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Language of Instruction for Increased Access to Relevant Education for Conflict-Affected Children in South Sudan

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More than one million children in South Sudan have no access to education and this number is growing instead of shrinking. In a uniquely diverse country where tribalism connects communities but also breeds deep division, language of instruction in schools can be leveraged for increased access or used for further marginalization. The goal of this paper is to explore the context and role of language in education in South Sudan, cite how language acts as a barrier to access in ongoing emergencies, discuss the current and future strategies to leverage language for educational service delivery and make recommendations for education policy and donor action. The emphasis will be on how language can be used by policymakers, education implementers, teachers and communities to help achieve the goal of access and quality learning for the out-of-school and conflict-affected children of South Sudan. Returnees, refugees, IDPs and those living in the conflict-affected northern border regions will be the population of focus in this paper, though much of the discussion applies to the entire country.

Introduction

A girl growing up in South Sudan, the world's newest nation, is twice as likely to die in childbirth as she is to finish her primary education and begin secondary school.¹ This shocking statistic not only reveals the dire health risks facing women, but it exposes the insurmountable challenges facing schoolgirls in South Sudan. More than one million children have no

access to education and this number is growing instead of shrinking. Since South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011, hundreds of thousands of ethnically southern Sudanese were forced to leave Sudan and create new lives in the south. In addition to these returnees, UNHCR reports that more than 200,000 Sudanese refugees have fled into South Sudan to escape persecution by Sudan's Khartoum government. Compounding these numbers further are half a million internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking safety and aid throughout South Sudan as border strife, inter-ethnic violence, cattle raiding (the traditional practice of stealing cattle) and drought have forced families to abandon their homes.ⁱⁱ Extreme poverty, rural marginalization, devastated post-war infrastructure and a struggling new government amplify the enormous humanitarian challenges facing children living in South Sudan. With one of the world's lowest human development indexes and an adult literacy rate of just 30 percent, narrowly achieved during decades of war, South Sudan cannot afford to lose another generation to the veil of illiteracy and educational neglect. The challenges facing schools, teachers and learners in South Sudan are daunting and there are many competing priorities. In this acutely fragile environment, populated by more than 60 indigenous ethnic groups and additional displaced people, the South Sudan education system must find a way to bring learning to all children to lay groundwork for improved livelihoods, peace prospects and enhanced social well-being.

Language is a crosscutting issue that exists as both a barrier and as an opportunity for teachers and students throughout South Sudan. In a uniquely diverse country where tribalism connects communities but also breeds deep division, language of instruction in schools can be leveraged for

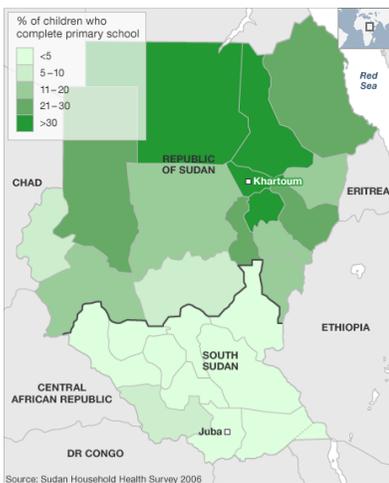
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increased access or used for further marginalization. The goal of this paper is to explore the context and role of language in education in South Sudan, cite how language acts as a barrier to access in ongoing emergencies, discuss the current language of instruction policies and possible strategies to leverage language for educational service delivery, and make

recommendations for education policy and donor action. Though this paper will briefly discuss the linguistic history of the region and make various arguments for mother tongue instruction, the purpose is not to provide an evidence-based assessment of linguistic issues in South Sudan. Rather the emphasis will be on *how* language can be used by policymakers, education implementers, teachers and communities to help achieve the goal of access and quality learning for the out-of-school and conflict-affected children of South Sudan. Returnees, refugees, IDPs and those living in the conflict-affected northern border regions will be the populations of focus in this paper, though much of the discussion applies to the entire country.

Understanding the Background and Context

Brief Background of South Sudan



Education disparities between Sudan and South Sudan

The role of education and language in South Sudan is directly related to the country’s conflicted history with Sudan and decades of war, deep-seated division, and recent unification. The civil war in Sudan between the North and the South (present-day South Sudan) lasted from 1955 to 2005 with intermittent cease-fires. The complexity of the conflict in Sudan should not be understated. According to Anders Breidlid, the roots of the war have been ascribed to the fundamental ethnic and

religious differences between the southern, non-Arab population and the northern, Muslim, Arab-dominated government. The National Congress Party (NCP) of the North aimed to impose Muslim values and the Arabic language on the South in an effort to unite the two regions into a powerful Islamic state. While the

Northerners denied the African elements in them, South Sudan is made up of more than 60 distinct tribes, with 53 different languages, and diverse religious beliefs. The struggles have been accentuated by the South's abundant oil resources, which continue to perpetuate border conflict today. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was reached in 2005 and ensured a trial separation period, and in 2011 the South voted to separate from the North.

