

# LIVES AT RISK

## A study of girls dropping out of school in Juba, Rumbek and Pibor Counties, South Sudan

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This study was undertaken by Oxfam as part of the 'Building Resilience through Gender and Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Education, Skills Development, and Sustainable Livelihoods' project, which is funded by SIDA. The study revealed that some of the factors contributing to girls' dropout rates include existing cultural norms and traditional practices such as early or forced marriage, the abduction of girls, and perceptions that education delays marriage and that educated girls risk not finding husbands. It was found that the cultural practice of 'booking on' girls as young as eight for marriage is normalized in all study sites, and that women and girls lack decision-making power over their lives. Other factors include the lack of adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities in schools, the distances learners need to travel, insecurity caused by communal violence, floods, food insecurity, and a heavy household work burden. The Government of South Sudan has in place laws and policies to address these issues, but they remain largely on paper and enforcement mechanisms are weak.

The report analyses the reasons so many girls drop out of school, and presents recommendations for how the SIDA project can begin to address them.

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The views are the authors', or those based on the perspectives and experiences articulated by the women and men in the community research areas. They do not represent those of Oxfam or its programmes or the Swedish Development Agency.

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# GLOSSARY

**Completion rate:** How many people in a given age group have completed the relevant level of education.

**Dropout:** A student who leaves school before finishing the course of instruction.

**Gender and conflict-sensitive approaches to education:** A development approach that involves understanding the context in which an organization or programme is operating – particularly inter-group relations, the interactions between interventions and the context – and then acting upon this understanding to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of a programme or other intervention.

**Gender-transformative education approach:** A development approach that seeks to use all parts of an education system to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.

**Inclusive education:** Education that values the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allows diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all.

**Resilience:** The capacity to adapt when faced with adversity or stress.

**Retention:** How many students enrol, continue and finish their studies in the same school.

**School enrolment:** Official registration at a school or institution and taking part in an educational programme.

**Sexual and gender-based violence:** This refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships.

**Skill development:** This is 'a process which enables trainees and...working age people to gain access to dexterity, knowledge and ability, career ethics and [a] good working attitude [through] skill[s] training, establishing skill standards, and other relating [sic] activities.' (Law Insider, n.d.)

**Sustainable livelihoods:** A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

# ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
FAL	Financial Adult Literacy
FGD	Focus group discussion
FSL	Food security and livelihoods
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IDPs	Internally displaced people
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MoGEI	Ministry of General Education and Instruction
MoGCSW	Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare
P/S	Primary school
PTA	Parent–teacher association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SMC	School management committee
SSP	South Sudanese pound

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxfam in South Sudan wanted to understand the factors influencing girls' school dropout rates (from Primary 6 to 8 in the age range of 12 to 18 years old) and the factors that facilitate or hinder their re-entry in Juba County in Central Equatorial State, Rumbek County in Lakes State, and Pibor County in Jonglei State in South Sudan. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with members of communities, development agencies and 16 schools were used to investigate these questions. Oxfam works with project partners to provide multisectoral education services that incorporate WASH, livelihoods, protection and gender mainstreaming through effective networks and coordination.

Basic education is free and compulsory in South Sudan. The study found that, while the gender enrolment gap was not vast in the surveyed areas, the dropout rate is twice as high for girls as for boys in upper classes. Enrolment rates vary between counties, influenced by various individual, family, school, community and state-level factors.

## ENROLMENT AND DROPOUT RATES

Across the surveyed counties, Rumbek County had the highest number of students in upper primary classes (P6–P8) with a total of 673, of whom 400 (59.4%) were boys and 273 (40.6%) were girls. Juba County had 536 enrolled students, 291 (54.3%) of whom were boys and 245 (45.7%) were girls. Pibor County had the least number of students registered for upper primary classes, with 218 in total, 138 of whom were boys and 80 of whom were girls. Juba had the highest dropout rates for girls: 76.3% female and 23.7% male. This was attributed to teenage pregnancies due to the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, child labour and teachers leaving the profession, among other factors. Pibor County had a similar gender dropout gap, with 61.3% of girls dropping out, compared to 38.3% of boys. This was attributed to early and forced marriages, community perception of girls' education, food insecurity, intertribal clashes and the effect of floods, among other factors. The statistics are more balanced in Rumbek County (Wulu and Awerial), with 47.6% of girls and 52.4% of boys dropping out.

