

**UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA**

Major Research Paper

**The Role of Education in Creating Peace, Unity, and a National Identity in South Sudan**

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## Disclaimer and Inquiries

This research paper was completed as part of the author's program requirements as a student of the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa. The views and opinions stated herein are those of the author solely and do not necessarily represent those of the supervisor, reader, department nor institute. Any inquiries on this work should be directed to the address below:

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## List of Acronyms

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
DFID	United Kingdom’s Department for International Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
GESP I	General Education Strategic Plan 2012-2017
GESP II	General Education Strategic Plan 2017-2022
GoSS	Government of South Sudan
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GTS	Go To School initiative
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IIEP	International Institute for Education Planning
MoE	Ministry of Education (Afghanistan)
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoGEI	Ministry of General Education and Instruction
NCP	National Congress Party
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PE	Physical Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPLM/A	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Sudan People’s Liberation Army
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
ZINTEC	Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course

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## Introduction

### Research Context

As the world's newest independent state, South Sudan faces considerable challenges in both creating functioning institutions and rebuilding a society ravaged by decades of civil conflict. Before South Sudan's independence, the conflict predominantly existed between the mostly Muslim North and the largely Christian, but ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse South. After Independence in 2011, South Sudan has been in internal civil conflict for most of its time as an independent state. In instances of civil conflict, schools and the education sector can play dual roles as both catalysts of conflict and integral institutions in the rebuilding process. Before South Sudan's independence, education reflected and contributed to the North's domination over and oppression of the South Sudanese, a relationship rooted in policies from the Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule. The denial of education to Southern Sudan was one of the main grievances of the civil war between the North and the South (Breidlid 2013). The educational landscape and the civil war have had lasting implications on South Sudan's ability to develop and stabilize. Only 27% of adults in South Sudan are literate and roughly 2% have completed primary school (Africa Research Bulletin 2012).

Education is often a casualty of conflict and South Sudan is no exception to this rule. The civil conflict has led to millions of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), low enrolment rates, and a critical shortage of trained teachers and learning materials. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 2.2 million school-aged children are out of school and over 70% of primary school teachers are untrained (UNICEF 2019a). In addition to a lack of educational infrastructure, widespread hunger and malnutrition, the recruitment of child soldiers, and gender-based violence compound the challenges children face in receiving quality education. Further, a February 2020 report of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan found

that intentional human rights violations continue to be used as war tactics (A/HRC/43/56). Despite these challenges, South Sudan has begun to focus on peace- and state-building in the brief and intermittent periods of peace.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (presently the Ministry of General Education and Instruction) showed commitment to strengthening and reforming the education sector by developing a National Curriculum Framework and the General Education Strategic Plans (GESP) 2012-2017 and 2017-2022. With the help of development agencies and partners, South Sudan has created a curriculum that “is designed to help young people learn about their shared national identity” and “supports key values for the country including justice, democracy, tolerance and respect” (Maphalala 2015). This curriculum aligns with the 2011 Transitional Constitution of South Sudan, their 2012 General Education Act, and the South Sudan Vision 2040, which aspire “to build an educated and informed nation by 2040” (GESP 2012, p. 15). Within the curriculum, there are seven goals for the broader education sector; one of the goals is to “promote national unity and cohesion” (MoEST 2015, p. 2). While the formation of a national identity can help post-conflict countries overcome differences, nationalism can also be associated with exclusionary policies (Keels 2018). How South Sudan moves forward in respecting its citizens’ ethnic diversity, acknowledging its history of conflict, and teaching learners to actively engage and think critically will be a key feature of the education system.

### Research Questions and Objectives

This research asks the following questions: how can education in a broader national context relate and contribute to reconciliation, peace, national unity, and/or a national identity? To what extent does South Sudan’s education sector and the guidelines set out by the new national curriculum promote unity and reconciliation? On a deeper level, what is the nature of peace, national identity, and unity being promoted? How does this kind of peace, unity, reconciliation,

and/or identity compare to what literature and previous experiences from other contexts have shown to be sustainable or desirable in the long term? Because of the extensive conflict and trauma experienced by the South Sudanese population, this research also examines how the education sector can support and mitigate these challenges.

### Methodology

The methodology informing this research is desk-based, mostly secondary research. This research includes an in-depth examination of national and international policy documents, reports, national peace agreements and scholarly work. These sources primarily covered: (a) post-conflict reconstruction; (b) education in post-conflict reconstruction; (c) education in South Sudan; and (d) national identity formation. I have paid particular attention to the National Curriculum Framework and the General Education Strategic Plans 2012-2017 and 2017-2022. Although published works expressing South Sudanese voices are limited, I found one website, “PaanLuel Wël”, that shares news stories and blog posts written by South Sudanese authors. By following the ‘Books & Education’ tab, several articles written within the last year were listed. These blog posts reflect the opinions of educated individuals (who were mostly educated outside of South Sudan) and are therefore a minority population. While I cite very few of these authors, I am appreciative of their work for bolstering my understanding of South Sudanese viewpoints.

To analyze the textual data, I have undertaken a content analysis. With this approach, I was able to analyze and code for recurring concepts and issues raised in the literature and relate these to broader national priorities and the peacebuilding process. By employing a directed content analysis, I used existing theories and prior research to identify “key concepts [and] variables as initial coding categories” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1281). I began with broader themes, including education in conflict and post-conflict settings, education reforms in South Sudan, and education reforms in other contexts. Within these themes, I identified sub-themes, including the

exclusion of minorities, language as a contributor to national identity, and the role of history teaching. In my examination of the national curriculum, I searched for key terms including peace, human rights, unity, reconciliation, and identity, both by hand and with the Adobe Reader search feature. Because my dataset was relatively small, I did not require a data analysis software. Microsoft Word and Excel and Adobe Reader were used to organize my data by theme and then sub-theme, write notes, draw comparisons, and create tables.

The findings of this study are limited by a lack of fieldwork. Without the ability to observe South Sudanese classes and their dynamics, I cannot adequately assess the reality on the ground. Nonetheless, because of the wealth of existing research on education in other post-conflict settings, I have utilized this literature pertaining to other contexts to draw comparisons and make inferences to the experience of South Sudan. For obvious reasons, however, there is little academic literature surrounding South Sudan's education sector. I found this to be both a challenge and an opportunity.

### Framework

Constructivist and institutionalist frameworks inform the basis of this research. Adopting a constructivist lens recognizes the importance of existing societal structures and institutions. This is particularly relevant in studying South Sudan, where existing institutions and norms are in place at the same time as novel state institutions are forming. Although constructivism as a framework does not necessarily provide explanations or solutions, it is useful in understanding complex issues and behaviours (Conteh-Morgan 2005). In determining how to create conditions of long-lasting peace and stability, it is important to understand where certain social and political norms and discourses stem from and how they have grown and changed. Constructivism is a valuable lens in this regard, as it recognizes the malleable nature of states' identities and interests (Tadros 2012). In studying the formation of national unity and a new state identity in South Sudan, a constructivist lens can illuminate how new educational priorities and messaging compare to previous discourses.

Of particular importance to this study is the notion that identities are socially constructed. One of three central claims of constructivism identified by Wendt (1994) is that “state identities and interests are in important part constructed by [intersubjective structures in the state system], rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics” (p. 385). In other words, identities and interests are constructed and malleable, rather than fixed. Notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ play “a central role in defining and structuring both interests and norms of behaviour” in constructivist theory (Jackson 2009, p. 177). This self/other dichotomy is relevant in the case of South Sudan, where a large aspect of their identity rested on standing “unified against a traditional enemy Other” (Vanner, Akseer & Kovinthan 2017, p. 46). The relationship between agents and structures finds that “structures and agents are inter-dependent and co-constitutive in the construction of conflict” (Jackson 2009, p. 179). Because of this intimate relationship, reforming structures and institutions – in this case education – that can contribute to the perpetuation of conflict is critical in ensuring that they no longer contribute to harmful norms and wider conflict.

Further, the new curriculum for South Sudan was created based on a constructivist approach to learning (MoEST 2015), arguing that knowledge is constructed and “that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning” (McLeod 2019). Given the importance of learning about the history of conflict and ethnic divisions, it is promising that culture and heritage are strongly reflected in the curriculum and that the lived experiences and knowledges of the population will be considered. Because decades of civil conflict in Southern and South Sudan have considerably damaged existing institutions and “left the country with a shattered infrastructure” (GESP 2012, p. 13), the dismantling of harmful state institutions that perpetuate inequality and violence is important in South Sudan’s transition to peace. Because in Sudan prior to 2011, “education [had] contributed to the polarized construction of ethnic identities that

contributed to violent conflict” (King 2005, p. 908), education should also be able to play a role in reconstructing these identities through a reformed curriculum.

Institutionalism “considers the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior” (Scott 2004, p. 2). Because South Sudan is a state with established, albeit informal, social norms and some institutions, this research illuminates whether the promotion of unity and reconciliation through education can assist in overcoming long-standing conflict and discriminatory processes and norms. As constructivism and institutionalism can have mutually exclusive connotations, this paper uses the two frameworks simultaneously to understand the social construction of institutions. This constructivist approach to institutionalism views institutions as being socially constructed and recognizes the power and value that society has collectively given to certain customs, traditions and ideas that do not tangibly exist (e.g. money, states, legal systems) (Harari 2015). Understanding how educational and peacebuilding institutions in South Sudan have been and continue to be socially constructed is critical to my analysis of the education sector’s ability to promote unity and reconciliation.

## Organization

This research paper is organized into five sections. In the first section, I examine the relationship between conflict and education. This section examines the effects, both positive and negative, of education in conflict-affected societies. In Chapter 2, I discuss South Sudan’s relationship with education, from colonial occupation to the time of writing. Chapter 3 examines the recent efforts by the South Sudanese government, including their strategic plans and national curriculum framework. In this section I begin to consider how the government of South Sudan is using the education sector to promote national unity and national identity. Chapter 4 discusses the experiences of Afghanistan, South Africa and Rwanda and determines if there are considerations

that can be applied to South Sudan. While each context is unique, some overarching themes and lessons are informative to my analysis of South Sudan's education sector. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of this research and considers if the educational reforms in South Sudan can contribute to sustained peace, reconciliation, and unity.

