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# Bridging Divisions in a War-torn State: Reflections on education and civics in South Sudan

Rachel Ibreck, Naomi Pendle, Alice Robinson, and the Bridge Network



CONFLICT  
RESEARCH  
PROGRAMME

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**The Bridge Network** is a group of eight South Sudanese early career researchers based in Nimule, Gogrial, Yambio, Wau, Leer, Mayendit, Abyei, Juba PoC 1, and Malakal. The Bridge Network members are embedded in the communities in which they conduct research. The South Sudanese researchers formed the Bridge Network in November 2017. The team met annually for joint analysis between 2017-2020 in partnership with the Conflict Research Programme.

# About the South Sudan Studies Association

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 civiness, 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 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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## Abstract

Despite civil war and economic crisis, the educational sector in South Sudan has made tentative gains since 2011. This paper explores the everyday governance of schools in South Sudan, and the struggles of teachers to deliver education amid violence and predation and with scarce resources. The paper presents an analysis of policy data on education coupled with the insights of researchers and teachers from seven locations in South Sudan, drawing on interviews and a dialogue conducted by a group of South Sudanese researchers (the Bridge Network),<sup>1</sup> between November 2018 and July 2019. The paper highlights commonalities between the experiences of teachers and schools across South Sudan, including the consequences of underinvestment in teachers and schools, and suggests that the notion of education as a civic right – which South Sudan's government has comprehensively failed to uphold – may well cut across the divisions of the conflict. It emphasises the initiatives and contributions of teachers, parents, and wider communities, highlighting some of the many ways in which reliance on local communities is built into the education system and contributes to sustaining it. The discussion builds the case for investment in teachers, schools, and educational resources not only as a public good in its own right, but also as a prerequisite for long term peace and security in South Sudan.

## Acronyms

GESS	Girls' Education in South Sudan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SMC	School Management Committee
SSP	South Sudanese Pounds
PoCs	United Nations Protection of Civilians sites

<sup>1</sup> The South Sudanese researchers formed the Bridge Network in November 2017. The team carried out research for the Conflict Research Programme in their local areas and its six to ten members met annually for joint analysis between 2017-2020. We thank all for their fundamental and valuable contributions and inputs to the research materials and some of the analysis in this paper. We do not name individuals here (since several were both researchers and research participants in the dialogue, see below). Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the named authors.

## Introduction

South Sudan's schools and teachers have a crucial role to play in bridging social differences and counteracting political violence in this war-torn state. The country has one of the world's lowest literacy rates and the lowest percentage of children in education, and its teachers have been egregiously underfunded, subject to violence, and demeaned over decades. Education is considered as a basic human right and public good, such that domestic and international policymakers and scholars generally agree on the need to promote it. What is at issue is how best to do so, and to what effect, in complex conflict settings. However, the relationships between conflict and education are complex and indirect, and there is no guarantee that supporting the education sector in a general sense will be instrumental to peacebuilding during or after conflict. This paper explains why support to teachers must be prioritised and sustained.

Laudable agendas to link education to international peacebuilding<sup>2</sup> are up against the tenacity of South Sudan's 'real governance' and its corollary of economic deprivation, instability, and inequality,<sup>3</sup> as well as the persistent prioritisation of political and military spending over expenditure on public goods such as health and education. This has left many young people either vulnerable to recruitment because they are not in school; or struggling to progress when they are. Scholars have shown that wealthy military-

political elites can exploit the militarised labour of uneducated, impoverished armed youths with the promise of education and jobs, in a situation where public education is a scarce and precious resource.<sup>4</sup> However, previous research has also demonstrated that the education system in South Sudan has produced and exacerbated inequalities between different groups.<sup>5</sup>

State-centric policies aimed at strengthening the education sector and aligning it with peacebuilding from the top down provide directions and ideals, but their implementation is bound to be frustrated by the realities that the state is contested; power is networked rather than institutionalised; and state institutions are not the sole providers of education. Plural authorities are involved in actually 'doing the state' and delivering public goods in contemporary protracted conflict settings.<sup>6</sup> Government officials, schools and teachers, private actors, international and local donors, agencies, and NGOs have all contributed to the delivery of education, and their various activities and the interactions between them are shaping forms of local governance and political order.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that we need to take a granular approach to the study of education, exploring experiences and 'practical norms' in different localities.<sup>8</sup>

This paper is based upon an analysis of policy reports and other documentary sources, as well as unique ethnographic research and reflections from the Bridge Network of South Sudanese researchers. The interviews, observations and documentary

2 See policy recommendations in Mario Novelli, Gabrielle Daoust, Jan Selby, Oscar Valiente, Rosario Scandurra, Luka Biong Deng Kuol, and Emma Salter, 2016, *Exploring the Linkages between Education Sector Governance, Inequity, Conflict, and Peacebuilding in South Sudan*, Research Report Prepared for UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESA-RO), February.

3 Novelli et al, 2016, 'Exploring the Linkages' pp. 76-84.

4 See Nicki Kindersley and Joseph Diing Majok, 2019, *Monetized Livelihoods and Militarized Labour in South Sudan's Borderlands*, Rift Valley Institute.

5 Novelli et al 2016. 'Exploring the Linkages' p.37.

6 Migdal, J.S. and Schlichte, K., 2005. Rethinking the State. In *The Dynamics of States: The Formation and Crises of State Domination*, London: Routledge. (pp. 11-50). Lund, C. (2006). Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa. *Development and Change*, 37(4), 685-705.

7 Titeca, K., & De Herdt, T., 2011, Real governance beyond the 'failed state': Negotiating education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *African Affairs*, 110(439), 213-231.

8 De Herdt, T. and de Sardan, J.P.O., 2015. Real governance and practical norms in sub-Saharan Africa. *London and New York: Routledge*.

evidence from schools were gathered mainly in the period between November 2018 and July 2019, at a time when a peace deal had recently been concluded to end the civil war (in October 2018), but when political uncertainty continued, with violent conflict continuing to flare up in parts of the country and two million people still internally displaced. The findings were shared and discussed at a network meeting of researchers from seven different localities in January 2019. They provide insights into the state of the education system and perspectives at the classroom level, including in displacement sites and United Nations Protection of Civilians sites (PoCs).

The paper begins with the rationale for our research, reviewing debates on why and how education matters politically in conflict settings. It then sets out existing knowledge about the governance of education in South Sudan, based on policy reports and statistics. Next it presents a brief survey highlighting the diversity of schools and localities involved in the research and explores findings from life history interviews with teachers and observations in schools in displacement sites to show the harsh realities of delivering education in a conflict setting, and the ways that frontline actors respond to these challenges. The following section presents extracts from the research network members' discussion with one of South Sudan's leading educationalists. This reveals that frontline civic actors in diverse schools and communities confront similar problems and develop expedient local responses and visions for change that are neglected in policy debates.

We argue that beneath the surface there are many commonalities between the experiences of teachers and schools regardless of whether they are officially government schools, 'private' schools funded

by NGOs or humanitarian organisations, or whether they are in established communities or relatively new displacement sites. Some schools and teachers are certainly marginally better off than others but all are, in one way or another, precarious institutions; their funding is unreliable and insufficient, leaving them reliant upon voluntary and community initiatives. All struggle to varying degrees with internal conflicts, poor quality teaching, a lack of resources, and concerns about inequality. International policies to steer education towards peacebuilding and national development tend to hinge upon support to government, partly in view of concerns about differences and tensions between different localities and ethnicities.<sup>9</sup> This overlooks a simmering critique of political corruption and violence within the educated classes, and the potential coalescing of national unity at the popular level around a demand for better education for all.

Our reflection on education during the conflict shows that despite threats and sharp constraints upon teaching and learning, schools and teachers are civic authorities with the potential to contribute to peace and development.<sup>10</sup> This validation of their work should not be confused with theories of local and 'hybrid' peacebuilding that conceive of 'resilience' at the grassroots as local instruments for liberal peace and stability 'on the cheap'.<sup>11</sup> Decades of underinvestment, war, displacement, and social disruption have excluded many from education entirely and placed unconscionable burdens upon teachers and schools. Recognising and valuing the endeavours of those who try to manage diversity and conflict and to address gender inequality, under financially straitened and volatile conditions is important. However, increasing investment and support to teachers and schools is essential to reinforce good practice and improve educational environments and outcomes.