Since 1990, the weak national Sudanese education system has been based on Islamic values and language at all levels. All instruction was to be conducted in Arabic language, regardless of the fact that many teachers and students in the South did not speak the language. Distributed textbooks promoted only Northern Sudanese history, religion and culture, dismissing the vast diversity and heterogeneity of the Southern Sudanese. While only 30% of school-aged children were enrolled in primary school in the South, 78% took the eighth grade exam in the North. One of the reasons for Southern youth's taking up arms against the NCP was that they were denied educational opportunities and that the North was "robbing our country and our religion."ⁱⁱⁱ A Southern Sudanese government representative reported: "In the movement we regard education as number one among our priorities. It is the backbone of development. Some people think we can liberate this country by only using the gun. We need different ways and strategies to liberate the people of Sudan—modern education is one of them."^{iv}

Current Educational Context

Since the 2005 signing of the CPA, in which Southern Sudan became semi-autonomous, the government declared education to be a top priority for improved human and economic development. With the help of multilateral donor funds, schoolhouses and makeshift classrooms were flooded with an unprecedented rise in school enrollment.^v In the two years following the agreement, the number of students in school quadrupled with the addition of over one million children. The country imported curricula from Uganda and Kenya and declared English to be the language of instruction in all schools. The massive influx of students has

led to an enormous strain on the physical and human resources of South Sudan, which continues today. The recent growth after a long period of stagnation has resulted in a concentration of students in the early grades, a high proportion of overage learners, repetition, and dropout. The improvements since 2005 are admirable, but according to the 2012 World Bank South Sudan Education report, the primary school completion rate is just 26 percent and there are colossal barriers to South Sudan attaining universal primary school access.

More than a million, or 53 percent, of all South Sudanese children are denied education as they face chronic obstacles to access, exacerbated by recent instability.^{vi} With more than 83 percent of South Sudanese living in sparsely populated rural areas with little access to main roads, many children simply do not have a school to attend (Ibid). Where there is high demand, classroom shortages are pervasive, with most students learning under trees and a shocking national classroom ratio of 134:1 (Brown, 24). While the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) has a nominal policy of free basic education, many schools levy charges and parents face additional costs associated with uniforms and books. With more than half the country living beneath the poverty line and struggling with prevalent malnutrition, hunger and the dependency on informal work incomes prevent children from attending school. According to a recent review by Gordon Brown, both cost and distance barriers reinforce gender disparities as parents prefer to educate their sons and protect their daughters from dangers associated with many school commutes, environments and cultural exposures (23). Contributing to the lack of access, South Sudan faces an acute shortage of teachers, 16 percent of whom are qualified, and there is currently no national teacher training infrastructure (World Bank).

Educational Context in Conflict-Affected Areas

Armed conflict and displacement continue to threaten the education of many students, especially in the northern states bordering Sudan and in Jonglei state. An estimated 152,000 primary and secondary school-aged children arrived or returned to South Sudan from the north during 2011 when the Sudanese government declared all ethnically Southern Sudanese

unwelcome in Sudan. Most of these people had spent their entire lives living in Sudan, speaking a northern tribal dialect and/or Arabic language. Additionally, more than 200,000 Sudanese refugees have fled from the north in search of safety, shelter and schools for their children (UNHCR). These mostly Muslim and Arabic-speaking people continue to cross the border daily from South Kordofan state to escape persecution from Sudan's Khartoum government, which accuses them of allying with the South during the war. South Sudanese IDPs from Jongeli state continue to seek refuge from inter-tribal warfare and deadly cattle raiding/wrestling^{vii} violence devastating urban and rural areas. As families flee from burned villages and suffer from lost livelihoods, they struggle to find new homes and schools for their children.

The continued arrival of refugees and returnees from the North, the inclusion and absorption of marginalized and displaced ethnic groups of the South, the integration of former child soldiers, and the addition of students who have experienced violence, loss and instability present enormous challenges to schools, teachers and communities. The existing phenomenon is one of unique ethnic and linguistic diversity of students trying to access refugee and IDP camp schools, temporary tent schools in rural areas and cattle camps, and community and government schools in the urban areas of the northern states. These students deserve a safe and inclusive learning space, accelerated learning, psychosocial support, and stability in the midst of ongoing emergencies. The schools operate within a particularly fragile environment that is undergoing existing changes as the country develops its national education system and implements English as its new national language. As South Sudan faces massive development challenges throughout the new country, these particular issues compound an already-strained budget and complicate a newly developed educational strategy.

