REQUEST RESPONSE

Case Study: Current Education Situation in Sudan

REQUEST SUBMISSION

War erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on 15 April 2023. Two years later, Sudan is facing one of the fastest unfolding crises globally, with approximately 30 million people (60% of the population) in need of humanitarian assistance.

The education landscape has changed substantially since the outbreak of the war, with widespread school closures. Estimations from 2024 indicated a total of 17 million out of 19 million school aged children remain out of school since September 2024 (Education Cluster, 2024). Teachers in 10 states have received partial payment since the onset of the war, while teachers in 8 states have received no payment since April 2023, with significant implications for the sector's capacity to retain staff (UNICEF, 2024).

In order to inform an effective international response, the Helpdesk has been requested to produce a case study on the current situation for education in Sudan. The objective of this report is to provide a better understanding of the history of the sector pre-conflict, damages that have been caused by conflict, inequitable trends of service provision in the current context and how best to support interventions that protect children and enhance learning opportunities in a scenario of a protracted conflict.

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Disclaimer

The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed here are entirely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the ERICC Helpdesk, ERICC partner organisations, the International Rescue Committee, or the UK government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The outbreak of war in Sudan has accelerated historical challenges and trends in the education system, hyper-localising and semi-privatising schools and rendering them reliant on community support and international funding. At the same time, the warring parties have politicised educational infrastructure and accreditation, using the education system to legitimise their claims on sovereignty, though they have provided little funding for the education system.

Relying on a review of available literature and semi-structured interviews from different stakeholders across the sector, this study uses the history of the education system to develop a baseline on education provision in Sudan. As established in the late colonial period, the education system was designed to train colonial bureaucrats and offered centrally funded, free education to a limited number of mostly male students. In the early independence period, the system was redefined as essential to civic participation and opportunity and was expanded. However regional inequality persisted, with the bulk of schools located in central Sudan and far fewer in the South, Darfur, Kordofan, and the East. The current education system was established under the Ingaz regime (1989-2019), which used it to advance religion and Arab identity across the country. While doing so, the system was both expanded and localised, with schools placed under the responsibility of the state government and locality and made reliant on funds from local communities. International support in the mid to late Ingaz period continued past 2019 when Sudan faced a number of political upheavals including a revolution and coup, during which time the education system was further disrupted.

Since the war, key coordination mechanisms of the education system have been seriously disrupted, with the greatest damage coming from the politicisation of education, with the Federal Ministry of Education under the control of one party in the armed conflict, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). This has disrupted coordination of education provision across the country. In areas under SAF control, education provision has varied widely, with some key states continuing education services with minimal disruption, and others facing significant disruption to teacher salaries and access to educational infrastructure. In Rapid Support Forces (RSF) controlled territories, locality government has largely stopped, with state Ministry of Education officials either fleeing to SAF controlled territories or working without salary. Schools in these areas have operated minimally, relying on community support and limited international funding.

International education assistance has run along two streams–one largely humanitarian, coordinated by the cluster system and managed through the Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), and one largely development oriented, coordinated through the Local Education Group (LEG). Humanitarian funding coordinated through the cluster has been limited and significantly lower than the assessed need, and education faces a risk of being dropped from the cluster system entirely should these conditions not change. Geographically, humanitarian education coordination covers areas under both RSF and SAF control, though less spending has occurred in Darfur than was targeted due to issues of access, security, and risk appetite. Development funding has been coordinated through the LEG since 2013, with almost all funds since the onset of the war in 2023 targeting SAF controlled areas.

These issues have all exacerbated existing regional inequalities in the education sector and have been compounded by the political dynamics of this war. While education is a right for all children, the state, including the Ministry of Education, is controlled by one party in the conflict and the SAF controlled government has withdrawn all services including education from areas outside of its control. International organisations and institutions have worked to be neutral and avoid contributing to the conflict, but they are hindered by the need for state permission to access any part of Sudan.

While Sudanese civil society is active and varied, it has interacted minimally with international coordinating bodies, due to operational differences and communication gaps. In the absence of a neutral state invested in advancing the interests of all citizens, this has represented a vacuum in accountability.

In light of this situation, this paper recommends a series of modular reforms to ensure access to education for children across Sudan and address regional inequalities in education access. The most important of these are: developing a precedent for operations in both SAF and RSF controlled territories; exercising sensitivity when advocating for educational accreditation; and ensuring accountability through consultation with a range of actors within Sudanese civil society. These can be further advanced through ensuring safety of education officials, teachers, and civil society; investing strategically in grassroots support; advocating for teacher salaries, training, and support; harmonising teacher incentives; and restoring schools locally. Also critical are supporting educational infrastructure in marginalised areas to develop dedicated programming to address the damage of the protracted education crisis, and prioritising access to education for marginalised children. Key to these processes will be promoting flexibility for development and humanitarian funding and ensuring data sharing and transparency across the humanitarian and development sector.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of war in Sudan on 15 April 2023 has severely undermined the stability and development of the education sector across the country, leaving millions of children without access to school. As of early 2025, only 33% of all schools are open, and only 3 million of 17 million school age children are currently in school, leaving 14 million children without access to school.[1] Of the 12.5 million children enrolled in 2023, 10.5 million have been unable to return to school since the outbreak of war, putting them at risk of permanently dropping out. This is in addition to the estimated 6.9 million children who were out of school before.[2]

The war has marked an acceleration of historical challenges and trends in the education system. In the absence of significant government support, the education system in large swathes of Sudan has been hyper-localised and semi-privatised, reliant on community funds and efforts supplemented by limited funds from international donors, in order to exist at all. This has exacerbated previously existing regional and socio-economic inequalities and has the potential to further inscribe such inequalities on an entire generation.

Even as these challenges have accelerated, questions of educational infrastructure and accreditation have been politicised by the warring parties. Due to the structure of the education system, with a central, state-run exam used to accredit students for academic achievement, both SAF and the RSF have attempted to leverage accreditation to prove the legitimacy of their claims to state sovereignty. Similarly, both SAF and the RSF have sought out support from the international community for rebuilding and maintaining educational infrastructure. In spite of this, neither SAF nor the SAF-controlled government, nor the RSF with its unrecognised government in Nairobi, have advanced significant resources to reopen or sustain schools.

This paper presents a historical overview of the education system, presenting a political-economy analysis of the system in Sudan prior to the outbreak of war in order to establish its functionality and progress on its goals pre-2023. It then uses that analysis to situate changes to the education sector. The paper moves on to examine damage to the education system caused by the conflict, evaluating

[1] "Sudan - Education Situation Overview - 2025." Education Cluster Monthly Meeting, June 2025.

[2] 3.1. Education | Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 | Humanitarian Action

system functionality in different areas of the country. Finally, it analyses the international response, drawing attention to the political economy of these interventions. It concludes with lessons learnt and recommendations. Ultimately, the findings presented herein aim to underscore productive approaches to education assistance and warn of incipient issues that should be borne in mind as international actors seek to assure the right to education for Sudanese children.

METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on a combination of a desk review of reports on the education sector and dashboards of internationally funded education programming in Sudan from the late 2010s onward, integrated with academic works on the history of education and politics of Sudan, in order to give a larger historical political-economy analysis of the education system in the lead-up to the war as a baseline. It then makes use of 24 semi-structured interviews conducted with 31 stakeholders from the education sector, including 10 members of Sudanese civil society including national organisations, local organisations, local initiatives, associations, and first responders, 6 current and former employees of state or parastate institutions including the Federal and State Ministries of Education as well as SARHO, 9 employees at international NGOs, and 6 members of Intergovernmental institutions and donors. These interviews' comments were integrated with existing reporting and planning, as well as ongoing reports and observations from Sudan's political sphere to provide an analysis of the education sector's political economy since the war.

This report focuses primarily on basic education and to a lesser extent, secondary education, though the education system extends from preschool through tertiary education. The report is limited by the authors' access to individuals working in disputed territories or territories controlled by armed movements, including in Kordofan and northern Darfur, as well as to donors from the Gulf countries. It is also limited in its capacity to contend with issues related to refugees, both Sudanese refugee children in neighbouring countries as well as refugees inside of Sudan.

1. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION IN SUDAN

Evolution of the education system in Sudan (1940s-1989)

At the time of Sudan's independence in 1956, it had a recently expanded, yet extremely limited, education system established in the 1940s and 50s as a means of training a small cadre of civil servants (Sharkey, 2003). This system included a limited number of primary schools, designed to feed into an even smaller number of secondary schools, largely boarding schools geared towards boys from central regions of Sudan, and a single university. Also present were *khalwas*, traditional Quranic schools that had been established in larger numbers under Ottoman-Egyptian rule following the 1821 conquest of Sudan, though the education system as it existed during this period was minimalistic (Seri-Hersch, 2017). Early government plans for this system discussed a gradual expansion, with an understanding that education at the primary level should expand first, followed by moderate expansions at the secondary school level, and an even more gradual expansion of tertiary education (Beshir, 1969).

The education system was defined by regional and linguistic inequalities created during the colonial period. These inequalities were most evident in the South, where divergent policies in education included English language missionary schools that functioned as the primary institutions of education. Northern Sudan, by contrast, hosted the more extensive system of government-run primary and middle schools, with 84% of all boys enrolled in any school enrolled in northern Sudan (Seri-Hersch, 2017). These regional inequalities also existed within northern Sudan, with schools

created in areas closer to centres of power, favouring children from those areas as well as elites from remote areas, whose children were seen as likely candidates to grow up to participate in state governance. In 1947 with the leadup to independence, the Sudanese curriculum was unified under the Northern curriculum that favoured education in Arabic, creating a system that began basic education in Arabic and introduced English by secondary school, preparing students for an English language university curriculum.

In the early independence period, the education system grew in waves. Education sector development was undertaken by the Ministry of Education, who allocated funding centrally for education at all levels. Government primary and secondary schools were free for students. This was possible due to the limited reach of schools, though efforts continued to expand the system. In practice, this system continued to favour the same regions it had before, with more schools built in central Sudan in comparison to Darfur, Kordofan, and the East, where government services were limited. The South, where school access was most limited, experienced an ongoing civil war, in which the government prioritised population control over government services, including education.