9 See Novelli et al, 'Education sector governance' 2016, pp.vi-x.

10 Kaldor 2019. The phenomenon of civiness and researching its advancement <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/05/22/kaldor-civiness/>; Theros, M. and Kaldor, M., 2018. The logics of public authority: understanding power, politics and security in Afghanistan, 2002–2014. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 7(1).

11 For a review of debates in peacebuilding see Mac Ginty, R. & Richmond, O, 2016, The fallacy of constructing hybrid political orders: a reappraisal of the hybrid turn in peacebuilding, *International Peacekeeping*, 23:2, 219–239.

## Education and Violent Conflict

Any assessment of the relevance of education to peace or conflict must be based on the specificities of educational practices and teachers' perspectives in particular localities. We cannot assume in advance either that conflict destroys educational systems, or that support for education contributes to tolerance and the prospects of peace. Indeed, education may be implicated in the complex processes and dynamics of political mobilisation. History shows that it has been harnessed by revolutionary movements in both violent and non-violent liberation struggles and may be associated with either civic or exclusionary nationalism.<sup>12</sup> The conduct of teachers and scholars, the content and language of educational materials, the allocations of jobs and scholarships, and the extent of educational inequality and exclusion can all entrench social and political hierarchies and violence.<sup>13</sup> School traditions and teaching practices might be implicated in encouraging competition and aggression and fomenting ethnic violence.<sup>14</sup>

In the history of Sudan, the education system was subjugated to the political interests of state elites, cementing the exclusion and disempowerment of South Sudanese people. In 1964, access to education was undermined when President Ibrahim Abboud closed missionary schools in southern Sudan. In 1990, President

Omar al Bashir announced that the national education system at all levels was to be based on Islamic values. The aim was also to bring all schools under government control and solidify the agenda of Arab-Islamic hegemony.<sup>15</sup> The reformed system marginalised, alienated, and humiliated many in the South and in the periphery more broadly. Even when participation in higher education in Sudan was expanded, opening up new opportunities for some, access to jobs and privileges became privatised and decentralised rather than more equitable; personal contacts or 'wasta' became more important than qualifications.<sup>16</sup> The history of education reflects uneven and violent processes of development,<sup>17</sup> displaying stark inequalities of access between those who are included and excluded; between provision in different localities and schools; and between opportunities for the socially well-connected and the marginalised. It also reflects a mode of governance that fuelled and instrumentalised differences between regions, classes, religions, and ethnicities, and privileged the centre at the expense of the periphery.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, efforts to use education as a divisive political instrument are invariably complicated by the inherent social value of learning and the aspirations and capacities associated with it. This is manifest in the history of southern Sudan, where institutions were 'pressed into the service of political objectives';<sup>19</sup> and yet 'communities mobilised

12 Pherali, T. and Tuner, E. (2018) 'Meanings of education under occupation: the shifting motivations for education in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp.567- 589, p.569. Pherali, T. 2016. "Education: Cultural Reproduction, Revolution and Peacebuilding in Conflict- Affected Societies." In *Dimensions of Peace: Disciplinary and Regional Approaches*, edited by O. P. Richmond, S. Pogodda and J. Ramovic, 296–313. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

13 Bourdieu, P. 1974. "The School as a Conservative Force: Scholastic and Cultural Inequalities." In *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Eggleston, 32–46. London, UK: Methuen, p.32. Alzaroo, S., and G. L. Hunt. 2003. "Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: The Palestinian Case." *Social and Policy Administration* 37 (2): 165–180.

14 Lange, M. 2012. *Educations in Ethnic Violence: Identity, Educational Bubbles, and Resource Mobilization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

15 Breidlid, Anders, 2013, 'The role of education in Sudan's civil wars', *Prospects, Volume 43, Issue 1*, pp 35– 47.

16 Mann, Laura, 2014, 'Wasta! The long-term implications of education expansion and economic liberalisation on politics in Sudan', *Review of African Political Economy*, 41 (142), pp.561–578.

17 Edward Thomas, 2015, *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation*, London: Zed Books.

18 Alex de Waal, 2007, 'Sudan: the Turbulent State' in Alex de Waal, ed., *War in Darfur and the search for peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

19 Arou, 1982, 'Regional devolution' p.43. In 1962, many other Southern schools went on strike in resistance to a government decision to change the day of rest from Sunday to Friday, p. viii. This despite the fact that a strike by students at Rumbek secondary school in 1960 was violently suppressed, Pogge 2009: 97.

to provide local solutions for challenges in education'<sup>20</sup> and pupils and students articulated demands for change in civic protests and initiatives, even though the numbers of students enrolled in schools were small.<sup>21</sup> More recently, during the current civil war, education has also proven to be a source of 'cultural capital', enabling civic activism against everyday violence and injustice.<sup>22</sup> It emerges that in South Sudan, as in other challenging contexts, education can provide opportunities for collective liberation or for individual material improvement.<sup>23</sup>

The literature suggests that the politics of education is shaped by both political structures and governance arrangements and by the actions of administrators, teachers, and students. Examining the institutions and policies of the state in question is essential to understanding these structures, but only tells part of the story. Public services in contemporary war zones are typically the product of arrangements and contestations between state and plural private actors: they are inherently variable, shaped by "power configurations in particular localities at particular times."<sup>24</sup> For these reasons, we need to investigate at multiple levels, examining both the policies and the everyday practices of ground-level actors to understand the political significance of education.

## The Governance of Education in South Sudan

South Sudan's independent education system dates back a mere fifteen years. From the outset, the Government of South Sudan faced the daunting challenge of responding to the highest rates of illiteracy globally – in 2008 the literacy rate for females over 15 was 19.19% and males 34.84%.<sup>25</sup> In 2003, only 28% of the school age population, fewer than 400,000 children, were enrolled in school.<sup>26</sup> The government promised the expansion of basic education as part of a 'peace dividend' following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005,<sup>27</sup> and the numbers of children in school did rise from their low base to 1.3 million by 2013. Yet the government routinely allocated a bare minimum of funds to education in the national budget, providing a mere 5-7%, among the lowest percentages globally,<sup>28</sup> and disbursement rates are estimated to be even lower.<sup>29</sup> The neglect of education is manifest in the gulf between this paltry education budget with the generous allocation of some 40% of the budget to the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the same period.<sup>30</sup>

Support from donors raised the overall education budget significantly.<sup>31</sup> However, even development donors only ranked education around half-way down their list of priorities, focusing instead mainly

20 Ginsburg et al 2017, p.228.

21 There was an extraordinary neglect of education during colonial times. There were only 2700 boys and 635 girls in primary school in the south by 1939 (Rolandsen and Daly 2016: 53). Investment increased after 1946 and by 1954, this number had grown significantly to 34,900 (Sanderson and Sanderson cited in Arou, M. K N., 1982, Regional Devolution in the Southern Sudan, Phd Thesis, University of Edinburgh, p.19).

22 See Ibreck 2019.

23 Pherali, T. and Tuner, E. (2018) 'Meanings of education under occupation: the shifting motivations for education in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp.567- 589.

24 Titeca, K., & De Herdt, T., 2011, Real governance beyond the 'failed state': Negotiating education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *African Affairs*, 110(439), 213-231.

25 UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2021 South Sudan, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ss>.

26 Breidlid, 2013. p. 41.

27 Novelli et al, 2016, p.16.

28 Ginsberg et al, 2017, 'Promoting community participation', p.224.

29 Hodgkin and Thomas, 2016, cites the Juba Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning report of 2016 as evidence on this point.

30 See Bennett, J., S. Pantuliano, W. Fenton, A. Vaux, C. Barnett and E. Brusset, 2010, *Aiding the Peace: A Multi-donor Evaluation of support to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Southern Sudan 2005-2010*. p.55.

31 Ginsburg et al, 2017, cite an estimate that accounts of donor contributions suggest education spending would be closer to 13% of the budget in 2009, p.224.

on emergency relief and governance and peacebuilding support.<sup>32</sup> A 2012 study launched by former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown emphasised that the core problem for the education system was a 'lack of predictable finance on a scale commensurate with the problem'. It advocated for an international response, including by the Global Partnership for Education, to provide US\$400 million per year for four years, in order to increase access, boost secondary education, end gender inequality, and train over 30,000 teachers.<sup>33</sup> These goals were never realised, not least because the education system has been ravaged by conflict since 2013.

