**EDUCATION IN SOUTH SUDAN**

*By Dr Ruth Eade*

In common with other post conflict countries, education is widely considered to be a core element of the peace premium for South Sudan. On this understanding, the enhanced participation of the ECS in education - through an ECS University - would potentially contribute to the country’s development and be a continuum of the ECS’s ongoing involvement in the development of the country. With particular reference to educational provision in South Sudan and the inherent challenges an ECS University -with a Faculty of Education - would potentially make a significant contribution to reducing the shortage of trained teachers and also by providing quality continuing professional development programmes for qualified teachers.

That the churches in South Sudan are perceived by agencies and the GoSS to have a role to play in future education provision is evidenced by its inclusion in a recent document - “Building a Better Future for Education: Education for an Independent South Sudan”. In this document UNESCO invited the international community, the churches, NGOs and civil society organisations to join with GoSS and the major ministries involved in educational provision, i.e., The Ministry of Youth Sports & Recreation - Minister: Makuac Teny Yoh; The Ministry of Education - Minister: Michael Milli Hussein; The Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Technology - Minister: Joseph Ukel, in ensuring that future generations enjoy their right to education.

Many examples of the ECS’s current provision for schooling were observed/identified during the research, a prime example being Juba Diocesan Model Secondary School. The school was founded by the ECS with financial assistance from a parish in a UK link diocese. It is now producing students with university entrance qualifications. Accordingly, should the ECS proceeds to establish a new university it will be essential for it also to retain its support of basic and secondary schools. Whilst such support is essential in the context of the need for the ECS to honour its existing commitments, it will also be an essential means of ensuring that the proposed university will have source of well qualified students for its continued existence.

**The Effects of the Civil Wars on Education** – The problems related to continuity and progression of education in South Sudan closely coincide with the civil wars. The creation of an independent Sudan in 1956 and the subsequent vigorous policy for Arabisation – imposed particularly on schools – profoundly challenged South Sudan’s African identity and disrupted schooling. The situation was further exacerbated by the 1962 Missionary Societies Act which curtailed the work of foreign missionaries in education, and also by their expulsion in 1964. The consequence was that many of the schools started by missionaries could not continue. Subsequently, the civil wars deprived generations of access to formal education resulting in an estimated illiteracy rate in South Sudan of between 80% and 90% - one of the highest in the world.

In 1980 southern Sudan had approximately eight hundred primary schools many of which were established during the Southern Regional administration (1972–81). However, the second Sudanese civil war - 1983–2005 - destroyed many schools, although the SPLA operated schools in areas under its control. Nevertheless, many teachers and students were
among the refugees who fled the ravages of war. Today many of the schools operate outside in the open, or under trees, due to lack of built classrooms.

Following the destruction of the country’s infrastructure, there are major geographical disparities in the quality of educational provision across South Sudan’s states. Many schools were started by parents to provide schooling for their children. Consequently growth was haphazard and mothers with basic education became the teachers. Currently there are some voluntary initiatives seeking to address the problems, e.g. the United States Agency for International Development is currently supporting the use of radio as a means of delivering high quality education to children in South Sudan - including the disputed regions of Abyei, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan. Some teacher and headteacher courses have been provided by the ECS; and the Mother’s Union has been instrumental in working with parents to set-up pre-schools where there is an emphasis on socialisation, developmental skills and play.

Further challenges arising from the conflict dynamics arise from language differences. Schools controlled by the government during the conflict continue to use Arabic and those held by the SPLM continue to use English. Consequently, there is an increasing need to make educational provision for the considerable number of returnees and displaced person returning to South Sudan, speaking only Arabic.

Formally scaling-up education provision in order to address the vast range of needs which currently exists, i.e. the large out of school population; the massive shortage of qualified teachers; the need to improve the quality of teaching; the need for advisory and inspection service and for a national education framework to deliver universal education, requires both money and human resources. In addressing these needs GoSS faces significant funding issues including the short term nature of financial aid in the context of the need for long term strategic planning. In 2010 aid represented 38% of the planned spending on education.

**Access to Education** - South Sudan comes at the bottom of most indicators for access to education. A recently released United Nations report says that children in South Sudan are more likely to die before the age of five than complete a basic education. However, the current estimate of a 1.3 million enrolment in South Sudan’s primary schools represents a four-fold increase over the 2005 figure. 2010 statistics indicate enrolment of about thirty four thousand children in secondary education with 1,600 in the final grade. The Go to School Campaign of 2008-2009, considerably contributed to an increase in enrolment. However, enrolment is relatively low when compared with the extent of the overall school-age population of the country. Areas of disparity include age, gender, rural/urban, rich/poor. Currently, the specific needs of children with special needs/war disabilities are not being addressed.

It is estimated that only one in ten primary school pupil’s complete primary education and few enroll in secondary schools. The drop-out rate is mainly exacerbated by a large over-age population in primary schools – approximately 90%, and home environment of girls which is frequently characterised by early marriage, domestic responsibilities and the tradition of educating sons before daughters. UNESCO’s research indicates that education can be highly instrumental in reaching illiterate or semi-literate adolescent girls and that this ultimately significantly benefits wider society. However, the challenges are particularly severe for girls. South Sudan has proportionately fewer girls going to school than any other country in the world. According to UNICEF, less than one per cent of South Sudanese girls complete
primary education and only one schoolchild in four is a girl resulting in South Sudan’s female illiteracy rate being the highest in the world.