The aims of the education system changed by the mid-1970s, when Nimeiri's Sudan Socialist Union undertook a mass expansion of the sector alongside a series of development projects. Education was no longer simply a means of training future government employees, but also a venue for social transformation and expanded civic participation. This wave of education expansion slowed by the late 1970s. In 1976, Nimeiri's regime initiated negotiations with the World Bank and IMF that prompted a series of austerity measures, limiting the ability of the state to expand education. Moreover, this period was marked by the outbreak of war in the South in 1983, a war that expanded during the 1980s to include Kordofan and Blue Nile as sites of conflict, impacting security, education access, and the capacity of the state to respond to systemic education questions. The ensuing parliamentary government that took office in 1985 contended with the same economic limitations as well as the ongoing war and political gridlock that laid the foundations for the coup in 1989.

Education under the Ingaz Regime (1989-2019)

Initial Reforms and Establishment of Education System Governance Structure (1989-2003)

When the Ingaz regime, led by Omer al Bashir, took power in 1989, it very quickly moved to undertake massive ideologically driven reform that required the existence of a large, educated workforce ideologically invested in maintaining their new political order. This reform was not only meant to transform Sudan socially, bringing about a more Islamic society in line with the regime, but also to transform the economic base of the country, expanding mechanised agriculture, industry, and the civil service (Verhoeven, 2015; Young, 2021). Education reform sat at the intersection of many of the Ingaz regime's priorities. It was a vehicle for social and ideological transformation consistent with the regime's "civilisation project" which sought to encourage the practice of a normative form of Islam consistent with a segment of the Arab-identified, middle class of central Sudan. It was also a way of expanding the base of workers equipped to participate in the economy that the regime sought to create. In order to further these goals, the government passed a series of laws, including the General Education Act of 1992, the Basic School Regulation Act and Secondary School Regulation Act of 1992, and the Higher Education Act of 1990 (UNESCO, 2018).

These laws transformed the education system ideologically, even as they expanded and decentralised it. The largest and most discussed goal was to change the system of education to shape society and encourage the practice of a particular type of Islam. To that end, Arabic became the language of instruction across all levels of education rather than just basic education, and religious teachings were introduced to the curriculum at all levels. Schools in predominantly non-Arab

communities enforced rules for class that not only involved instruction in Arabic, but also demanded adherence to Arab identified norms, even going so far as to "Arabise" children's names. The Federal Ministry of Education became responsible for the development of a national curriculum that included religious instruction. The National Centre for Curricula and Education Research was established by the government in 1996 in order to further that purpose as one of a number of semi-autonomous agencies under the oversight of the Federal Ministry of Education including the Sudanese National Institute for Languages (SULTI) and the National Centre for Teacher Training (NCTT). Other institutions were established outside of the Federal Ministry of Education, such as the National Accreditation Centre, responsible for certifying teachers, and the National Teacher Training Centre, under direct management of the Cabinet of Ministers and Prime Minister though supervised and consulted with the Minister of Education.

Structurally, the laws changed the length and scope of education as well as placed the responsibility for implementing it under the control of different bodies. The sequence of education was changed from a primary school, middle school, secondary school sequence of 12 years to an 11-13 year sequence of pre-basic education or preschool (2 years), basic education (8 years), and secondary education (3 years). Pre-basic and basic education was placed under the oversight and regulation of the locality, with secondary education the responsibility of the State Ministry of Education. In the process, the boarding school system was eliminated, with secondary schools present opened and maintained across all states. These changes localised service provision in education, expanding access to education for many, while also accentuating disparities from region to region, particularly with regards to funding, as well as making education less accessible to nomadic communities.

The isolation of the regime in the 1990s and withdrawal of most international aid required new ways of extracting revenue to support expansions in the education system. Federal funding on education was essentially eliminated, with national expenditures going to 1-2% of the total budget for most of the decade (Battahani, 2024). Funding for education was localised, with the locality responsible for financing primary schools through local taxes, and the State Ministry of Education responsible for financing secondary education. Teacher salaries were still determined by the federal government and paid through federal accounts, but the revenue was redistributed from state level taxes and revenue, and almost all other funds for school maintenance, facilities, and materials were dispersed at the state and locality level. While meant to target and expand education on the local level and increase access to education across the country, these changes had the effect of exacerbating inequalities; some states and localities had greater tax-bases than others or prioritised education differently, meaning that expenditures on schools varied from locality to locality. Moreover, the continued civil war in the South, Kordofan, and Blue Nile meant that locality and state government in those states focused overwhelmingly on conducting the war and population control.

The ongoing civil war not only affected the dispersal of education in areas under the central government's control but also had implications for education in areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The civil war began in 1983, but by the 1990s, it accelerated. Government services were largely withdrawn in conflict areas and areas under SPLA control, focusing all resources and local budgets on security at the expense of sectors that serve civilians, including education, and leaving civilians without access to either government services or humanitarian support. In April 1989, the UN negotiated an agreement with the government of Sudan and the SPLM to form an operating body, Operation Lifeline Sudan. With the ability to negotiate access with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), a non-state actor, as well as with the Sudanese government, Operation Lifeline Sudan was designed to deliver humanitarian aid across Sudan. This had the effect of legitimising the SPLM, encouraging the creation of parallel systems in SPLM-controlled areas. Negotiated two months before Ingaz took power, the regime viewed it in negative terms and was a reluctant party to the agreement, which remained in place until 2005. Many in the

security apparatus of Ingaz saw this agreement as setting a foundation for the separation of South Sudan, making the regime and those who participated in it reluctant to grant authorisations to aid agencies to operate in areas outside of their control in similar circumstances.

Reorientation of Education System and Engagement with International Institutions (2003-2019)

In the 2000s, the regime reoriented as it pursued greater normalisation in its external relations, signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to end the war in the South, and moderated some of the coercive aspects of its political projects. In the education sector, these changes prompted reforms to the Sudanese curriculum which allowed southern students and religious minorities to take a separate religious studies course as the whole system became increasingly dependent on funds from individual students and their families. As part of these moves, the government passed a law in 2003 to regulate non-governmental schools, as well as to allow for these schools to teach an English translation of the national curriculum (UNESCO, 2018). These practices both opened up education to greater engagement with international agencies and reintroduced English into the education system for those who sought it out, while also allowing for more private education.

In practice, most basic and secondary schools remained governmental schools. From 2009 until 2017, public expenditure on education made up a little more than 11% of total expenditure, with a decline of 6% in terms of recurrent government expenditure (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019).[3] During this time, there was a moderate increase in private education in urban areas. Between 1% and 2.4% of all schools were private schools by 2012, but the proportion of private schools was higher in urban areas and certain key states, representing 28% of schools in Khartoum (UNESCO, 2018). Government schools were forced to charge fees in order to make up adequate costs to continue running; while entry to school itself was sometimes free, schools charged fees for examinations, as well as for school materials and other activities and items necessary for study. Both the growth of private schools as well as the proliferation of fees charged at government schools point to a growing privatisation of schools during this period that exacerbated class and regional inequalities since access to education, government or private, was dependent on sufficient funds.

In the process, the 2000s and 2010s were marked by both the end of one protracted conflict, as well as the outbreak of others in Darfur and then subsequently in Kordofan and Blue Nile. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) reduced conflict in certain areas–namely the South, Kordofan, and Blue Nile–even as conflict broke out in Darfur, meaning that already weak or sparse education systems in marginalised areas were also affected by the effects of conflict and displacement. By 2012, Sudan had a population of 2.5 million IDPs,[4] including a significant number of children whose education was disrupted. Schools also struggled to remain open as they became shelters for IDP communities. Other areas were newly calmer, allowing for a greater degree of educational intervention in areas with education systems depleted by war. By the 2010s, the separation of the South and the reduction of active conflict in Darfur as well as the outbreak of conflict

[3] Target expenditure on education as part of the Sustainable Development Goals is between 15-20% of total government expenditure. "Education Expenditure Data: Challenges and Solutions Forward,"" UNESCO, February 2024. https://ces.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/01/EDS-6-Expenditure-Final-WEB.pdf

[4] Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC), Global Overview 2012: People internally displaced by conflict and violence - Sudan, 29 April 2013, https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/idmc/2013/en/83903

in Kordofan had further complicated the education systems in these regions and created ongoing impediments for children's education.

As a result of inequalities in education access and persistent conflict, one ongoing challenge to the education system has been a large population of out of school children. In the 2000s, the National Council for Literacy and Adult Education (NCLAE), a national Sudanese body operating with oversight from the Federal Ministry of Education, with the support of UN entities including UNICEF and UNESCO, developed an Alternative Learning Programme (ALP) as an educational approach to address these children, among them IDPs, nomads, and others who had missed out on access to education. UNESCO estimated that even with efforts to improve access, the total number of children under 12 years old who were out of school was 2 million in 2018 (Rasheed et. al, 2022). The ALP curriculum attempts to combine eight years of educational outcomes in four years, with the aim of reintegrating adolescent and out of school children into formal learning. While it was developed through a government body, ALP has been largely carried out through local and international partners and organisations in consultation with the NCLAE. By 2022, around 7 million children were out of school.[5] Over 800,00 of them were attending nearly 1,000 ALP centres across the country through UNICEF support, with more than one third of these students having never attended formal schools before. Yet while the curriculum was designed to serve rural populations, in practice these programmes were far more present in central regions of Sudan. They also had mixed results, with some indications that communities preferred them due to their reduced cost and proximity to their residences rather than because of the quality of teaching or outcomes for children. They also faced the same issues as government schools regarding a lack of adequate teaching materials and WASH facilities and had a far higher percentage of volunteer teachers (Rasheed et. al., 2022).

One effect of the localisation and semi-privatisation of education was the rise in local responses by communities, which came most often in the form of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). Sudan has long had grassroots and community-driven and -funded educational initiatives, including *ahlia* schools and *khalwa*s. In the absence of larger state funds, PTAs and community groups were organised to supplement and support government schools. These groups have organised to raise funds for basic schools and improve their facilities. They have also hired "volunteer" teachers whose salaries were not paid by the Ministry of Education in cases in which the state was unable to allocate adequate teachers to their schools. This support was most essential in rural areas, areas with large nomadic communities, and those affected by conflict. By 2016, estimates were that 11.4% of basic school teachers and 11% of secondary school teachers were volunteers, with these volunteer teachers serving in largely rural schools, supported through community initiatives (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). Women have been essential to these community efforts as well as to the running of schools. By 2019, 73.2% of all teachers in Sudan were women, though female teachers are less represented in rural schools (UNESCO, 2018). Similarly, women have been active in PTAs and community efforts to support education, though leadership in rural areas has been more dominated by men.