## Chapter 1: Education in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The damaging effects of armed conflict on society are well-known and education in particular is severely affected by conflict. There are often direct and physical effects, such as schools being targets of military attacks or appropriated for use as military barracks or refugee shelters (Davies 2004). There are also long-term social and psychological implications, such as a disruption in the learning process, children being used as child soldiers, and traumatized populations (Davies 2004). However, the literature also considers the inverse relationship between education and conflict, namely how education systems play a positive role in peace processes, as well as how education systems may create and/or perpetuate conflict. Formal education can shape “the understandings, attitudes, and ultimately, the behavior of individuals” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 9). In light of this capability, there is an increasing focus on not only the provision of education in countries emerging from conflict, but also the nature and quality of the education. Education systems can often be key actors in the incitement of conflict, such as through the teaching of history, religion, and languages. The holistic approach to conflict resolution implied by constructivism seeks to ensure that all harmful narratives, beliefs, ideologies, and discourses are addressed, and the education sector is a key vehicle in embodying this broader institutional change.

Traditionally, humanitarian and development efforts in post-conflict societies focused on “issues related directly to nutrition, healthcare and shelter, relegating education to the developmental sphere once a country [is] stabilized” (Mendenhall 2014, p. 67). However, the last few decades have brought a greater awareness that rebuilding the education sector is essential for sustainable development and peace. The education sector is now seen as “a core component in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies” (Barrios-Tao et al. 2017, p. 2). While rebuilding an education system can pose challenges, successfully doing so “can help underpin the peace process,

build government legitimacy and set a country back on course to recovery” (Barakat et al. 2013, p. 125). However, that education can also act as a catalyst of conflict and reproduce the ideas of the various aggrieved groups in a divided society is also recognized. In societies emerging from conflict, governments must decide to either “reconstruct a pre-conflict education system or transform it in order to address the conflict’s root causes” (Vanner et al. 2017, p. 33). Despite the growing recognition of the value in reconstructing education following a conflict, it “remains a low priority in situations of conflict [and] receives just 2% of humanitarian aid and only 38% of emergency aid requests for education are met” (Smith 2014, p. 113).

### Education as a Catalyst of Conflict

There is a “growing recognition of the role that schools and education systems can play in reproducing many of the factors that underlie much civil conflict” (Buckland 2005, p. 9). The denial of education to certain groups, the manipulation of curriculum and learning materials, and racial or ethnic discrimination are some examples of ways in which the education system can incite or perpetuate conflict. There are numerous cases where ethnic groups, and social groups more broadly “have been denied access to educational resources and, therefore, excluded from full participation in the economic and social life of a country” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 9). In many places, this exclusionary practice finds its roots in colonial practices (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). This was the case in Sudan when British-Egyptian colonizers provided education preferentially to those in the north. Education has become a highly valuable commodity, such that when it is unequally allocated, it “has been a serious source of friction that has frequently led to confrontation” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 9). Because education policies and programs can exacerbate conflict, close attention needs to be paid to how education is reconstructed.

Schools themselves can be sites of violence, both physically and in terms of implicit and explicit messaging. In many countries, “schools have been places of intimidation and violence”

with experiences of armed recruitment and gender-based violence being common occurrences (King 2011). The use of violence both in and out of classrooms shows children that violence is an appropriate mechanism for conflict resolution. Additionally, the contents of curricula and learning materials “can normalize violence and war, particularly when taught in a school context that emphasizes unquestioning obedience to authority” (Vanner, Levi & Akseer 2019, p. 6). In societies with ethnic conflict, teachers are often forced to use learning materials that “either homogenize diversity and difference or worse, present it as a threat to be feared and eliminated” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 12). Further, teachers may favour students from certain ethnic groups over others and display negative attitudes towards students from other ethnicities, races or religions (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). Feelings of insecurity, violence, and marginalization can often become indoctrinated into the minds of children and feed into civil conflict occurring outside the classroom.

### Role of Education in Peacebuilding

The value of education cannot be overstated. In the United Nations General Assembly Resolution (73/25) establishing the International Day of Education, the following was recognized:

“[education] increases the productivity of individuals and strengthens the potential for economic growth, develops the skills needed for decent work, develops the professional skills needed for sustainable development, including in the fields of water and sanitation, green energy and the conservation of natural resources, helps to eradicate poverty and hunger, contributes to improved health, promotes gender equality and can reduce inequality, and promotes peace, the rule of law and respect for human rights” (2018).

Despite its potential to incite or perpetuate conflict, education can also instill new values and attitudes, promote equitable development, build resilience to conflict (Buckland 2005) and “potentially contribute towards future peacebuilding” (Smith 2014, p. 122). In recovering from conflict, studies have shown that a return to school also reflects a return to “a sense of normalcy in the midst of chaos and [can provide] a protective environment and a sense of continuity for young people” (Buckland 2005, p. 21). Further, education and schools can provide physically safe

spaces for children to learn, interact with trusted adults and peers, and receive food and medical attention (Smith 2014).

Broadly speaking, education is “understood to provide the means for the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, and thence for development” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 29). Not only does education serve as a means of instilling new knowledge and skills, it is also a fundamental tool that facilitates change across other sectors (Smith 2014; Tidwell 2004). Formal education is important for teaching children literacy and numeracy skills, as well as values such as cooperation and a respect for and understanding of differences. In addition to creating a sense of normalcy and stability, education can teach children about and promote their rights and responsibilities, which can serve to provide long-term benefits to society (Smith 2014). Critical thinking and problem-solving skills fostered in schools can also equip children to be better protected against “exploitation and harm, abduction, child soldiering, and sexual and gender-based violence” (Smith 2014, p. 114). Constructivism recognizes that “children do not come to the classroom as blank slates [but] bring with them the attitudes, values and behaviour of their societies beyond the classroom walls” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000 p. 3). The ability of education to stimulate a change in ideas and understandings in broader society speaks to the need for robust educational reforms in societies engaged in conflict.

### National Identity and Unity Through Education

Within a constructivist framework, the concept of identity is central. As previously mentioned, constructivism sees identity as being socially constructed, and therefore “context-dependent, highly malleable and continuously evolving” (Jackson 2009, p. 177). This construction of identity is often referred to in terms of a ‘self’ and an ‘other’ and in conflict situations, this ‘other’ is often negative and deeply threatening (Jackson 2009). Certain actors, such as political and cultural elites, and history, culture, ideology and religion play key roles in the construction of

identity (Jackson 2009, p. 179). Given that many of these themes and norms are taught and reinforced in schools, education systems naturally play a large role in the creation of identities. As mentioned above, education can either serve to reinforce an antagonizing view of the ‘other’, and thus perpetuate conflict, or it can attempt to construct an identity in the absence of this enemy other. Although national identity formation cuts across any subject, the teaching of history and citizenship are particularly salient in this regard (Torney 2006, p. 316). The way in which history is taught can be categorized into three main approaches: (1) a single narrative of history; (2) multiperspectivity; or (3) avoidance (Skårås 2019). In post-conflict settings, single narratives and/or avoidance are common, due to sensitivities in the classroom. Because social and cultural values, and therefore group and national identities are passed from generation to generation through the education sector (Smith 2014), it is vital that the messaging in schools peaceful and promotes co-existence.

Because schools and education systems can play a strong role in the creation of identity, this can either harm or promote national unity. Singing the national anthem, displaying portraits of leaders, and celebrating national days are some ways in which schools encourage students to cultivate loyalty to their country (Smith 2014). As education systems “tend to reproduce the skills, values, attitudes, and social relations of dominant groups in society” (Buckland 2005, p. 9), harmful and exclusionary ideas can be indoctrinated into young and susceptible minds. In ethnically divided societies, schools can make minority children feel inferior and “children of majority groups learn to think of themselves as being better than others” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 15). This is particularly dangerous in fostering feelings of exclusion and resentment and can be seen in instances such as the targeted discrimination against Tutsi students in Rwanda prior to the 1994 genocide. However, the promotion of a national identity in schools can be beneficial in rebuilding and connecting a previously divided society. In schools, individuals can learn how to

co-exist and collaborate peacefully, respect individuals and their differences, and develop an identity based on broader shared culture and history. Further, as the border between schools and society is permeable, “students may carry non-confrontational and tolerant attitudes from the classroom into the broader community” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 4).

## Chapter 2: South Sudan's Complicated History with Education

In order to understand the current challenges faced by South Sudan, it is critical to understand its history with colonialism. A somewhat unique case, Sudan was occupied by a joint Anglo-Egyptian condominium from 1899-1956. Differing policies of the British and the Egyptians during this time “resulted in a separate administration and development for the south and the north” (Skårås, Carsillo & Breidlid 2019, p. 2), which has had lasting implications on the development of South Sudan. The experience of South Sudan is particular, as it was arguably colonized again by northern Sudan following independence from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in 1956. Marginalization and suppression were still felt in the mainly Christian south, as “they found the new state basing itself on Arab and Islamic identity” (Skårås 2019, p. 518). South Sudan has a diverse population with 64 distinct ethno-lingual groups (IIEP-UNESCO 2017). Although the population is predominantly Christian (approximately 60.5%), roughly 32.9% of South Sudanese practice traditional African religions and 6.2% are Muslim (Pew Research Centre 2016). It is largely because of this diversity that southern Sudan felt marginalized by the imposition of Islamic values and began to resist and subsequently fight for independence.