The Problem of Language of Instruction for Conflict-Affected Children

South Sudan is extremely linguistically and ethnically diverse, with more than 60 tribes and 53 languages spoken throughout the country.^{viii} The

lingua franca adopted by much of Southern Sudan throughout decades of civil war was a dialect of Arabic, called Juba Arabic.^{ix} According to linguist Jackie Marshall of SIL South Sudan, this language is considered a trade language and does not have a high degree of mutual comprehensibility with Sudanese Arabic.^x Naturally, the states bordering Sudan adopted more Arabic language and cultural influence than those in the southern states. Language has been a symbol of the struggle for South Sudan's independence, as Arabic was viewed by many to be a tool of the Arabization and the oppression and marginalization of Southern Sudan.^{xi} Christian missionaries introduced English at the beginning of the 20th century during the time of British influence.^{xii} The language of the Southern elite has therefore historically been English, as the region strengthened political and economic ties with neighboring Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia. Upon independence, the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) proudly declared English to be the national language, as a symbol of the break with Sudanese culture, an effort to unify South Sudan in a common identity, and as a strategic economic move to link South Sudan to East Africa trading partners and international donors.

Before the peace agreement in 2005, Sudan encompassed Southern Sudan in its school system and all schools were required to instruct in Arabic. However, schools in rebel-held areas with heavy Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) influence ran 'bush schools' and NGO-supported schools that used the English system introduced by the missionaries.^{xiii} After the CPA, schools increasingly began adopting Ugandan, Kenyan and Ethiopian curricula and the SPLA encouraged English language learning. Now that the independent GoSS has declared English to be the only official language of the country and the primary language of instruction, the education sector must find a way to implement this transition nation-wide.

The transition to English language use and instruction in South Sudan continues to raise complex problems. There are reportedly some states that resist the introduction of English language completely, especially in the north where a majority of the teachers only speak Arabic. Arabic is sometimes seen as synonymous with the Khartoum government, yet those

who have adopted it as their primary language feel that it is part of the South Sudan national identity and should continue to be taught in schools. Furthermore, all dispersed materials are written in English. Teachers throughout South Sudan lack English language skills and can therefore not instruct in this medium. In practice, most rural and small village schools use mother tongue instruction because unqualified teachers lack the skills to instruct in another language at all. The returnee situation compounds all of these problems as children, young people and teachers resettle in South Sudan having been educated in the Sudanese, Arabic-speaking schools of the North. Those who wish to continue their education and professions as teachers face the daunting challenge of switching to the English language. Additionally, Sudanese refugees and South Sudanese IDPs need to be absorbed into the educational system and language must not present an additional barrier to access.

New ad hoc policies and plans, articulated without realistic implementation strategies or committed funding, complicate these problems. South Sudan's General Education Strategy Paper (GESP) 2012-2017 and its accompanying Action Plan, which are currently being finalized by the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) and development partners, will provide the framework for the development of the education sector over the next five years. The strategy paper commits to using mother tongue language for instruction in primary grades 1 – 3, but it is unclear how these initiatives are to be supported and coordinated. Moreover, the GoSS has released a policy decision on providing continued learning in Arabic in pre-existing schools for returnees in grades 4 – 8 and in secondary school (MoGEI policy paper). There is a significant lack of resources to implement this challenging provision. Policies still need to be developed and implemented to help Sudanese refugees and ethnically diverse IDPs overcome the language obstacles that prevent access for conflict-affected and out-of-school children. Overall, it is unclear how teachers throughout South Sudan will be trained in the use of mother tongue (for grades 1 – 3), Arabic (for returnees and refugees), and/or English instruction and how materials will be developed to align with these new policies. The following sections of this paper will analyze and address these complex problems.

Urgency of the Problem

It is crucial that conflict-affected children be able to access school, gain relevant skills, and hear lifesaving messages as a part of humanitarian and development response and a guarantee of their human rights. Under the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration of Human Rights, and other international laws, children have the inalienable right to education in all circumstances—this right is not suspended because of disasters or emergencies when they are most vulnerable. According to the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, education during a crisis can be both life-saving and life-sustaining. Since so many Sudanese and South Sudanese are displaced from their communities and homes, emergency education provision in refugee and IDP camps will help disperse relevant and life-saving messages such as landmine awareness, protection strategies, health and HIV knowledge, and anti-recruitment messages to children, youth and adults. Establishing safe spaces for children in these camps creates a way to track and serve orphans and vulnerable children, promote inclusion for people with disabilities, and target at-risk youth who are most likely to join and perpetuate violent lifestyles. Using language to enable children and youth to access relevant emergency education services is therefore critical to addressing the ongoing humanitarian challenges in South Sudan.