## IDENTIFYING STUDENTS MOST AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT

Across the surveyed areas, the girls most at risk of dropping out or failing to re-enter school were:

- orphans;
- children from female-headed households or families with a majority of male members;
- those with elderly caregivers;
- those who must perform many household chores or have jobs;
- internally displaced people (IDPs);
- those from locations with no upper primary classes;
- children with disabilities; and
- young mothers.

# FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GIRLS DROPPING OUT

**Poverty and the high cost of schooling.** The loss of livelihoods due to conflict, flooding, the closure of businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation have all increased school dropout rates. The majority of households of the children surveyed lack funds to cover termly school fees of 3,000–5,000 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP) (\$8–12), as well as school uniforms, shoes and textbooks.

**Limited schooling provision.** Few schools have upper primary classes in the surveyed areas. For example, in Juba County's Gondokoro Payam, only one school had a P8 class. In Rumbek, Kalthok, Dor and Bidibadai Primary Schools do not have P7 and/or P8. Many schools surveyed, especially in Pibor and Rumbek Counties, lack school buildings and students study under trees. In Rumbek, for example, some classes take place under trees or in grass-thatched huts that are affected by rain, limiting student attendance and resulting in some dropping out. Some schools have been destroyed by conflict or floods, while others are poorly constructed and maintained, putting learners' lives at risk.

**Sociocultural factors.** Cultural norms and practices such as early and forced marriage, the abduction of girls, negative perceptions of girls' education and limited roles for decision making by women and girls have a negative impact on girls' education across the study sites. The cultural practice of 'booking on' girls (i.e. arranging marriage) as young as eight years old is normalized in all study sites. Moreover, communities in Rumbek and Pibor Counties reported the belief that education delays marriage, so educated girls are at risk of not finding a husband.

**Lack of sanitation facilities.** Only 37.5% of the schools surveyed had clean water in their bathrooms and latrines. Those schools with separate female bathrooms and changing rooms lacked water and provision for adolescent girls to wash. Bathrooms were generally poorly maintained and dirty, so many girls preferred to go home, resulting in missed lessons. In addition, the majority of female learners interviewed reported that they did not have access to dignity kits when they needed them. While some humanitarian agencies have supported girls with dignity kits over the years, unfortunately, the study found that the size and discomfort of the sanitary pads meant they have usually not been adopted by the community in Pibor County.

**Teenage pregnancy.** Unwanted and early pregnancy is one of the most significant reasons for adolescent girls to drop out of school. Whenever a girl becomes pregnant, she is usually forced by her family to marry the perpetrator to avoid the shame that could befall the family. Some girls also drop out due to the stigma of pregnancy.

**Insecurity and intertribal conflict.** Conflicts continue to displace hundreds of thousands of people across South Sudan. These displacements lead to school absence and dropping out. Additionally, during conflict, community members often find shelter in classrooms, so classes are suspended until calm returns to the village. This prevents both girls and boys from continuing with school, with some put at risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

**Floods.** The states of Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile and the Pibor Administrative Area were the worst hit by floods in 2019–21. Schools here have been often flooded during the rainy season, with many buildings destroyed and learning materials spoiled.

**Food insecurity and child labour.** School feeding programmes usually implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) are slowly being phased out due to reduced funding, yet food insecurity is still rising. Parents have as a result prioritized food over education during the economic crisis, forcing many children to join the labour market. South Sudan has relied on food aid since conflict erupted in 2013.

**Impact of COVID-19.** The impact of 14 months of school closures as a safety measure for COVID-19 prevention has had a significant effect on children's education. As a result of the related economic crisis, many girls were married off, children forced into work to supplement household incomes, and some girls sexually abused in the process. Measures taken to deal with COVID-19 meant restricted movement, closure of businesses and many people their losing jobs. All of this culminated in an economic crisis, forcing many children to drop out or engage in the labour market. Additionally, a number of teachers left the profession to find alternative means of survival.