One persistent issue that grew starker during the period was that of teacher pay, with those teachers receiving a government salary facing extremely low pay and delays in payment. Accurate historical figures for teacher pay are not available. However, the Federal Ministry of Education reported in its annual plan in 2019 that primary school teachers received an annual salary of 15,500 SDG with secondary school teachers earning a salary of 17,500 SDG (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019), wages

[5]"Joint Statement: Urgent action needed as 6.9 million children are out-of-school and 12 million face learning disruptions." UNICEF Sudan and Save the Children, September 12, 2022. https://www.unicef.org/sudan/press-releases/joint-statement-urgent-action-needed-69-million-children-are-out-school-and-12

below the poverty threshold.[6] Such low salaries have kept teachers in a state of economic precarity, dependent on a very low salary that is vulnerable to fluctuations in economic conditions and less capable of withstanding hardship.

LANGUAGE POLICY AND REGIONAL INEQUALITY

The Arabisation of the curriculum contributed to regional inequalities, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile, as well as in the East. These regions are characterised by communities who do not speak Arabic at home, and they are also areas where children have historically had less access to education. A National Learning Assessment conducted in 2015 found that 40% of learners in grade 3 were unable to read words familiar to them; however, this rate was not uniform across the country. Rather, in Central, West, East, and North Darfur, as well as North and South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Kassala, between 52% and 76% of all children tested could not read words familiar to them (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). While there is a diversity of contributory factors (including presence of teachers, adequate facilities, and quality of instruction), all of these states host significant communities in which Arabic is not the language spoken at home. International research has clearly identified language of instruction as a significant contributory factor in children's capacity to access classroom instruction and learn.[7]

Regional inequality in access to education has been recognised both explicitly and tacitly in ongoing political conflicts and attempts at resolving them. For instance, ongoing efforts to end war in Darfur made reference to education repeatedly, with the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement negotiated in Abuja and the follow up 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur both framing power-sharing as requiring access to affirmative action in education and training. These regional inequalities in education create a negative cycle in provision. Teachers remain more difficult to hire in rural areas, particularly in states affected by conflict and a history of less access to education, including in Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile. This in turn means that most of the teachers hired in these states come from outside the state. Consequently, most teachers do not speak local languages that students are most comfortable in, affecting the quality of instruction and making it more likely students will drop out or not enter at all. Moreover, the prevalence of teachers from outside the state makes education a service that students understand to be provided by outsiders. This has been reflected in the enrolment rates for students, with some of the lowest gross enrolment rates for secondary school occurring in Darfur, Kordofan, and the East (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019).

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[6] At the World Bank average currency conversion for 2018 of 24.33 SDG to a dollar, this would amount to an annual salary of roughly $637 a year for primary school teachers and $720 a year for secondary school teachers, payment of $50-60 a month, giving roughly $1.66-2.00 a day to spend. The annual plan brings this up in the context of comparing salaries for university lecturers and professors, claiming that a university professor makes 26,800 Sudanese pounds a year, which it converts to be $9000 a year, a salary for university professors understood to be low by regional comparison. This conversion would indicate a currency conversion rate of 2.9 SDG to a dollar, which would have been consistent with the official exchange rate in Sudan prior to 2011, when inflation began to accelerate, and the SDG declined in value alongside the dollar. See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.FCRF?locations=SD This considers exclusively the official exchange rate as designated by the Central Bank of Sudan, not black market rates, in which the SDG was considerably weaker alongside the dollar, which suggests that the purchasing power of teacher salaries was even lower than this. For an analysis of poverty and the criteria for income, see "Poverty and Equity Brief: Sudan," World Bank Group Poverty and Equity, October 2020.

[7] "The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa" UNICEF, 2016.

Education in times of political upheaval (2019-2023)

Challenges in the transitional period (2019-2021)

The period following the 2018-2019 December Revolution was characterised by political upheaval and confrontation, bringing in successive governments who contended with increasing challenges to the education system. The revolution itself involved a period of eight months in which schools and universities were closed for long stretches or completely, with more consistent reopenings only after the transitional agreement was signed in August 2019. The initial two years following the signing of the transitional agreement brought significant attention and support from the international community on issues of education.

Data on education outcomes during this period is sparse–the Sudanese government was last able to collect national data on education for 2018/2019. While specific reports have been written and plans have been made since then, the scale of the effects of these disruptions is known qualitatively rather than quantitatively in most cases. At the same time, this period was marked by disruptions to the education system and challenges that have increased with the outbreak of war.

The newly appointed transitional government attempted to promote education in a manner consistent with the new political aims of the revolution while meeting the immediate challenges to education provision. The Minister of Education led a push to reform the curriculum to better respect the ethnic, religious, and social diversity of the country and promote freedom of religion. These curricular reforms were combined with the changes in the education system initially planned in 2018 that extended basic education by one year and divided basic education into elementary and middle school, designated to be fully implemented by 2023 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). Yet the reforms were met with opposition after new textbooks were produced, centring around the presence of a Michelangelo painting deemed by some to violate public decency. The painting's presence was used by supporters of the former regime and other Islamists to argue that the curricular reforms themselves were illegitimate and promoted bad morals. As the outcry and public discussion ensued, the textbooks with the offending painting were eventually withdrawn, requiring further use of the old textbooks and stalling further curricular reform. The director of curricular reform as well as the Minister of Education both resigned soon after, and schools proceeded with the curriculum as it existed at that point, with many revised textbooks, as well as some years, including preschool and several other grades, using the old curriculum or a new curriculum with minimal reform.

The acting Minister who replaced him continued with reform attempts, particularly efforts to remove members of the former governing party from within the civil service. This involved a high level committee close to the Minister tasked with removing employees who were members of the National Congress Party (NCP), the former governing party of Ingaz, and reviewing policies initiated in the past by the ministry in order to revoke those seen to further the former regime's ideological commitments. The committee was made up of members of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), some who had limited prior experience with the Ministry. Tension arose between the committee and the rank and file civil servants, whose work and records were scrutinised by virtue of their experience within the Ministry under the previous regime. This mutual distrust slowed governing processes and made it significantly harder to initiate other reforms to streamline education-related government bodies or to address challenges facing education.

This period was also marked by a series of crises and challenges that kept the Ministry of Education reacting to immediate issues rather than developing forward-looking policies. Issues included flooding in various parts of the country in 2020 and 2021, which caused displacement and damaged schools and other critical facilities. They also included budgetary challenges and inflation which

interfered with timely teacher pay and created further strain on teachers' living conditions. These challenges came alongside regular protests, especially in Khartoum, which continued to disrupt studies in different areas of the city.

One of the largest challenges, which prompted significant response both by the government as well as by international donors, was that of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Upon the outbreak of Covid in Sudan, the government issued a lockdown in Khartoum and proceeded to close schools across the country, with schools remaining closed for several months. In the wake of this lockdown, efforts were made, with the support of international institutions and foreign donors, to institute efforts at remote learning, introducing electronics in areas to help with this initiative, largely under the auspices of UNICEF. These interventions helped to continue education in some areas at a difficult moment; however, they were challenging due to limited resources of communities, persistent power cuts and inadequate data coverage across the country which created serious challenges to effective implementation. They also set a precedent for a new approach to education support that deemphasised classrooms and trained teachers. This approach has remained since the war, despite limited evidence of effectiveness.[8]

Challenges following the October 2021 Coup (2021-2023)

The October 2021 coup, undertaken by the security apparatus against the Forces of Freedom and Chance (FFC), the civilian members of the transitional government, initiated a period of further disruptions to education. Ongoing protests, economic hardship, and a diminished government budget prompted by cuts in external funding all seriously hindered the ability of the Ministry and schools themselves to maintain education provision. Moreover, the coup marked a withdrawal of international support and limitations on engagements with the government of Sudan that affected the ability of donors and international organisations to coordinate with the state to further education. These issues, taken together, had the effect of exacerbating previously existing challenges to the education system and creating disruptions of education for students across the country, with some noting that schools closed regularly for at least one day a week for large portions of this period, making it difficult to proceed with the academic calendar.

The government that the security apparatus put in place was meant to be temporary and was not defined by political appointees, though reports noted the presence of Islamists who had been removed from office during the transitional period returning to government ministries. In the end, acting undersecretaries for non-security-related ministries were elevated to the status of ministers, meaning that these ministries operated with great continuity with previous ministerial policies, maintaining activities, policies, and priorities that had existed within the ministry during late Ingaz. This policy was followed with regard to the Minister of Education, who had previously been a director of the Teacher Training Institute and was consequently invested in promoting continuity.

At the same time, western donor regulations related to interacting with military juntas meant that ongoing coordination with state institutions became confined to technical entities, in practice, largely

[8] Little research has been done on the role of technology and remote education in Sudan or equivalent settings. A preliminary study was conducted on sample populations of out of school children in eight villages in Kassala and Sennar which found moderate improvements in mathematics and Arabic literacy, though with little social or psychological benefits. See Brown et al., "Can't Wait to Learn." The study does not consider social or environmental challenges, and since it considers the program after six months, does not contend with other environmental challenges, though it notes challenges regarding technological glitches in the mathematics game and issues with usage. Logistical concerns regarding the use of technology in Sudan have been raised due to the limited data coverage of the country, inequalities and challenges to its use, but further research would be needed to assess the effectiveness of this programming as practiced in the wake of these issues.

the teacher training centres. This meant that instead of working directly through the state, international organisations turned to third-party implementing partners, largely international and national NGOs who worked either through "technical" government bodies at the state level such as teacher training institutes or directly with schools and state-level ministries to implement projects related to education. Accordingly, while the UN's cluster system operated similarly after the coup as it had before, the Local Education Group removed the government of Sudan from its members. Furthermore, its operations were significantly disrupted by the coup, meeting less frequently and with reduced capacity for sector leadership. The level of continuity in programmatic activities by international and national organisations working in education during this period can be attributed to goodwill within the Federal Ministry of Education. Despite the inability of many organisations receiving donor funds to coordinate directly with the Ministry, the acting Minister of Education and the security dominated government allowed international organisations to continue in their existing activities without substantial restriction, likely a tactical decision given the material need in the sector as well as the desire of the junta to encourage resumption of relations with international donors.

