

REQUEST RESPONSE: COUNTRY BRIEF

Financing teacher pay in Sudan: Innovative options for sustaining the teaching workforce

Introduction

Teacher pay is central to school functionality, learning outcomes, teacher retention, and the continuity of education in times of crisis. In Sudan, since the outbreak of conflict in April 2023 between the internationally recognised Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), government-payrolled teachers have experienced their wages reduced well below what is needed to feed a typical family, while in many areas teachers have not been paid at all (Abdelhai, 2025; Education Cluster, 2025). This leaves many more teachers dependent on community financing, about which little is known. As of September 2025, an estimated 55 per cent of schools are closed nationwide, leaving close to 75 per cent of school-age children out of school (Save the Children, 2025). One government official estimates that around one-third of teachers have left Sudan (Transitional Education Plan, 2025). This is unfolding amid what the United Nations has called the world's largest humanitarian crisis, including famine, mass displacement, and claims of genocide in the western Darfur region (UNICEF, 2025). Against the backdrop of polycrisis, collapsing education provision and reduced external assistance, this brief examines the possibilities for innovative financing for teacher pay including improved domestic financing.

Background

Sudan was facing an education access and teacher pay crisis prior to the 2019 political transition and 2023 outbreak of civil war. Sudan made significant improvements in basic education provision between 2008/09 and 2018/19, increasing access by 1.7 million children (World Bank, 2021a). Despite this progress, around 6.9 million children in Sudan remained out of school in 2019. The teaching workforce was also under strain. In 2018/19, there were around 248,000 government-payrolled teachers, plus 31,000 volunteers in public schools, and 111,000 teachers in non-government schools (World Bank, 2021a). Yet, salaries for public payrolled teachers in 2018/19 were low: around USD 50 to USD 60 per month for basic education,¹ with supplements in some states and underpayment in other states (Glade & Elbashir, 2025). While the pre-war primary and secondary national pupil to teacher

¹ 75%-90% of GDP per capita in 2018, using World Bank (2021) and IMF WEO data. This compares poorly with low-income countries which pay government teachers more than 200% of GDP per capita on average

ratio was quite low for Sudan's pre-war GDP per capita,² teacher allocation was also inequitable, with several of the poorest states experiencing the most overcrowded classrooms and the highest share of parent-funded volunteer teachers (Savrimootoo et al., 2021; World Bank, 2021a, 2021b). This form of inequality is also inefficient, as it increases the number of teachers required to provide the minimum conditions for learning.³

Sudan's economy is in freefall as a result of the conflict, but the SAF authority retains some spending capability. GDP dropped 40 per cent during 2023 and 2024 while public spending as a share of GDP dropped 25 per cent over the same period, reducing the state's ability to pay its bills by more than half and putting acute pressure on recurrent spending like teacher salaries (World Bank, 2025a). Pre-conflict, public revenues depended in part on oil pumped from South Sudan. Since April 2023, intermittent stoppages lasting up to a year on the main pipeline continue to hobble revenues for both countries, with another stoppage announced by the SAF at the end of October 2025. The SAF authority responded to the conflict by reintroducing a special exchange rate for customs duties⁴ which, along with economic disruption of the domestic economy, contributes to high prices for basic imported goods. Gold exports are very large, but not all due proceeds are likely to reach government coffers.⁵ Economy-wide compound inflation has exceeded 400 per cent over 2023 and 2024, while WFP's basic calorific requirement food basket cost 478 per cent more in September 2025 than it did in the first quarter of 2023.

Status of Teacher Compensation in Sudan

A key driver for decimated teacher salaries is the SAF authority's decision not to adjust them for inflation. Sudan started the war with low teacher salaries relative to GDP per capita: government payrolled salaries were an average 50 USD–60 USD per month for basic education teachers in 2018/19 (World Bank, 2021a). The civilian government attempted to increase salaries and federal transfers to states, and announced large increases in 2022.⁶ But by March 2024, salaries had reportedly eroded from a peak of 128 USD to 498 USD in 2022 to 70 USD–128 USD due to high inflation (Abdelhai, 2025). As of August 2025, monthly base salaries for novice teachers are as low as 3.50–30 USD (Abdelhai, 2025). Nominal salaries (the amount that is paid without being adjusted for inflation) have not been adjusted since October 2022 and are more than 95 per cent lower than those announced in 2022 (Abdelhai, 2025).⁷ As of September 2025, a new public teacher's salary at the lowest rank is equivalent to about 1.5 days of the national average casual labourer pay rate, and pays for less than one-fifth of

