct Items, PoCs



Although provision of educational services is relatively better, the overall situation of the PoCs is appalling, with many people forced to live in small spaces where privacy is almost non-existent and the threat of epidemics such as COVID-19 is ever present. Many PoC residents are still dealing with trauma resulting from the ethnic cleansing meted upon them at the hands of Dinka elements of South Sudan security apparatus in December 2013 (African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan 2014). Unsurprisingly, some of these people have left the PoCs for other places within or outside the country, or are struggling to get out as pointed out by a female student interviewed in the Juba PoC for the RERA study:

“Some of our parents lost their jobs when the war erupted in Juba and so it became difficult to support our education and limited us to schools in the PoC which may not be offering quality education. Some of my friends whose parents are still working managed to get out from the camp, others went to Kenya or Uganda and are now studying in good schools.”

Another major challenge with schooling has to do with the kind of teachers in the schools, as well as their recruitment, development, and compensation. The next section focuses on this issue.

Teacher and student perceptions of teacher professional identity and education quality

South Sudan has been focusing more on access to education but less on quality of education accessible to learners. It recorded tremendous increases in enrolment figures since the Second Sudanese Civil War ended in January 2005 and before the resumption of fighting in December 2013. The gross primary school enrolment increased from 21 percent to 72 percent from 2000 to 2009 (The World Bank 2012: 39). However, the country failed to pay adequate attention to quality of education provision at all levels, which is not good for the future of the nascent state. Expressing

the importance of educational quality, Dr. Lawrence Wuol Wuol perceptively informed a conference organised by University of Juba in Khartoum in 1993 that, “a university must strive for excellence that the generations coming tomorrow should be better than the generation of today” (Wuol 1993: 279). The comment quite clearly applies to other schools, for achievement of quality at university also has to do with the quality of students being produced at lower educational levels. When the quality of primary and secondary schools is poor, the students arriving at the university will be of poor quality as well. This will lead to poor graduates at the university, which is supposed to not only produce a capable workforce and quality research, but also cultivate a culture that brings cohesion, especially in a conflict-affected one like South Sudan.

The low quality of education in the country is particularly evident in the rural *payams*, villages, and *bomas*, which are the most neglected places by the leaders of the country even though formally they are supposed to have some powers to execute activities for the benefit of local people. The management of education in the country is highly decentralised, but the truth is that offices at lower-level administrations have limited resources. Moreover, they also have limited say on the way education is provided, as elucidated by the team of researchers led by University of Sussex (mentioned earlier):

“However, participant descriptions of sector management reflected a deconcentrated form of decentralization based on centralized policy decisions with limited political authority at the sub-national level and little space for representation of local education officials. Participants at the school and *payam* level felt that their voices and concerns are not clearly heard, and that they are often undermined by higher government levels and donors (for example, by bypassing *payams* when approaching schools). While school governing bodies play a key role in school-level management, teachers and youth suffer lack of representation in decision-making processes, which can increase their risk for involvement in violence when combined with inequalities in access to professional and economic opportunities” (Novelli 2010: iii).

Persistent demands by communities for deployment of teachers to *payams*, villages, and *bomas*, and their timely and adequate payment, have often fallen on deaf ears from those with the power and remit to rectify the situation. As a result, many schools ended up recruiting untrained volunteers to fill the gaps.

The RERA study paid special attention to the situation of South Sudanese teachers, who have been hard hit by the conflict. Challenges confronting teachers range from unfair recruitment practices to irregular and low salaries. A large proportion of key informants involved in the study complained that teacher recruitment was not merit-based and dogged with ethnic favouritism and nepotism. A majority of teacher focus group discussions pointed out that appointment of teachers, particularly in government schools, were based on relationships (government officials appoint those they are related to or know well). This is perhaps not surprising considering the existence of rampant corruption, nepotism, and other injustices in the country.

The upsurge of violence and utter neglect of the education sector meant that trained and competent teachers drifted away from the sector to pursuits that promise better opportunities for higher incomes. A key informant from an international NGO explained that the country:

"has been in crisis situation for a long time. Before the conflict, there are people with the necessary skills but what are you now left with? Some teachers have not completed secondary school...In the learning spaces, teachers have varying capacities. Many of them are volunteers. Some have not been trained as teachers. The minimum requirement would be that the community accepts the teachers to teach their children; the goodwill of the community is important. In some of the PoCs, some teachers took manual jobs because of pay."

The payment of irregular and exceptionally low salaries is a persistent cause of complaints on the part of teachers. Over three quarters of focus groups involving teachers and sub-national level key informants voiced concerns about teachers' salaries not being paid fully or being paid late. Because of this, some teachers cannot

concentrate on their teaching profession and many of them are forced to combine it with other roles to sustain their families. Quite clearly, they are not focussed and motivated to serve their students and communities.

It has also been noted that deployment of teachers was complicated by the enmities wrought by the significant ethnic overtones of the. Some people were killed or forced to leave their place of abode on account of their ethnic belonging, and some of the survivors might still harbour anger and frustration against other groups that targeted them due to their ethnicity. A telling example are the PoCs, which are mainly inhabited by people from a single or a few ethnic groups. For example, Nuer are the majority inhabitants of the PoCs in Juba. The teachers in the area are Nuer, and quite clearly no one would deploy Dinka teachers there for fear of being targeted by some Nuer who are still angry because of the killings that forced them to flee to the PoCs, which they attribute to Dinka elements of the security forces. Therefore, one significant challenge to communities without sufficient qualified teachers is that they will fail to recruit because deploying teachers from other ethnic groups will be risky. So, acceptance of teachers by communities is a major issue that continues to concern teachers themselves and pose problems for social cohesion.