**Household work burden.** Discussions with female learners revealed that they have to perform household tasks early in the morning before school and late in the evening after school, leaving them exhausted and without time for completing school assignments. This leads to poor performance.

**Lack of parental support.** Many learners who drop out of school lack an adult caregiver to inspire, motivate and support them. Repeated shocks have weakened community-based structures and services.

**Distance to school.** Given the limited number of schools with upper primary classes in Pibor and Rumbek Counties, many children have to walk long distances (more than 2km) to access schools, with parents fearing for their children's safety along the way.

**Poor conditions for teachers.** Low and delayed payments and incentives for teachers result in absenteeism, apathy, high turnover and low-quality teaching. Teachers reported being paid 1,254–4,000 SSP per month, and often late. This has resulted in many teachers abandoning the sector. None of the schools surveyed provide accommodation or transport, and only a few provide food for teachers, further impacting motivation.

**Inadequate and unqualified teachers.** In all the schools surveyed, complaints about a lack of teaching staff were common. While most headteachers in Juba County had a diploma or degree in education, most did not in Rumbek and Pibor Counties. For the latter, most headteachers are currently enrolled in higher learning institutions, or are senior four dropouts, and are not qualified to be in these positions. Further, the lack of female teachers able to provide guidance and support to female learners was evident in a number of schools.

**Violence in school.** Violence was widespread in the schools surveyed, with some of the children interviewed reporting missing school at times due to the fear of bullying, being physically attacked, facing corporal punishment by teachers, dealing with unfriendly teachers, and girls fearing being humiliated by boys during their menstrual period. The study also found that SGBV was common in almost all schools, yet underreported due to its sensitivity and the lack of proper confidential feedback mechanisms.

**Limited facilities for children with disabilities.** Most school communities are not sensitized on the need to create enabling environments for children with disabilities. As a result, they are often discriminated against and are forced to drop out of school when they cannot find the support they need.

**Inadequate or weakly enforced policies.** While the Ministry of Education and Instruction has a teachers' code of conduct on the teacher–learner relationship that applies to all teachers nationwide, its implementation remains weak. Across all the surveyed schools, cultural practices such as child marriages and abductions have been recognized by the government and communities as rights violations that are harmful to children. However, little effort has been made by governments to enforce strict penalties or provide support for survivors.

**Inflexible education programmes.** Many adolescent girls and women have not been able to re-join schools because flexible education programmes have not yet been introduced. However, a discussion with out-of-school respondents revealed high demand for such interventions.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, we recommend that Oxfam should:

- **Monitor school attendance.** Emphasize regular recording and analysis of school enrolment, daily attendance, and completion and dropout rates for all schools. In addition, Oxfam could lobby the government to establish a system that ensures any SGBV perpetrators are permanently excluded from the education system.
- **Sensitize communities.** Communities need to be aware of the importance of educating both girls and boys, and how to minimize the challenges that could limit their access to education. This could be done through community discussions or using trained community-based gender equality promoters and other related advocacy groups at all levels
- **Implement gender-sensitive education approaches.** This could be achieved through community sensitization on promoting women and girls into leadership positions using gender promoters as change agents and role models, and/or supporting local leaders and those in positions of authority to change policies to promote gender equality at all levels. This could include promoting adult literacy programmes, empowering adolescents around sexual and reproductive health, and providing training in life skills, financial literacy and vocational skills.
- **Address poverty at the household level.** Oxfam could support caregivers with income-generating activities and provide financial support to selected marginalized learners or households.
- **Create women- and girl-friendly spaces.** Consider actions that can create opportunities for information-sharing on available local services and support, as well as safe spaces for survivors of SGBV to disclose incidents of violence and receive support to address school-based SGBV. Integrate school linkages to existing referral systems for psychosocial support, such as support groups, individual counselling, recreational and skill-building activities, and SGBV case management.
- **Support menstrual hygiene management.** Distribute sanitary pads to women and girls of reproductive age regularly. In Pibor County, there is a need to consult with women and girls to understand their negative perceptions and concerns about the sanitary pads currently being distributed by humanitarian agencies. In addition, introduce topics in the school curricula such as sexual and reproductive health, life skills and SGBV to mitigate and minimize the risk of sexually transmitted disease, early pregnancies and early marriages.
- **Build schools' capacity.** Build the capacity of teachers, PTA and school management committee (SMC) members, community leaders and project staff around inclusive education, the prevention of SGBV, children's rights and alternative education approaches to promoting girls' education.
- **Introduce or support adult literacy/flexible programmes.** Support and promote adult learning and flexible education programmes to meet the needs of women and girls who have dropped out of school, working students and those struggling to balance household chores and school.
- **Provide incentives for teachers and learners.** Financial incentives could be paid monthly for teachers and termly for learners. Oxfam should use best practices from other education partners implementing this approach.
- **Integrate sanitation activities.** Integrate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in all education interventions. Oxfam could sensitize communities on proper WASH practices, such as appropriate use of latrines and regular handwashing, and could form hygiene clubs in schools to train girls on improved hygiene practices. The latter could, in turn, transfer this knowledge to their families.
- **Undertake lobbying and advocacy.** There is a need to advocate for better and timely payment of teachers' salaries, an increase in the number of teachers, especially women and those trained to work with children with disabilities, and better provision of school facilities. There is also a need to liaise with the World Food Programme (WFP) to advocate for the reinstatement of school feeding programmes. At the state level, there is a need to advocate for the enforcement and

implementation of policies and guidelines aimed at inclusive education, such as those on child labour, disability inclusion, the teachers' code of conduct and early marriages.

- **Establish functional referral pathways.** For the provision of holistic services, there is a need to establish GBV referral pathways by mapping out and regularly updating information for adolescent girls and women on where they can access support with health, SGBV, psychosocial needs, education, nutrition and WASH.
- **Promote community participation.** As part of accountability to the affected populations, engage communities in all activities. This can be through consultations, sensitization campaigns and behavioural change activities. In addition, to mitigate the possibility of SGBV when women and girls re-enter school, there is a need for Oxfam staff to engage caregivers and spouses to ensure they are in support of the girls going back to school.
- **Establish complaint feedback mechanisms in schools.** Confidential and accessible feedback mechanisms for learners to freely report any acts of violence and abuse are essential in schools.
- **Further research needed.** Given the large population of people with disabilities in the country – about 15% of the population of South Sudan (UN OCHA, 2022a), further research is needed on the specific needs and barriers this vulnerable group is experiencing. At a minimum, disability-inclusive education should be considered.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important and formative role in society. It can contribute to developing peaceful and prosperous communities and promote good governance. As Islam and Asadullah (2018, p.2) wrote, *'schools serve as the dominant institution for transmitting social knowledge and attitudes, thereby facilitating social change.'* It also plays a crucial role in reducing violence by equipping young people with the skills to avoid and reduce violence (UNESCO, 2015, p.3).

Decades of civil war have devastated South Sudan's infrastructure and social services. Millions of people have been displaced, meaning generations of boys and girls have never had an opportunity to attend school. In South Sudan, about 2.8 million children do not go to school, of whom 55% are girls (UNICEF, 2021). One of the consequences is that South Sudan has one of the world's highest illiteracy rates, at 92% for women and girls, and 80% for men and boys.

Girls worldwide are kept from attending school because of gender norms related to their role in household chores and the position of girls in society. Their voices are undervalued if heard at all. Their childhoods are stolen, and the countries where they live are robbed of their talent and potential. This is even worse in South Sudan, where girls of every age are more likely to be excluded from education than boys, despite various interventions by government and humanitarian agencies.