² Using 2018/19 figures for Sudan and the latest UNESCO UIS data for other countries. The Pupil to teacher ratio averaged between 13–36 at the state level for the elementary level (World Bank, 2021b). The primary average PTR reported to UIS for 2019 was 27 national, 31 for secondary.

³ The Bashir et al. (2018) guideline developed for SSA was 50:1 (all teachers); GPE 2020's guideline was 40:1 (qualified teachers). The average for Sudan was below this in all states in 2018/19.

⁴ As any charges or taxes must be paid using more international currency for the same Sudanese Pound, than would be the case under the market exchange rate.

⁵ Sudan reported production of 64 tonnes of gold in 2024 (Hogendoorn, 2025) and reported exports of 22 tonnes of gold in 2024 (Central Bank of Sudan, 2025).

⁶ The reported salary scale at its peak was 128 USD–498 USD per month (Radio Tamazuj, 2024). It is unclear whether salary increases were ever implemented beyond Khartoum civil servants (AMB, 2025; Dabanga, 2022a, 2022b). Increases were supported by increased transfers to states, although whether these were equitably implemented or not is unclear– Darfur states have long received less than expected, implementation of the formula for transferring resources is opaque (World Bank, 2021a). If they were implemented, the percent loss to September is over 95% for the lowest-paid salaried teachers.

⁷ This is worse than that of the Assad regime in Syria, which repeatedly uprated civil service salaries during the civil war (Omran, 2023), and the internationally recognised government in Yemen (World Bank, 2025b). Both authorities increased salaries on several occasions – not sufficiently to compensate for compounding inflation– but sufficiently to make some difference to the continued feasibility of teaching.

the monthly calorific requirement at average national prices for one person (WFP, 2025). The top teacher salary would not feed a two-person household.⁸

Teacher pay in Sudan has become highly politicised, exposing teachers to personal risk when collecting salaries or protesting non-payment, which also restricts options for external support. In RSF-controlled areas, it can be too dangerous to collect an SAF-paid salary—reportedly punishable by execution in some cases (Abdelhai, 2025). The security situation therefore limits options for external support. At the same time, SAF have removed teachers from the payroll on allegations of collaboration with the RSF (Abdelhai, 2025). Further, while there is a strong tradition of strikes and protests in Sudan, reports indicate that demonstrations and protests concerning salaries have been met with detainment and violence under the military regime (Global Coalition to Prevent Education from Attack, 2024; Omer, n.d.).

By any standard, the authorities are doing little to help address the high cost of education for households, a key barrier to access. The SAF is likely allocating less than 2 per cent of its spending on education (Transitional Education Plan, 2025), one of the lowest shares globally, which increases pressure on households to cover education costs. A September 2025 survey of over 4,000 households finds that schooling costs are the most common reason for withdrawing children from school (World Bank, 2025c). Seventy-six per cent of households report coping with food costs by cutting non-food spending including on health and education (Ibid.). In 2009, education accounted for 7 per cent of total household spending, considerably higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa average of 2 per cent (Ebaidalla, 2017).⁹ Despite pressures on households, some states have chosen to increase charges for school examinations (AMB, 2023), and even in Red Sea State, charges in the private and public sectors discourage enrolments (Al-Nashadir, 2024). In addition to low allocative priority to education, reductions in education spending are also happening at the payment stage, as the SAF is reportedly reducing teacher salaries by 50 per cent to fund paramilitaries (Sudan Tribune, 2025). While there is little data on the share of household spending on education, community efforts to provide education services are reportedly substantial (Glade & Elbashir, 2025; Global Education Cluster, 2025). In the 2022 Afrobarometer survey, respondents in Sudan ranked education as the second most pressing issue (Resimić, 2025), indicating that demand for education remains very strong, but affordability is a critical constraint.