Other challenges to the education system were amplified during this period, including challenges related to teacher pay, labour actions, conflict and displacement, and flooding and challenges to infrastructure. Following the coup, existing austerity measures, including the removal of fuel subsidies, continued to be in place as they had been during the transitional period; however, measures meant to curb the impact on the general population were eliminated, causing most families to face increased hardship (Ali et. al, 2025). Under the auspices of the Sudanese Teachers' Committee, a coalition of labour unions that, through its membership in the Sudanese Professionals Association, was part of the recently deposed FFC, teachers in a number of states, including Kassala and South Darfur, went on strike. They did so in protest not only of the coup, but of the extended delays in payment of their salaries and their increasing economic precarity.

Ethnic tensions in Blue Nile state prompted country-wide protests by Hausa communities and increased displacement of Hausa from Blue Nile, removing a number of teachers, even as unpaid salaries and the presence of IDPs in schools eventually led to schools in five of Blue Nile's seven localities stopping entirely in 2022. Acceleration of conflict in Darfur led to displacement of communities and disruptions to education. Moreover, the ongoing protests and political impasse created a situation in which state infrastructure, notably roads but including schools, was largely unmaintained, leading to even greater impact when events like flooding occurred, as they did in 2022.[9]

2. DAMAGES TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM CAUSED BY THE CONFLICT

General conditions in the education system since outbreak of war

The war that broke out in Sudan on 15 April 2023 accelerated existing problems in the Sudanese education system. On the local level, it further hyper-localised and privatised education. Meanwhile, the ongoing competition between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to claim not only control of territory, but also legitimacy as sovereign controllers of the state, politicised the issue of education accreditation and the ability to designate what constitutes formal education. While neither the RSF nor SAF are prioritising education, both see the existence of an education system with functioning infrastructure as an essential legitimising element to their claims to sovereignty.

[9] "Sudan: Humanitarian Update, September 2022 (No. 08)," OCHA, October 23, 2022. https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-update-september-2022-no-08

Conditions in the education system have varied significantly across the country and are defined by breakdown between different levels of government, leaving responsibilities and resources for implementing educational programming confined to the state and locality levels. This has exacerbated existing inequalities and left communities particularly vulnerable to education disruptions related not only to security, but also the availability of resources and movement of IDPs.

The field of conflict has changed somewhat over the course of the past two years, with certain areas remaining under SAF control, other areas under RSF control, and the field of disputed areas changing somewhat over time. While exact breakdowns of territory have changed over time, SAF has continuously controlled northern and eastern Sudan as well as Blue Nile, while the RSF has controlled most of Darfur with the exception of North Darfur. Some states, including Gezira, White Nile, and Sennar, moved between SAF and RSF control, first in December 2023 and then again in November 2024. Khartoum, initially dominated by the RSF, moved to SAF control in early 2025. The geography of the conflict has had significant effects on the types of education-related challenges a given area has faced, as well as other challenges, particularly with regards to threats of violence and food security.

Areas under dispute and with active combat operations unsurprisingly have suspended or non-existent education systems. Consistent with that, payment of teachers in these areas is entirely suspended, and school grounds are often either damaged due to combat or hosting IDPs. These areas at times have remained disputed and sites of combat for some time, such as Khartoum, which is coming to stabilise as largely under the control of SAF as of April 2025.[10] Other areas, including parts of White Nile and Sennar, were disputed and hosted combat operations for a shorter period or were less of a focus of dispute by both SAF and the RSF. Whatever the duration, these areas have faced particular challenges that endure even after one of the parties to the conflict has secured control over the area, undermining capacity for education service delivery.

The greatest damage that has been caused to the education sector in Sudan comes from the elimination of all coordination of education services at the national level across territories. While education itself is a right for all children, the Federal Ministry of Education is part of a government composed by SAF, with priorities determined by SAF. Consequently, it is limited in its reach and restricted in its ability to serve or coordinate with schools or local government in areas outside of SAF control. This means that its responsibilities coordinating education questions, managing curriculum, and setting national education policies across the country have been disrupted. State ministries, responsible for implementing and managing secondary education, and localities, responsible for basic education, have faced disruptions and found communication with the federal ministry disrupted, with even those states controlled by SAF finding a lack of material resources and logistical support.

NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

National secondary school certificate exams fell at the intersection of competing claims to political legitimacy and state sovereignty and point to the politicisation of education accreditation. From December 2024 through January 2025, the Federal Ministry of Education undertook state-wide exams for the Sudan Secondary School Certificate. Roughly 344,000 students registered to sit for exams, roughly two-thirds the number who sit for exams in normal years (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025). The education system in Sudan relies on a state-run and -evaluated examination to determine whether students have completed their studies at the standard necessary to receive a secondary school certificate. This in turn implies that only the state has the ability to designate students as having completed formal education. By encouraging and facilitating the Ministry of

[10] https://acleddata.com/2025/04/15/two-years-of-war-in-sudan-how-the-saf-is-gaining-the-upper-hand/

Education to conduct these examinations, the SAF controlled government was also making a claim to the ongoing sovereignty and political legitimacy of the state as guarantor for education.

The politics of these exams help to explain the lack of political agreements to enable students in RSF controlled areas to sit for the exams, as well as the insistence of the Ministry to not delay exams despite logistical challenges. The Ministry refused to delay the exams at the behest of the international community and was adamant that it would not negotiate with RSF officials in any capacity to facilitate movement of students to exam centres or coordinate safe-passage agreements for students from RSF controlled areas to take their exams. For their part, the RSF also viewed these exams in the same political terms, and accordingly refused to allow students to travel to take the exams (ERICC Helpdesk, 2025). Showing the further politicisation, the government of Chad chose to recognise this refusal and blocked Darfuri students in Chad from taking the exams.[11] The failure to assure inclusivity of children residing in RSF controlled areas had consequences, endangering children who travelled anyway and denying others the opportunity to do so. Moreover, the speed and haphazard manner in which the exams were held seems to have resulted in serious errors in the reporting of exam results, with some children receiving different results when they checked through mobile networks at different times.[12]

EFFECTS OF DISPLACEMENT ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS

All areas of Sudan have been massively affected by displacement, with the total number of those displaced inside of Sudan currently standing at 8.6 million people.[13] This scale of displacement has included a large proportion of children displaced due to the war, making Sudan the largest child displacement crisis in the world.[14] Such displacement has caused logistical challenges for Federal and State Ministries of Education, since ministry employees have been displaced themselves as have students and teachers. International agencies have targeted regions hosting large numbers of displaced people due to the increased need among this population. In addition, IDPs in different areas have sought shelter in schools, further straining education systems. Schools are not ideal facilities to accommodate IDPs. Many have limited electricity and WASH facilities even for their original purpose. Reports from January 2025 indicate that more than 2,000 schools are currently used as shelters by IDPs.[15] The presence of IDPs in schools has been addressed to different degrees, with regional inequalities manifesting in the ability of authorities to see to the needs of IDPs while also keeping schools operating. In River Nile, Red Sea state, and to some extent Gedarif and Northern state, local authorities and various organisations have been able to provide support for IDPs while keeping schools open. Other areas like al Gezira and Darfur have been highly impacted by conflict and the presence of the RSF, with few mechanisms to meet the needs of IDPs, much less to relocate them to allow school facilities to operate. The presence of IDPs in schools has also been used as a means of population control, with IDPs forcibly removed from schools at moments when the SAF controlled government has hoped to pressure IDPs to return to their original areas of residence.

[11] https://sudantribune.com/article294643/

[12] Yousif Abusin, "Secondary School National Examinations: Missing grades, gender confusion and doubtful marks results," *Atar Magazine*, May 19, 2025.

[13] https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation

[14] OCHA, Sudan Humanitarian Update,12 November 2023

[15] School Tracker, January 2025.

3. CURRENT FUNCTIONALITY OF EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education systems in SAF controlled areas

Areas under SAF control are subject to the oversight of the Federal Ministry of Education; however, disruptions and displacements caused by the war have hindered communication and coordination between all levels of government responsible for oversight and management of education. These disruptions have created great variety in the functionality of education systems regionally and have impeded the Federal Ministry from advancing a unified policy towards education across the country, further exacerbated by the fact the Federal Ministry of Education's Education Sector Plan (2019-2023) was designed prior to the revolution and not adapted or extended after the outbreak of war. These challenges have been exacerbated by extreme underfunding of the education system from the Ministry of Finance, which has meant that funds for teacher salaries, sent by the Ministry of Finance to the Federal Ministry of Education and in turn to the state ministries, have been irregular and inconsistent across the country, with some states having more regular payment of schools while others remain largely unpaid or reliant on incentives by international organisations and community support systems.

Following the initial outbreak of war, the Federal Ministry of Education relocated to areas outside of Khartoum. The Minister of Education has been located in Port Sudan, but different units have been located elsewhere, depending in part on where employees were able to relocate. Core units of the Federal Ministry have been relocated to Atbara in River Nile State, with the relocation taking place with the support of private companies as well as the logistical management of the late Minister of Education. Atbara has in the process become the hub for education initiatives in Sudan, with a number of national and international NGOs working on education operating with offices there in order to maintain access and coordination with the Federal Ministry. Efforts have continued at the federal level to print new textbooks with the support of international NGOs; these textbooks use the previously existing curriculum with minimal revisions and have been distributed in states with more functional state ministries.

State level educational initiatives and delivery of salaries to teachers has varied widely across states under SAF control. Reports indicate core functionality has been retained in roughly four states, with River Nile, Red Sea, Kassala, and Northern state mentioned frequently as representing functional education systems operating in the face of massive challenges. Other states under SAF control have faced far greater dysfunctionality, including damages to facilities that cannot be repaired, disruptions in teacher pay, displacement of communities, and influxes of IDPs.

In all states, the management of elementary and middle schools[16] falls under the responsibility of the locality, meaning that there is variability even within an individual state between localities. Individual localities have communicated with state ministries to different extents depending on the level of previously existing coordination, security concerns and challenges in the state, and the level of engagement and prioritisation of education prior to the war. This has meant that individual states have varying abilities to assess education provision across the state as well as to coordinate assistance.

[16] In 2022/2023, the government completed the transition that extended basic education by one year to 9 years, divided between 6 years of elementary school followed by three years of middle school, with an exam following elementary school managed by the state government. Elementary and middle school education remain under the responsibility of the locality as basic education had been previously.