Language as an Access and Quality Barrier

Language barriers affect millions of children throughout South Sudan, but especially for returnees, refugees and IDP children. When parents or children cannot communicate with school officials, teachers or other students, they are less inclined to enroll their child in school or attend classes. A child who cannot decipher the language written on the blackboard or in a textbook is more likely to fail his/her classes, become alienated from classmates, and drop out of school. Parents are less motivated to become involved in PTAs and support school initiatives when they are uncomfortable with the language used at school. These dynamics are often seen in refugee camp schools in a host country.^{xiv} For

example, when there are diverse populations attending the same school and the language of instruction is foreign, families are skeptical about what is being taught and they may keep their children home. Child-friendly school initiatives, promoted by UNICEF, focus on making schools places where students feel included and comfortable. This is especially important for new students who are being absorbed into foreign communities and may already feel ostracized and disconnected. For students who have been forced to discontinue their education because of displacement, schools must address language barriers to advocate and raise awareness for enrollment. Since community awareness of the importance of education is already weak in South Sudan and the provision of education extremely poor in the border regions, language barriers amplify obstacles to accessing learning.

A second concern around language instruction in conflict-affected areas is relevancy and how education will benefit students in the immediate and long-term. To make education relevant, and to get the necessary buy-in from families and students, the language of instruction must be accessible. Students are more likely to drop out if they are not learning applicable skills, such as literacy and numeracy, in a system that will allow them to succeed. For example, it could be argued that it may not be appropriate for pastoral children in cattle camps to be learning English if this is not the primary language of trade transactions. On the other hand, it might be especially helpful for these children to learn English as a source of resilience if they lose this traditional livelihood due to cattle wrestling or climate change, as is the case for many. Likewise, refugee students being taught in camps in South Sudan may benefit from continuing their education in Arabic so there is continuity if or when they return to Sudan. However, if these students are unable to return to Sudan because of ongoing persecution, they will benefit from learning English to succeed in South Sudan. There are no clear answers to these debates, but the importance of language for accessing *relevant* education should therefore be central to the discussion of education in South Sudan in light on the ongoing crises.

Case Study: the Government of South Sudan's Response to Language Issues

To address languages issues of access and quality for the returnees from the North who are settling throughout South Sudan, the MoGEI issued a policy in 2011. The policy acknowledges that children and youth returning from the North have been using Arabic as their language of instruction, whereas the majority of schools in South Sudan use English. The consensus was that returnees in grades 1 – 3 would be absorbed into pre-existing schools when possible and would adapt to the language taught in that school, which realistically varies depending on the state and location. The returnees in early grades are to receive instruction in English as a second language, along with the rest of the students, assuming that the separate policy stipulating mother tongue language instruction is implemented in practice. The returnee policy then states that, “returnees who *want* to continue learning in Arabic in grades 4 – 8 and onwards will be provided with Arabic-language teaching...Separate schools are not to be established but existing schools are to be adapted to absorb extra classes being taught in Arabic, through for example, the addition of temporary classrooms” (GoSS MoGEI Returnee Policy Summary). This stand-alone returnee policy has requested the support of humanitarian and development partners in the Education Cluster to respond accordingly but there have are enormous barriers to actual implementation. Most significantly, the policy challenges schools to be able to provide additional space and systems for returnees that are beyond their existing capacity and teachers’ abilities. In theory, this policy, which positively promotes meeting displaced children’s language needs, could apply to schools absorbing IDPs and refugees as well, but to date there is no explicit policy addressing issues for these populations.

Challenges to Policy and Practice – Teachers

Without teachers who can teach in the designated language of instruction (mother tongue, English or Arabic), relevant and quality education cannot be delivered and access will continue to be hindered. The current policies oblige schools to absorb additional students and meet diverse linguistic

needs, but there are no systems in place for training teachers to do so. There is currently no national training of teachers in mother tongue language instruction to support the new MoGEI policy on early grade languages. Likewise, there are no current and widespread coordinated efforts to train teachers in English. Not only do teachers need to learn to speak and write English, but also they must learn to *teach in English*—a vastly different task. For example, there are many NGOs and major donor-led efforts to provide English instruction to teachers through innovative distance learning methods such as radio. However, many of these programs lack continuity or are irrelevant for learning to teach the new South Sudanese curriculum in English.

Recruitment and training of additional teachers is sorely needed in areas that are absorbing the majority of returnees and IDPs. The MoGEI returnee policy does acknowledge this need and considers the issues of gender and language in its Reintegration Assessments conducted at state levels to identify returnee teachers. Northern teaching qualifications are to be recognized as valid in South Sudan and the GoSS will work with cluster partners to provide English language training for these reintegrated teachers, but the policy admits that the “budget to integrate returnee teachers into the system has yet to be identified.”