The civil war directly and indirectly impacted both the functioning and governance of schools. By 2017, only 59% of schools were open compared to the previous assessment in 2013/2015, and of those 50% had closed temporarily.<sup>34</sup> Some 31% of primary schools were estimated to have suffered at least one or more attacks since December 2013 and 25% of schools were 'non-functional,' while an estimated 17,000 children had been recruited into armed groups.<sup>35</sup> Some teachers were killed, while others joined the army or fled into exile, and some schools were occupied and used as military barracks. The areas most affected by conflict typically had the lowest number

of students in primary education and limited secondary provision.

In this taxing civil war context, education clearly stagnated, yet it did not regress. The number of children in schools grew, reaching a current estimated total of over two million,<sup>36</sup> and gender equality has improved.<sup>37</sup> The literacy rate for the population aged over 15 rose from its globally low base to the benefit of women and girls especially, reaching 40.26% for males and 28.86% for females.<sup>38</sup> These achievements rested upon plural efforts and collaborations, including the contributions of individual government officials, civil society organisations, and international and bilateral donors who determined that 'education cannot wait'.<sup>39</sup>

Out of 6,000 schools operating in South Sudan in 2017, only 60% were governmental and the remainder were run by communities, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and for-profit providers.<sup>40</sup> Much of the international support they received has been coordinated and documented by the South Sudan Education Cluster, a coordinating mechanism comprising 43 international and national partners.<sup>41</sup> This includes funds targeting education for girls and students with disabilities; initiatives to provide free school meals to pupils and peacebuilding efforts within schools; and investments in monitoring mechanisms.<sup>42</sup>

32 Donors spent US\$236.5 million on education in comparison to US\$1,244.9 million on emergency relief and US\$665.5 million on governance and civil society, of which US\$134.2 million on civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution.

33 Brown, G. 2012, Education in South Sudan: Investing in a better future <http://gordonandsarahbrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Education-in-South-Sudan-investing-in-a-better-future.pdf>

34 South Sudan Education Cluster, *Education Cluster Assessment South Sudan*, 2017, p.7, p.17.

35 South Sudan Education Cluster 2017, "Education Cannot Wait for the War to End" The role of education in saving lives and averting the loss of another generation in South Sudan, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/education\\_cannot\\_wait\\_for\\_the\\_war\\_to\\_end\\_-\\_ssec\\_-\\_2017-06.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/education_cannot_wait_for_the_war_to_end_-_ssec_-_2017-06.pdf).

36 See South Sudan Attendance Management System (SSAMS), 2020, <https://www.sssams.org/ams/reports.php?tab=tab2>.

37 Universalia, 2019, xiii.

38 <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ss>

39 The South Sudan Education Cluster was informed by commitments made at the High-level Humanitarian Conference on South Sudan in May 2014. It advocated that 4% of humanitarian funding should be devoted to education. See [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/education\\_cannot\\_wait\\_in\\_south\\_sudan\\_2014.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/education_cannot_wait_in_south_sudan_2014.pdf).

40 Universalia, 2019, Summative GPE country program evaluation, Batch 4, Country 9, Republic of South Sudan, May. Novelli et al, 'Education sector governance' 2016, note that in 2013, 74% of primary schools and 62% of secondary schools were government-run or government-aided, while 26% of primary schools and 37% of secondary schools were private or community-managed.

41 Key partners include GESS, IMPACT, NGOs, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. 32 had active programmes in 2019, Education Cluster Strategy South Sudan, 2019.

42 SSAMS.

For instance, statistics for 2017 reveal that 91% of schools were receiving support from external partners, the majority coming from the Girls' Education in South Sudan (GESS) and IMPACT programmes, including financial incentives for teachers, teaching and learning supplies, and cash grants for pupils in more than half of the schools.<sup>43</sup>

The new sources of financial support for teachers were undoubtedly valuable, but crucially the pay and conditions for teachers overall did not improve significantly. At the start of 2017, the student-teacher ratio of 37:1 was seen to be a sign of progress compared to the same time the previous year, when the average was 44:1. However, that year still saw high degrees of teacher absenteeism over time, averaging at 26% compared to 31% the previous year. According to reports from schools, a key part of the explanation is that neither government nor international support for salaries proved to be reliable. Teachers on average had received only four months of either salaries or incentives in a 10-month period, which was even worse than the previous year's average of eight months.<sup>44</sup> By 2018, many schools had reopened, but the shortage of qualified teachers and of teaching and learning resources was dire. Teacher absenteeism had risen back up to 30% and only three months of their salaries or incentives had been paid over a nine-month period.<sup>45</sup>

A key lesson of the statistics is that education has remained severely underfunded, and teachers were especially hard hit by the shortfalls, with many of

them being forced to either find alternative employment or to work voluntarily, or both.<sup>46</sup> The deficits in funding help to explain teacher shortages and salary delays. The percentage of government expenditure dedicated to education declined from 3.23% in 2013, to a meagre 0.88% in 2018.<sup>47</sup> International support has also consistently come up short. For instance, the Humanitarian Response Plan (2019) specified that 2.8 million children needed education support and that international actors would target support at around 31% of them. It estimated they would need US\$53.9 million to deliver on their goals. However, the education cluster actually raised just over half of the required amount, a total of US\$28.8 million, performing less well in their fundraising than several other clusters.<sup>48</sup> Little wonder that an evaluation of external donor support indicated no improvement in the fundamentals of education including the availability of teachers, the pupil-teacher ratio, teacher quality, or the provision of teaching and learning materials.<sup>49</sup>

Relatedly, policy evaluations indicate that, either by default or design, the burden of education has fallen not only upon teachers but also on local communities. To some extent, community involvement has been explicitly encouraged and valued. Both donors and the government were involved in programmes aimed at creating capacity for community participation and school-based management; there was a view that 'promoting community participation can help to mobilise local financial and human resources.'<sup>50</sup> Donors incentivised this

43 South Sudan Education Cluster 2017, pp.20-28. GESS funding came from the Department for International Development (DfID) while IMPACT funding came from the European Union.

44 South Sudan Education Cluster 2017, pp.20-28.

45 Up to 80.4% were now functioning. South Sudan Education Cluster, 2018, p.60; p.8.

46 This is also a key finding of a related research project, which reveals the extent to which teachers went into the NGO sector, to be published in a forthcoming paper, Rachel Ibreck, Alice Robinson, Ajang Mabior Ajang, Onyango Galdine, and Benjamin Dut Dut 'Teachers are for everyone'? The everyday political economy of education and the civic power of teachers in South Sudan.

47 UNESCO Institute of Statistics, South Sudan, 2021, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ss>.

48 Several clusters were underfunded, although education did less well than five of the 11 clusters in this regard and its original ask was lower than seven of the 11 clusters. See South Sudan 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan, rev. 1:1 <https://hum-insight.info/plan/713>.

49 Universalia, 2019, xii.

50 Ginsburg et al, 2017, p.237.

through support to school financing, sending money directly to schools as 'capitation' grants under the GESS for instance. It was not clear how functional or 'sustainable' some of the more bureaucratic interventions were,<sup>51</sup> but certainly this influenced practices within schools and helped to ensure that most had a School Management Committee (SMC) or Parent Teacher Association (PTA) by 2017, a development seen as progressive. Some reports also highlight the crucial role of financial contributions from household funds including for school fees; one study estimates that "households spent roughly 50 percent as much as the government on education in 2009 [and] this share is likely to have increased in recent years."<sup>52</sup> Additionally, policy evaluations are bound to underestimate community support, potentially overlooking *ad hoc* inputs, such as voluntary work by teachers.

It emerges from the reports that various forms of reliance upon local communities are built into the education system and have contributed to sustaining it. Yet, this is set against concerns about the national character of the education system in the context of the declining influence of government. The fragmentation of the education sector is identified as a problem and potential source of tensions. Schools in displacement sites, especially the PoC sites, are singled out as presenting particular challenges. A divergence between government schools and 'private schools' is seen to be associated with rising differences and inequalities<sup>53</sup> and "the emergence of a parallel system of education, based on the use of different curricula, teacher training programs, and management approaches."<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, education in South Sudan remains embroiled in predatory and exploitative systems, and can also entrench and perpetuate, as well as subvert, vast inequalities. Recent research in northern Bahr el Ghazal, for example, has highlighted the ways in which education can be exploited and controlled by elites to entrench their own power. The study highlights the control of educational opportunities in the borderlands between Sudan and South Sudan, noting that "managing access to good quality schooling, higher education and jobs is a key tool in the management and manipulation of young people by regional authorities."<sup>55</sup>

Education statistics and evaluations make bleak reading. There have been some achievements in maintaining access to education during the conflict. However, the system as a whole is manifestly in crisis, with significant funding gaps; a serious problem of teacher shortages coupled with a lack of trained teachers; inequalities between and within schools; and increasing reliance on community support. The impacts are bound to be felt at the sharp end in schools, as confirmed in our research.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, when a USAID project 'Room to Learn' followed up on schools which had already been supported by GESS to make a school development plan a year earlier, in most cases there was no physical copy of the plan and they had to start the process again. See Ginsburg et al, 2017, p230.