CASE STUDIES: EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONALITY IN DIFFERENT STATES

River Nile State

On the most functioning end of this spectrum is River Nile state, where the Federal Ministry of Education relocated, and where educational responses have proceeded in an orderly fashion. While River Nile state has contended with an influx of IDPs needing critical services and accommodation as well as of children who have entered schools there, the infrastructure and capacity was largely available, with officials working hard, at times organising two shifts of schooling on the same grounds to accommodate the new children. These operations have been assisted with critical support from the private sector, including African Development Bank, mines and companies in the state, as well as by international NGOs and agencies, whose support has been critical in operating and maintaining the projects underway. This support has meant that the River Nile State Ministry has been able to ensure that teachers in the state regularly receive salaries and that classrooms are able to continue running.

Blue Nile State

In Blue Nile state, educational systems have been massively disrupted since long before the war, and ongoing activities have been hampered by a lack of financial and logistical support. While Blue Nile has not been a site of conflict during this war, the war has affected its operations severely. For long stretches of time after the RSF entered Gezira and parts of Sennar, Blue Nile was cut off geographically from other SAF controlled areas of the country, meaning that supplies to the area, including key supplies for schools and educational operations, were stopped entirely. Similarly, teacher salaries have been cut off entirely for long stretches in Damazine and Roseires localities—the only two localities with schools that have been active at all in the last three years. This has forced many teachers to leave the profession to work in markets or find other income. State officials and those working with schools have noted that many of those teachers are unlikely to return to schools given the low and unreliable pay as well as the change in social status that occurs when students witness their teachers working as casual laborers. While Blue Nile continues to perform state level exams for the movement from elementary to middle school and middle school to secondary school, and the state participated in holding the national Secondary School certificate exams, the number of students that progress through this entire system was low before the war, and the damage to the education system has meant that even fewer students have progressed through this system.

TEACHER PAY

Questions of teacher pay, including the scale and speed at which they are paid, have been a persistent challenge in Sudan's education system. Teacher salaries are determined by seniority, with salaries set by the Federal Ministry of Education, but supplemented by the state Ministry and at times the locality and community. Currently, teachers who have worked less than 2 years are paid roughly 60-70 thousand SDG a month and those who have taught for over 30 years are paid 200 thousand SDG a month, roughly 24-80 USD a month, depending on length of service. Such low salaries have kept teachers as a profession in a state of economic precarity. Other teachers received no salary from the government at all. Prior to the war, roughly 11% of all teachers in schools in Sudan (and half of those in ALP centres) were "volunteers" meaning that communities and individual schools were responsible for obtaining funds to pay their salaries (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019; Rasheed et. al., 2022). This vulnerability to economic fluctuations has been particularly exacerbated by the late payment of salaries. Salaries being paid late occurred most often in the states, where budget shortfalls and delays in transfers from the Ministry of Finance to the states and localities have meant that teachers have had to work without knowing when or at what rate they would be paid.

Since the war, both the low scale of teachers' salaries as well as the precarity and inconstancy in payment of salaries has accelerated dramatically. Some states have been able to assure regular payment of teachers with only minimal delays, while other states have only been able to pay teachers two thirds of their salaries intermittently, and others still have faced long interruptions in payment of teachers, leading to disruptions in school operations. This has rendered almost *all* teachers in the education system, particularly in states facing budgetary shortfalls or in RSF controlled territory, as "volunteer" teachers. International NGOs and donor programming has involved paying "incentives" to teachers in schools operating in partnership with them. These incentives often function as replacements for government salaries and have allowed for teaching to continue uninterrupted. However, these measures are partial at best, unable to cover all schools in a locality or state, and not meant to be long-term, creating a system in which the ability of schools to run is dependent on external donors.

Other challenges are particularly prominent in areas now under SAF control that changed hands over the course of the war. These areas have faced extensive damage to their infrastructure, as well as displacement caused by the conflict and terrorisation and looting from the RSF. Since coming under SAF control, there have been efforts both by the Ministry of Education as well as NGOs to reopen schools in these areas, though these efforts are only just underway since October 2024. Those operating in these areas, particularly in White Nile and Sennar where operations are further along than in Gezira and Khartoum, report challenges related to community displacement, damage to school facilities, IDPs sheltering in schools or having done so, and trauma to both students and teaching staff. Efforts to reopen schools in these areas are taking place in deeply militarised areas. After gaining control of the area, SAF has reportedly targeted civilians along ethnic lines based on perceived support to the RSF, as well as accusing community responders and activists of being collaborators and subjecting them to detention and violence. This violence and atmosphere of suspicion will affect efforts to reopen schools, especially with support from community groups.

Community-led efforts to support schools, including PTAs, local NGOs, community groups, and Emergency Response Rooms, have been essential to responses on education; however, they are not evenly distributed or equally capable to respond across the region. Parent Teacher Associations are typically led by parents and other community members with means and status in communities, who

are adept at mobilising resources for schools and leveraging those resources on a continued basis. These associations are vital across Sudan and have a long and deeply rooted history in Sudan. At the same time, these associations are strongest in areas with more resources to devote to education and in which more parents are educated. This means that PTAs in areas already marginalised are typically less active and less resourced. Moreover, areas that have been affected by conflict have experienced population displacement. Many of those displaced are the ones with the means and connections that previously led PTAs, meaning that they may not be present in areas that are only now rebuilding or resuming educational activities or, if there, may be less equipped to lead PTA efforts. Similarly, many local NGOs and community groups have been devastated by the war or have focused their work on other priority areas, including IDP assistance, food security, or health efforts, as well as responding to the immediate needs of the war. This means that while these groups are active, they are not equally active everywhere, and those that are active may not all be focused on education.

In addition, international and national NGOs, civil society organisations, and grassroots organisations are all subject to regulation, and at times interference, from state entities. All of them face scrutiny and risk of targeting from national security and army intelligence, with reports of army intelligence restricting or stopping activities of ERRs in some areas as well as targeting those who have participated in them. International and national NGOs are subject to oversight and require registration with the Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC), which has required ongoing negotiations and limited activities in particular states. Dealings with HAC and state security are often slow and subject to seemingly arbitrary stoppages and restrictions on activities, with state level offices at times revoking permissions for individual organisations or entities to operate. This is often punctuated by restrictions and demands on international organisations and entities taking donor funds regarding who to hire and where and how to allocate resources, as well as demands to accompany international organisations on field visits. Many of these same issues have continued or accelerated since the war, with greater restrictions on types of work that security bodies and HAC do not understand or prioritise in the same form as government ministries, much less the international community. The support of the Ministry of Education for activities of international organisations in areas under SAF control has helped mitigate some of these restrictions at key moments, but only in areas of priority for the SAF controlled government where the state ministry as well supports the priorities of the organisations in question.

Education systems in RSF controlled areas

Like SAF, the RSF has sought out support to acquire functioning educational infrastructure as a way of legitimising its claim to sovereignty in areas under its control. In February of this year, RSF officials signed a charter in Nairobi meant to pave the way to forming a parallel government in areas under its control. These larger political questions and the claims being made by them, however, do not translate into governance activities by the RSF in areas under its control. This government, to the extent it exists, operates from outside of Sudan and has not yet nominated any official meant to be responsible on issues of education. It currently operates without a budget for governance.

RSF controlled areas have faced an extremely unstable and violent security situation, punctuated by active combat and arbitrary violence committed by the RSF. This has included active ethnic targeting by the RSF against non-Arab ethnic groups, including the Masalit in West Darfur, as well as targeting of activists perceived to be supporting SAF, including Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs). Community groups focused on education are not perceived as a particular threat by the RSF. However, the violence perpetrated by the RSF, as well as the violence perpetuated by combat with SAF, have threatened the security of children and prevented the operation of schools in many areas.

In RSF controlled areas, the day-to-day functioning of state Ministry of Education offices has largely been frozen, with locality governments completely non-existent and individual schools left to pursue operations on their own. This is a direct by-product of the claims on legitimacy for pursuance of state services. Those within the state Ministry of Education in RSF territory known to be working with the RSF have their salaries frozen and work without salary, while those who opt not to work with the RSF are mostly displaced or opt to flee, moving to SAF or Joint Forces controlled territory, where provisions have been made to pay their salaries and allow them to work from other states, including from North Darfur or River Nile state. Remaining in RSF controlled territory seems to come with the potential to be accused of collaborating with the RSF, regardless of whether state ministry officials work or not.

Yet the RSF has leveraged existing institutions that interact with international bodies, such as the Sudanese Agency for Humanitarian and Relief Operations (SARHO), in order to make demands involving the expansion of education infrastructure in areas under their control. These demands have been made after consultations with the state Ministry of Education employees and have largely centred around the rebuilding of education-related state infrastructure, including a state-run printing house for printing educational materials and the rebuilding of the state ministry's offices. The types of demands and relationship with state ministry employees indicates that the RSF understands the education system and issues of education infrastructure as essential to state functioning, even if it does not currently allocate funds for state ministry employees or operate with any direct oversight of school operations beyond granting or revoking permission for outside organisations to access areas and the schools therein. These organisations, for their part, have struggled with responding to these demands, both because the scale of cost to meet them is high as well as the political risk of being seen to grant legitimacy to the RSF government and in doing so, sustaining the war.

In the context of RSF controlled areas, particularly in Darfur where RSF control has been largely constant, school operations have been disrupted severely and occur largely through extended community efforts combined with limited support by the small number of international NGOs and UN bodies. Conditions in many areas under RSF control are extremely dire, with some areas experiencing famine and others extreme food insecurity. This has created serious challenges for establishing or maintaining school operations in those areas, as often families are forced to sell textbooks in the market to purchase food for their children. Schools thus operate only when sufficient resources have been obtained to ensure the schools operations, often with support from international NGOs, who have at times run programmes through schools, utilising state Ministry of Education employees as teacher trainers, which both secures state ministry employees' funds in the absence of state-paid salaries, as well as secures access and cooperation from local officials and schools. These programmes also pay "incentives" to teachers, allowing them to continue teaching in the absence of state funded salaries. These "incentives" allow for schools to run either previously existing programmes using remote learning equipment or run a modified ALP curriculum in schools and attempt mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Community-led initiatives and efforts have been essential in many of these areas, though these efforts are more focused on immediate relief and survival in key areas. Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) in Darfur, while focusing on providing medical care and collective kitchens, have monitored and intervened in education. Individual ERRs have monitored and maintained reporting for ERR coordinating bodies on what schools in their locality are operating and noted the ways that these schools can be further supported. Some have also held workshops and training for educators on trauma and ways to address it in school settings. There has been some collaboration between ERRs and international NGOs, with some provision of micro-grants to ERRs to provide meals at schools operating with support from the NGOs. However, these grants have been small and focused mostly on the existing work ERRS have been doing regarding community kitchens in school settings. While

small scale and not currently widely practiced in Darfur, these collaborations have a potential to expand as a best practice in areas experiencing both food insecurity and disruptions to education.

