

POLICY BRIEF

Educating for Peace in South Sudan

South Sudan gaining independence from Sudan in July 2011 raised great hopes for the new country. Rich in culture and natural resources, it has the potential to develop into an economically prosperous state. While many opportunities exist, a number of challenges—particularly related to violent conflict—stand in the way.

Underdevelopment persists. The country has weak infrastructure, underfunded health and education services, and a nascent economy because of decades of neglect and protracted civil war with the Sudanese to the north. Although South Sudan is now independent, animosity between South Sudan and Sudan remains and conflicts flare up in disputed territories. Just as concerning are the violent clashes between tribal and ethnic groups within South Sudan. Regardless of its source, the conflict South Sudan experiences is an important factor in its slow pace of development.

The country can address internal conflict by teaching tolerance and understanding and equipping citizens with the ability to deal with conflict in a non-violent manner. Many South Sudanese are being exposed to democracy for the first time and they may not fully understand their rights and what they should expect under this system. In the absence of a country-wide education strategy to implement a newly-developed unified curriculum, conflict will likely continue. The question is: how can the Government of South Sudan and its development partners create a responsible citizenry that is mindful of conflict and actively working toward peace?

Educating for peace draws together three areas of instruction: peace, civic, and citizenship education. Together they can help build the knowledge and skills that citizens need to become responsible. Peace education aims to foster a culture of peace and peacebuilding through conflict mitigation, resolution, and reconciliation. Civic education seeks to build an understanding of the democratic system based on notions of civic and human rights. Citizenship education attempts to teach an awareness of rights and responsibilities and instill respect for others' rights and viewpoints. Teaching these three areas can improve knowledge about the principles and practices that should underpin the functioning of the new country and can in turn improve peace prospects.

This policy brief explores challenges to building a peaceful society in South Sudan through education.

It examines existing efforts, identifies opportunities and makes recommendations for how to improve peace, civic and citizenship education in South Sudan.

Children have lunch at an orphanage in Juba, capital of South Sudan.

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Peace, civic, and citizenship education can be provided by governments—this is formal education—or by non-governmental stakeholders—here understood as informal education. An example of informal education is the Peace Education Programme run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Part of the program targeted adults, many of whom are South Sudanese, in refugee camps in Dadaab and Kakuma, Kenya, in 2000. Later, in 2001, the program included refugee youth. The program demonstrated that thousands of people can receive quality peace education—even in crisis situations—and that such education can reduce violence (Obura 2002). However, the program missed an opportunity when it did not include teacher training, meaning that its impact would not be sustained through formal education (Westheimer and Kahne 2004; Noddings 2005; Levin and Bishai 2010). In South Sudan, formal education within a national school system could help to overcome inter-group differences and equip youth with the knowledge and skills they need to assume active roles as citizens and build peace within their country.

State of Education in South Sudan

Formal provision of peace, civic, and citizenship education would be through primary and secondary schooling. However, the national education system in South Sudan faces serious challenges. Education is one of the country's six priority areas and much work remains to be done (Davies, Smith, and Williamson 2011). Many schools continue to be opened on an ad hoc basis, with most schooling for children provided by community groups, churches, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Schools usually do not follow a common curriculum, but rather use whatever resources are readily available. Although a South Sudanese curriculum exists, most schools that can provide curriculum-based schooling continue to teach the Ugandan or Kenyan curricula they used in the past, due to the slow pace of training teachers to use the unified curriculum. This makes determining the level of a child's education difficult.

Primary schools remain rare, particularly outside urban areas, and students must walk several kilometres to reach the nearest one. Access to secondary schools is even more limited. Moreover, class sizes in both primary and secondary schools are large, averaging 50 pupils to one teacher. High drop-out rates among students are compounded by family obligations and social constraints that may prevent young people, girls in particular, from attending school (Deng 2006; Hewison 2009). Teachers and officials at education ministries lack the capacity to provide good-quality, well-managed services. For

instance, a 2009 assessment revealed that 96 percent of all teachers in South Sudan have no formal training (Hewison 2009). Despite a growing focus on teacher training, that number is likely to remain high for years. Furthermore, education is often disrupted because the population of individual classes is continuously in flux because of population displacement caused by conflict and natural disasters.

The government is struggling to build and coordinate a national education system and at the same time decentralize power to the state and payam (municipal) levels (South Sudan 2012; Hewison 2009). South Sudan cannot fully fund its own services, placing donors in a crucial position with regard to the development of education—especially curricula. Donor funding provides approximately 60 percent of the budget for core services, including education (Davies, Smith, and Williamson 2011). Since capacities are low and the responsibilities of various levels of government are not clearly defined, a large percentage of the aid flows through NGOs and civil society organizations.