This study explores the social, economic and political factors that influence or impede girls' school enrolment, attendance and dropout rate, focusing on those in upper primary (P6–P8) in the age range of 12 to 18 years old. Along with secondary research of statistics, 16 schools were selected in the three counties of Juba, Rumbek and Pibor for observation. The study also maps the support system for girls at risk of dropping out or those who have dropped out in the study sites. (See **Chapter 2** for the methodology.)

## 1.1 CONTEXT

The South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in February 2022, reports that an estimated 3.6 million people, 97% of whom are children, need education services. About 139,000 are refugee children. UNICEF (Karamperidou, 2020) notes that more than 2.8 million of South Sudan's children, over 70% of the total, are out of school; some live in pastoral communities, moving with their cattle, and cannot attend regular classes.

According to South Sudan's latest Education Needs Assessment (MoGEI & SSEC, 2021), only 46.9% of children of school age are enrolled in school. For boys, the figure is 53.19%, compared to girls at 46.81% (Amutabi, 2021). While enrolment is high in lower primary grades, the number of boys and girls completing upper primary education is just 14%.

Studies indicate that rural adolescent girls are more disadvantaged, vulnerable and at risk of dropping out of school than those in urban areas (Mitra et al., 2022). The World Bank (2020) notes that female learners in South Sudan face multiple challenges in accessing and completing primary, secondary and higher education. These are mainly attributed to structural barriers combined with harmful practices such as early and forced marriage, poverty, the gendered division of labour within the home, negative attitudes toward female education, and political instability (Faye, 2010, pp.26–30). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation, resulting in the closure of schools between March 2020 and May 2021. Oxfam (2021) notes that many learners struggled to return when schools reopened, with girls in particular reporting an increased burden of domestic chores, along with pressure to support household incomes.

The ongoing insecurity in most of the country has damaged or destroyed a third of schools; recent floods have caused further damage (HART, 2021). In 2021, 5,862 schools were operating in South Sudan, of which 560 were damaged due to flooding and 535 due to conflict. An additional 17 schools were being used as temporary shelters, while 1,292 were closed for unspecified reasons (UN OCHA, 2022a). A UNICEF 2021 report confirms this and adds that, in 2020–21, Pibor’s schools were occupied by displaced people who had fled violence and floods. Juba and Rumbek Counties have the highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees in the country (Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2021).

South Sudan's schools lack resources. Many do not have learning materials, seating or blackboards. The 2021 Education Needs Assessment (MoGEI & SSEC, 2021) reported that one in three schools did not have access to a functioning safe water source, and less than half had clean water and soap available. The same report notes that teachers’ salaries are small and often paid late, resulting in apathy, high turnover and poor-quality teaching. In addition, despite the increased cost of living, their salaries have not been reviewed.

Other barriers include the distance of schools from settlements and households’ limited financial resources. Girls face additional challenges, including cultural norms, practices and community perceptions that discriminate against them and rob them of their opportunities to acquire an education. In addition, South Sudan’s food insecurity has exacerbated its educational challenges. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) findings issued in April 2022 report that 6.8 million people (55.3% of the population) are facing a severe food crisis. Pibor Administrative Area is classified as IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe), while Central Equatoria and Lake States are classified as IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) (FEWS NET, 2022).

## 1.2 STUDY LOCATIONS

### 1.2.1 JUBA COUNTY

Juba County in Central Equatoria State includes South Sudan’s capital city, and so is one of the most privileged areas in terms of access to education. Juba is second only to Yei County for its number of schools, at 470. In Juba County, 74% of school-aged boys and 69% of school-aged girls are enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Juba County has the highest number of teachers with a teaching qualification, and the best-equipped primary schools, with 95% having permanent or semi-permanent classrooms and access to water.

Nonetheless, challenges exist in Juba County. For example, there are many street children, with their numbers growing due to successive waves of violence and continued economic vulnerability. Juba also has the highest numbers of IDPs and returnees in the country. The current statistics stand at 75,365 IDPs and 51,075 returnees (Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2021). IDPs have limited access to land for cultivation, and usually rely on humanitarian assistance.