Areas under armed movement control

Areas under the control of armed movements have existed in Sudan for some time. While longer histories of this phenomenon existed over the course of the Ingaz regime, both in what is now South Sudan as well as in Kordofan and Blue Nile, the recent iterations began in the mid-2000s in Darfur, where the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdel Wahid continues to control territory. Moreover, the SPLM-North of Abdel Aziz Hilu in Kordofan has continued to control territory since the reignition of war in 2011 following the independence of South Sudan. These movements not only control territory but have attempted to differing degrees to build institutions requiring interaction in order for international organisations to access the territory and support in education provision.

This research is limited in how much information it could gather on conditions in these areas and the status of education-related institutions in them. It is clear that prior to the war, both SLA-Abdel Wahid and the SPLM-North of al Hilu had institutions equivalent in nature to HAC and SARHO, which negotiated with international organisations to allow access and made state-like demands on entities with regard to types of infrastructure and types of work to be conducted. In Kordofan, these institutions were extremely developed due to the history of the SPLM-North, and they reportedly included a parallel education apparatus including possibly a separate curriculum for schools, though information on the degree of functionality and recognition of it is limited. NGOs that operate in SPLM-North controlled Kordofan have delivered supplies and run programme management for operations through South Sudan rather than through Sudan since the outbreak of conflict in 2011.

Conditions in these areas have displayed continuity in how education systems have operated, yet they remain subject to effects from the war. These effects include security conditions prompted by ongoing conflict that has disrupted education activities in serious ways. They both have also faced displacements due to the conflict as well as the presence of IDPs. While international support for education has continued to some extent in both areas, the amount of support is extremely limited, and the authors are unsure of the extent of educational operations in either.

4. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE AND COORDINATION

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, international organisations entered Sudan and began working in the field of education, creating coordinating bodies to help organise their investments and activities. Prior to the outbreak of war, education coordination in Sudan ran along two tracks–one humanitarian facilitated through the Education Cluster, and the other largely development-oriented coordinated by the Local Education Group (LEG). In the humanitarian field, the UN cluster system was established through the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAPs), now the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), which ensures that international responses to humanitarian emergencies are predictable, accountable, and have clear leadership. In Sudan, this was established first in Darfur, then expanded to other regions. In the more development-oriented track, the LEG has focused on long-term education systems strengthening. Both of these tracks were developed in the 2000s, with coordination accelerating following the outbreak of war in 2023. Recent dynamics in Sudan have required strong coordination between the Cluster and LEG, with the LEG working to incorporate a stronger emphasis on humanitarian education. Analysis of both of these streams indicates that significantly more resources for the education sector are currently being directed to SAF controlled areas, with essential funding for education in RSF controlled areas imperilled due to extremely limited international funding.

Cluster coordination

The Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) is developed annually and consists of 13 clusters that require immediate humanitarian intervention. All clusters are coordinated under the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) that is managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). One of these clusters is the Education Cluster for Sudan, which coordinates activities through the Sudan Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). It is co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children with two dedicated national education coordinators, one surge support dedicated subnational coordinator for Darfur Region, and 12 subnational education coordinators who also double hat, working with UNICEF and Save the Children as educational officers in the field at the same time. There are 28 national and international partners who regularly contribute to the cluster system through data sharing and coordination. Support from the global fund Education Cannot Wait has been instrumental in reinforcing the Global Education Clusters' core cluster functions, and has provided some limited support for specific education cluster activities in Sudan, most notably an educational needs assessment commenced in October 2024.

The Sudan HNRP has faced substantial challenges in securing funding for multiple clusters. As per the Financial Tracking System (FTS) in 2024, the education component of the HNRP received only 20% funding against the education cluster's appeal, roughly 26 million USD of the required 131 million USD.[17] Additionally, UNICEF Sudan's Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appealed for 80 million USD to allocate for education, securing these funds by the end of the year.[18] In 2025, Sudan HNRP appealed for 108 million USD for education, with 11.3 million USD (10%) secured by May 2025, lower than the funding at this point in 2024.[19] Despite the essential role of education in the humanitarian response, globally and within Sudan, education is often not prioritised, and challenges to funding education amidst this crisis are ongoing, amplified by the suspension of USAID funds. Despite its importance, education risks further deprioritisation in upcoming years due to lack of funds.

Geographic coverage of humanitarian education funding has remained more limited in scope than HNRP had originally allocated. Education cluster coordinators and implementing partners meet regularly to coordinate response per the guidance of the 2025 HNRP, organising around ten activities under three core objectives. These three core objectives include (i) providing principled and timely life-saving assistance to school-aged children, (ii) enabling equitable access to safe, protective and inclusive learning environments, and (iii) providing quality education for crisis-affected girls and boys, including children with disabilities. In October 2023 there were 14 active implementing partners working across 17 states; however, this geographic reach had fluctuated over time, as the education cluster currently covers 14 states across 81 localities, with plans to reach and/or regain access to the four remaining states of West Kordofan, East and South Darfur, and Aljazirah.[20]

[17] This doesn't include other funding sources that are not tracked via FTS, such as ECW and GPE. In 2024, ECW's First Emergency Response (FER) and the GEP's Accelerated Fund (AF) contributions weren't reported on FTS.

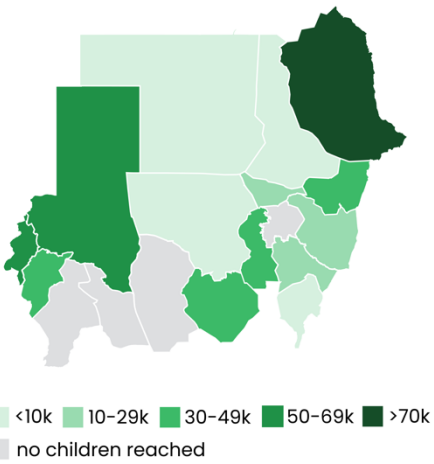
[18] 2024 HAC Appeal, Unicef Sudan.

[19] https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1220

[20] Sudan Education Cluster Partners Operational Presence Map – October 2023.

Overall, the cluster's capacity and reach have been challenged by access and funding constraints. The 2025 HNRP has included targets in all 18 states despite significant reduction of target and budget as part of the recent reprioritisation of the HNRP. The Education Cluster maintained plans covering 146 of the most affected localities across all states based on vulnerability criteria that include but are not limited to severity levels, risk of famine, and number of IDPs. This reprioritisation, however, comes despite the fact that not all areas originally prioritised by HNRP were being reached, and it does not adequately factor in questions of access given escalations in violence in many of the locations that are now prioritised. Under the reprioritisation, the education cluster funding requirement was reduced to 10% of the initial 108 million USD and limited to one activity.

Children reached through Sudan Education Cluster



Source: Education Cluster Dashboard, from January through May 2025

Other limitations in geographic coverage can be attributed to concerns related to security and access, questions of feasibility, and risk appetite. HNRP 2025 has noted that Darfur bears the highest need for education at this juncture and has designated a target of 40% of spending going to Darfur. Yet in practice, these targets have not been met. Project scope and location are designated by donors after consultation and advocacy from the cluster, and a number of donors have chosen to centre activities in locations deemed to be more feasible, both due to issues of accessibility and security concerns related to operations in areas outside of SAF control, leading to high project risk. Notably, some essential humanitarian actors continue to prioritise implementation in high risk locations outside of SAF control, including Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO).

Local Education Group

The Local Education Group (LEG) was formally established in 2013, aligning with the entry of the Global Fund and Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the start of Sudan working with the World Bank to develop its first Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) in 2012. This period marked a significant shift towards structured coordination between the Sudanese government, development partners, and civil society to align on education sector priorities and reforms. From 2013 to 2021, the LEG was co-chaired by the Sudan Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF, with the state operating as the primary partner and guarantor to set the agenda for education. Following the 2021 coup and subsequent removal of the Ministry of Education from the LEG, it was chaired by UNICEF. In November 2023 UNESCO took over the Chairing of the LEG, increasing stakeholder engagement, particularly among those operating in SAF controlled areas.

Components of LEG coordination, including biannual in person meetings and the development of the Transitional Education Plan (TEP), are directly funded through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) System Capacity Grant (STG) and aim to play a critical role in shaping international and domestic investment in education. Despite the formal removal of the Ministry of Education from the LEG, individual members of the LEG consult with various Ministry of Education units at state and federal levels to carry-out educational activities, and support coordination and harmonisation between the humanitarian actors and development actors working on education in Sudan.

Since the outbreak of war, it has become increasingly important to ensure optimal coordination and complementarity across the Cluster and the LEG. To facilitate this, the Cluster Coordinators and the

representatives of UNESCO in their role as LEG Chair prioritised information sharing through regular meeting updates. The LEG also completed drafting a Transitional Education Plan (2025-2027) in 2025 to facilitate enhanced sector planning and coordination. The LEG and Cluster prioritised integration of HNRP indicators into the three main pillars of the Transitional Education Plan (TEP) for 2025-2027 to further maximise coordination capabilities.

TRANSITIONAL EDUCATION PLAN (2025-2027)

In November 2023, the Local Education Group endorsed the development of Sudan's Transitional Education Plan (TEP) 2025–2027. While it was not written in close coordination with the Federal Ministry of Education, this plan functions as a LEG instrument to coordinate partner activities and those activities supported by the Ministry of Education at the state and federal level in light of emergencies caused by the war, creating a framework for identifying and prioritising needs in the education sector. This is particularly important since the 2018/19 – 2022/23 Federal Ministry of Education plan has not only concluded, but also was developed prior to the 2019 overthrow of Bashir and did not anticipate the political upheavals of the 2019-2023 period or the ensuing war.