<sup>52</sup> Universalia, 2019, p.x; p.42.

<sup>53</sup> Novelli et al, 'Education sector governance' 2016, p.48 also raises a concern that the Ministry of Education support for private schools was linked to "neoliberal policies focused on private responsibility for public service provision."

<sup>54</sup> Novelli et al 2016, p.49.

<sup>55</sup> Kindersley and Majok, 2019, 'Monetized Livelihoods and Militarized Labour in South Sudan's borderlands', Rift Valley Institute X-Border Local Research network. Available at <http://riftvalley.net/publication/monetized-livelihoods-and-militarized-labour-south-sudans-borderlands>.

## Dialogue on Education, Conflict, and Civicism

Experiences and perspectives from the ground can enrich policy data and analyses of the everyday governance of schools and provide in-depth insights into the struggles of teachers and their actual and potential contributions to promoting civic practices and identities. We begin by presenting a snapshot of several different schools visited by members of the Bridge Network in December 2018, serving to illustrate some of the themes introduced in the previous section. We then present two first-person accounts from teachers in Juba and Bentiu PoCs. Finally, we synthesise a dialogue between one of South Sudan's foremost educationalists and the Bridge Network researchers from the Conflict Research Programme in January 2019. We set out to compare the day-to-day realities of the education system, based on their research and experiences, and to consider its value in relation to promoting civic authority and transforming conflict.

### Local arrangements: Improvisation at school level

The key findings from the review of policy reports are echoed in snapshots from different schools across the country visited by Bridge Network researchers in December 2018. They illustrate the heterogeneity of school governance and funding arrangements, the reliance on community support, the challenges of underfunding, delayed salaries, and a lack of clarity about or access to the curriculum.

We focus on schools in three locations: Bor, Malakal, and Pageri, to provide examples that are diversely situated, either in areas under government control during the civil war – in Bor town and a displacement site in Mugali *payam* – or within the PoC site in Malakal. It is worth underlining that the selected schools were in one way or another 'community-based', relying on some form of local support, despite the fact that all were located in communities that had recently been devastated by atrocities: Bor and Malakal were both sites of massacres of civilians and ethnic targeting during the civil war, while the families of students in Malakal and Pageri were forced to flee from the violence.<sup>56</sup>

### St. Andrew's Primary, Bor Town, Jonglei

St. Andrew's Primary, located in a church compound, was managed by the PTA and SMC made up of parents, church members, and teachers, headed by the school director. It relied on both the community and the church for funding. Pupils paid fees of 850 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP), less than US\$4 per term, which largely went towards teachers' salaries. The school also received incentives for teachers and for girls on a selective and occasional basis under the GESS and the IMPACT<sup>57</sup> projects from international development donors.<sup>58</sup>

The school had attracted a large student cohort, with over 2,700 pupils, and its good reputation was reflected in growing pupil numbers and in their strong performance in the state primary education certificate.<sup>59</sup> Students came from a mixture of ethnic backgrounds including mainly Dinka, but also Shilluk, Anuak, and Bari, and included

<sup>56</sup> See for instance, Human Rights Watch, 2014, South Sudan: Ethnic Targeting Widespread Killings: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/16/south-sudan-ethnic-targeting-widespread-killings>, and Human Rights Watch, 2014, South Sudan: War Crimes Both Sides: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/26/south-sudan-war-crimes-both-sides>.

<sup>57</sup> Impact Project, funded by the European Union, pays 30,000 teachers what it estimates in 2017 as an equivalent of US\$40 ever quarter. <https://www.camb-ed.com/intdev/article/534/impact>.

<sup>58</sup> As an example, it was reported that the GESS paid girls in class 5-8 320 SSP in 2015, 2,000 SSP in 2016, and 2,900 SSP in 2017, but no further amounts were reported. The EU IMPACT was reported to have paid 4,000 SSP per teacher 'for two months' in 2017 and a similar amount in 2018 'for a year'. While these details were not verified, it was clear that funding came irregularly. It is also worth noting that even the highest of these amounts, 4,000 SSP was equivalent to only US\$18 (at the 2019 rate) and that the value of the SSP fluctuated and declined significantly over time.

<sup>59</sup> The school displayed its results of 100% pass rate for 21 students in 2015 and 42 pupils in 2016.

around 100 orphans from the fighting in the town in 2013, who were under the care and support of the church. The main concern raised by the teachers was the extent to which they had been overstretched, with rising workloads and class numbers, while their salaries diminished in worth. The pupils were taught in English, using the South Sudan education curriculum.

### ***Alliance High School, Bor Town, Jonglei***

Alliance High School was operating as a community secondary located in Bor Town, managed by a PTA, Board of Governors, and SMC, chaired by the head teacher. The school relied largely on income from fees, with each student paying 6,800 SSP (US\$27) per term, but it also received incentives for teachers and girls through GESS funds implemented by Food for the Hungry.<sup>60</sup>

The student body included members of diverse communities including Nuer, Anuak, Mundari, and Dinka, who were said to work peacefully together. Indeed, the students had excellent results to the extent that every year between 2014 and 2018, one of them had been placed in the top three students in the country in the South Sudan National Secondary Exam. Nevertheless, they had difficulties retaining teachers, and attributed the problems of teacher absence or unreliability to low or unpaid salaries, explaining that: "limited payment for the teachers sometimes resulted in teachers not actively participating as expected." The school was using a combination of the South Sudan curriculum and Kenyan syllabus and resources.

### ***Melijo Nursery and Primary School, Mugali Payam, Pageri Administrative Area***

Melijo Nursery and Primary School was located in an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp established in 2014, which mainly hosted the children of displaced people who had fled massacres of Dinka in Bor town in December 2013. The school was 'community-based' and managed by the PTA, but without an SMC. Teachers were not receiving a government salary but were paid through 'incentives' from ChildFund Korea, Health-Link South, and GESS, which also provided cash transfers to girls attending the school.<sup>61</sup> For a period they had also received funding from Plan International to support food for the pupils, but that funding was suspended at the time of the visit, with a possibility that it might resume later. Additionally, Hope is Education had provided training to teachers and to PTA members as well as some stationary. The school also relied on the community, charging school fees to fill the gaps in its other sources of income.

The school routinely faced challenges related to the underpayment of teachers, including delays in receiving incentives from donors; teacher absences due to their need to supplement their income from other sources; and tensions between teachers, the headmaster, and the PTA over management issues, as well as problems with parents over disciplinary matters. Pupils were taught in English and were following the Ugandan curriculum.

<sup>60</sup> The school reported that each teacher received about 4,000 SSP twice a year.

<sup>61</sup> These payments direct to girls are intended to boost attendance and prevent dropouts, and are commonly spent on basic needs such as shoes, stationary, and soap, see GESS <http://girlseducationsouthsudan.org/activity/cash-transfers/>.

### ***Malakal Protection of Civilians Site Secondary School, Malakal, Upper Nile***

Malakal PoC Secondary School was established by War Child Canada in 2017 with funding from UNICEF. It did not charge school fees, but it had inputs from a PTA and support from the local community in the form of donations from the Merchants Union. Teachers were described as 'volunteers' and were paid a monthly incentive of SSP 7,000 (US\$33).

Low payment to teachers was highlighted as the main problem affecting both teachers and students. Initially the teachers had gone on strike every few months to demand a pay increase but were told that this was impossible, since international donors fixed their incentives to the "payment scale for teachers of the host country government." However, the Merchants Union then stepped in to fundraise for the school, collecting funds from businesses within the camp and distributing it to teachers to supplement their incentives, providing varying amounts up to 4,000 SSP per teacher on a monthly basis.

Even with the additional payments, the school struggled to find and motivate trained teachers. As a result, the class sizes were very large with nearly 100 in one classroom in Form One, and some 85-90 students in Form Two. There was a general lack of learning materials, and no history books. The school was taught in English following a syllabus and books from Kenya.