The denial of education and broader opportunities to the southern population in Sudan is an important factor in the incitement of civil conflict in 1955 and again in 1972. Unfortunately, the secession of South Sudan in 2011 did not put an end to the civil conflict and strain on the education sector. Presently, the challenges of the education sector in South Sudan are not dissimilar to those in many other African countries: “low or no teacher salaries, lack of materials for teaching and learning, lack of qualified teachers, and overcrowded classrooms” (Skårås 2019, p. 519). This section examines the history of southern/South Sudan from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium until present day in an attempt to understand the country's relationship with education. The deeply

rooted and long-standing history of conflict and societal division in South Sudan represents a need for holistic transformation targeting the harmful and divisive norms prevalent across institutions.

### Anglo-Egyptian Condominium

Deprivation of formal education in southern Sudan can be traced back to the time of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1956). For the majority of this colonial period, “Sudan was ruled as two Sudans, as the British sought to separate the predominantly Islamic and Arabic-speaking North from the multireligious and multilingual South” (Seri-Hersch 2017, p. 1). Given this separation, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Government adopted vastly different educational policies in the North and the South and particularly in the South, “the government opted for tolerating rather than fostering education” (Seri-Hersch 2017, p. 7). For the colonial rulers, there was a fear that through expanding formal education to southern Sudan, tribal leaders would be less effective and these communities would be more difficult to govern (Vanner et al. 2019). It was not until the 1920s that the government allowed for other schools to open in the south to complement the existing missionary schools (Sanderson 1962). Upon the visitation of education department officials in 1921, it was noted that “in the North Arab and Muslim traditions provided a useful basis for educational development but in the South there was no homogeneity of culture and no older civilization on which to build” (Sanderson 1962, p. 111). The education system in southern Sudan began to develop slowly, but remained considerably less developed than the north.

### Independence (1956-2005)

Following independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, the education sector in Sudan was characterized by the North’s imposition of Islamic law, practices, and education onto Southern Sudan. The unequal educational opportunities imposed by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium left education in the south severely under-developed (Vanner et al. 2017). Khartoum and the more educated North were given power and became responsible for managing the affairs of the state, serving to further marginalize the south. To the North, southern Sudan was seen as “an obstacle to

the spreading of Islam further south in Africa” (Breidlid 2013, p. 117). The subsequent Arabization and Islamization of the state and education curriculum led education issues to become “a central site for resistance in the south” (Skårås et al. 2019, p. 2). For the predominantly Christian south, the ensuing feelings of resentment and marginalization were a key factor in the incitement of both civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005) (Breidlid 2013; Novelli et al. 2016; Skårås et al. 2019).

In 1990, the president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir established an education system based Islamic values and began to develop textbooks and curricula to reflect this (Breidlid 2012; Vanner et al. 2017). It is clear that al-Bashir’s intention was to transfer Islamic principles, “both individually and institutionally, from one generation to the next in the heterogeneous Sudan” (Breidlid 2013, p. 119). Although South Sudan is diverse, the war and opposition to the north ultimately served to bind southerners together across ethnic lines (Skårås 2019). For several decades, a primary aspect of southern Sudanese identity was rooted in their resistance to Arab and Islamic identity (Skårås & Breidlid 2016). This has posed ongoing challenges for the education sector in constructing a national identity in the absence of an enemy ‘other’. Breidlid (2013) suggests that South Sudanese learning materials should attempt to establish an “identity in the absence of the Other (the North), and to minimize suspicion/animosities in relation to another Other (i.e. other ethnic groups)” (p. 45). However, until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the South Sudanese had very little capacity to ameliorate their education sector, due to the country being controlled by the Islamic North and the ongoing ethnic conflict.

#### Post CPA (2005)

On 9 January 2005, the CPA was signed, ending “the bitter and brutal twenty-one-year war” between the National Congress Party (NCP)-dominated Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A) (Human Rights Watch

2006, p.1). In the brief period of peace from 2005 to 2011, there were some efforts to improve the education sector in South Sudan, largely owing to the support of external organizations and donors. In this time, due to the “strong presence of international development partners, the singular ambitions of the national government, and high demand for education by the local population” (Kim et al 2011, p. 285) education in South Sudan started to develop. From 2006 to 2009, the number of students in primary school increased exceptionally, from 700,000 to 1.6 million (Kim et al. 2011). In April 2006, the Government of South Sudan collaborated with UNICEF to launch the Go To School (GTS) initiative, which had “a focus on both access to education and the quality of learning” (Barakat et al. 2013, p. 135). Through this initiative, UNICEF supported South Sudan in the not only increasing enrolment rates, but also in the development of more permanent learning spaces and learning materials and the training of teachers (UNICEF 2009).

However, it is now clear that the Government of South Sudan did not place enough investment in the construction of their education sector at such a precarious time. Mayai and Hammond (2014) are critical of the government and argue that education was of little importance to the Government of South Sudan since the CPA era. Further, the reduction of the education budget from US\$134 million in 2006 to \$111 million in 2010 (Barakat et al. 2013) demonstrates a lessening interest of the government in strengthening its educational capacity. While the 2012 Education Act stipulates that 15% of the national budget is to be allocated to education, only 5.5% was allocated in 2013-14 (UNESCO 2016). The legacy of war, extreme poverty, and dependency on international assistance have exacerbated challenges and made educational needs and deficiencies chronic (Barakat et al. 2013). The apparent lack of investment and focus by the government ultimately served to deter development partners (Mayai & Hammond 2014) and infrastructure challenges, severe shortages of materials and trained teachers made the environment difficult for development agencies to work. Additionally, a lack of donor coordination and long-

term, predictable commitments and investments further diminished the effectiveness of international assistance (UNESCO 2011). South Sudan therefore began its time as an independent state with some of the worst indicators for education in the world (see Figure 1) (UNESCO 2011).

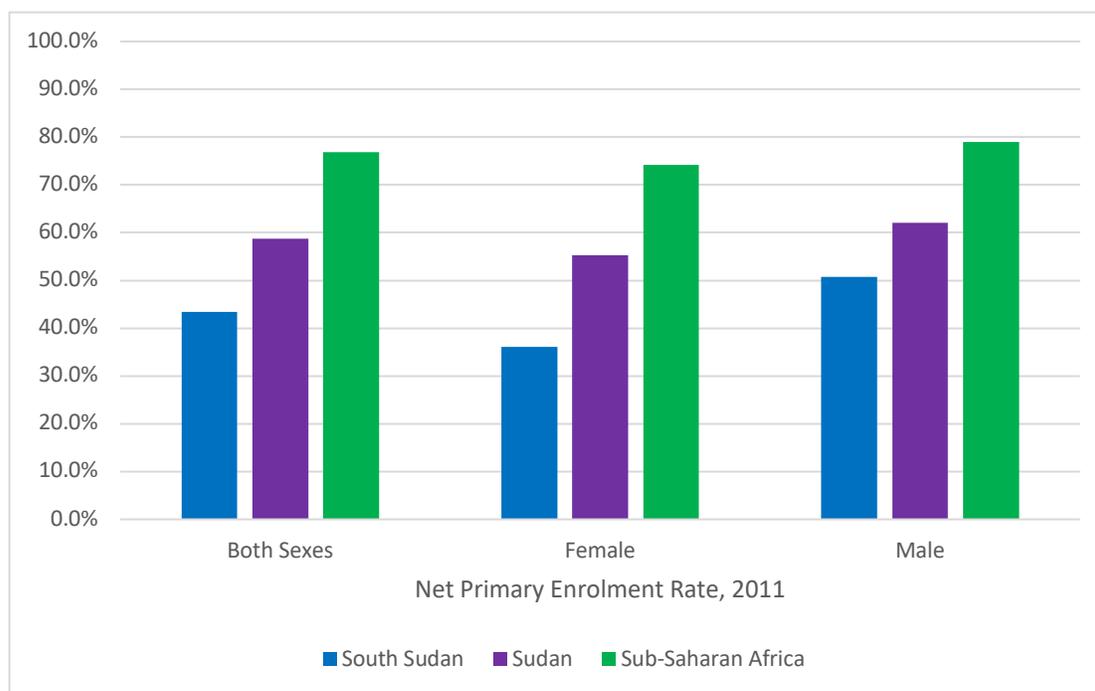


Figure 1. Adjusted net primary enrolment rate in 2011 for South Sudan, Sudan, and Sub-Saharan Africa, disaggregated by sex. (source: World Bank)

### Post-Independence (2011)

Coinciding with South Sudan’s independence in 2011, the government developed the “South Sudan Vision 2040: Towards Freedom, Equality, Justice, Peace and Prosperity for All”, which aims to improve the general quality of life for the people of South Sudan. This strategic vision includes many education-related goals, such as increasing higher education opportunities, providing greater educational infrastructure, and improving the quality of teacher education programs (GoSS 2011a). The outbreak of conflict in the newly independent South Sudan on 16 December 2013 rendered the aforementioned moderate improvements short-lived. This civil war has led to “comprehensive famine, ethnic conflict, media censorship, and arbitrary arrests of civilians, politicians, and journalists” (Skårås et al. 2019, p. 3), and thus diminished the investment

in educational improvements. While GTS and other initiatives saw temporary increases in enrolment numbers and infrastructural improvements, this “resurgence of violence in December 2013 reversed many of the gains made in education service delivery since 2005” (GESP 2017, p. 2). Approximately 400,000 previously enrolled students were out of school by May 2015 (Novelli et al. 2016) and an estimated 2.2 million school-aged children were out of school in 2018 (UNICEF 2019a). Further, the conflict beginning in 2013 has caused nearly one third of schools to close and schools that are still operational have insufficient resources and capacity and irregular attendance by both teachers and students (Skårås et al. 2019). The ongoing conflict has led to a massive shortage of teachers, specifically trained and female teachers, and learning materials are scarce (Vanner et al. 2019). The present civil war has also led to minimized presence of development agencies and donor partners on the ground.