The TEP's three pillars comprise: (i) increasing safe and inclusive access to and retention in education, (ii) improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning in crisis context 'with focus on literacy, numeracy and life skills', and (iii) strengthening the education system capacity, governance and coordination. In contrast, cluster indicators highlight education targets and metrics used to track progress in emergency education and are informed by situation assessments, partner activity reporting, HNRP, and the Refugee Response Plan (RRP). There is some discussion of leveraging the cluster's 5W reporting system and expanding it to include development actors and activities across the whole scope of TEP, which would be a positive step forward for enhanced coordination.

Geographic coverage of development related projects coordinated by LEG, such as GPE Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG) that aims to support increased access to quality education and protection, has remained focused on SAF controlled areas, in part due to the focus on secure areas where system strengthening would be most feasible. Since the war, geographic coverage has centred on two factors: identifying locations where host communities were coping with the highest rates of IDPs, and locations that were not being targeted under other funding opportunities.[21]

GPE EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION GRANT (ESPIG): A CHALLENGE IN REPROGRAMMING

The Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (52.4 million USD) was initially approved by GPE in October 2021 with the World Bank as the Grant Agent. Following the October 2021 coup d'état and the World Bank enactment of Operational Policy 7.30: Dealings with de Facto Governments, it was put on hold. Ten million USD was successfully reprogrammed to UNICEF in August 2023 for use through GPE Accelerated Funds in alignment with TEP's three pillars; however, the remaining balance, 41.5 million USD, remained allocated to the World Bank without capacity for implementation. These delays were likely caused not only by inefficiencies in programming but a false optimism that some form of transitional government might be established that would allow for programming to resume. Only in November 2023 did the World Bank approach the Local Education Group to endorse the reprogramming of remaining 41.5 million USD funds, with UNICEF taking on the essential role of Third-Party Implementer. Final approvals were not obtained until

[21] Programme document for an accelerated funding to Sudan. 2023, GPE.

November 2024, more than three years after the intended start date. This dynamic underscores the inefficiencies in disbursal of GPE grants and limited stakeholder capacity to adapt in light of substantial changes in context, with untold implications for the children and education personnel unable to access essential education services during the three-year period in which funds were frozen. Notably, as a result of these delays, Sudan has been subject to a larger reduction in 2025 GPE allocations than other low-income countries, with continued ramifications for the state of the education system and the children and families reliant on its services.

As with humanitarian funding, not all donors have gone through LEG coordination, with some bilateral agreements operating outside of international mechanisms. Prior to the outbreak of war, Gulf countries, most notably Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have invested in education outside of coordinating mechanisms. These bilateral and multilateral agreements have not been transparent, and information on these funding streams is limited; however, evidence suggests most developmental aid of this kind has focused on SAF controlled areas following the priorities and geographic focus requested by the SAF controlled government.

5. POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS OF DELIVERY PARTNERS

The ongoing war has complicated both humanitarian and development education assistance. Humanitarian aid is committed to upholding neutrality and negotiating with all parties in a conflict to assure access to provide necessary support to vulnerable populations. Development aid often comes with restrictions, including restrictions on interacting with junta-led governments such as the one that took power following the 2021 coup. Both types of aid are required, though navigating its provision in a conflict sensitive manner and avoiding contributing further to armed conflict presents a substantial challenge. These imperatives are particularly difficult since one party to the conflict, the Sudanese Armed Forces, has de facto control of the recognised government, effectively determining access for the whole country and defining educational priorities for interactions with international agencies.

Since the war, the SAF controlled government has relied on international support, particularly recovery and development assistance, in order to keep a minimum degree of functionality in the education system. While the post-war 2023 SAF government has not announced total expenditures or the Ministry of Education's allocation as a percentage therein in the past two years, accounts by interlocutors note that education is currently at 1-2% of the total expenditures, with a dramatic decline in spending on education compared to the previous 11% of spending over the past two decades. The Ministry of Education has become increasingly reliant on support from international partners, albeit delivered indirectly, with remarks from interlocutors that support from external donors makes up 80% of funds going to education. Such support has been especially important in cases of "incentives" for teachers, who often have gone long stretches without government salaries. It is not clear that in the absence of these funds, the Ministry of Finance would allocate more money for education; rather, these funds have been used by the Ministry as a stopgap to finance the system at a moment when education systems would have otherwise disintegrated entirely. The international community has focused interventions in areas largely according to the influx of IDPs into the area and the education system. At the same time, these areas are also areas of priority to the government due to proximity of communities to power, primarily in central and eastern Sudan, which has left historically marginalised areas with less support and attention. This risks exacerbating regional inequalities in education.

This has occurred while the Sudanese Armed Forces reconfigures its government and appoints civilians to key posts, revealing a set of political orientations in the process. Since the outbreak of war,

the Sudanese Armed Forces has relied heavily on existing connections in and outside of the army with the Islamic Movement, and Islamists have significant presence in the newly appointed government.[22] The April 2025 appointment of a professor from Bahri University, former NCP member and participant in the Juba Peace Agreement, Central Tract, as Minister of Education indicates that these political trends are likely to be present within the Federal Ministry of Education, with the Ministry likely to pursue similar policies on education as had been pursued in the late Ingaz period. It also makes it likely that this government will pursue similar tactics to those pursued by Ingaz during the civil war that took place in the 1990s, including intentionally denying civilians in areas outside of its control access to key services including access to education.

Institutions delivering humanitarian aid have faced a difficult balancing act—maintaining neutrality while ensuring access to different areas of Sudan. This has been a persistent issue for UNICEF, who played a key role as sole chair of LEG from 2021-2023, as well as functioning as an active member of the humanitarian country team and the inter-cluster coordination group (ICCG).[23] UNICEF's mandate on issues related to the rights of children and its typical position functioning in partnership with governments were challenges following the 2021 coup. Despite donor restrictions on government funding and collaboration, UNICEF continued to engage, negotiate access, and channel more limited resources through government institutions in an attempt to prevent the collapse of the education system, though these funds prioritised the state level rather than federal level.

Following the war, UNICEF and other key international actors ceased all collaboration and funding of projects through the Federal Ministry of Education. Relatedly, they have faced a more difficult challenge navigating how to ensure neutrality in service provision while also ensuring access to Sudan given the restrictions of the government. This challenge has been particularly high stakes at moments in which the SAF controlled government has initiated projects with political salience, such as the national secondary school exams. While UNICEF advocated for an inclusive approach to the examinations that would ensure the ability of children in RSF areas to participate, when the government proceeded on a fast timeline without coordination to ensure inclusivity, UNICEF proceeded to provide support for students sitting the exams. This was motivated by the need to ensure the dignity and safety of children traveling to sit examinations, but it also had the effect of bolstering a government initiative designed not only to accredit children but also strengthen the SAF government's sovereignty and legitimacy.

This challenge to remain neutral also accounts for why international agencies have operated largely through national NGOs as implementing partners in RSF controlled territory and a limited number of international organisations. These organisations face high programmatic risk including risk of violence to employees. By relying heavily on national and local organisations, the international community have reduced the stakes and scale of negotiating access with the RSF, limiting potential retaliation from the SAF controlled government by offloading this risk onto international organisations with higher risk tolerance and Sudanese organisations less equipped to protect staff. In practice, these activities are more limited across the board with smaller funds and more limited scope.

Despite this dynamic, and despite the capacity of Sudanese civil society, international humanitarian systems have interacted with them in only a limited and paternalistic fashion. Community initiatives, Emergency Response Rooms, local NGOs, and national NGOs have all operated, often with support from Sudanese diaspora, to respond to the emergencies faced by Sudanese communities at this moment. This has been the case for Sudanese initiatives across the political spectrum and includes civilian Islamist organisations and initiatives as well as those aligned with other political movements

[22] "Sudan's army, Islamists, and the Al-Baraa Bin Malik Brigade," Ayin Network, March 25, 2025. https://3ayin.com/en/bin-malik/

[23] Sudan Education Cluster Monthly Update – February 2024.

in Sudan or without clear political commitments. Engagement with humanitarian systems has been limited due to obstacles including language barriers and the impulse of international actors to adapt international processes to local spaces, rather than recognising the unique ability of locally driven processes, with an emphasis on financial reporting and bureaucratic processes. These dynamics have created a lack of trust on all sides, exacerbated by a lack of communication between civil society and international agencies beyond those contracted as implementing partners.[24] Some local initiatives, such as Emergency Response Rooms, have noted that they do not wish to become NGOs and feel that partnership with INGOs has involved pressure to do so. Moreover, both SAF and the RSF have viewed grassroots initiatives with suspicion and targeted them, making interaction with them a potential political liability for INGOs.

In the absence of a neutral government representing the interests of all citizens, questions of accountability within the international community's interventions take on greater urgency and become increasingly challenging to address. This was an issue following the ouster of the transitional government, when the junta advanced policies while operating without popular legitimacy in the face of ongoing protests. This prompted some international institutions to withdraw, in keeping with existing policies. Those that remained faced challenges in terms of accountability that are now exacerbated in the face of an ongoing war in which neither armed party advances the interests of all citizens and one also actively harnesses the powers of the state in order to deprive those outside of its control from essential services.

This vacuum in accountability has no easy answers; international organisations and institutions risk imposing their own priorities and concerns on the Sudanese people. One way to address this is to dedicate time and space to consult with civil society, including community leaders and activists working on the ground leading community initiatives. Such consultations, in order to be effective, would require a reversal of existing power dynamics, elevating the priorities and concerns of groups that are often seen as third party implementing partners carrying out existing programmatic activities rather than those who set developmental or humanitarian agendas. Sudanese civil society is not a monolith and will not present a single view, but such consultations can function as a counterpoint to the interests of the armed parties themselves. While incomplete, these consultations, held regularly enough, can help point to a set of best practices and prevent an external imposition of priorities and concerns onto Sudan by the international community.

6. LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presented a wide-scope political economy analysis of the education system in Sudan, integrating the development of the education system into the larger political and economic history of the country to account for the capabilities of the education system prior to the war. It then analysed the politics and implications of current education policies and interventions in light of the system's capabilities and the damage to them caused by war. The outbreak of war in 2023 accelerated long-standing challenges within the education system, which was already hyper-localised and semi-privatised. This has had the effect of accentuating regional, economic, and social inequalities across the country. At the same time, educational infrastructure and the question of education accreditation have been politicised in this conflict, with both SAF and the RSF understanding the presence of educational infrastructure and operating schools, as well as the certification of students within that system, as proof of their status as a legitimate state with claims to sovereignty.