Moreover, the lack of trained teachers in schools has been linked to whether students continue to attend or drop out of classes. When students go to a school where teaching is badly affected by poor attendance of teachers, it is likely that they will skip classes and possibly drop out altogether. In the RERA study, over 90 percent of student focus groups, both male and female, mentioned that students drop out or miss classes due to a range of factors including low teacher salaries that cause teachers to strike, and school closures.

Furthermore, the learning environment – characterised in some instances by temporary structures, and lack of textbooks and other scholastic materials – has fuelled frustration among students, teachers, and parents. All national level key informants who participated in the RERA study noted that lack of teaching materials has

negatively impacted the quality of teaching and motivation of teachers. This problem is certainly more acute in rural areas, some of which are still mired in violence linked to actions of armed groups or youth involved in cattle rustling and associated revenge attacks. For example, Jonglei state and Pibor administrative area are suffering disruptions, which also affect schools and provision of other basic services, due to massive violence involving youth from Dinka, Nuer, and Murle communities. Many people were forced to leave their homes in parts of Pibor as heavily armed Dinka and Nuer youth pillaged villages, allegedly in revenge for violence caused by Murle youth in their areas. Ending this problem will include rebuilding or establishing schools with good teachers in the locations where the youth are originating and encouraging them to learn new skills and change their attitudes to forever end the cycles of attack and revenge. The next section addresses the financing of education and implications for ownership and cohesion.

External support for basic education

Donors, international organisations, and national organisations have played a pivotal role in the education sector in South Sudan, especially considering that the government has been investing meagre resources in the sector. The yearly budgetary allocation to the education sector in the country is very small, only between five and eight percent of the overall annual resource envelope (The World Bank 2012: 6). The bulk of the sector's financing has come from international actors. In fact, this raises questions about the political will of South Sudanese leaders to support the sector as well as its ownership. Expectedly, the international actors have their own ideas about the sector and how it should be organised for maximum benefit. For example, funding is largely directed at basic and secondary education, but the leaders of the country would probably want higher education, especially universities, to be prioritised as well.

Donors' interest in aiding delivery of educational was premised on the notion that delivery of services to the long-underserved South Sudanese populace would lead to enhancement of the legitimacy of their leaders (Moro et al 2017). Their support included huge initiatives entailing millions of US dollars to increase education access in the country as well as access to other services. In February 2015, for example, President Salva Kiir launched the Back to Learning (BTL) initiative as a way of solving the problem of the 2.2 million out-of-school children. The initiative brought together educational partners and donors for a concerted action aimed at bringing the out-of-school children back to the classroom. The programme was led by UNICEF and supported by Norway, USAID, DFID, EU, and Denmark. The first phase was from 2015-2017 and the second from 2017-2020. BTL was a comprehensive educational program featuring a number of activities and thematic areas. Its overarching objective was the equitable access to quality education and peacebuilding interventions that contribute to lasting peace, intercommunity harmony, and sustainable development. Therefore, it was directly tailored to reduce conflicts and promote national cohesion.

Moreover, donors have played an instrumental part in special programmes, including enhancing girls' education through grants, curriculum development, and teachers' incentives. The Girls' Education South Sudan, mostly funded by DFID, provided grants for girls to access and remain in schools. Also, donors and international organisations supported the development of a comprehensive curriculum for the nation, which is more suited to the conditions of the country as it incorporates important issues such as peacebuilding to promote national cohesion. Moreover, they have supported teachers to continue to serve in schools by providing incentives.

Quite clearly, the support of donors has been crucial in the development of the education sector which is a key to forging national cohesion in the nascent country.

Conclusion

Accessible quality education is essential for the development of country, as well as a factor in forging a collective sense of belonging, especially in fragile countries torn apart by war and associated ethnic animosities. This article argues that education in South Sudan has yet to significantly serve as a force to mould the country into a cohesive nation. Instead, the way education is being delivered accentuates inequalities in the country, continuing from a trajectory of uneven development that characterised educational provision before the secession of Southern Sudan from Sudan.

The article was based on information acquired from several sources, including published materials and findings from a RERA study carried out in 2017. The article focuses on the legacies of uneven delivery of educational services in pre-independence South Sudan and its political repercussions, the rapid expansion of educational provision after the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War, and the eruption of violence in 2013 and its impact on education provision. It highlights the often-neglected perceptions of teachers, students, parents, local administrators, and other government officials. In the context of ongoing conflict and curtailment of freedom of expression by South Sudan's elites, views, opinions, and perceptions of most South Sudanese about their country are not being safely and readily voiced (Thiong 2018).

The conflict led to a loss of some of the gains South Sudan made in the area of education. Many students have been forced to drop out as schools are destroyed or occupied by armed elements, low investment, lack of teaching and learning materials, displacement of families, and abandonment of teaching by some teachers due mainly to irregular and low salaries. However, the impacts of the war are not uniform. The weaknesses in the education sector are more acute in some areas, such as the hitherto relatively more prosperous Equatoria region, large parts of which

have been wrecked by violence involving government and rebel forces. The unequal delivery of educational services undermines social cohesion.

Moreover, the conflict has resulted in concentration of displaced persons in certain locations with relatively better provision of educational services which does not promote national healing and cohesion. This phenomenon is noted in some refugee settings where new arrivals often receive better services compared to services benefitting the host populations, fuelling grievance and disagreements. A similar situation has been noted in the PoCs. These "warehouses" attract a lot of attention from humanitarian actors. The RERA study found that education provision to PoCs populations, despite their miserable overall situation, is better, and therefore students in them perform better than those in neighbouring communities. This does not help in healing the disrupted social fabric of the country.

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