Challenges to Policy and Practice – Materials

Without available materials to support teachers, it is difficult for any language policies to be implemented to meet the linguistic diversity and national transition to English. According to the 2012 South Sudan National Textbook Policy development support initiative funded by DFID, there has been “an extreme paucity of supplies...as a result of the war, a serious lack of funds, and a related piecemeal and emergency approach to textbook procurement.”^{xv} Material provision crosscuts the issues of language and content relevancy especially relating to the populations in focus. The current South Sudanese curriculum, which is used in some schools while others borrow neighboring country’s curricula, was prepared prior to South Sudan’s independence and is therefore extremely out of date. New materials for primary school have since been developed

and are now being distributed, but the curriculum is incomplete. All distributed books are in English only. There is discontinuity between the new language policies of mother tongue instruction for grades 1 – 3 and the provision of materials to support this teaching. Furthermore, the returnee policy states that the GoSS will work with partners to procure Arabic-language textbooks from Khartoum but with returnees resettling throughout the country there is no stipulation for how these books will follow the need.

Challenges to policy and practice – Assessments

The issues of language of assessments and examinations are crucial for the continuity of the education system for all students in South Sudan. There are a number of concerns around examinations in the country, and the availability of appropriate and relevant materials for students to work towards these examinations.^{xvi} Currently each of the ten states sets its own primary school examination for grade 8 based on the primary curriculum, which is problematic because the curricula taught vary across regions, districts, counties and *payams*.^{xvii} This also makes it challenging to compare achievements across states, which directly relates to districts receiving needed funding. When the GoSS announced English as the sole national language, students who had been learning in Arabic throughout their schooling were unable to take the exam. Exemplifying this issue of language and examinations is the recent protest at and temporary closing of Juba University. Sudanese and South Sudanese students who majored in Arabic language were unable to finish their exams and complete their degree when the GoSS canceled this degree program and outlawed the use of Arabic language in all tertiary education.^{xviii}

To address the issues of examinations for those resettling in South Sudan, the GoSS says it is committed to facilitating examinations in Arabic to be promoted to secondary or tertiary levels, but the policy does not describe how these students should proceed with their educational trajectories, especially at the university levels. Students who may have been committed to continuing their secondary and higher education may find it impossible to learn English to pursue these opportunities. Likewise, refugees and

IDPs who are absorbed into schools which are unable to meet their linguistic needs may become discouraged and drop out or discontinue their education, contributing to more out-of-school youth and less skills development.

Donor dependency

Due to the weakness of the government and economy, South Sudan is completely dependent on donor funding for humanitarian response and development assistance. This donor-driven reality means that large funders heavily influence the setting of policies, which are often articulated without the commitment of resources. The MoEGI is extremely dependent upon donors and aid organization to implement its policies and commitments. Because of the nature of the ongoing humanitarian emergencies, the organizations that implement education through the Cluster have many competing priorities and cannot easily address many of the language issues discussed above. However, the South Sudan General Education Strategic Plan, which has recently obtained financial and endorsement support from the World Bank's Global Partnership for Education fund, identifies positive educational strategies that acknowledge language issues throughout South Sudan and garner the support of many donors. The following section will identify and discuss this and other strategies, highlighting those that indicate realistic approaches to using language to increase access to relevant education for conflict-affected children in South Sudan.

Possible Strategies and Analysis of Alternatives

According to the 2011 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report concerning education and armed conflict, no issue better demonstrates the tough choices facing post-conflict governments than approaches to the language of instruction.^{xix} Language is a central component of identity and helps determine how people see themselves a part of the national context. The language of instruction in schools is one of the vehicles through which these identities are established. By declaring English as the sole national language of South Sudan, the GoSS aimed to create a sense of national

identity. However, as in other contexts like Rwanda and South Africa, this approach might be seen as reinforcing ethnic and tribal divisions or denying an important history. As this paper has highlighted above, this approach may also hinder access and quality of instruction for many students and undermine the abilities of teachers. One strategy for South Sudan is to continue to publish and commit “in theory” to ad hoc policies without real implementation. This section will highlight two alternative strategies and focus on each strategy’s impact on crisis-affected children: 1) rolling out English instruction country-wide for all learners, and 2) heavy investment in mother tongue or country of origin instruction for early grades. In the discussion of these strategies, the paper will offer ways to adapt and implement the strategies.

Strategy 1: English Language Instruction for All

Many have criticized the GoSS’ transition to English as a hasty attempt to demonstrate the country’s new sovereignty and cut off relations with Islamic Sudan. However, in the conflict-ridden history of South Sudan, the choice for a single national language may be seen as a unifying force and part of a wider strategy for building identities that transcend tribal and ethnic differences. Tribalism is seen as a source of division and ongoing strife in South Sudan and the new GoSS has vocalized its commitment to unify the country for improved human development and prospects for peace. Choosing a national language that also opens up economic opportunities for improved livelihoods was a calculated decision. How can schools teach the national language to all those settling in South Sudan?