### ***Makeshift schools***

The schools visited were all core providers of education, either because they were among the best schools (as in Bor) or because they were the only schools available, as in Malakal or Melijo. Regardless of their location, each of them survived by patching together funding from a variety of sources, including school fees, donations from the local community, and international NGOs. None of these sources proved to be reliable, consistent, or sufficient. In all the schools, teachers received a paltry wage or 'incentive.' Moreover, each of the schools used whatever learning materials they had access to, such that some students used the Kenyan syllabus while others were following the Ugandan syllabus. Notably, none of the schools reported concerns about ethnic conflict between students despite the sensitive contexts in which they were working; instead, the main tensions related to the lack of financial support.

### **Teaching in an Emergency: The experiences of secondary teachers in the PoCs**

While international support has provided vital funds for the education system, during the conflict, local agency, initiative, and effort has remained central in ensuring (or undermining) the implementation of existing programmes and in the development of new educational initiatives. In this section we present two first-person accounts from secondary school teachers in Bentiu and Juba PoCs. These two case studies were selected from a wider sample of interviews<sup>62</sup> because they illustrate many of the themes discussed in this essay. In particular, they highlight the achievements of individual teachers and their problem-solving approaches, and the diverse challenges they face, including those related to under-resourcing, over-crowding, and an unclear syllabus. They also provide illustrations of a troubling deficit in emergency education.

62 Overall, we gathered more than 100 interviews with teachers in different localities, mainly Abyei and Nimule.

Secondary education in the PoCs was excluded from government support and is not prioritised by international donors, who principally target the primary level. The schools were created by teachers, and rely on a mixture of voluntary efforts, school fees, and *ad hoc* international inputs. They play essential roles not only in delivering education but also responding to trauma and conflict among young people and illustrate both individual achievements and struggles in promoting education.

### **Case study one: Secondary School Teacher, Mat Secondary School, Juba PoC3<sup>63</sup>**

I have been a teacher since 2007, and now teach voluntarily at Mat (*Unity*) Secondary school in the PoC. We mobilised ourselves as a group of intellectuals after 15 December 2013, when we realised that there were no education services for the IDPs in the camp. I started teaching in primary, until when we established a secondary school after primary eight students sat for exams in the PoC and the UNMISS and other humanitarian organisations were not willing to open a secondary school.

My experience of delivering education has totally changed after the crises, because teaching in an emergency situation is not easy... You find yourself teaching students who are traumatised as the result of conflicts, the school lacks everything. Services are not enough. As teacher you are responsible for management administration of the school and frequently giving lessons to the learners.

[There are many challenges]. Students are learning in crowded schools with no good facilities such as toilets, latrine, libraries, textbooks, food, clothing, water, and conducive environment.<sup>64</sup> There is also the issue of language. There are different

tribes in the PoCs but they are considered as minorities, they can't speak Nuer language, but all the teachers in the PoCs are Nuer... There is no rule or provisions to assist those who are deaf or disabled persons in the class, it depends on the school administration policy to help people with disabilities. The issue of disabilities is always handled by care, for instance if a disabled student fought with other students, teachers condemn such student who is found with him or her.

Also, the syllabus in the whole South Sudan is not clear because we received only course guidelines from the Ministry of Education which put all South Sudan teachers to restless searching all syllabuses of East Africans textbooks in order that you could cover all topics. You might find some topics for instance in Kenya Secondary textbooks (syllabus) and other topics in Uganda syllabus.

The inequalities, tension, and conflict which exist in the classroom could be seen in different ways, for instance school uniforms and payment of monthly fees. Some pupils are unable to pay school fees or buy school uniforms. For that reason, some students are dismissed from school and others remain in the school. The teachers do respond to the issue of school fees depending on individual's living standard. This involves investigation; if a student is found living as an orphan, he or she may study freely. Special attention is [also] put in place for particular children who are not monitored by their parents; we do check their presence in the class and also we do consider their problems if they failed to pay school fees.

[Regarding the contributions of international donors] GESS was introduced in 2017 to support female learners. In fact, we appreciated it when it was supporting our

<sup>63</sup> This case study is based on an interview conducted in PoC3 in Juba. It has been edited for length and clarity.

<sup>64</sup> These challenges are not unique to the PoCs, or to the immediate post-conflict environment of 2013. Schools and universities across the country face similar challenges.

female students for one full year. In 2018, GESS collected all the girls' details and promised them to bring money, but they failed to bring money. Because of this, in 2019, GESS came and wanted to collect details of all girls but was rejected by the school administration.

[On the relationship with the national education system], our relationship with the Ministry of Education is good, because they do provide both primary and secondary examinations to our pupils in the camp, except in 2017 when the government got politically involved and decided that both candidates should sit for exams outside instead of PoCs. That surprised everyone in the camp because from 2014 to 2016 the examination had been taking place inside the camp. Some candidates from both primary and secondary schools had boycotted examinations because of fear that they may be arrested for reason that some candidates were government staff or officials, for instance some had been working for South Sudan Police Services, National Security, and other government institutions.

We have good relationship with other teachers within the PoCs because we have the same common objectives of teaching our children. Everyone in this camp is vulnerable, including secondary school teachers who depend on what is collected from students. This is why they do spend two-three months without receiving salaries. Some teachers run away from teaching and are working with international and local organisations.

Before the crisis I was studying and working as trader but at the current situation I lost sources of income, relatives, property including my mind is affected. Everything has changed, including the environment itself is affected... [there is] tribalism, hatred amongst the South Sudan. Everything is politicised. I never been in such situation before since I was born.

### **Case study two: Secondary School Headteacher, Bentiu Complex Secondary School, Bentiu PoC<sup>65</sup>**

I am the headteacher of Bentiu Complex Secondary School. I started my teaching career in 2003; in 2009 I became a teacher in Rubkona secondary school; I also taught in Juba Day Secondary school up to 2013 when crisis erupted. When I came here in 2014, what was occupying my thinking is how to open a school to help the population in PoC. I started the initiative with mobilising the teachers and community [saying] if we could at least open a secondary school so that those pupils who are finishing from class eight... should have where to go. From there 15 teachers joined me and we opened this school 2016 and it is running up to now. When we opened the school, we were actually a team and given my seniority I was selected to be the team's leader.

This school was the first secondary school and simultaneously the first to enroll the candidates for South Sudan Certificate in Bentiu PoC. We started with 240 students, and we were having around 16 teachers in 2016. Coming around 2017, the number of the students increased to 560 and 36 teachers; then reaching to 2018 we have 640 students and 40 teachers – the classes are ranging from Senior 1 to Senior 4. Most of the teachers are graduates... about 10 of them in the field of education. We don't have our own school that belong to us because we are learning under primary; they take the morning and we have afternoon; we are yet to secure a land that could belong to the secondary school.

When people came to PoC for two years there was never an examination in the PoC, so my main objective was to provide an opportunity to those who stayed without examinations for two years could have access to it. I tried my means to talk to the ministry to allow those students to get exam, and then one of the goals also was to allow

these pupils to continue enrolling in school secondary... another thing was to engage those sitting idle teachers and to build up their capacities, because if you are not using that knowledge then it would evaporate.

The performance was very high, last year when students sat for examination the percentage was 98% only five students failed to make it out of 270. [Some of] the students do go to five universities in South Sudan and enroll there.

Regarding the financial status, the pupils and with their respective parents do contribute some little amount of money, which amounted to 250 SSP on monthly basis and the salaries of the teacher are paid from this for their motivation. We don't get support from NGOs, but UNICEF is supporting the school in term of materials like blackboards, exercises books, teacher kits, like chalks... also the school sometimes gets support from GESS that is capitation grant and girls are also getting cash transfer right from Senior 1 to Senior 4 all those registered females in the school. The GESS is changing everything in girl's education. Before this programme could be introduced the number of the girls was less, but the introduction pushed many girls to go to school because it helped them buy exercise books, and other special things needed by girls. Like if you see the primary school the population is very high with females because of the effect of that programme. The attendance of female students is really encouraging because if you assess the number of the girl in the school 150 out of 450 with 20 female candidates for Senior 4 so the turnout is not that bad comparing with previous years where most of the girl when reaching secondary they drop out. It need advocacy from the community that the education is essential and not to stop girl to reach different level of education, the community must learn the importance of girls' education...

[Regarding tensions between students], in 2017 you could see some cases of violence among but now coming to 2018 most of them have so much discipline not like before. In 2017 the rate of discipline could be 60% but in 2018 the rate increased to 80% because students transformed and understood through different engagement like the debates, school assembly, sports, health activities, and also journalism practices, by collecting news from community and when weekly assembly we announce them in parades.