Most SAF-controlled states continued to pay teacher salaries after the outbreak of the war, with significant variation across states. The Education Cluster tracking tool indicates that as of November 2025, only four states had paid no teacher salaries, while Red Sea, River Nile, Gederaf and Blue Nile States had “fully paid”, and the rest had paid some salaries (Education Cluster, 2025). A March 2024 report from the Sudan Teachers’ Committee, an umbrella teacher union group, indicates similarly broad variation across states. Three states had continued to pay teacher salaries following the outbreak of the conflict: Red Sea (where Port Sudan, the seat of the SAF authority, is located) paid salaries in 11 of the previous 12 months reviewed, while Nile River State paid 9 months, and Northern State paid 8 months (Radio Tamazuj, 2024). The Transitional Education Plan (TEP) reports an additional seven states paying at least some salaries during the war. Interviews indicate that specific state ministers and ministries may have been instrumental in preserving some functionality in specific sectors.

⁸ The average household size in Sudan is nearly six.

⁹ The author reports that almost all households have some education expenditures, based on the national 2014 Household Budget Survey. Spending in Darfur was higher (adjusting for a host of other variables) than in Kordofan, Central, Eastern and Northern areas, matched only by Khartoum where the difference is insignificant. Darfur is the most underprovided area for education on the part of the state (World Bank, 2021b). Lower shares of household expenditure (2–3 percent for school fees only) were reported in 2009 (World Bank, 2012); overall, households spent more than the government, confirmed in 2014/15 data. The SSA average is around 2 percent of household income (Figure 5, Le Nestour et al., 2020).

Currently, external assistance for teacher incentives is limited, fragmented, and poorly documented publicly. Estimated coverage of teachers' incentives through external programming is likely less than one-tenth of total teachers remaining in Sudan.¹⁰ Humanitarian funding for education in Sudan in 2025 totalled 21.7 million USD, around 1.5 per cent of the OCHA-tracked total (OCHA FTS, 2025). This is around the same amount as in 2024 when 6,967 teacher stipends were funded (UNICEF, 2025). Large scale external support for teachers includes a USD 20 million GPE-funded, UNICEF/Save the Children-implemented project, the Provision of Quality Education for Crisis-Affected Children (2023-2025) which covers 1,500 teachers and facilitators for safe learning spaces with 800 USD each, payable in August, September and October during two years (the school year is intended to start in September; the hunger season typically lasts until the same month, which might account for this pattern). In addition, UNICEF's 2024 reopening programme involved school grants, and Save the Children's 2025 programming involves teacher incentives in a maximum 400 schools.¹¹ A 42 million USD GPE-funded, World Bank-supervised, UNICEF-implemented Primary Education Emergency Support Project (PEESP) implemented by UNICEF (November 2024-2026) supports 3,000 schools with grants, a portion of which can be used for teachers for incentives. School grants amount to an average of around 4,400 USD per school over the life of the project¹² (World Bank, 2024a). If these 3,000 schools were to spend half their grant on four sets of teacher incentives each,¹³ and the project lasts for three years, this would work out to around 15 USD per teacher per month. Across all externally financed teacher incentive schemes, little information is publicly available on the number of months, the value of teacher incentives, the extent of community co-financing or other features. The amount of external assistance in total falls short of what would be required for a large-scale national stipend programme. Cash transfer and in-kind coverage of the population in Sudan are limited and are likely to remain so. This limits the scope to pay teachers stipends as a top-up to a base cash transfer, which could make support more efficient by reaching more teachers and supporting a minimal standard of living with limited funding.

Status of the teacher payment chain

There are four stages in the payment chain between the source of funds and the teacher. First, **funds must be allocated in the budget and managed**. Second, **payroll systems need to include the correct teachers**. Third, **teachers must be able to access their pay** (for example, through banks, mobile money or cash). Finally, **there needs to be some form of verification of whether teachers are in post and working** (Dolan et al., 2012). At each of these stages, there is the option to work full through government systems or to "unbundle" specific functions and deliver them through other actors. These decisions are often shaped by how the World Bank classify the governing authority (e.g. designation as a de facto authority limits cooperation and use of country systems) alongside individual donor assessments of whether government processes are sound enough to use for externally funded projects. In Sudan, this is further complicated by the large role played by states in operating their teacher payrolls. On the positive side, this might have bolstered system resilience, with stronger states able to continue to be functional and sound in effectively paying teachers, even if the governing authority is not.