What Are Donors Doing to Help?

Donors play a major role in supporting and shaping South Sudan's education system. Until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, most assistance to then-Southern Sudan was focused on acute humanitarian needs. Education was considered a development program area secondary to these needs. A noted exception among donors was the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which introduced emergency education programming in 1993 in recognition of its importance for child development during the ongoing civil war (Deng 2006). Since 2002, donors have paid increasing attention to the education system, although none is making peace and civic education a central pillar of its support.

The United States is currently the largest donor to South Sudan, with US\$30.0 million in planned investment for basic education alone in fiscal year 2013 (ForeignAssistance.gov 2012). Funding for the education sector and education-based programming also comes via American support for democracy, human rights, governance, economic development, peace, and security. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is responsible for bolstering the education system. It began in 2002–03 with the three-year Sudan Basic Education Program. This program was delivered through contracting partners and, for the first time, offered common teacher training and developed a uniform education system (Hewison 2009).

Despite a focus on conflict-affected and fragile states in its 2011–15 education strategy (USAID 2011a), USAID does not fund peace, civic, or citizenship education as a specific component of any program in South Sudan. Nevertheless, peacebuilding and conflict mitigation are part of other USAID-funded projects in the country and, as these remain strategic areas for programming, USAID's implementing partners often include peacebuilding, conflict mitigation, and/or reconciliation as cross-cutting themes in their programs. The USAID-funded Transition and Conflict Mitigation program, for example, combines work on livelihoods and reconstruction with active peacebuilding and civic engagement for youth and the wider community (USAID 2011b). The concepts of peace and reconciliation are passed on through donor and stakeholder programming, although a program's scope depends on the mandate of individual agencies and organizations.

The next largest donor is a consortium of bilateral agencies from Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom known as the Joint Donor Team (JDT), established in 2006 to strengthen development efforts in Southern Sudan. It is responsible for funding two areas that support education. The Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Southern Sudan (MDTF-SS), which includes additional donors, covers government teacher training, ministry capacity building and hardware, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, including an education component (MDTF-SS 2012). The Basic Services Fund (BSF) covers the provision of education services through implementing partners, such as national and international NGOs (BSF 2012). Peace, civic, and citizenship education are included in projects funded by the MDTF-SS, but not as central components. The BSF requires peacebuilding to be a cross-cutting theme in all projects that it funds, including education projects carried out through partners. Since projects are implemented through various organizations, those focused on peace, civic, and citizenship education vary in depth and scope.

Apart from the members of the JDT, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency also funds the education sector in South Sudan. It primarily supports teacher training in science, mathematics, and basic education. Other major donors include United Nations agencies, with UNICEF and UNHCR providing significant funding for education. The JDT will likely wind down as South Sudan consolidates its independence, though individual donors are expected to continue funding services and projects.

Supplementing these modest efforts at peace, civic, and citizenship education in formal settings are those outside of government, such as Youth Lead, a project implemented by UNICEF with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency. Youth Lead provides space and training for young people in Sudan and South Sudan to become community economic and social leaders and active promoters of peace.

The Way Forward

South Sudan has incredible potential. In building a standardized country-wide education system almost from scratch, the government has the opportunity and flexibility to create curricula that promote conflict mitigation, reconciliation, and understanding of democratic rights, privileges, and responsibilities. But South Sudan evidently faces immense challenges. Despite limited capacity to provide services, compounded by ongoing humanitarian emergencies, the government's focus remains to try to increase access to basic education for as many South Sudanese as possible (Marian Hodgkin, UNICEF, personal communication, September 2011; Stephen Backman, USAID, personal communication, October 2011). Curricula devoted to peace, civic, and citizenship education are not seen as a pressing concern.

By not incorporating formal peace, civic, and citizenship education in the national education system, the government and its development partners are missing opportunities to promote peace and reconciliation during a critical moment in South Sudan's emergence as an independent state. Emergency education programs, teacher training, and development of new curricula are all initiatives into which peace, reconciliation, and good citizenship should be integrated.

Moving forward, the Government of South Sudan, its development partners, and key stakeholders should consider:

- including focused peace and civic education in new national curricula for both primary and secondary schools in addition to mainstreaming good citizenship principles;
- incorporating a standard peace, civic, and citizenship education unit into all emergency education programs;
- continuing to promote hate-free curriculum support;
- ensuring that projects targeting the reintegration of ex-combatants include civic education;

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- promoting the participatory creation of peace and civic education projects and curricula to make certain that information will be relevant and understood by all groups (information should be translated into all languages widely used in South Sudan); and
- linking education projects with other government and NGO services that include peace programming to create a community-based approach to peacebuilding. 🌐

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