Given the relatively high urbanization of Juba County, its residents engage in a range of livelihoods. The presence of national, state, county and municipal government institutions – and the humanitarian and development community – provides significant employment opportunities through direct work or ancillary support and business services. Residents also engage in small business, farming, cattle-keeping and technical vocations. However, the economic crisis has had an impact on Juba County, as has the food security crisis. The April 2022 IPC findings categorize the county as Phase 3 (Crisis) (FEWS NET, 2022).

According to the latest HNO (UN OCHA, 2022a), an estimated 243,700 people in the county have significant humanitarian needs, many of whom are IDPs. This is equivalent to approximately 48% of the total IDP population for Juba County. Needs span all sectors, including nutrition, protection, SGBV, health, food security, shelter and non-food items. All significantly impact children’s access to education.

## 1.2.2 PIBOR COUNTY

Pibor is home to the cattle-keeping Murle tribe, who live in South Sudan's lowlands area and Boma plateau. Pibor is a particularly disadvantaged area and has the second-highest level of education needs in the country (UN OCHA, 2022b). Oxfam's education-focused gender analysis (Toma, 2019) revealed that Pibor had the lowest number of schools and children attending classes. There are no secondary schools in the whole county. In addition, the region is often inaccessible due to insecurity and seasonal floods. While various humanitarian and development partners are working in Pibor, their coverage remains limited due to insecurity and accessibility, particularly in the rainy season.

There are many barriers to educational access for boys and girls, but the major ones are linked to insecurity, lack of education facilities, distance to school, poverty, seasonal floods, early marriage and a lack of qualified teachers (ibid.). The situation is more challenging for adolescent girls who are already married and have children, due to the culture of forced and early marriages, coupled with parents' fear of girls being abducted while travelling to and from school.

Particular to the Murle tribe is a system of 'age sets' or groups of men of the same generation that have a number of social functions. Such age sets can terrorize the county when they mount attacks against each other for power and dominance through cattle raids (Finn Church Aid, 2018). They also engage in communal fights to attack neighbouring tribes, mainly the Nuer, Dinka and Jie tribes, and vice versa – often in revenge, which can displace thousands of people, further limiting access to education.

## 1.2.3 RUMBOK (WULU AND AWERIAL) COUNTIES

### WULU COUNTY

Located in Lakes State, Wulu County borders Cueibet County to the north, Rumbek Centre and Rumbek East Counties to the north-east, and Yirol West County to the east. It also borders Warrap State (Tonj South County) to the north-west and Western Equatoria State to the west, south and south-east. The people of Wulu County practice agriculture and fishing, with a minority of households supplementing their livelihoods by raising animals. Some members of Wulu county also practice bee-keeping.

According to UN OCHA's 2022 HNO, over 44,500 people in Wulu County have significant humanitarian needs. The HNO also lists Wulu as one of 14 counties in 'extreme' need of SGBV services, due to intertribal conflicts and floods. Violence has been a long-term driver of insecurity and displacement in Wulu County, attributed to cattle keepers from neighbouring Rumbek East who move through Wulu to seek water and grazing land, causing damage to local farms, beehives and water sources for fishing. Residents of Wulu County and neighbouring Rumbek Centre, Cueibet and Rumbek East Counties have had long-standing conflicts over borders. These have resulted in clashes between youth from Wulu and Belle and Dinka Agar communities from Mvolo County in neighbouring Western Equatoria State, leading to mass displacements, killings and destruction of property and infrastructure.

The poor security in Wulu County has hit the education sector, which contains 36 primary schools and only one secondary school. For example, in 2009, schools were closed due to intercommunal conflict between the Dinka Agaar of Rumbek East County and the Jur-beli of Wulu County, and only reopened in 2016. Many students fled to Western Bhar El-Ghazal State during the clashes, but only a small number have returned. The education director of Wulu County told us in an interview that there are not enough teachers, and getting quality teachers is a challenge.

## AWERIAL COUNTY

Awerial County, located in the south-eastern corner of Lakes State, borders Yirol West County to the north-west, Yirol East County to the north-east, Bor South County to the east and Terekeka County to the south. In 2018, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization and World Food Programme (WFP) reported that 60% of households engage in agriculture. Some people living near the White Nile engage in cattle-keeping, agriculture and fishing. Livelihoods in Awerial County are frequently at the root of communal clashes, particularly around accessing grazing land and water sources for cattle.