¹⁰ This estimate is subject to uncertainty, both in the number of teachers under SAF control and the teacher incentive coverage. The following paragraph provides the available information.

¹¹ ECW also have mentioned support for teacher incentives in their MYRP which ran until 2024, with planned spend of 2.3 million USD, around double the GPE line for facilitators and teachers in the Provision of Quality Education for Crisis-Affected Children project. It is not clear how much of this was funded and implemented. Issues with the completeness and transparency of humanitarian reporting around support for teachers are discussed in Homonchuk et al., (2025).

¹² Net of whatever UNICEF budgets in that component line as costs of delivery.

¹³ Based on the assumption that the project supports smaller, more rural primary schools.

Of the four stages in the teacher payment chain, the largest gaps lie in government financial management and the limited availability of external financing. Another critical weakness is the lack of data systems and reliable information on how many teachers remain in Sudan, the quantity of community resources and state resources they are receiving, and where they are located. By contrast, access to payments appears to be the most functional stage, although it was profoundly disrupted in 2023 (Siddig, 2023). Outside of government systems, cash delivery mechanisms used by donors and the private sector (banks and mobile network operators) are apparently functional in many Port Sudan-controlled localities, although some modalities require a smartphone for access,¹⁴ which are more difficult to access in RSF areas. Cash transfers have been delivered through several modalities, depending on the state, to get cash to individual beneficiaries and groups. Building on this existing experience, group cash transfer procedures may be a promising option to transfer money to communities to part-finance schools where external resources are available.

Financing options in the recovery phase

Several new options may become available in a future recovery and normalisation phase in Sudan. Their relevance and sequencing are briefly discussed below.

Any tax increase on fuel or telecoms could further raise essential household and aid costs during the crisis and immediately afterwards. For example, fuel price surges are linked to extreme sorghum shortages (WFP October 2025 Monitor). The SAF authority has taken measures to adapt domestic revenue collection by raising effective customs duties. Careful attention to the incidence and design of future efforts to increase revenues in the light of faltering oil revenues could assist with more effective, fairer taxation, and could be the subject of external dialogue.

Tobacco taxes are a more immediately relevant option, but the tax base for imports is small. Tobacco imports, which can be targets for increased taxation with positive social effects in the form of reduced health burdens, are also relatively low in value in Sudan at USD 39 million based on analysis of UN COMTRADE pre-war data. A low average cigarette price of just 35 US cents per pack, according to WHO's 2024 Cost Recovery and Revenue Estimator, suggests that there is substantial scope in the longer term for increasing revenue and ideally ringfencing this revenue for social services. Although imports of tobacco may have increased as local production was disrupted, it is probable that consumption has been curbed by the cost of survival.

Additional international borrowing is out of the question for some time after recovery and normalisation begin, as Sudan remains debt-distressed and both military-led authorities are internationally estranged. Furthermore, Sudan is currently midway through the most generous debt forgiveness process, the Highly Indebted Poor Countries process, which offers generous debt relief when completed. This places debt-for-sector spending swaps to the benefit of the education sector specifically (such as those effected in Cote d'Ivoire in 2025) low down the list of concerns far into the recovery phase, as it typically takes place after more general debt forgiveness processes have concluded.

International remittances appear limited compared to similar countries. Reported remittances to Sudan were around 2 per cent of GDP in 2024 (World Bank, 2024b), which limits its potential for matching community contributions to schools or as a taxation base, compared to other conflict-affected countries.

¹⁴ The Bankak website suggests some functions are available via USSD however, which doesn't require a smartphone. Any modern cell phone will suffice for USSD. Bankak has been used to pay teachers and offers some flexibility if teachers are relocated.