These students of mine have contributed much [to reducing tensions in the PoC]. Like now the leader of the gang who was disturbing the community in PoC has reported in Senior 2 and [he is] now mobilising his group, whom some have actually joined. Before he became a criminal, he was in Form 1 and then withdrew from the school. His former classmates convinced him and he came back. Not only him, also last year another leader of the gang sat and obtained 75% from national examination and now waiting for admission. So the number which don't join school is less than those in the school because of mobilisation from their colleagues who are in the school here. So, I humbly say that there is great impact; not only that but also the number of the elders acquiring education is increasing compared to some time back.

As you see, the secondary school has a huge role therefore my appeal to the teachers to work hard because what they are getting is not enough, but [we provide] emotional support and show them that the work you are doing is valued by the community. Another message goes to the youth who are sitting without school or who left the school to go back to school instead of wasting their time and at least help the community.

## A Dialogue on Education

In the remainder of this paper, we summarise a dialogue between Bridge Network members and a leading South Sudanese educationalist in January 2019. The discussion included 10 South Sudanese researchers working in nine different localities stretching right across the country: Nimule, Abyei, Bor, and Gogrial, under government control; parts of Ler under rebel control; a camp for internally displaced people in Melijo, eastern Equatoria; and Malakal, Bentiu, and Juba PoCs under UN governance. Their contributions to the discussion were variously informed by visits to schools to observe practices and gather documentary evidence, by individual interviews with teachers, and by their own personal experiences as members of the diverse communities they worked in.<sup>66</sup> Six of them brought rich experiential knowledge of the education system by virtue of current or previous roles as teachers, including a former headmaster of a primary school, and a deputy headmaster of a secondary school. The researchers were all male, but the group was otherwise socially diverse: several were IDPs, who had fled either massacres in Juba, Malakal, or Bor; some were based in their home areas, others travelled back there for research. They identified as members of different clans, ethnic groups or home areas spanning across the ethnic frames and political divides of the conflict.<sup>67</sup>

Our findings highlighted a multiplicity of contrasts between schools from different parts of the country, yet the deliberations testified to an overarching similarity in the parlous state of education. It revealed uncertainties over funding and governance and a consistent reliance on local problem-solving and community resources across the board. More positively, the dialogue also

revealed the contributions of all the South Sudanese participants to trying to improve education in their localities; and suggested that common visions and aspirations for education transcend social differences.

## Shared Problems of Educational Deprivation

Looking beyond the circumstances of individual schools, the researchers reflected on the significance of education; the constraints on access and delivery; and the detrimental impacts of scarce and poor-quality education for politics and society. Extracts from their dialogue provide important insights into why investing in education is essential to transforming conflict and into some of the particular causes and consequences of current deprivations. They identified shared problems ranging from political neglect and corruption, to the functioning of schools and challenges for teachers, to basic issues of poverty, resources, and gender inequality at the classroom level.

They then explored how a potent mix of problems coalesces to frustrate the implementation of international initiatives to support education, providing insights into both the value and limitations of external support.

## "The Political Dimension" of Education

The discussion turned to aspects of the political neglect of the education system in South Sudan, manifest in the underfunding described above. Researchers, like many of the teachers interviewed, highlighted that with political elites sending their own children abroad for education, there is little incentive for public investment in the South Sudanese education system. Instead, most

<sup>66</sup> In particular, two researchers undertook extensive research on education in Nimule and Abyei.

<sup>67</sup> We do not list individual names here since they are not necessary to understand the data; therefore an element of anonymity is in line with standard ethical guidelines. The dialogue is presented in an edited form and we only identify speakers using initials.

funding for education in South Sudan comes through international initiatives, over which teachers have little control, as highlighted in the dialogue below. Researchers also highlighted how issues of low and delayed salaries and lack of access to teacher training are undermining the teaching profession.

**JR:** If you consider South Sudan as a body, the part that has the most critical problem is our minds... This causes a lot of problems... We don't have good education, people are not educated, that is why our minds are suffering...

**OG:** When I look at the budget – education is almost the least. And yet it is the most important....

**PJ:** Without investing in our people's education, we will still face these problems. Even if Salva Kiir goes and someone else comes, what will happen?... Why are we not asking difficult questions? Why do all the MPs, governors, ministers, the directors, have their families in Nairobi and Kampala? Education. And you are struggling at home, to educate the South Sudanese who have not had a chance to grab the resources...

**GT:** Education in South Sudan has been weakened even before independence of South Sudan. I have experienced so many teachers in northern Sudan. The education system had been changed into political dimension. You may find a person with the lowest mark to be taken into educational system. That was system in old Sudan... The result is that the people who are going to be admitted in universities will be the people with the lowest mark. That person will be graduated, and they will not be able to express themselves with the students. This is now the case adapted in South Sudan. These days the people with the lowest marks are the ones admitted into the college of education to become teachers, engineers... This must be changed, we need

people with high scores in secondary school, with brilliant minds, to go to university.

**OG:** The people who were supposed to be in the right place in education – like the vice chancellors – they are sent out. Somebody else is put there. We are spoiling our system... They should empower those in secondary and university so they can analyse, but it is not happening.

*The teachers 'need to be empowered'*

**GT:** We need to change our education system. We have to use the right people that may develop our country in the nearest future. In our educational system of South Sudan, the payment is the matter... The training is very low to become a teacher. The teacher is like if you have failed at all other jobs, then you will be a teacher. But if you have your uncle... people who know uncles will go to organisations.

**AA:** At the moment the schools are reluctant to train teachers because they go to work for organisations. The teaching profession has become a profession that is hated by everyone. No one likes it because they say when you are a teacher you become poor for life.

**GW:** Another challenge is the issue of salaries... [it is] because there is no salary [that teachers] go and get another job. This turnover of teachers disrupts the learning.

**OG:** There is also an issue of foreign intervention in education. It is free education. But it is also free of knowledge. The education system needs to be empowered – payment for teachers is not there, capacity building is low, it is for primary only.... We were discussing with the donor at our school, we said why can't you increase this free system to secondary or tertiary level. They say no the level is primary. You find now many South Sudanese are able to read and write but what is their capacity?... Someone from Ministry of Education went

to visit our school. We said, is there a budget line for capacity building? Most of our teachers were trained in Uganda, but their education is now static. Why can't you develop our teachers? But the minister said: 'your time has not yet come.' [Apparently] the time now is for the minister, and the son and daughter of the minister who are able to go to school. But it is not our time.

*'Poverty... is influencing teaching'*

**LD:** [A key issue is] poverty, lack of food influencing teaching in these areas. Children cannot go to school when they are hungry.

**PN:** Also, there is a lack of enough classes, of infrastructure – there are over 80 students in one of my second-year classes. And Malakal is very hot, so it gets very congested especially during the hot season, some people easily give up. And I don't have a microphone to talk to them at the back. And the exercise books to write on are not enough.

**OG:** Another issue is the syllabus. The books used in South Sudan are a collection of East African books. Practically there is no book which shows where the resources of South Sudan are located in geography. No textbooks for South Sudan at secondary school level.

**GW:** The Ministry of Education did not issue a clear South Sudan syllabus. Therefore, teachers are given syllabus guides which contain course content. It is the role of teachers to search for such content. For example, if you are teaching history, you must buy a history textbook of South Sudan. And if you don't get the course content, you have to buy the textbooks of Kenya or Uganda, which means a big challenge to get money and buy more textbooks to get the content you need.

**DD:** [Another issue is] if they don't have uniform they will not go. Also the parents,

they are a big challenge, they can detain their girls at home, that they cook first for them. The girl will be late. She will quarrel with the father or with the teacher and she will get out of school.

**PN:** In the PoCs we have so many girl-led households. Maybe she has a child that she left at home, maybe the poverty is getting to her, she wants to continue the studies but there is this pressing demand behind. She comes twice, she is absent for the entire next week. Sometimes they wouldn't want to share so if you don't try to find out the difficulties they face, some of them end up leaving for good.

**International Support: "The implementation has become a problem"**

The topic of international support for education also came on the agenda, with participants sharing experiences of aid. In particular, researchers working as teachers highlighted both the value and the challenges of the GESS, including issues relating to delays in the money reaching schools and additional reporting burdens on teachers. Some also questioned the wider premise of the initiative, with teachers still receiving little support. In a general sense, their accounts reveal changing practices and expectations in the financing of education that may have lasting significance beyond the scope of the particular programmes discussed.