To support this decision to use English as the official language of instruction in all schools throughout South Sudan, the GoSS would need to invest in the required resources required to roll this out strategically.^{xx} All donors involved in the education sector would need to streamline teacher trainings in English, establish teacher resource centers with English materials, align distance education and media campaigns with English language, and promote English as a vehicle for peaceful dialogue between ethnic groups. Coordination of efforts must ensure that this transition unrolls in all ten states simultaneously and is implemented in the most

hard-to-reach areas to avoid marginalization of certain populations. The MoGEI could absorb all returnees into these English-speaking schools with the rationale that they are now South Sudanese citizens and must adapt to this new identity to unite with their fellow countrymen. In refugee camps, English would be the sole language in schools, in line with UNHCR's education policy of using the host country's language of instruction. In areas of the north that are heavily Arabic speaking, there could be established Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) that target populations and returnees to provide remedial instruction in English to help them catch up to their peers. Likewise, there could be ALPs for teachers in these same areas to fast track the transition from Arabic to English school-wide. Such a policy that affects teachers so significantly would need to be paired with some sort of incentive program to encourage actual implementation and oversight by dedicated administrative officials. This intensified and centralized implementation strategy would require huge amounts of investment but would result in a quicker transition to English usage.

Alternatives, Adaptations and Backlash

This strategy could be adapted using alternative methods of implementation. One adaption of this fast track, national approach could be the slower roll out of English language instruction. The MoGEI could pilot some of the English language training programs articulated above in the southern-most states that are not so dominated by Arabic and then expand north while adopting lessons learned. One potential pitfall of this plan is the possible linguistic stratification of the country if the programs are not continuously rolled out or if funding runs out.

Alternatively, English language could be institutionalized as part of pre-service training for all teachers countrywide and the transition would occur as teachers begin their posts. Potentially this could also lead to the most remote areas of the country being the last to benefit from these trained teachers, a problem that already exists.

Additionally, the media could begin increasing the amount of educational programs in English on the radio and television, including English subtitles on all programs to reach the general population. Again, the possibility of these services reaching the most neglected are dependent on ongoing efforts to build roads and increase delivery of basic services to these areas. Like many development initiatives, any new educational programs are dependent upon improvements in other sectors. An added benefit of a slow transition, therefore, is the possibility that more time will result in other sectors strengthening and reinforcing these programs, particularly the security and health sectors which may improve conditions for education delivery in the conflict-affected regions.

Strategy 2: Using mother tongue instruction for early grades

Another strategy option is to use native language instruction for early years of education. While this option may seem weak at first, teaching children in their home language offers wide advantages. There is evidence that using mother tongues as languages of instruction in school yields positive cognitive and academic outcomes for learners as well as positive cultural and social outcomes for multilingual communities. Multiple UNESCO reports provide evidence-based research encouraging the use of mother tongue instruction in early grades and indicate its advantages for reaching disadvantaged groups, including girls and children from rural communities.^{xxi} By recognizing diversity and empowering all ethnic groups in South Sudan, the country can demonstrate its dedication to peaceful inclusion of all citizens through emphasizing mother tongue language instruction in schools. A strategy for encouraging mother tongue language instruction is to implement programs supporting South Sudan's new policy in grades 1 – 3 and transitioning to English in grades 4 and above.

Due to the linguistic diversity of South Sudan, it is important to find a peaceful way for schools to decide which language to use for early grade instruction. The decision on which language to use in the early grades in multilingual areas could be decided on the district or *payam* level to mitigate the inevitable problems of tribal clash. In areas where it is

deemed appropriate to include two mother tongue languages, or the inclusion of Arabic for displaced populations, schools could offer two streams, one for each language. In areas of the north where this split is more likely to occur, this could serve as a semi-permanent solution; over time, students could transition to the local or national language as they resettle. Since the GoSS has indicated that there are few resources for new schools at this time, this stream system may help accommodate these additional students while simultaneously addressing linguistic diversity. In such schools, additional measures could be taken to create bilingual PTAs and hold school events that would promote school as inclusive and a platform for community reconciliation and cohesiveness.

As expressed in the General Education Strategy: “When a mother tongue language policy is enforced, with its focus on languages of instruction in lower primary, materials to support this must also be incorporated into the primary curriculum.” This is a long-term project. The challenge here is that of the 53 distinct languages used in South Sudan, very few have printed materials for teaching and learning. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is the lead partner organization on mother tongue education and has been developing content and materials for primary instruction. However, the coordinated work is required for mass-production and distribution of these materials. Donors must commit funds to the priority of mother tongue language instruction in early grades and investments must be made in the writing, publishing, and supply planning and distribution sectors. Curricula and teacher training materials must be translated into these mother tongues and distributed to the correct regions. Since six non-Arabic mother tongue languages are used by about 80% of the population, the focus could initially be on material development and distribution for those languages.^{xxii} Ideally, as the education sector in South Sudan expands, early childhood centers would use mother tongue instruction with a developed curriculum to facilitate children’s transition into primary school and increase the chances for students to acquire literacy skills in two languages.