Islamic giving is highly procyclical—its capability is linked to current economic health—and in Sudan has been focused on health and direct cash assistance. While there is potential for Islamic giving to play an important role, it remains small relative to social and education needs and to Sudan's economy.¹⁵ In Sudan particularly, its potential is closely linked to state capacity. *Aqwaf* refers to donated assets that are often used for the repair and construction of religious buildings. *Zakat* is an annual wealth contribution, typically used for direct cash transfers to the poorest families. Domestically-funded *Zakat* donations and *Awqaf* property rents will fall during conflict as the economy shrinks. Government intervention in Islamic finance in Sudan has been extensive compared to other countries (Machado et al., 2018), which is likely to have depressed its potential to raise resources as state capability has retreated. Some *Zakat* agency functionality was reported in 2023, with few details available (Siddig, 2023). Pre-war, government-collected *Zakat* provided many households with relief and part-funded health insurance according to official records, but these transfers were small in size on average (Abbas, 2024; Machado et al., 2018), and household survey respondents reported low rates of receipt of cash transfers.

Potential avenues for immediate policy

Advocate for and incentivise an increase in public spending for education, including for teacher salaries, which could be supported by an earmarked resource export tax. Even under present circumstances, the SAF government could afford to spend far more on education. Public spending on education was an extraordinarily low 2 per cent of total public expenditure in 2023 (Local Education Group Sudan, 2025); it is likely to have reduced since then. This is around the same as the share in the 1990s but represents a large decline from the average 11% share the sector received from 2009 to 2017 (Glade & Elbashir, 2025) and is among the lowest in the world. The share of military spending by the SAF authority is not clear, but is likely extremely high.

A modest export tax on gold could fund substantial additional support for teachers. Revenues from gold and other exports, and from control of border points, are key to sustaining war efforts for both the SAF and RSF (Hogendoorn, 2025). If we assume that around two-thirds of the 2018/19 national payrolled teacher count is under SAF control (as per the figures used by the Education Cluster, 2025), and one-third of teachers have exited, as reported in the Transitional Education Plan, then adding a 2% export tax to SAF-controlled gold could fund a 50 USD a month addition to all teachers' salaries in SAF areas plus substantial non-salary outlays. Increased support for teachers could be linked to conditions for other forms of external engagement with SAF.

The SAF government has exhibited limited interest in financing teacher pay at a reasonable level, but is likely capable of doing far more for teachers without much affecting other spending priorities or finding new revenue sources. Substantially increasing allocations to education would still account for only a modest slice of expenditure for SAF. SAF payments of 50 USD per month to those remaining teachers would cost 66 million USD per year based on the 2018/19 teacher counts (World Bank, 2021a). This is equivalent to roughly 3.5% of projected 2024 government spending (IMF WEO estimate), or just 0.2 per cent of 2024 GDP; the inflationary risk stems likely from military, not civil spending (although there are no recent figures to confirm this). Including volunteer and non-state teachers would increase these figures only marginally, and well within affordable totals. While there are limited precedents for authorities in conflicts choosing to increase expenditure for a social purpose, there are many examples of governments and de facto authorities being aggressive in finding revenues during

¹⁵ In common with other conflict-affected counties in MENA. (Machado et al., 2018; Saad et al., 2019)

conflicts- including through turnover taxes,¹⁶ export taxes or specific levies which purportedly fund education, when they choose to do so (Awsat, 2023; Bandula-Irwin et al., 2022).

In the short-term, strengthen transparency and engagement at the state level. The fact that at least 10 (possibly up to 14) states have made some effort to pay teachers suggests that resource is an important constraint, and most resources likely remain under federal control. It is unclear how far states can realistically increase state-level finance as there is little information on their revenue and spending. A tandem effort to try to establish a dialogue with some states, regularise basic state revenue and expenditure information,¹⁷ and increase information on federal support could form an initial step. This would expand on valuable work being done by the teacher unions, the Education Cluster, and other international partners. It is likely that some immediate needs of teachers could be addressed through external assistance. Experience from South Sudan suggests that such efforts are unlikely to be successful without engaging decision makers in state and federal ministries of finance and the political-military leadership—wherever financing decisions ultimately sit—rather than only engaging the education ministry and state education ministry. Somalia offers a potential model where the World Bank provided analytical support to a politically led Financial Governance Committee, which freed up resources for social sectors by targeting other leakages such as army food procurement and reducing their size (Davies et al., 2021), however the context is quite distinct partly due to the centrality of state funding of education in Sudan and relative stability in Somalia.