A February 2020 report of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan draws attention to the ongoing and intentional human rights violations being used as war tactics in South Sudan. Some of these include sexual and gender-based violence, food insecurity, and a systematic denial of fundamental rights and freedoms (A/HRC/43/56). Further, government officials are reportedly involved in “the pillaging of public funds as well as money laundering, bribery and tax evasion” and “millions of dollars have been diverted from the National Revenue Authority” (OHCHR 2020). The corruption of the government and use of public funds for personal gain means that there are fewer resources available for public goods and services, such as education and health care. Not only are these institutions unable to improve and serve the population, but South Sudanese citizens are “too concerned with day-to-day survival to participate effectively in public life” (A/HRC/43/56, p. 2). Further, incorporating the needs of the high number of refugees, internally displaced persons, former child soldiers, and traumatized individuals poses additional challenges on improving educational outcomes. Despite a finding by Novelli et al. (2016) that

there appear “to be few links between the education sector and broader peacebuilding processes” (2016, p. 22), there is some optimism that the minimal education that is available can provide a space to create peace and reconciliation (Vanner et al. 2019).

South Sudan has attempted to bring peace to the country on several occasions, signing power-sharing agreements in both 2015 and 2018 (Onapa 2019), and again on 22 February 2020. Although it remains to be seen if the 2020 peace deal will hold, the previous agreements were rushed and created under intense pressure of the international community (UNESCO 2016), causing those signed in 2015 and 2018 to ultimately fail. While sustainable peace has yet to be achieved, there have been intermittent attempts to ameliorate the education system. In addition to the South Sudan Vision 2040, the 2012 General Education Act and the 2011 Transitional Constitution have specific goals and objectives pertaining to improving access and quality of education. UNICEF has adopted a ‘government-led’ approach to their assistance and is working to give South Sudan ownership and responsibility over this education system transformation, but the capacity and resources of the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) remain limited, specifically in terms of the availability of trained teachers and allocated funding (UNICEF 2019a). Despite the government’s attempts to increase access to education, poverty, insecurity, school closures, conflict, and pregnancy and child, early and forced marriages continue to act as barriers to keeping children in school in South Sudan (GESP 2017). The following section will examine some of the specific strategic plans and reforms that the government has introduced and consider if they can introduce a culture of national unity and sustainable peace.

## Chapter 3: Educational Reforms in South Sudan

There are two levels of reform that are taking place in South Sudan with respect to the education system. On a higher, more systemic level, the government is attempting to prioritize education by creating strategic plans and bolstering the infrastructure required for an effective education sector. The General Education Act 2012 and the commitments to education made in South Sudan's 2011 Transitional Constitution reflect a legal commitment to improve education. On a deeper level, there are reforms being made to the curriculum and teaching materials, attempting to improve the quality of education and promote peace in South Sudan. These two aspects of educational reform are inextricably linked and both are required to achieve an effective transformation. UNICEF continues to work closely with MoGEI and coordinate with implementing partners, which has "greatly facilitated implementation of innovative, effective and context-specific education interventions" (UNICEF 2019a). In 2019, these efforts led to over 598,000 children being enrolled in schools (UNICEF 2019b). The pressure on South Sudan to rebuild and reform the education sector results from both demand from the population to ameliorate their living situation, as well as particular demographic challenges. South Sudan has a notably young population, with over half of the population being under 18 (UNESCO 2016) and this already large school-age population is expected to continue to grow. In addition, the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of the conflict place additional challenges on the education system.

As discussed in Chapter 1, education is now widely regarded as critical to the rebuilding process following conflict. It is also clear through the strategic plans, legal documents, blog posts and the national curriculum that South Sudanese people see education as critical to having opportunities and becoming global citizens. Vanner et al. (2017) illuminate that the rebuilding of the education sector provides an opportunity for governments to either "reconstruct a pre-conflict

education system or transform it in order to address the conflict's root causes" (p. 33). As South Sudan's educational infrastructure was almost non-existent, "nearly all education institutions had to be built from scratch, and education policy and planning to be undertaken by a motivated staff that often lacked the necessary training" (UNESCO 2016). The adoption of the Education Act in 2012, the completion of two Education Sector Analyses (ESA), and the creation of various strategic plans represent a conscious effort to build capacity and incite positive change to the educational landscape. Further, the introduction of a national curriculum framework demonstrates an effort by the government and MoGEI to unite and consolidate learning outcomes. However, ongoing conflict and instability has made the implementation of these measures limited.

### Strategic Plans

Since attaining independence in 2011 and with technical support from UNICEF and UNESCO, South Sudan has created two General Education Strategic Plans for the periods of 2012-2017 and 2017-2022 (hereafter GESP I and GESP II, respectively) and undertook ESAs prior to both. Within these strategic plans, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI), and the former Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, is cognizant of the many challenges that accompany rebuilding a society after widespread violent conflict, in particular one with so few functioning institutions. GESP I specifies its mission as being "to introduce a series of reforms to improve quality, access to and funding for general education as well as tackle the issue of illiteracy in the country and low institutional and human capacity in the general education sub-sector" (GESP 2012, p. 15). This strategic plan draws on wider Vision 2040 and South Sudan development priorities, including enhancing education access and quality, building institutional capacity, designing an appropriate curriculum, and reducing illiteracy (GoSS 2011a). GESP I makes no specific references national unity, reconciliation, or peace and tolerance across ethnic groups. While the objectives of GESP I are admirable and important, the implementation of this

2012-2017 strategic plan was “limited by low resources, unrealistic timelines, and lack of clear objectives and indicators” (Novelli et al. 2016, p. 19). Further, as the country descended into civil war in 2013, the government’s focus turned away from the education sector.

Prior to the development of the 2017-2022 strategic plan, another ESA was undertaken to analyze “the vulnerabilities, including conflict, disasters and economic crises that are specific to [the] country” (GESP 2017, p. 3). GESP II articulates two main phases: first, 2017-18 was to be a transitional phase, taking into account the political and financial crisis; and second is the broader strategic plan to guide the educational reform “if/when more financial resources are available and the situation stabilizes such that all parts of the country are accessible” (GESP 2017, p. 36). Noting the key words ‘if/when’ highlights an acute awareness that the transformation of the education sector could continue to take a backseat as political and humanitarian challenges prevail. Nonetheless, this strategic plan aligns itself with international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the priorities identified attempt to address the challenges outlined in the 2016 ESA (GESP 2017). Although some policy frameworks have been put into place, various supply-side barriers (e.g. a shortage of trained teachers and learning materials and inadequate spaces) and demand-side barriers (e.g. rising poverty levels and socio-cultural beliefs) mean that challenges in increasing enrollment are persisting (UNESCO 2018).

Generally speaking, South Sudan is to be commended for the creation of these strategic plans. In a comparative evaluation, it was found that both GESP I and GESP II “meet the minimum number of standards to be considered ‘credible’ plans by [Global Partnership for Education] GPE standards” (Universalia 2019, p. 16). However, these strategic plans also exhibit several weaknesses, thus hindering their capacity for inducing change. GESP I is criticized for having had unrealistic timelines, financing gaps, and not effectively translating into the accompanying Action

Plan (UNESCO 2016). Further, the rushed nature in which GESP I was completed meant that there were inadequate consultations and a lack of ownership by MoEST (UNESCO 2016). Problematically, GESP II does not appear to have “learned from, built on, and/or addressed, limitations of the GESP I development process”, likely due to GESP I not being properly implemented or monitored (Universalia 2019, p. 22). Given that South Sudan has been engaged in ongoing conflict over the last several years, it is likely that a new education sector analysis will need to be undertaken to reflect current conditions. Ensuring that there is broad consultation, realistic timeframes, and ownership by all relevant ministries will be critical for effective implementation.

#### National Curriculum Framework

In September 2015, MoEST launched South Sudan’s first national curriculum in partnership with the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) and UNICEF’s Global Education Partnership (MoEST 2015). This national curriculum is rooted in the 2011 Transitional Constitution, the Education Act (2012), and GESP I (Maphalala 2015). The development of a unified national curriculum is an important milestone, as South Sudan previously borrowed curricula and learning materials from neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan (Novelli et al. 2016; Skårås & Breidlid 2016; Skårås et al. 2019). The key aims of the curriculum underpinning all learning are to inspire: good citizens of South Sudan; successful life-long learners; creative and productive individuals; and environmentally responsible members of society (MoEST 2015). In alignment with these aims, the four themes of the curriculum are: citizenship, literacy and numeracy, enterprise and the environment (MoEST 2015). Based on a constructivist approach to learning, this curriculum highlights the need for learners to “engage actively in their own learning, and [not] be passive recipients of knowledge” (MoEST 2015, p. 6). This notion follows the constructivist view that “children do not come to the classroom

as blank slates”, but rather “bring with them the attitudes, values and behaviour of their societies beyond the classroom walls” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 3). In this regard, the ways in which the curriculum, learning materials and teachers approach South Sudan’s history and ongoing ethnic tensions is critical for replacing harmful norms with ones that are cooperative, tolerant and peaceful.

The National Curriculum Framework is built on a set of five values that are meant to “permeate learning and become embedded in young people’s approach to life” (MoEST 2015, p. 8). These values are: (1) human rights and gender equity, (2) respect and integrity, (3) peace and tolerance, (4) compassion and social justice, and (5) democracy and national pride (MoEST 2015). Additionally, four principles are specified that the curriculum should provide: (1) a culture of excellence that supports innovation, creativity, continuous improvement, and effectiveness; (2) an environment of empowerment that promotes independence, individual learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence; (3) a context of South Sudanese heritage and culture that builds on national pride and identity within an understanding of global citizenship; and (4) a spirit of hope, respect, peace, reconciliation, unity, national pride, democracy and global understanding (MoEST 2015). The curriculum makes reference to identity ten times, unity three times, and reconciliation three times (MoEST 2015). Further, critical and creative thinking and cooperation are identified as two of four competencies and are mentioned ten and seven times respectively (MoEST 2015). Given that this is South Sudan’s first national curriculum, these figures and mentions of themes cannot be compared to previous curricula. However, reflecting these aims in the curriculum demonstrates an awareness of the importance of these issues in South Sudan’s transition to peace. Chapter 5 further analyses the implications of the use of terms and concepts such identity, unity, and reconciliation in the curriculum framework.