**JR:** Girls education in South Sudan is good; it encourages girls to go to school, but also the money that is allocated to the girl doesn't reach them in most cases. It is delayed.

**GW:** In the PoC, people really appreciate GESS, especially the girls and women. It has encouraged them to go back to school because of the financial support. However, there are some challenges of GESS. The

first challenge is that lower classes and some schools are not supported. Another challenge is the delay of financial support. GESS comes at the end of the year, and because of the delay, some girls suspect that the school administration has received the money on their behalf. There is also a challenge because the teachers want financial support from GESS. There is a dispute between GESS, the teachers and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). The teachers are supported by NRC, and NRC dictates that one school cannot be supported by two humanitarian organisations. The teachers urged that the GESS programme should top up teachers' salaries. But GESS said we don't support teachers in that way – we are topping up the schoolteachers who are paid by the government. The schools who are supported by organisations are not part of our programme.

**WA:** One of the challenges for GESS is the financial institution that is assigned to transport money to the rural areas... you have got to spend some money in the process, and then for the payment of these people. Most of the time the money is delayed because the place is far. Another problem is the administration of schools. This money when it reaches the school... You find that some money doesn't actually reach the intended girls.

**DD:** [In Gogrial] the teachers wrote [down] a lot of ladies. People received the money on behalf of ghost names. When they came to verify it, they just got lots of people to represent the girls. So GESS need to give identity cards to each girl in the school so that the money goes direct to them.

**AA:** My school benefited from GESS with a capitation grant... It was supposed to start last year in June, but after all it was not done the way it was communicated, because the money for teachers' incentives was given for two months, then in the second

phase they said there was an issue in the reporting system. You as the school need to update on a daily basis – the attendance of teachers, attendance of pupils – you send it to them online every day. Then at the end they can identify what school is active and what is not. So some schools failed to receive the money because Vivacell [phone network] closed all the schools were disconnected, they couldn't give the reports, so the services were cut. There are many delays. They are still saying we will get it. We benefited once from the cash for girls, maybe twice for teachers' incentives, some other schools benefited once and did not get the second, and the others have got the third.

**OG:** What incentive is there for the teachers to report? They have to report all the girls daily. It takes a long time... people might have a simple phone, not a smart phone, so they cannot do it.

**AA:** The [donors] considered 50 to be the ideal class size. So, 50 students per one teacher. So now they are selecting some teachers to benefit from the programme, not all of them. The school administration has to select the ones that are the most committed. So, in my school they selected seven teachers, there are 15 in the school, only seven will benefit from the programme.

**OG:** We have not received anything [from GESS] since 2014, up to last year [2018]. Also, [there is a problem] because of the displacement – they want only the girls who first registered in term 1 in the first two weeks, whose names were sent to the education department. So those girls who registered after when timeframe was over, they cannot benefit. Another thing – there is frequent change of staff. The county supervisor for example. I think this is a problem, because in a school, people say they sent the money. But there is no money. The state says the money is there. There is no accountability. There is also an argument

about the US\$40. Because practically those administrators at *payam* and county [levels] are not looked at. They don't get anything. So, the teachers get more than the *payam* supervisor (county education supervisor).

**DD:** GESS came with the money and the implementation has become a problem. Everyone wants a share from it. But the teachers are the ones who are suffering. Those people who are earning more than them, they are claiming that they need US\$40 too.

**GT:** GESS and NRC were in the government-controlled area in Leer town, but there is no population there, no schools, no one has stayed there. Only the government and the soldiers are there. So, the money was supposed to be distributed outside. But when they brought the money, they were intimidated by the state Ministry of Education to report the cash to them. The schools which are outside are under IO controlled areas so the minister could not reach out to them... Result of that issue, the money did not reach outside. But when GESS came outside to see if teachers have received their money, they found no-one had received the money. Teachers blamed them and said why did you not come in person – we cannot access Leer, and people in Leer cannot access us... The minister said he would report the money, but he did not. It resulted in the sacking of that minister of education; they have appointed another person. So, they came to handle it by making direct report from the schools to the organisation. Now the teachers are reporting directly to GESS.

[Also, international donors] were to [support] construction of some local schools... I met with one of the headteachers in Toc. The money was supposed to be 30,000 SSP per school... he was given 15,000. He said where is the rest, he refused to take the money and said he would report directly back to the donor. He was told, what came

from Juba is only 20,000, and from 20,000 education department have taken 5,000. He said – I will not take the money; he quarrelled until heard by the community and intellectuals, other teachers from other schools. They found that is something which has happened for all the schools, not just his. Finally, he came and took the money because he found that all the schools had been intimidated.

**LD:** Someone came to Nile Hope, asked for a secure place to put some money. [He had] about a million for many schools. He reported to the local authorities and invited the teachers. Teachers complained because some of the schools were not in that project, but the schools are working together. So, the teachers said we cannot accept the money unless all the schools get it. But the guy said, he has the list, he has particular named people he can give the money to. If they had refused, he would have taken the money and gone back to Juba.

### **"Linking education to building our nation"**

The final part of the dialogue turned to questions of education and nation-building, motivations for teaching, and to the researchers' own efforts to support education.

**PJ:** You are teachers. You are developing the people of tomorrow. We need to invest in our people, in education, to develop a human being that can create South Sudan... We need a national vision... We want to develop a human being that is a developed and informed person... Are our citizens or our students being developed to become people who can critically think about their own environment, and how to change it? There is a big question about how people understand knowledge... Critical thinking, questioning everything is part of the curriculum. But we

shouldn't take that for granted. There are different ideas about what knowledge is, about authority – and critical questioning of authority in school influences how you then criticise authority outside school. So, it is a question of pedagogical decision... It is not just about resources. It's about mindset, creativity. Some of the issues come with teacher training, how they can be creative... Are you doing it because you want to be a teacher, because you really love what you are doing and because you have that commitment to develop your country, or for the 40 dollars?

**OG:** We have to clearly outline the philosophy of education in South Sudan. What do we want our learners to achieve?

**PN:** The way forward relies on each of us. Our personal commitment to keep doing what you know is right. Regardless of the difficulties.

**PJ:** What have each of you done to successfully to influence education in your area? [For example] with the community in the PoC, we moved education to them... I said these are South Sudanese and they need education. We could have given up, said let them stay in the PoC and not register. But where is the future of South Sudan if the population is kept out, if only part of the population is getting the opportunity. Are we doing the nation building? We are not. These are some of the critical questions for you as teachers and leaders... Are you addressing your classroom challenges because of your commitment?

**GW:** Before the crisis, I was a teacher, and when the fighting erupted I went to the PoC with some students. In the same month of December, the government announced that examinations for primary eight students would be on the 9 January. Students were going out and coming back to the PoC, and were being targeted based on ethnicity. I went to the main gates and

advised the students to go back to the camp. I had decided to take the risks by myself. I went to the Ministry of Education of Central Equatoria, to the Director for Examinations, and I said to him, "education cannot wait," the primary 8 candidates in the PoC are willing to sit for examinations. The candidates were really affected by the war, but some were willing. I asked the Director, is it possible to register them, and after you will facilitate the examinations inside the PoC? He said yes, go to the UNMISS Department of Education to facilitate. The UNMISS Education Department directed me to meet NRC. They said, go and register all the candidates from different schools who are in the PoC. In fact, I registered four hundred candidates and took the list to UNMISS. It was accepted that they should sit for exams in the PoC on 9 January 2014. I appreciated the Government of South Sudan and the education partners for recognising the right to education.

**PJ:** I know this story well. [From outside the PoC] We influenced UNMISS and Ministry of Education. Because when it was announced that examination might be taken to UNMISS, we ambushed the minister. We were also pushing. And we went to the commissioners. They were not happy with this announcement. We said if there is a way we can deliver examination at UNMISS we should do. The examination should be brought there and not tampered with. It's a big success story.

**OG:** In my school in Nimule, we have about 970 students, in form 1 to form 4. Most of our teachers left. We are only five trained teachers left. I called the parents in 2016, said this is how many students we have, and we have no teachers, the state said they are not doing recruitment. The parents contributed money instead of waiting for the government. So, we recruited more teachers. At the end of the month we were able to pay a teacher at least 7,000 SSP. We also

developed an appraisal – if you do really well you get a scholarship from the school to study free for the rest of the year. This is motivating students... Especially to help the girls.