As with the first strategy, there are concerns about unintended consequences and backlash. This approach requires heavy emphasis on

pre- and in-service teacher training, particularly in reading instruction and in bilingual teaching strategies. Likewise, for schools using the two-stream system, teachers must learn to teach equally well in two different languages. Regional stratification exists in teacher training services and resources. Rural and small ethnic minority groups may be the last to benefit from receiving trained teachers and published resources in mother tongue. Similarly to the first strategy, incentive systems for teachers must be in place to compensate teachers for additional time and efforts. Commitment to mother tongue language instruction for early grades in South Sudan requires ongoing financial dedication and decentralized decision-making to ensure that access and quality are improving for conflict-affected children.

Recommendations

Native-language instruction allows students to understand the messages and lessons they are taught. If schools are to be connectors in communities and leverage resiliency among conflict-affected children and youth, language must be a *tool*, not an obstacle, in increasing access and quality of learning. A focus on the relevancy of language and curriculum content should also be central to this discussion. Education can only be life-saving, life sustaining and contribute to stability and peace if children and parents can understand the messages and lessons taught. Therefore, this writer recommends that schools serving conflict-affected children provide instruction in the language that will enable widespread student access to the content, especially in the short-term crisis environment. In the longterm, this writer recommends a slow rollout of the English language among the general population, while simultaneously celebrating the preservation of diversity. To allow for this, the national and local governments should use a combination of the above strategies.

Recommended Activities

Mother tongue language and Arabic should be used in schools as necessary, with a logical transition to English over time, which is of secondary importance in the short term. Schools serving returnees, IDPs

and refugee children should be allocated additional funding through district education offices and advocate for donor funds to be used to respond to meet these children's linguistic needs. Establishing two streams, providing remedial classes for students who are transitioning languages, implementing student club and mentorship programs, translating for bilingual PTAs and awareness-raising campaigns are some activities that could promote this approach. There should be incentive programs for teachers and administrators to continue new approaches and careful monitoring to ensure that increased funds are contributing to increased access and improved quality. Education Cluster members should coordinate approaches in these difficult areas and report good practices and lessons learned for continued improvement.

Assuming that South Sudan continues to work toward stabilization and peacebuilding, English skill building can contribute positively toward other development priorities. Therefore, English should be rolled out nationwide in a practical and strategic way, with the GoSS recognizing that the transition is generational and cannot be done hastily. This should be seen as a transitional period, during which ongoing dialogue should continue to address language issues. One approach to the shortage of relevant materials during this transitional time is to distribute "language free" teaching materials such as flash cards and posters, which could facilitate similar instruction and be used with any children in any location. In this period of active- and post-conflict, campaigns and informative materials should use pictures and writing in Juba Arabic, English and some mother tongue languages so that the general population has access to important messages.^{xxiii}

Crosscutting Recommendations

South Sudan is at a crossroads and there are many opportunities for meaningful education sector improvement. Establishing a national teacher training system and writing new South Sudanese curricula are ways to meaningfully incorporate English and mother tongue languages resulting in more relevant education for all students. For example, mother tongue reading materials produced for children in early grades can highlight life

skills, peace education and a positive national South Sudanese identity. Likewise, English materials for upper grades can incorporate messages of inclusion and conflict resolution and can recognize South Sudan's history while celebrating its diversity. All new materials should be sensitive to psychosocial issues for generations that have been engulfed in conflict. An Institute of National Languages has been proposed by SIL in South Sudan as a way to preserve South Sudan's linguistic diversity, and this could link with universities throughout the country to develop and improve writing and publishing sectors.^{xxiv} To incorporate more English and literacy in day-to-day life in South Sudan, television programming could include English subtitles while also broadcasting special segments utilizing other languages. Bilingual 'edu-taining' radio programming can engage rural populations that may not use printed languages. Embracing linguistic and ethnic diversity as a point of pride and opportunity for South Sudan may assist the country in discovering and forging its own unique national identity.

Conclusion

While the above recommendations promote responsive activities for the short- and long-term assistance periods in South Sudan, it is important to recognize the reality of the donor-driven environment. Unfortunately, South Sudan is completely dependent on international donor funds; policymakers have shown more dedication to appeasing them and aligning with their priorities and beliefs than with those of the South Sudanese people. For example, the well-articulated 5-year General Education Strategic Plan was written with heavy international assistance and is somewhat of a compilation of best educational policies. The role of international donors is also evident in the number of positive policy initiatives recently distributed that are unrealistic in scope, such as the education policy for returnees. These documents show strong commitments to changing the current trajectory of South Sudan, but lack adequate resource backing to implement the tasks. Therefore, as long as South Sudan is being propped up by international donors, it will be difficult for the country to show real commitment to promoting a South Sudanese identity in schools.