Learn from cash transfer protocols to streamline grants to communities for school running costs, including teacher incentives. This is particularly relevant in RSF-controlled areas and for schools not supported by states. The largest ongoing project listed above, the GPE/World Bank/UNICEF PEESP, covers less than one-fifth of the pre-war school count of over 20,000 (Transitional Education Plan, 2025), leaving many schools unsupported, even after accounting for school closures. The value of the funded school grants cannot support all teachers with a meaningful stipend. If school grants were large enough, several teachers could be paid relying on a self-governing community arrangement with streamlined administration following group cash transfer protocols, which are used for grants of up to 7,000 USD in some contexts (interview and CALP Network, 2024). The education sector could have the option to combine this with communication for development interventions aimed at raising and efficiently spending community resources on education to the extent possible (example activities are described in South Sudan by Windle Trust International n.d.) or ensuring that paid teachers are attending and teaching. Paying teachers frequently and using cash transfer working group calculations to vary the value of the grant according to the local cost of food could increase equity and effectiveness. Critically, this would require additional and likely external assistance to become available; education's share of aid has long been low in Sudan (See table 1, below). MENA regional official donor financing for education in conflict (from Türkiye, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), UAE and Qatar) has been very extensive in Syria and Yemen. It has included large-scale budget support in Yemen and quasi-budget support for salaries in Syria in 2025. UAE and KSA/Qatar's interests in Sudan are particularly complex, as they have supported opposite sides of the conflict.

Key areas identified for further research are: (1) community-based education systems in Sudan.

There are significant community-level education systems as well as religiously-affiliated education provision. Yet, there is limited information on how these community-based education systems (e.g.

¹⁶ Turnover taxes are a tax on total transactions or gross sales usually applicable to all sales of commodities by manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers. They are often adopted in low-capability situations. They are easy to assess, but in the absence of profitable activities, they may be difficult to pay. The risk in the current context is that introduction of new charges by either authority may be harmful and may not reach the education sector or other social sectors.

¹⁷ The TEP already includes an undertaking to engage state governments, and operationalising that, ensuring transparency of expenditure execution and receipt of transfers could be a first priority.

Qur’anic Khalawi schools and Emergency Response Room-led education) are financed, including at the household and community level, and how these hyper-local financing arrangements shape who can access schooling, the quality of learning, and the continuity of education amidst conflict. Addressing this evidence gap would ultimately shed light on how best to provide external or state support, which ensures access particularly for groups of children who are often left behind.

(2) State and federal fiscal functionality. There is little recent evidence on how states are funding their education activities, and in particular what has happened to “volunteer” teachers, who were partly state-funded according to a 2021 four-state study (World Bank, 2021c). This scope of work would shed light on how states have been supporting teacher (and volunteer teacher) cash and non-salary compensation over the last 12 months and the frequency, coverage, and timeliness of salary payments. This would require careful coordination with envisaged future GPE-funded work under PEESP to ensure complementarity, alongside substantial access to information from the state and federal authorities. It is likely that both topics might have wider interest across social sectors where there is significant authority interest and responsibility, including health.

Official Development Aid to Sudan, 2018–2023

Table 1: Disbursed aid, USD millions

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sudan total ODA	981	1,550	2,482	5,039	1,619	1,495
Education development	34	26	32	37	37	22
Per cent of total	3.5%	1.7%	1.3%	0.7%	2.3%	1.5%
Budget support (all-sector)	40	372	946	1,600	0	0
Other development	532	641	899	2,594	855	578
Humanitarian aid:	374	511	605	809	727	895
- mentions school or education	0.9	3.8	33.4	6.0	16.1	7.1
<i>Per cent of humanitarian aid</i>	0.3%	0.7%	5.5%	0.7%	2.2%	0.8%
<i>Per cent Humanitarian and development aid attributable to education</i>	3.6%	1.9%	2.6%	0.9%	3.3%	1.9%

Source: OECD. Note: excludes spend in donor countries. OECD FTS data may differ. Mentions school or education includes multi-sector projects.

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