In the context of this war and the protracted crisis that it has created, education is essential and high stakes. Maintaining an education system and ensuring children in Sudan have the right to an

[24] CDAC Local Lifeline Projects - January 2025

education enables access to children, allows for the conveyance of life-saving messages to their whole families, as well as creates a platform for life-saving referrals for other services. In the long-term, maintaining education systems lays a foundation for recovery when this war ends, equipping the next generation with critical skills that will be necessary to rebuild and recover from these disastrous conditions.

In light of the analysis presented, we suggest the following recommendations and key points for donors and international stakeholders:

- **Develop a precedent for operations in both SAF and RSF controlled territories.** Organisations operating in RSF controlled territory may face repercussions in their operations in SAF controlled territory, with withdrawals by the Port Sudan government of permissions to operate and access areas. This is consistent with SAF's longer history of withdrawing state services and operations from civilians in areas outside of its control, and will be initiated as a way of preventing the provision of education in areas that might throw their dominance into question. Current operations in SAF controlled territory have already faced restrictions and monitoring by HAC and SAF security services; however, they have been mitigated by the general recognition by the Ministry of Education of the importance of international support. That Ministerial support is likely to continue in the short-term, given the extreme reduction in state spending on education and the dependence of the Ministry on international donors to make up the shortfall. Over time, however, the risk of retaliation, including the removal of international organisations from the education sector in retaliation for work in RSF controlled areas increases. That risk can be somewhat mitigated by donors and organisations acting now to craft a coherent policy affirming the need to deliver humanitarian services including education in RSF controlled areas. This response must set a precedent by acknowledging the rival claims to legitimacy and reaffirming the rights of children to education. This should occur early, while operations for reopening schools and rebuilding are underway in areas of political priority to the SAF government, such as Khartoum and Gezira. Doing so is consistent with existing priorities to reach difficult to reach areas of Sudan, as many of these areas are currently located in RSF controlled territory.
- **Exercise sensitivity when advocating for educational accreditation.** Questions of educational accreditation, particularly the certification or recognition of students who complete a phase of their education but also for students who complete an ALP curriculum, are inherently political assertions of sovereignty. Donors and international stakeholders should proceed with an understanding of these politics and advocate appropriately, making the case for the prioritisation of student accreditation across the country regardless of which party controls an area, but also be aware that such an agreement will involve political concessions for the armed parties. In the absence of mutually recognised education accreditations, other options for students to receive some sort of accreditation acceptable for hiring purposes or for onward study regionally will need to be explored. Lessons might be drawn from accreditation systems in SPLM-N controlled areas, as well as in other contexts, such as Lebanon, where efforts have been made to address this issue. Over time, if this war persists with RSF controlling territory, there is a potential risk that they might develop a parallel education system, which would force a decision for international donors and UN bodies on whether to recognise that system, implicitly recognising an RSF government in the process, forcing difficult decisions and potential compromises.
- **Consult with a broad cross-section of Sudanese civil society to assure accountability.** In the absence of a neutral state that represents the interests of all citizens, the international community should consult with a range of actors within Sudanese civil society in order to ensure accountability. This will require an inversion of typical power relationships, since many of these groups are typically understood to function as third party implementing partners

rather than constituents setting an agenda. Doing so is essential, however, in order to gain a sense of the range of priorities and concerns of the Sudanese people and ensure conflict sensitivity in international support as the war continues. This can be accomplished through a series of recurring forums held outside of Sudan in which a cross-section of community leaders, grassroots organisers, and civil society activists from the whole country can meet and express their priorities and concerns with regards to education and the particular challenges faced in different areas of the country. These forums would also be able to discuss the successes and limits of existing initiatives and programming and point to ways forward that might not have been considered or that could be scaled up.

- **Ensure safety of education officials, teachers, and civil society.** Ensuring the safety of civilians is paramount across Sudan, particularly in militarised areas under SAF control, where civil society activists have been targeted as potential collaborators with the RSF. In the event that SAF gains control of territory controlled by the RSF in which educational programming is underway, there is a significant risk that SAF might retaliate against State Ministry of Education officials, as well as teachers, community actors, and local NGOs who have worked in schools when the RSF controlled the area. Assuring the safety of these officials will be a challenge and will require joint advocacy and lobbying from across the international community.
- **Invest strategically in grassroots support.** To some extent, investing in the grassroots, with microgrants to individual schools delivered to PTAs and Emergency Response Rooms, is one means of bypassing questions of sovereignty and political legitimacy. They also provide an important mechanism for long-term support of communities that strengthens democratic principles and has the potential to support women-led groups, including women-led PTAs, encouraging women's participation in local governance. At the same time, these efforts should be undertaken with an understanding that these organisations are not equally present across all of Sudan. ERRs have done important work; however, their immediate focus has been on issues other than education, and community responders and grassroots groups may require training in order to identify what needs are most pressing for schools in their areas. Marginalised areas where funding has been scarce and fewer students graduate from secondary school will also have fewer resources to allocate to education and fewer individuals with the skillsets necessary to lead PTAs. These inequalities and challenges in organisation must be considered when prioritising where to work and which modalities to work through. Moreover, this work requires concerted communication with the grassroots to allow for partnerships, with an understanding that grassroots organisations are not NGOs and do not expect to operate as such.
- **Advocate for teacher salaries, training, and support.** School operations have been hampered severely through the absence of teacher salaries. Resource allocation for teacher incentives have been important at this juncture for keeping schools operating, particularly outside of the states where regular salaries have been consistently paid. These incentives have been crucial. At the same time, there is a real risk that by stepping in to provide incentives, donors create an incentive for any Sudanese government (whether SAF dominated or an RSF government) to continue not paying government salaries. Donors should advocate for the SAF government to prioritise teacher salaries as proof of state legitimacy as much as school infrastructure is taken to be. Moreover, donors should work with PTAs in areas where they are available to find alternative funding sources for teachers whenever possible, while also funding increased education training and support for education in emergencies and psychosocial support, as both students and teachers are facing massive trauma, and teachers are operating in educational environments with limited experience in how to address this scale of trauma.
- **Harmonise teacher incentives.** Work should be done to assess and harmonise teacher incentives across the education sector, paying attention to the cost of living and amount of

work required in different areas, in keeping with international best practices.[25] These incentives should prioritise marginalised regions where teacher salaries are least likely to be resumed by the government.

- **Restore schools locally.** The effects of the war on school infrastructure as well as the use of schools as shelters for IDPs at different times necessitates some degree of restoration of schools despite serious budget constraints. This can best be done either through grants to PTAs or through direct implementation that contracts with community members and obtains supplies locally in order to bypass expenses regarding movement of material and to ensure community ownership. It is worth noting that these sorts of investments in building up educational infrastructure will be extremely appealing to both SAF and the RSF and will likely be less impeded than efforts in remote learning and other efforts where educational infrastructure is not built. Restoring schools and safe learning spaces also serves an added benefit for communities by creating a place where IDPs can seek refuge again if the conflict's site of operations changes again, as well as being key to allowing clear sites to provide psychosocial support, health services, and food assistance in times of stability and instability. At the same time, implementers and donors should be careful not to inadvertently support SAF-dominated efforts to oust IDPs from collective sites on the pretext of needing the site for school activities. Efforts to pursue this recommendation are already being done in SAF controlled areas through SPEEP grants; however, they should be expanded where appropriate to include RSF controlled areas.
- **Support educational infrastructure in marginalised areas.** The Port Sudan government is particularly invested in the reestablishment of educational infrastructure and the reopening of schools in areas closely connected to its key political constituencies, mostly Khartoum and Gezira. School reopenings in these areas are essential and will receive greater funding by the government as well as by bilateral investments from the Gulf. Historically marginalised areas, including Blue Nile, Kordofan, or Darfur, are far less likely to receive state resources for school restoration. If any funds are directed for school restoration at all, these resources should be allocated in historically marginalised regions to make up for these shortfalls and to ensure education systems operate in some capacity in those areas, since there are no guarantees the state will do so as the security situation improves.
- **Develop dedicated programming to address the damage of the protracted education crisis.** The continuation of the war has led to over two years of education crisis in Sudan, which will require dedicated programming to address. Such programming will need to involve back to school and back to learning initiatives to address the needs of children whose education has been disrupted for years now. It will also require programming to address the needs of adults who have been denied access to education due to Sudan's protracted conflicts, including adult literacy efforts. Education efforts focused on adults will have an added benefit of bolstering community education initiatives and encouraging involvement in PTAs in historically marginalised areas.
- **Prioritise access to education for girls, children with disabilities, and nomadic children.** The international community must continue prioritising education for vulnerable and marginalised children, including for girls, children with disabilities, and nomadic children. These children require more support not only with regard to child protection, but also in order to retain access to education. Given the proliferation of challenges to education across the board, there is a risk of these groups being deprioritised without deliberate efforts to include them. Maintaining education for them requires special attention and dedicated resources.
- **Flexibility for development and humanitarian funding.** There is a need for flexibility in development funding through LEG as well as allocations for HNRP immediate needs with

[25] "INEE Guidance Notes on Teacher Compensation in Fragile States, Situations of Displacement and Post-Crisis Recovery," Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, March 2009.

regards to project location and the need for possible relocations, in light of changing security concerns in SAF controlled areas as well as changing needs as IDPs return to areas where they had previously lived. This should be done alongside enhanced coordination across both streams of funding in keeping with international best practices.[26]

- **Ensure data sharing and transparency across the humanitarian and development sector.** Current efforts at coordination have yielded some data sharing across the humanitarian sector, but these efforts must be expanded to include development funding. This is particularly important with regards to bilateral agreements, since not all donors have engaged with coordinating mechanisms. Timely data on active programming and conditions across Sudan is essential to expose needs and support coordinated responses and advocacy.

Few of these recommendations are easy to implement. Indeed, the current crisis in Sudan has accelerated challenges and trends in the education system that are over 40 years in the making and represent deep structural challenges that require serious reform. Consequently, there are no easy solutions. Still, these recommendations point to a means to incrementally reform flawed structures to ensure access to education for all children in Sudan.

[26] "Education in Emergencies coordination Harnessing humanitarian and development architecture for Education 2030 A Report on the Global Partners Project," Initiative for Strengthening Education in Emergencies Coordination, August 2020.

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