In alignment with UNESCO recommendations, instruction for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Primary 1-3 is to be in an official national language (which language they use is at the discretion of the school), and English is to be the language of instruction for all subsequent grades, with Primary 4 and 5 being transitional years (MoEST 2015). In upper years of school (Primary 5 to Primary 8), students will also learn Arabic and are then given the option to learn Arabic, French, and/or Kiswahili from Secondary 1-4 (MoEST 2015). This is in line with the 2012 Education Act, which also stipulates that for ECD and Primary 1-3, the medium of instruction is to be the indigenous language of the area, switching to English from Primary 4 onwards. However, in practice, this language policy has yet to be effectively implemented, as there are minimal teaching and learning materials to support it (Vanner et al. 2017). Although English is the national language of South Sudan, the reality on the ground is more complicated. Because of the previous imposition of Arabic as the language of instruction, many teachers are trained in Arabic and will not be able to effectively deliver the new curriculum in English (Novelli et al. 2016; Vanner et al. 2019). Additionally, there are 64 different indigenous languages spoken in South Sudan, which not only poses a significant capacity issue in creating learning materials, but also, many children “cannot speak either Arabic or English” (Vanner et al. 2019, p. 4). Ensuring that teachers are effectively trained in English and indigenous languages and sufficient learning materials become available is critical in delivering on this policy.

Mandatory classes include math, citizenship education, religious education, science, and history (MoEST 2015). The curriculum also identifies that school programs, such as personal development and careers guidance will be offered from Primary 7 through Secondary 4 (MoEST 2015). On several occasions the curriculum stresses the desire to have students be actively engaged in their learning and become global citizens of the twenty-first century (MoEST 2015). Culture and heritage are prevalent aspects of the curriculum and are key concepts in identity formation and

peacebuilding. These themes are reflected through both the social studies courses (i.e. history, geography, citizenship, and peace education and human rights), as well as in the cross-cutting issues of life skills and peace education, thus providing context for all learning and permeating the entirety of the curriculum (MoEST 2015). The national curriculum specifically underscores the importance of information reflecting the local and cultural context and being “presented through real-life examples that make sense to the student within the context of their own experience” (MoEST 2015, p. 20)

As previously mentioned, critical and creative thinking and cooperation are identified as two of four competencies outlined in the curriculum framework. These competencies are meant to be applied to all subjects, as well as throughout life (MoEST 2015). Critical thinking is a concept that while widely agreed is important, there is no consensus on how it is best taught or exemplified. In post-conflict societies, critical thinking has been identified as an important means to examine root causes of conflict and interrogate systems and divisions that lead to conflict (Skårås 2019; Vanner et al. 2019). In emerging from conflict, critical thinking has been attributed to the fostering of “an empathetic and analytical generation that is empowered to work towards peace” (Vanner et al. 2017, p. 48). Additionally, the encouragement of critical thinking skills helps “individuals to question taken for granted understandings and facts (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 29). With respect to the cooperation competency, it is particularly important in ethnically divided societies that children learn to come together across ethnic lines. Studies have shown that classrooms can play a positive role in “bringing together different parties to conflict and changing their views of one another through interaction” (King 2011). Because both critical thinking and cooperation are key aspects of broader peace- and statebuilding efforts, it is vital that these competencies are adequately developed in South Sudanese schools.

Education is a deliberate and purposeful activity that sets out to achieve particular goals (Njeng'ere 2014). As previously mentioned, the constructivist emphasis of identities being shaped by “history, myth, culture, symbols, ideology, religion, political practice and nationalism” places education systems at the centre of this process (Jackson 2009, p. 177). In South Sudan’s peacebuilding process, how the curriculum and teaching materials set out to achieve this reformation is critical. A significant expectation has been placed on teachers to deliver on this ambitious curriculum, reshape South Sudanese identities, and determine how children learn about sensitive issues. While it is important for children to learn about tolerance, reconciliation, human rights, and peace, these concepts are best learned in practice. In order for attitudes to change, “pupils need to participate actively in the learning process” (O’Donoghue 2002, p. 388) and cannot simply be told that cooperation is important. For these themes to be not only taught, but also learned, teachers need to be effectively trained to address sensitive issues and support these participatory methods. Unfortunately, studies show that “the lived realities of teachers in a context of civil war differ greatly from the aims and objectives of the policy documents” (Skårås et al. 2019, p. 8). This discrepancy will undoubtedly hinder the effective implementation of the lofty goals in the national curriculum.

## Chapter 4: Learning from Other Contexts

In today's climate, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental bodies, and other donors are facing complex challenges in fulfilling their work. In attempts to support the building of peaceful and stable institutions, provide humanitarian assistance, and reconstruct conflict-affected societies, these actors are often met with "limited national resources, weak institutional capacity and, in many cases, endemic corruption and protracted conflict" (Ramalingam, Laric & Primrose 2014, p. 1). In peace- and state-building initiatives, there are rarely universal solutions that can be applied to every context. Development and humanitarian efforts are beginning to recognize the importance of local contexts and knowledge and donors are shifting away from traditional, Western solutions. With educational initiatives that specifically seek to improve inter-group relations, "a useful starting point is the recognition that one size never fits all" (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 25). That being said, examining other contexts is useful in considering what aspects should not be replicated and those that have produced desirable and sustainable outcomes. Although this research paper is specific to South Sudan, ethnic conflict and education sector rebuilding have occurred in numerous other contexts. Because the conflict in South Sudan is relatively new and ongoing, there is no concrete evidence on what is successful in sustaining peace. By considering the experiences of Afghanistan, South Africa, and Rwanda, one can draw comparisons and consider if South Sudan is on a path to achieving sustained peace.

### Afghanistan

Over the last several decades, the educational landscape in Afghanistan has been reflective of the strong presence of foreign actors. When the British relinquished their involvement in Afghanistan's foreign policy in 1919, Afghanistan viewed this as an opportunity to modernize the education sector with two goals: "to develop technical skills for people throughout the country, such as doctors and engineers; and to create a national identity for the newly independent

Afghanistan” (Spink 2005, p. 196). Despite Afghanistan being an ethnically diverse state, post-independence educational policies favoured Pashtun<sup>1</sup> nationalism and learning materials focused exclusively on their history, language, and culture (Baiza 2013; Spink 2005). Throughout the Cold War and following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Afghanistan was a key pawn in the ideological warfare between the Soviet Union and the United States. During this time, the United States “saw the education system as one of the most important means of spreading anti-communist ideology” (Spink 2005, p. 198). While Soviet-inspired lessons included communist propaganda songs, textbooks created for Afghanistan by the University of Nebraska instead promoted an explicitly violent form of Islam with math problems related to shooting Russians in the forehead (Vanner et al. 2017). The strong influence of donors in Afghanistan’s development since 2001 has left the country dependent on foreign aid and unable to control their own future (Vanner et al. 2017).

In cases where donors are heavily involved in the crafting of education materials, subjects and messaging may be more reflective of the donor country’s values than those of the recipient country. In Afghanistan, American-led reforms attempt to secularize the curriculum and reduce religious education, thus leading educators and parents to mistrust these new materials (Spink 2005; Vanner et al. 2017). In both South Sudan and Afghanistan, the heavy reliance on donors has led the curricula and learning materials to reflect a convergence of Western and traditional local discourses, with a stronger focus on a Western and structure, thus implying its superiority (Skårås et al. 2019; Vanner et al. 2017). Western models of education often include features such as “grade structure, school hours and semesters, subjects like language, mathematics, science, etc. which are taught in separate modules”, which were not historically present in Afghan schools (Karlsson &

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<sup>1</sup> Pashtun is one of several ethnicities in Afghanistan. Others include: Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, and Turkmen, all of which speak different languages. Pashtu and Dari are the official languages of Afghanistan.

Mansory 2007, p. 6). The consequence of this is that many Afghans feel this approach runs contradictory to their traditional and rural lifestyle (Karlsson & Mansory 2007; Vanner et al. 2017). In order for there to be strong investment by the population, the curriculum and learning materials in Afghanistan and South Sudan must be relevant to the local context

Decades of “invasion, occupation, civil war, and the Taliban” had devastating effects on Afghanistan’s infrastructure and by the time of the United States’ invasion in 2001, the education system had all but collapsed (Spink 2005, p. 200). Despite ongoing conflict and instability persisting in many sectors, significant progress has been made in education, largely driven by commitment to and public awareness of education (Baiza 2013). In 2001, Afghanistan began developing a new national curriculum and textbooks for both primary and secondary schools and national strategic plans were endorsed (Georgescu 2007). Although the education reforms were met with many challenges, Georgescu (2007) credits “the strong political will of the Afghan authorities” and effective cooperation between international and national partners for achievements (p. 445) such as enrolment increasing from 1 million to 8.5 million children in school between 2002 and 2015 (UNICEF 2020). Following the development of the curriculum framework, the progress come to a standstill in 2004 and 2005 and the curriculum was not disseminated, as it was viewed as time-consuming and non-essential (Georgescu 2007). Additionally, a series of textbooks funded by the United States do not address history after 1973, in order to be apolitical and ‘de-ethnicized’ (Sieff 2012). Since this time however, the Ministry of Education has developed a new curriculum framework and new textbooks (MoE 2015). Afghanistan’s experience shows that in order to ensure that the curriculum is widely disseminated and incorporated into schools across South Sudan, efforts will need to be made in supporting teachers and principals to do so. Ensuring all stakeholders are meaningfully engaged and supported in contributing to and implementing these education reforms are key to their success.