**LD:** [In Leer] people live in islands where they are displaced from the mainland. In the islands there are local NGOs that operate there [including my NGO] ... but there was no NGO that was really taking seriously supporting education. Then one of the organisations came and did an assessment in Toc Riek... and were granted some support to build some permanent structure for classrooms. Children were willing to learn but there was no proper place to do it. He came with that funding, when he reached Toc Riek went to the local authorities... [they] said you are coming to build permanent structure, but you should not build it here because when peace comes people will leave these islands. They suspended the case. He came and talked to me and explained to me what had happened. I said, in the next meeting, there should be three of us – the director, you and me. Then we went back, gave advice to the director to say: Right now, people are here, and they need these things; children need to go to school. What guarantee do you have that peace will come tomorrow? We should allow this person to do this building so the children can be taught right now. They said, let us build it on the mainland which is near to the island. Then people can access it from the island and from the mainland. So, they built four buildings. The children went to the school and did the exam, their results were to be announced. They wrote a letter to the organisation, addressed to me, inviting me to attend the announcement of the results... I was given time to encourage [the students]. I encouraged them to enjoy this situation, that slowly by slowly they will get help, they should attend the classes. We promised them that if any of us goes to live in Juba, when they come back they will bring with

them four textbooks. So, we are doing that, now. Anytime I am going to Juba I buy these textbooks and I take them back.

**AA:** I am a teacher in Mugali in an IDP camp... In 2016, there was no secondary school, it is a distance of 14km to nearest town, so it is hard for the children to access secondary schools in Nimule. Those who finished Class 8 had to stay, there was no more progress. So, we did a proposal to the organisation that is funding the [primary] school... that we would do a secondary school, or that we could take the students who finished Primary 8 to Nimule for secondary school. They said that it is not in our budget to fund a secondary school, they fund primary schools... but they could do something if the parents participated. So, I called the parents of these people – we had 11 pupils who had finished Primary 8 and could not continue – and we shared together in a meeting on what we can do. [They agreed] that if the organisation can [assist] they will accommodate the children, look for where they will stay and cater for their basic needs. The organisation was happy with this proposal. They saw these people are so interested for their children to learn. They said we will do sanitary kits for the girls, and for the boys will pay stationary. So, the children were brought to Nimule and started secondary school there until Senior 2, then, the organisation said the project ended...

**GT:** When I was working with IMC... a school operating in Toc Riek island, near Leer opened... but they had no materials. The teacher came to me when I was doing logistics. They said they had no red pens even to mark the children's exercise books. It happened some of the children had no exercise book. So, the little they had they would cut in the middle and divide in two, and that cut book would be used for all lessons. They said this is the time of examination, can you help with red pens

and with papers for the examinations. I said that issue is a bit tough, even one pen I cannot give out myself, but I have to address to decision of organisation to discuss... I communicated the message to the IMC office in Juba. I addressed the issue, they accepted to give that help. I took them papers for the examination, and I also got them the blue pens and red pens to be distributed. That was one of the achievements.

**DD:** My sister was impregnated at school. In our culture when a girl is impregnated, she can be given to an old man. I said this sister of mine should not be given out. Let her go back to school. She went back to school, finished secondary school and she is married now. She has continued her education... People are saying how can a girl be impregnated, and I take her back to school? People were abusing me in the community. But I was just enduring it.

**B:** There was an issue in the primary school in my area... The headmaster gave order to teachers to collect exam moneys from the students [then] he went to Wau with the money, spent two weeks, came back, but had not typed any exam. So, the teachers were annoyed, started fighting with him, even the students were involved in supporting the teachers... I was passing by the school; I saw the children running around. I asked the problem; the children said we have this issue with examination, because on Monday the students must sit the exam and we have nothing now. We sent the headmaster to Wau to get the exam and we got nothing. So I told them fighting is not the solution. I called the commissioner of the area. The commissioner came, called all the teachers and school headmaster, took them to the office and talked to the headmaster to find solution to find money to pay for the exams. The headmaster said he had nothing now. The commissioner said you cooked the money... [but he] gave [him]

some money and he went back again to Wau, and got the exam. From there was not any problem and they sat the exam... The commissioner wrote a letter to the Minister of Education in the state, because this issue is not only this school, it is all over the schools.

**PJ:** This is what education means to many of us... You are able to address your issues... Education is the link to everything you do... Problems are created by people and then can also be solved by people.

## Conclusion

Despite an ongoing conflict and funding shortages, many schools in South Sudan have continued to function and some new schools have been established. There are people in positions of authority, both within and beyond the state striving to provide access to education in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Existing international support for teachers, and girls' education, has generally been welcomed and impactful but it is neither sufficient nor consistent. Teachers, schools, and their local communities are struggling to keep schools running in an unpredictable and under-resourced environment. This is evidenced in the policy data, and it is further illustrated in our accounts based on interviews and observations from different parts of the country. Our findings reinforce calls for a dramatic boost to education budgets in South Sudan.

However, in reflecting on how to support education it is important to understand that schools cannot simply be categorised as either state-provided or private, since education is neither predominantly delivered, funded, and managed by the state, nor is it simply being 'privatised'.<sup>68</sup> Instead both state and 'private' schools depend on civic initiatives by an array of state and non-state actors including government officials, local authorities, academics, community leaders, national and international humanitarian actors, volunteers, and contributions from families. Even schools that benefit from international support may also be reliant upon fees from parents, and a patchwork

of local initiatives, voluntary efforts, and improvisations by teachers. These informal arrangements in which non-state actors and networks have played a vital part in the delivery of a public service reflects the contingencies of 'real governance' more broadly in South Sudan and echoes findings in another war-torn state in Africa.<sup>69</sup>

Ideally, the government should be at the forefront of providing education and ending educational inequalities, taking responsibility for ensuring that no child or adult is excluded or left behind. But in the politically turbulent context of South Sudan, our review suggests the scope for support to education to serve as a bedrock of state and nation-building from below, with or without government leadership. Teachers are already 'frontline statebuilders' and have the potential to also contribute to nation-building, depending upon the conditions and the provision of educational resources.<sup>70</sup> Many schools have embraced problem-solving approaches while communities have been ready to input their own meagre resources. There is much to learn from their initiatives to promote education, including that support at the grassroots is not necessarily in contradiction with the development of state education.

At present, teachers largely remain poorly paid with limited or no training, and are constrained in their local silos, disconnected from one another. This restricts the opportunities for a national approach to education and limits the potential for educational deprivations to catalyse united political movements for change.<sup>71</sup> We show that deliberations between educators

68 Novelli et al, 'Education sector governance' 2016, p.48.

69 See Titeca, K., & De Herdt, T., 2011 on the education sector in DRC.

70 We borrow this term from Luka Biong Deng, CRP education workshop Kampala, July 2019.

71 Such as the following "targeted and strategic forms of nonviolent resistance... civic groups could start by mobilizing around basic necessities, such as the price of food, the availability of medicines in the market, and the failure to pay salaries to public employees," David Deng and the Conflict Research Programme South Sudan Panel, 2019, From the Region to the Grassroots: Political Dynamics in South Sudan, Conflict Research Programme Briefing December. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/ccs-research-unit/Conflict-Research-Programme/crp-memos/CRP-South-Sudan-Panel-Memo-December-19-Final.pdf>.

from different contexts is productive in the articulation of shared problems and common agendas. As the dialogue and interview material suggests, despite the ethnic cleavages and regional differences produced through violent conflict and uneven development, there are shared problems and aspirations for education that cut across diverse settings and schools. The issue of low and irregular payments for teachers (established in the policy data) were among the worrying issues provoking complaints in all the research sites, even if in every location there were examples of local people and teachers taking independent initiatives to create schools or support education. Yet such efforts are not sustainable without reliable support for a living wage and support for the professionalisation of teaching.

Overall, schools are vital opportunities for the development of 'civism', in the sense of encouraging everyday practices oriented towards deliberation, legitimate authority, and rights. At present, their capacity to deliver upon this is dependent on multiple local features including funding; the good will and commitment of local authorities; the choice of syllabus; the qualifications of staff; and humanitarian support. It is nevertheless remarkable that many staff and schools still broadly share educational imperatives and orientations and have not been systematically harnessed by conflict actors to promote particular political ideologies and interests. Validating and valuing the extraordinary efforts of teachers, including by training them, increasing their salaries, and connecting them to each other through national frameworks and bodies, is essential to promoting a peaceful future in South Sudan.



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