Such an identity has yet to accurately be defined and South Sudan should not be in a rush to define one—nor should international donors be too quick to assign one. What unified many South Sudanese around the fight for an independent state was a common desire for freedom to practice their own religion and cultural traditions and to speak their own language without fear of persecution from an autocratic government. South Sudan remains in an extremely fragile state, where peace is precarious among many ethnic groups and shallow stability is threatened by outside forces. It is more urgent than ever that South Sudan remain acutely self-aware and cognizant that issues of education and marginalization have been catalysts of past conflicts. Ongoing dialogues about South Sudan's identity and unity must engage the diverse population and prioritize strategies for education to promote saving lives and upholding peace. Whether the child learns English in a classroom or Dinka under a tree, each child living in South Sudan must be recognized as an important catalyst in the ongoing struggle to define the country's future and promote improved human development.

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ⁱ Gordon Brown, "Education in South Sudan: Investing in a Better Future," 2011, 7.

ⁱⁱ Recent data from UN OCHA

ⁱⁱⁱ As quoted by Anders Breidlid in "Sudanese Images of the Other: Education and Conflict in Sudan" *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (November 2010), 565.

^{iv} Ibid, 567.

^v This is an enormous achievement and reflects South Sudan's desire for education. Post-conflict enrollment growth is not always rapid. For example, in Liberia the number of pupils has remained constant since its civil conflict ended. HyeJin Kim, Kurt D. Moses, Bosun Jang, Annababette Wils, "Viewing the reconstruction of primary schooling in Southern Sudan through education data, 2006-2009" (UNESCO background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2011), 284.

^{vi} World Bank Education South Sudan Report, 2011, 5.

^{vii} Cattle raiding/wrestling is a traditional and violent practice of stealing cattle from other tribes or villages. Cattle raids are especially violent and widespread between tribes in Jonglei state, where tens of thousands have lost their lives or been displaced in the past year.

^{viii} According to the Ethnologue (SIL2005a) there are 53 languages, including Juba Arabic spoken as mother tongue languages throughout South Sudan. The inclusion of disputed northern border regions may increase this number, presenting unique linguistic diversity.

^{ix} Juba is the capital of South Sudan.

^x Ibid, 21.

^{xi} Breidlid, 564.

^{xii} There is a debate as to whether Arabic or English is the language of oppression, since the British occupation period resulted in the persecution of many ethnically southern Sudanese.

^{xiii} The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was the principle fighting force against the Khartoum government. When fighting ceased in 2005, the SPLA led South Sudan's unification efforts, absorbed all southern militias and is currently the national army of South Sudan.

^{xiv} Based on my observations and analysis of the education sector in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya which serves 12 different nationalities in the schools. Primary qualitative research with UNICEF, 2012.

^{xv} DFID South Sudan and Education for Change. "South Sudan National Textbook Policy development" background paper. London: EfC, July 2012, p.3

^{xvi} Ibid, 9.

^{xvii} *Payams* are smaller than districts and may be a village or group of villages, usually of the same tribe or ethnicity.

^{xviii} Miraya News, “Arabic Students of Juba University Protest Use of English Language,” February 2012. Accessed at: <http://mirayafm.net/index.php/south-sudan-news/7766-arabic-pattern-students-of-juba-university-protest-use-of-english-language>.

^{xix} *Ibid*, 241

^{xx} Post-conflict Rwanda offers a unique case with lessons applicable to South Sudan. In addition to the native language of Kinyarwanda, English and French are recognized as the official languages. Kinyarwanda is taught until grade three and then students can choose English or French as the language of instruction. Recently, shifted to require all textbooks to be printed in English. South-South collaboration should be encouraged during South Sudan’s language transition.

^{xxi} UNESCO “Enhancing Learning of Children from Diverse Language Backgrounds: Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual or Multilingual Education in the Early Years,” Paris: UNESCO, 2011.

^{xxii} Education for Change, 15.

^{xxiii} In this writer’s opinion, Juba Arabic should have been made an official national language, along with English. Rwanda adopted its lingua franca, along with English and French to serve as a unifying force following the genocide. Juba Arabic is still used as the primary language in the SPLA which South Sudanese revere as the powerful backbone behind its recent independence. Therefore, most South Sudanese see this language as a symbol of unity across tribal lines. Since English was historically seen as the language of the elite, this may act as another stratifying force among the rich and poor. If Juba Arabic is every made an official language in South Sudan, primary and secondary school curricula should be printed and distributed in both languages countrywide and leave the decision up to the school for the medium of instruction.

^{xxiv} Some ideas proposed in the “Southern Sudan Ministry of Education Strategy and Guidelines for Language and Education Policy” *draft*, May 2009, as shared by Jackie Marshall of SIL South Sudan. This draft was never finalized nor implemented.