## South Africa

For several decades in the twentieth century, South Africa's political, social, and economic institutions were characterized by apartheid politics, preferring the minority white population over all other races. The experience of Apartheid-era South Africa is an example of when education is used as a vehicle to reinforce exclusionary structures and policies into broader society. During this time, the education system played a large role in perpetuating the apartheid system and "unequal, segregated education was both a reflection of, and contribution to, the repressive apartheid system" (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 15). Throughout the twentieth century, South Africa had several different education systems running parallel to each other, varying in quality and tailored towards specific races (Christie 2016; McKeever 2017). During the Apartheid, there were "19 different educational departments separated by race, geography, and ideology" (Barrios-Tao et al. 2017, p. 15). The separate systems were accompanied by unequal curricula and funding, as expectations and requirements were lower for the non-white population; white education tended to be more academic and African more 'practical', for eventual blue-collar jobs (Bush & Saltarelli 2000; McKeever 2017). Despite the Apartheid ending in 1994, South Africa continues to have "features of a fragmented society such as lack of social cohesion [and] mistrust among various race groups", where a simple disagreement at school can quickly become a racial/tribal conflict (Mthiyane 2013, p. 21).

After the end of the Apartheid (1994) and with a democratic government introduced, educational reforms were undertaken. These reforms included curriculum reforms, infusing the "the values of human dignity, social justice, equity, and democracy", as well as greater involvement of parents (Barrios-Tao et al. 2017, p. 15). As the government transitioned to democracy, schools also attempted to democratize, implementing a "school governance structure that involves all educational stakeholder groups in active and responsible roles in order to promote issues of democracy" (Harber 2019, p. 98). Presently, South Africa's education system is the most

developed on the continent, with almost universal primary education and hundreds of thousands of students enrolled in university (McKeever 2017). However, despite South Africa having a high average level of education when compared to other countries in Africa, education access and distribution remains uneven (McKeever 2017). Because segregation on the basis of race was the dominant issue during the Apartheid, other inequalities in the education system, such as social class were initially masked and came to the forefront following the end of the Apartheid (Christie 2016). The experience of South Africa shows that even when discriminatory policies and laws are abolished, inequalities can persist and continue to plague education systems and broader social institutions.

A key lesson from the experience of South Africa is that the idealism driving the anti-apartheid struggle “was, itself, insufficient to ensure the social reconstruction it aspired to” (Christie 2016, p. 440). Christie (2016) argues that the defeat of the apartheid era inspired lofty dreams for educational reform, resulting in unrealistic policies that stemmed from a lack of experience. While having transformative goals is important to post-conflict education reforms, a lack of capacity and experience can serve to hinder their achievement. In South Africa, many reforms to the education system exist on a surface-level only and have not successfully achieved meaningful change. For instance, with the School Governing Bodies, the role of parents is limited, principals continue to play a dominant role, and learner participation is minimal, thus indicating that power relations in school structures remain largely unchanged (Harber 2019). Additionally, in education reconstruction it is possible that “some injustices may be addressed while others are left in place – and even legitimated – in the new social arrangements” (Christie 2016, p. 444). While it is unavoidable that South Sudan will encounter some challenges and barriers in its reconstruction of the education system, lessons from South Africa illuminate the importance of

maintaining realistic goals and understanding that changing entrenched social norms is not a quick or linear process.

## Rwanda

Rwanda is frequently used to study the relationship between ethnic conflict and education. The ethnic conflict in Rwanda between the Hutus and Tutsis stems from deeply rooted colonial favouritism. Notably, the Belgian colonizers deemed the Tutsi people as superior, creating migration myths and effectively rendering them to be seen as immigrants to Rwanda (Buckley-Zistel 2006). This portrayal led to citizenship being defined through ethnic identity and Tutsis being denied full citizenship in post-Independence Rwanda (Buckley-Zistel 2006). Decades of power struggles and violence culminated in a civil war from 1990-1993 and the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, where roughly 800,000 people were killed (King 2011). While there are varying factors credited with inciting the civil war and genocide, King (2013) argues that “ethnicity, socially constructed over a long period of time, is integral to understanding violent intergroup conflict in Rwanda” (p. 17). Rwanda’s schooling system leading up to the genocide was demonstrative of the ability for schools to reproduce and reinforce exclusionary policies and ideas. Despite Rwanda’s history of violence and instability, it is now seen to be “a model developing country [that] has made important advances in many areas, including education” (King 2011).

Schooling in Rwanda is now recognized for its ability to play a fundamental role in the promotion of national unity and reconciliation (King 2011; King 2013). What is particularly relevant to consider in the case of Rwanda is the focus on ‘Rwandanness’ following the 1994 genocide. In order to end ethnic conflict in the country, the government is attempting to erase ethnicity from the notion of citizenship (Buckley-Zistel 2006; Smith 2014). Along with this, concepts of ethnicity have been removed from schools; no longer are children forced to state their ethnicities in class and quotas for secondary schools have been banned, thus promoting a

meritocracy (King 2013). While these efforts to remove ethnicity from Rwandan identity may serve to facilitate some level of peace, there are also harmful consequences. King (2013) argues that the “Rwandan government’s ban on ethnicity is an example of conflict-avoidance, making students fear ethnicity rather than deal with it” (p. 142). Further, this forceful unification means that reconciliation may appear to be achieved without actually being achieved in practice (King 2013). While the government of South Sudan has not explicitly banned ethnicity, it too is determined to discover a unified South Sudanese identity. The diversity of the South Sudanese population is a core component of its identity and should not be lost in the reconciliation process.

In line with this singular concept of identity is the government’s implementation of “a single narrative of the past in school” (Skårås et al. 2019, p. 5). Initially after the genocide, there was a moratorium on teaching history until unified messaging was decided upon by the government (King 2013). As with Afghanistan, the recent conflict in Rwanda is considered to be “too sensitive and politically difficult to discuss openly in the classroom” (Harber 2019, p. 66). Although it is common for post-conflict societies to opt to avoid teaching recent history, studies show that teaching history can foster critical thinking, build peace and show children that histories are constructed and not given (Bush & Saltarelli 2000; King 2013). History is a “key subject in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, and a growing body of research underscores its importance for citizenship and nation-building purposes” (Skårås 2019, p. 517). Further, teaching inaccurate or incomplete versions of history can lead to false interpretations of conflict. Avoiding discussions of ethnicity does not mean that ethnicity ceases to exist; children will likely know what ethnicity they belong to and ethnic grievances will often still be implicit in broader society. This disconnect leads to a cognitive dissonance between what is taught in schools and lived experiences of individuals. Constructivists argue that “without an effective diagnosis of the nature and causes of conflict, conflict resolution is likely to be ad hoc, ineffectual or even counter-productive”

(Jackson 2009). Although lessons from Rwanda and other contexts demonstrate the importance of teaching history, recent studies from South Sudan show that due to the ongoing nature of conflict, many teachers are electing to avoid discussing potentially sensitive or conflictual topics (Skårås 2019).

Table 1. Synthesis of Country Comparison

	What prompted educational reforms?	Ethnicity and/or race relations in broader society	Ethnicity and/or race in classrooms	How is recent/conflictual history taught?	Centralized curriculum?
<b>South Sudan</b>	Independence (2011); Recent peace agreements (2015; 2018; 2020)	Ethnically-diverse society; civil war mainly between dominant groups (Dinka and Nuer)	Ethnic conflict and differences not explicitly discussed	Avoided: some historical conflict (e.g. with Sudan) listed in syllabus, but recent civil wars not addressed in detail; singular narrative	Centralized
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Fall of Taliban (2001)	Ethnically plural society; some ethnic conflict due to power being held by a Pashtun government	Dominant ethnicity prevails through curriculum, language and history, despite attempts to change this	Avoided: many history textbooks and lessons do not teach 1973 onwards due to sensitivities	Centralized
<b>South Africa</b>	End of Apartheid (1994)	Despite attempts at deconstructing racial divisions, they are still prevalent through social class divisions, poverty, etc.	Despite mandates to have education be free, many charge fees. Thus, social divisions based on history racial divisions are still prevalent in classes	Some discussion on human rights abuses and racism, but not on lasting implications of the Apartheid	Centralized
<b>Rwanda</b>	End of Genocide and new government in power (1994)	Avoided/banned in favour of 'Rwandanness'	Avoided/banned in favour of 'Rwandanness'	Moratorium on teaching history; narrative favourable to the ruling gov't has emerged	Centralized

## Chapter 5: Summary of Findings and Discussion

### How Can Education Contribute to Peace, Unity, and/or National Identity?

As introduced in Chapter 1, education can play a strong role in contributing to peace, unity and a national identity in societies previously engaged in conflict. In many post-conflict societies, peace- and nation-building efforts are “hampered by strong feelings of hatred, mistrust and fear among groups in society (Conteh-Morgan 2005, p. 77). The implication of this is that negative images of the ‘other’ will have to be deconstructed and replaced with tolerance and mutual understanding. Governments in post-conflict settings can empower schools to play a role in this peace process by implementing laws, strategic plans, and programs to ensure barriers to accessing education are removed and everyone has the right to attend school. In societies where certain groups were previously excluded from schools, these measures can foster intergroup cooperation, tolerance, and collaboration (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). Ensuring schools are accessible to all and without bias is critical in teaching learners to respect and understand differences. Research shows that “ethnic attitudes are formed early”, so it is therefore critical that socialization experiences occur early in life to foster positive attitudes (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. 3). Through schools, social bonds and partnerships can be re-established, thus acting as a catalyst for peace in broader society (Barakat et al. 2013).