Residents of Awerial County have consistently struggled with food insecurity. The HNO 2022 report notes that, out of 76,300 people in need of humanitarian assistance in Awerial County, 14,000 are classified as IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe) (UN OCHA, 2022a). The key drivers of food insecurity are high food prices, internal and external conflicts, and devastating floods that followed a prolonged dry spell earlier in the season. Awerial County also hosts many IDPs, increasing pressure on local resources. According to the Inter-Agency Rapid Needs Assessment conducted in 2020, there are over 50,000 IDPs in Mingkaman Spontaneous Settlement (IRNA, 2020).

Communal clashes between groups from Magok, Abuyung and Bunagok payams, and clashes with Mundari from Terekeka have a long history in Lakes State, including Awerial County. These largely contribute to internal displacements, infrastructure destruction and the disruption of community activities (PAX, 2018).

The inter-agency needs analysis report (IRNA, 2020) further mentions that school buildings have been filled by people displaced by conflict, while floods have destroyed school facilities, including pit latrines. Moreover, the location of a few schools requires many of their learners to walk long distances.

## 1.3 PROJECT INFORMATION

Oxfam in South Sudan, with funding from SIDA, is implementing the 'Building Resilience through gender and conflict-sensitive approaches to education, skills development, and sustainable livelihoods in South Sudan' project in the counties of Juba, Rumbek and Pibor. The project intends to support 25 upper primary schools, targeting 3,000 girls in primary 6 to 8 (P6–8) classes to be retained in school. This is expected to be achieved through direct support provided to girls at risk, school clubs, capacity development of teachers, sensitization and other activities. The project is inclusive of the most vulnerable IDPs, returnees and their host communities.

The project has two outcome indicators:

1. Conflict-affected adolescents, youth, women and men have improved knowledge and skills through safe, quality and gender-responsive/sensitive education and skills development.
2. Strengthened inclusive participation and gender-responsive local leadership to ensure resilient education.

Under outcome 1, the project aims to address the following problems:

- The imminent education crisis of South Sudan leaving millions of children, youth and adults with limited knowledge and skills.
- The lack of qualified local teachers (especially female teachers) with competencies in gender- and conflict-sensitive education approaches.
- The lack of economic, education and skills-development opportunities to enable young people, girls, women out of school and children who have dropped out of school to have agency over their lives.

Under Outcome 2, the following problems will be addressed:

- The weak and fragile education system, which has little capacity to manage schools, teachers' professional development and the role of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) during natural and manmade disasters, shocks and conflicts.
- The over-centralization of decision making in government authorities and the lack of stakeholder involvement, which have weakened policy processes, decreased efficiency, and permitted patronage of powerful interests and corruption, with a huge impact on the functioning of the education system.
- That women face protection issues and have limited opportunities to participate in decision making at all levels, as well as in economic and educational activities.
- The poor livelihood opportunities available as a result of conflict, climate change and many farmers being low-skilled, which mean that subsistence/family farmers lack capacity to promote food systems that are more resilient to climate change.

## 1.4 OBJECTIVES

Between March and April 2022, Oxfam commissioned a study in Juba, Pibor and Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial) Counties, with the main aim of exploring and understanding the different factors that affect the dropout rates of girls in P6-8, and the factors facilitating or hindering their re-entry to school. The findings and recommendations are not only to be used to guide the mapping of schools for direct project support and intervention, but also to recommend possible actions in addressing or mitigating further barriers that limit girls' access to education. In addition, the findings are intended to influence Oxfam in South Sudan's education programming strategy.