**Primary Education** - This is free in the public schools to South Sudanese children between the ages of six and thirteen years of age. The educational system of South Sudan is modelled on that of the Republic of Sudan, i.e. the $8 + 3 + 4$ a system which has been in place since 1990. Accordingly, primary education consists of eight years, followed by three years of secondary education. On completion of primary education pupils are awarded the Basic School Leaving Certificate which indicates a measure of competency in Christian Religious Education, Arabic, English, Mathematics, Science, and Geography. This certificate is regarded as an important tool in gaining employment and necessary for those wishing to proceed to secondary education.

**Secondary Education** – This phase covers the $9^{	ext{th}}$, $10^{	ext{th}}$ and $11^{	ext{th}}$ grades and introduces science including chemistry, biology, physics, and geography. There is a particularly high drop-out rate from secondary school mainly attributed to truancy among boys and pregnancy among girls.

Secondary school pupils passing a recognised School Certificate and who gain more than 50% in six or more subjects are eligible for university entrance. In an attempt to standardise the wide range of certification currently on offer to South Sudan’s secondary schools, the GoSS has produced a new certificate intended to provide a common curriculum for all South Sudan’s Schools. However, since the associated textbooks and professional development for the teachers are not yet available, it is not possible for a common curriculum to be followed. Vocational, primary and early year’s education is also under review by the GoSS.

**Quality of Teaching Provision in Schools** - Subsequent to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, training has been offered at various teacher training centres. Since 2005 the pupil-qualified teacher ratio in southern Sudan has risen to 53:1 with the figure for the pupil-unqualified teacher ratio being 100:1. Current estimates indicate that there are up to fifteen thousand untrained teachers working in South Sudan’s schools. It is envisaged that an ECS University - with its proposed Faculty of Education - would potentially be instrumental in raising the standard of education in South Sudan through the provision of continuing professional development opportunities for serving teachers and through the training of new teachers.

**Post secondary education**

- **Vocational schooling** – The shortage of vocational training colleges is primarily attributed to an historical emphasis on acquiring a university education rather than the acquisition of the practical skills. Accordingly South Sudan lacks vocational training colleges graduates capable of building, maintaining and developing its infrastructure, e.g. roads, houses, water treatment systems and sewage plants - as well as computer networks, telephone systems and electricity generating plants to power the entire infrastructure. Implementing such facilities will require a well trained, qualified workforce. Accordingly, more vocational training colleges are needed.

- **University Education** – Provision for university education is discussed elsewhere in this report. However, it is of note in this context that South Sudanese university degrees do not operate at UK honours degree level and, therefore, are not regarded as equivalent to those awarded by other universities. Accordingly, this report advises the implementation of an ECS University degree at the recognised standard. Initially, this might involve...
external validation for degrees in order to ensure the ECS University achieves widespread acceptance and recognition of its standards. This report also advises that an ECS University should make provision for a Foundation Year course and that, in order to assist students, it should comprise a compulsory English module.

At university level, it is usual for teachers to have a PhD and at least three years teaching experience before being appointed to a first lectureship. Whilst research participants felt that – including the Sudanese world-wide diaspora - there were staff of sufficient academic calibre to teach in an ECS University, it was not possible for the university feasibility study to substantiate this claim. However, what it was able to establish was that currently there is a considerable shortage of university teachers in South Sudan’s public universities and that this situation is jeopardising the re-opening of some of them in the autumn of 2011. This indicates there would need to be extensive staff recruitment campaign and continuing professional courses in order to staff an ECS University with those capable of delivering educational excellence and engaging in research.

**Current Challenges to Education** - In seeking to establish a national framework for education, the destruction of the county’s infrastructure presents the GoSS with three major, simultaneous challenges

- the construction of additional classrooms where facilities already exist
- the repair of damaged schools
- the building new school to accommodate the increasing demand for education.

**Developing a National Framework for Education** – The GoSS is currently embarked on a highly ambitious programme of education re-construction focused on the realisation of goals contained in South Sudan’s Development Plan and the Education Sector Strategic Plan. However, resources for achieving the plan’s goals are considerably limited and do not meet the increasing demand for education. The goals involved are as follows

- Increase primary school net enrolment from 46% to 63%
- Double secondary school net enrolment from 4% to 8%
- Provide In-service and Pre-service training for seven thousand primary and nine hundred secondary school teachers
- Reduce the ratio of textbooks to primary and secondary school children from 4:1 to 1:1 by 2015
- Construct four thousand primary school classrooms by 2013
- Construct 800 community and 80 boarding schools for girls by 2013
- Construct sixty seven new secondary schools
- Construct one (steel constructed) model secondary school in each of the ten states.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

As well as taking cognisance of the GoSS’s strategies for the overall future economic and social development of South Sudan, the ECS is recommended to also take particular note of the GoSS’s ongoing, increased provision, reforms and changes planned for schooling - including the development of other types of higher education, e.g. vocational training.