Because constructivism understands identities to be socially constructed, education is a particularly important mechanism for the construction and transformation of identities (King 2013). As this research demonstrates, education does not only impart knowledge about specific subjects, but also transmits “language, culture, moral values and social organization, leading to a particular identity” (Bush & Saltarelli 2000, p. ix). As peace and statebuilding initiatives typically emphasize “equal rights and responsibilities of all citizens irrespective of their ethnic, religious or cultural identity”, education becomes a key vehicle for the teaching of these concepts (Smith 2014,

p. 115). Language is recognized as a key element in the maintenance of both ethnic identities and broader national identity. While the imposition of a singular national language can be a repressive act, as was the case in colonial and post-colonial Sudan, it can also have a unifying impact and ease inter-ethnic relations (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). For instance, some suggest that “[former President] Nyerere’s policy of language homogenization [in favour of Kiswahili is] perhaps the most important reason behind the lack of political conflict in post-colonial Tanzania” (Bandyopadhyay & Green 2013, p. 110). As Kiswahili is not a colonial language or associated with a particular ethnic group, the example from Tanzania cannot necessarily speak uniformly to singular language policies.

Because education systems can contribute to conflict, proponents of education reform are advocating for a focus on the quality of education to increase, not only enrolment numbers (Barakat et al. 2013; Breidlid 2013; Smith & Vaux 2003). This focus on quality education recognizes the role of what is taught in school – both explicitly and implicitly – in contributing to peace and reconciliation across society. It is through curricula that “the ideological as well as educational priorities of the state” are reflected by specifying languages of instruction “and influencing the content of education in areas such as literature, history and geography as well as religious or cultural studies” (Graham-Brown 1994, p. 27). The teaching of history not only contributes to a shared national identity, but it also allows children to understand the causes of conflict that may have severely impacted their lives. Further, peace education courses and programs can teach children communication skills, problem-solving methods, and skills development including “cultural awareness, demonstrating empathy, and nonviolent resistance” (Tidwell 2004, p. 465). Teaching these skills to children can present conflict resolution alternatives by demonstrating that violence is not an appropriate problem-solving mechanism. Further, courses dedicated to civics

and citizenship can teach children about justice, democratic governance, civic rights and responsibilities (Bush & Saltarelli 2000; Skårås et al. 2019)

### To What Extent Does South Sudan's Education Sector Promote Unity, Reconciliation and a National Identity?

There is a limited extent to which South Sudan's education sector will be able to effectively contribute to broader peace and reconciliation, especially as less than half of the school-aged population attends school. In times of peace, the government of South Sudan has acknowledged that they are in need of "a new national narrative and a South Sudanese identity" and specifically one that can cut across ethnicity and competing knowledge systems (Breidlid 2012, p. 44). Through laws, strategic plans, and curriculum documents, South Sudan has set in motion many important steps to transform its education sector to achieve these aims. The Education Act 2012 specifies that the promotion of national unity and cohesion is a goal of the education sector and is thus reflected prominently in both the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan and the National Curriculum Framework (GESp 2017; GoSS 2011; MoEST 2015). Through the curriculum and strategic plans, it is clear, at least in rhetoric, that the government of South Sudan aspires to develop in prosperity and harmony, emphasizing values such as human rights, gender equality, and peace and tolerance (MoEST 2015).

While these education materials promote concepts of peace, unity, and reconciliation, the few recent studies that have been done on South Sudanese classrooms do not reflect that these concepts are being taught in reality. Skårås, Carsillo, and Breidlid (2019) find that "superiority claims of Western technology ... and the use of English as the medium of instruction leave little room for pride in national identity and culture" (p. 17). As well, issues of oppression and inequity are deemed too controversial to be in schools, thus inhibiting national unity efforts in South Sudan (Skårås et al. 2019). In South Sudan, there is no deficiency in terms of strategic plans, but a shortage of capacity and financing are severely detrimental to the realization of the education

sector's plans to foster unity and reconciliation (Longfield 2015). Further, Longfield (2015) argues that the national plans and strategies are not to be credited for increases in enrolment, but rather, the "educational development that is taking place in Juba is largely due to the efforts and initiatives of local people" (p. 193). The implication of this is not that the government of South Sudan should discontinue strategic planning and reform efforts, but should instead learn from local initiatives and work more collaboratively with these actors.

Prior to the national curriculum that was created in 2015, South Sudan did not have a unified curriculum and many schools borrowed curricula from neighbouring countries. In Afghanistan, a unified national curriculum was seen as a mechanism to reduce fragmentation across regions, and ensure quality learning outcomes (Georgescu 2007), and the same is true for South Sudan. A national curriculum framework can support learners in South Sudan to receive quality education irrespective of their geographical location. Further, clearly delineating subjects, topics, learning outcomes and assessment measures can reduce burden and decision-making responsibilities on teachers with limited knowledge and capacity. Although the curriculum espouses important goals of unity and reconciliation and can ideally improve educational quality across South Sudan, lack of consistent implementation will continue to hamper the achievement of these goals. Due to ongoing conflict, budgetary constraints and lack of teacher training, implementation of the new curriculum framework has been slow (Malik 2019). In the absence of the proper tools and assistance, many teachers may revert to more comfortable and less controversial subjects and teaching methods, such as math and English. Additionally, many South Sudanese schools will continue to operate either without a curriculum, or with an outdated curriculum, potentially from a neighbouring country, thus hindering efforts at national unity.

As introduced in Chapter 3, identity is mentioned ten times throughout the curriculum framework. It is mentioned both as a competency that children will learn and in the context of

forging and taking pride in a South Sudanese identity. Additionally, co-operation is mentioned seven times. Co-operation is also identified as a core competency that students are to learn throughout their schooling and apply to their daily lives. While co-operation is mainly used in the context of the competencies, synonyms such as collaboration are used in the text as well. Peace is mentioned eleven times throughout the curriculum, six times when referring to 'Peace Education' and standing on its own five times. Comparatively, unity and reconciliation are only mentioned three times each. Human rights is mentioned five times, both as a key value underpinning the curriculum and as a component of peace education. In the foreword by Dr. John Gai Yoh, former Minister of Education, Science and Technology, there are no mentions of peace, unity, reconciliation, or identity. As curricula tend to reflect the priorities of the government, the minimal mentions of unity and reconciliation imply that these themes are not high priority. Conversely, the repeated mentions of identity, co-operation, and human rights reflect the education sector's prioritization of these issues, at least in rhetoric. The extent to which these themes are realized in schools is dependent on teachers' ability to promote these concepts with participatory methods. As observations demonstrate that classes remain lecture-heavy (Skårås 2019; Skårås et al. 2016), the realization of these themes continues to be limited.

The aspirations of South Sudan to integrate into the international community is clear through the curriculum and national strategic plans. Despite calling for the rooting learning in local experiences and cultures, the curriculum does not sufficiently "address the real issues and challenges that teachers and students face in the classroom when civil war is being waged outside the school windows" (Skårås et al. 2019, p. 15). However, the curriculum's aims to inspire critical and creative thinking, communication, co-operation, and culture and identity can effectively contribute to broader peacebuilding efforts. Through the teaching of culture and heritage, children can become "active and responsible future citizens of South Sudan and the wider world, and ...

develop their own strong identities” (MoEST 2015, p. 9). How history is taught in post-conflict societies greatly influences how the conflict periods will be remembered and interpreted by future generations. For instance, in Primary 6 when students are taught to “understand the struggle for independence of South Sudan and name the role of the key people involved” (MoEST, n.d.), the material will have to be presented in such a way so as to not demonize South Sudan’s former counterpart. Similarly, there is an opportunity for teachers to contribute to current peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts by teaching about the more recent conflicts in a neutral way that does not contribute to ethnic divisions.

In addition to history and culture, language is a key component in group identity and is one that is strongly disseminated through the education system (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). Similar to many other countries in the region, the use of English in South Sudan goes back to the British colonial period. Since Arabic was used as a form of control over southern Sudan by the North, the use of English became seen as a tool of resistance (Vanner et al. 2017). However, there are over 60 different languages spoken in South Sudan, and much of the population speaks neither Arabic nor English (Vanner et al. 2019). The 2011 Transitional Constitution recognizes that “all indigenous languages of South Sudan are national languages and shall be respected, developed and promoted”, but that English will be the working language and language of instruction (GoSS 2011b, p. 11). Although the imposition of a national language has had repressive effects in many contexts, the use of English in South Sudanese schools can serve to have a uniting effect, downplaying ethnic differences and contributing to a national identity (Skårås 2019). The implementation of this language policy is challenging; the shortage of teachers trained to deliver material in local languages and English and the availability of teaching materials in all indigenous languages for lower grades are ongoing barriers.

### What Kind of Peace, Unity, and National Identity is Being Promoted in South Sudan?

Prior to South Sudan's independence in 2011, their national identity was largely rooted in opposing the control of northern Sudan (Skårås 2019; Skårås & Breidlid 2016). For this reason, scholars have called on South Sudan to develop a national identity in the absence an enemy 'other' (Breidlid 2013; Vanner et al. 2017). The curriculum and strategic plans therefore make several references to 'South Sudanese identity', a concept that is compounded by teachers' avoidance of mentioning ethnic groups (Skårås 2019). However, what is meant by this 'we' is not well-defined or understood (Skårås 2019). Further, the words 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' are not mentioned once in the curriculum framework (MoEST 2015). While this can be understood as an attempt to demonstrate the irrelevance of ethnicity in the pursuit of education, it can also be interpreted as a Rwanda-like attempt to avoid ethnic divisions, rather than confront them. Although not discussing ethnicity in classrooms avoids potentially upsetting students and creating a hostile environment, it also means that children will not learn to respect and appreciate each other despite their ethnic differences. Unless schools begin to break down and transform these norms of ethnic division, they will remain a dominant narrative in broader South Sudanese society. Thus, similar to the case of Rwanda, an uncomfortable difference may prevail between what is taught about ethnicity in schools and what the lived realities of South Sudanese individuals are. Therefore, unity may be promoted on the surface without achieving reconciliation.

Despite all school subjects being important in creating well-rounded and informed students, teaching history is particularly important in post-conflict societies. Greater detail about the aims, rationale, and learning objectives is provided for each subject area in the supplementary 'Subject Overviews' (MoEST, n.d.). For social studies, it is articulated that "learners should be given opportunities to survey and analyse a wide range of sources and learn to form ... their own opinions and draw their own conclusions" (MoEST, n.d.). Although the subject overview for history occasionally asks learners to 'analyse' certain events, the majority of the syllabus asks

learners to ‘understand’ historical events (MoEST, n.d.). The implication of this phrasing is that teachers will likely rely on lecture-centric teaching methods to avoid classroom discussion on potentially sensitive issues. Observations by Skårås (2019) support this finding and argue that verbs such as explain, describe, and understand do not encourage critical thinking and instead encourage memorization, thus limiting multiple perspectives and discouraging a multicultural national identity. The resulting ‘single narrative’ of history “does not promote sustainable national unity ... [or] address the roles of all of the parties in past wars” (Skårås 2019, p. 531).

South Sudan’s subject overview for social studies also includes the main learning objectives for peace education and human rights and citizenship courses. Through active citizenship, the subject overview recognizes that this “will enhance democratic life for us all, both rights and responsibilities, beginning in school, and radiating out” (MoEST, n.d.). Additionally, under peace education and human rights, the learner should “know about different sorts of rights such as Constitutional and Human rights” and “be aware of the importance of HIV/AIDS and STIs and the need to promote gender equality” (MoEST, n.d.). Similar to the verb choice in the learning objectives for history, a teacher-centric approach is implied. For instance, in Primary 5, students are asked to “appreciate the qualities of a good leader and good citizen” rather than learn how to exhibit these qualities themselves (MoEST, n.d.). Despite the curriculum advocating for student-centred and active learning, the challenge of implementing this style of learning remains. Overcrowded classrooms and shortages of trained teachers and learning materials continue to hamper the ability for students to actively participate in their learning, thus reinforcing the lecture model of learning and resulting singular narrative (GESP 2017; Skårås 2019).

### How is South Sudan Positioned against what is Sustainable or Desirable in the Long-Term?

A major challenge for South Sudan’s education sector is the shortage of trained teachers. Regardless of how ambitious and comprehensive the reform documents and efforts are, teachers

are critical pieces in their implementation and these reforms will not be effective if teachers and principals are not given the tools to be successful. Teachers are the “most important factor in mediating the curriculum and the values it conveys, and any education strategy needs to take account of their central role” (Smith 2010, p. 21). While UNICEF has trained over 5,000 teachers in South Sudan, with 20% being female (UNICEF 2019a), it is not clear that they have been effectively trained to implement the new curriculum. Certain teacher training models from other countries, such as ZINTEC in Zimbabwe, may be appropriate for South Sudan to adopt. With ZINTEC (Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course), aspiring teachers combine coursework and practical experience teaching primary classes, serving to both train teachers and reduce the shortage of primary teachers (Maguraushe 2015). South Sudan’s education goals and curriculum provisions are ambitious and require trained teachers capable of managing a sensitive post-conflict environment. Presently, over 70% of primary teachers are untrained and many “leave schools due to insufficient, delayed or unpaid salaries, as well as insecurity” (UNICEF 2019a). Building the capacity and morale of teachers is one of the most important steps for South Sudan to take in ensuring educational reforms are effectively implemented and concepts of peace, human rights, and reconciliation are realized.

In both conflict and peaceful societies, teachers are faced with the challenge of addressing sensitive and/or controversial topics. Teachers are put under pressure by parents, politicians, and special interest groups with respect to what is taught and conveyed in schools. In Canada for instance, comprehensive sexual education is wildly controversial, with no agreement on what is appropriate to teach. Some parents and other stakeholders will be upset if sex education curriculum is too progressive, while others will take issue if it is not comprehensive and updated enough, thus placing significant pressure on teachers. A study of the 1991-1998 AIDS Action Programme in Zimbabwe found that most teachers were not well-equipped to deal with sensitive and

controversial issues or employ participatory teaching methods (O'Donoghue 2002). If teachers are ill-equipped to convey sensitive messages or have personal, more traditional views that interfere with their teaching, the implementation of controversial programs can be derailed. In South Sudan, teaching peace and reconciliation across ethnicities is a highly sensitive issue and many teachers may not be readily equipped to address this in a productive way. Most students and teachers have been personally affected by the civil war, and teachers are aware of "how their teaching might influence their students emotionally, and so they manage difficult memories and narratives by avoiding sensitive topics" (Skårås 2019, p. 529). To effectively contribute to peace and reconciliation, teachers need to be thoroughly trained and equipped to convey controversial matters in a clear and unprovocative way.

While a unique case, positioning the experience of South Sudan against lessons from other contexts can shed light on if reforms may lead to sustainable peace. A key difference between South Sudan and the contexts presented in the previous chapter (Afghanistan, South Africa, and Rwanda) is that these countries had a change of leadership, and in some cases regime, simultaneously occurring with educational reforms. Constructivism sees ideas as being closely linked to political change and "it is argued that a process of learning is involved" (Conteh-Morgan 2005, p. 75). With peacebuilding, it is reasoned that "new ideas emerge and are embraced by an entire nation because the old order has experienced policy failures, shocks, or crises" (Conteh-Morgan 2005, p. 75). South Sudan however, has been led by Salva Kiir since 2005, with Riek Machar as his second in command for the majority of the time. These men and their supporters have long histories of distrust and conflict that continue to culminate in power struggles and disagreements on governance issues (Onapa 2019). Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue that no matter how tolerant and egalitarian they are, education reforms "that are delivered within educational

structures that are fundamentally intolerant and inegalitarian cancel out much of the potential positive impact” (p. 34).

South Sudan will not be able to achieve sustainable peace in the absence of political will, regardless of the success of the education sector. Ongoing human rights violations, famine, sexual and gender-based violence continue to plague the population of South Sudan and restrict their ability to receive an education. In 2015, only 14.8% of primary teachers were female (World Bank), which also contributes to instances of gender-based violence in schools. Further, the ongoing conflict in certain areas makes it challenging for humanitarian assistance and education programs to reach many communities. While education initiatives at the school and community level can achieve improvements in the short-term, “longer-term and broader impacts of interventions are ultimately dependent on the structural factors that maintain the conflict and thus the broader political, social and economic context” (Barakat et al. 2013, p. 137). On the surface, the power sharing agreements between president Salva Kiir and first Vice-President Machar reflect the coming together of warring parties, across ethnic lines, to bring peace to South Sudan. However, these peace agreements have yet to address the underlying causes of conflict at the political level (Onapa 2019). Despite a multitude of studies identifying “war legacies, power struggles, wealth and ethnicity as some of the causes of conflict”, a systematic approach harnessing these causations of conflict has not emerged (Onapa 2019, p. 87). So long as there continues to be hasty and reluctant peace agreements without attempting to have true reconciliation and address root causes of conflict, peace agreements will continue to have a high probability of failing and reforms to the education sector will not be effectively implemented.

## Conclusion

South Sudan faces numerous challenges in developing stable institutions in their transition to peace. In rebuilding the education sector, the strategic plans and national curriculum recognize key concepts and values, such as human rights, cooperation, peace, and reconciliation. However, most of the ambitious goals and aims of these documents are yet to be realized. Despite the numerous countries that have rebuilt education systems following civil and/or ethnic conflict, South Sudan does not appear to be learning from these experiences. One blog post by a fourth-year law student criticizes MoGEI for “being busy doing a lot of nothing” and making shallow promises (Nhial 2019). Instead of attempting to implement all of these reforms and goals at once, South Sudan and MoGEI should focus on a few priority areas in the short-term, such as training teachers, improving access, and disseminating learning materials. Then, their focus can turn to medium- and long-term goals, such as addressing sensitive histories, encouraging participatory teaching and learning methods, and learning additional languages. Further, increased and ongoing engagement with teachers, students, and parents on both the learning outcomes in the curriculum and lived experiences will support the implementation of reforms and better tailor these efforts to realities in classrooms. While aid organizations, donors, and UNICEF can attempt to mitigate barriers to education, the South Sudanese government ultimately needs to be more accountable to and supportive of its population. The experience of South Sudan demonstrates the immense challenges in rebuilding an education sector in a (post-)conflict setting.

This paper has demonstrated both how education can incite conflict, as well as how it can be employed to promote peace, unity and reconciliation. South Sudan’s experience is demonstrative of how years of exclusion, marginalization, and conflict can prevent education from flourishing and contributing to state-wide development. Constructivism and a constructivist approach to institutionalism place great importance on societal norms and ideas, which are not

easily altered. On this, it is important to note that simply stating that education is or should be a priority will not bring about meaningful reform. In order for the South Sudanese government, broader society, and harder to reach populations, such as pastoralists and girls, to prioritize education, a widespread normative change is required. South Sudanese people are hungry for an education and the ability to ameliorate their living situation, but are still primarily concerned with day-to-day survival. Informal blog posts by South Sudanese individuals (Ayii Riak 2020; Nhial 2019) calling on the government to prioritize national education and allocate more money to the education sector are demonstrative of this desire.

Despite positive efforts such as the development of a national curriculum, strategic plans, and partnerships with aid organizations, the effectiveness of educational reforms is hampered by a consistent lack of political will by South Sudanese officials. While there is hope that the most recent (February 2020) power sharing agreement will pave the way for sustainable peace, it is too soon to tell if this time will be different. As with those in the past, this agreement was settled at the last minute under the pressures of the international community, and has a focus on power sharing and not on reforming the state (Yaw Tchie 2020). Education reforms can play a positive role in supporting sustainable peace in post-conflict societies, but cannot do so in the absence of investment by the state. South Sudanese officials must address the root causes of conflict and prioritize supporting social institutions in order to sustained peace to prevail.

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