The following specific objectives guided the study:

1. Provide an understanding of the current enrolment and dropout rates of girls in schools in Juba, Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial) and Pibor Counties.
2. Outline the socio-economic and cultural factors that lead girls to drop out of school and identify those most at risk.
3. Explore the factors exacerbating girls dropping out and/or preventing them from going back to school.
4. Assess support systems needed by and available to girls who have dropped out.
5. Examine any differences in perspectives between locations, and between IDPs, returnees and host communities.
6. Assess the facts on schools' functionality, enrolment and attendance.
7. Recommend strategies to inform ongoing project activities, guidelines and policies.
8. Map the presence of UNICEF and other education partners for possible synergies and coordination mechanisms.
9. Identify possible anticipated constraints if no intervention were to take place.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 STUDY DESIGN

The study adopted a qualitative cross-sectional descriptive survey to investigate the factors contributing to girls' dropout rates in Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial Counties), Juba County and Pibor County. A participatory qualitative approach of desk reviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews was adopted (see **Annex 2** for a list of key informants). A contextual analysis was used to analyse the factors likely to influence girls' access to education or school dropout in P6–8 classes.

The study targeted:

- in-school girls and boys, mainly in upper primary school;
- out-of-school girls aged 15–21;
- primary teachers (both male and female);
- PTA and SMC members;
- county-level representatives of the Ministry of Gender Child and Social Welfare (MoGCSW) and Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI);
- community leaders and members; and
- representatives of humanitarian agencies implementing education and protection programmes, to share experiences on their approaches and activities, their current and future plans, and the possibility of networking.

Oxfam's project staff furnished the study with project-specific information. **Table 1** summarizes the different categories of respondents that took part in the study. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select the schools (from those with upper primary classes), while all other categories were purposively selected.

**Table 1: A breakdown of study participants by category**

FGD Categories	Juba	Pibor	Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial)	Total	Percent reached	Justification
<i>Target number of girls for FGDs</i>	60	60	40	160		
<i>Girls who participated in FGDs</i>	22	17	50	89	56%	Schools still closed
<i>Target number of boys for FGDs</i>	10	10	10	30		
<i>Boys who participated in FGDs</i>	7	8	17	32	107%	Many schools from Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial) were surveyed
<i>Target number of community members for FGDs</i>	30	30	20	80		
<i>Community members who participated in FGDs</i>	79	47	72	198	247%	More community members participated in the FGDs
<i>Target number of individual interviews with out-of-school girls</i>	6	6	4	16		

<i>Out-of-school girls interviewed</i>	4	2	6	12	75%	Two locations in Pibor were inaccessible
<i>Target number of key informant interviews</i>	15	15	11	41		
<i>Number of key informants interviewed</i>	13	11	11	35	85%	Some targeted government officials were not found in offices or had travelled to the capital
<b>TOTAL TARGET</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>327</b>		
<b>TOTAL REACHED</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>111.9%</b>	

From the table above, a total of 89 girls participated in the nine FGDs, 32 boys (four FGDs), 198 community members (16 FGDs), and 12 individual interviews were conducted with out-of-school girls (aged 15–21). In addition, 35 key informants were interviewed. Overall, 125 respondents were drawn from Juba County, 85 respondents from Pibor, and 156 from Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial). In total, 35 people were interviewed. The number of people included in the FGDs was 331, of which 89 were girls, 32 were boys, 198 were community members, and finally, 12 were girls out of school. To sum up, **366** of the planned **327 participants (111.9%)** took part in the study. In addition to the above qualitative approach, an extensive literature review was conducted, the scope of which is available in the bibliography section.

## LIMITATIONS

A key limitation was in data collection. The available data was only for the 2020–2021 school year. Basing our conclusions on a single school year could be misleading and so should be treated with caution.

## 2.2 DATA COLLECTION

Field data collection began on 4 April 2022. The study team of three consultants began piloting and collecting data in Juba County from 4–8 April. Two consultants then proceeded to Rumbek (Wulu and Awerial) and one to Pibor County, where data was collected from 11–17 April. Different data collection tools were used to gather information from the different respondent categories (see **Annex 3** for detail on the data collection tools). All the information collected was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and coded. Themes were then generated for quick analysis. Given that the study adopted a qualitative design, the information generated was then thematically analysed and triangulated.

## 2.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Thanks to the perseverance of the consultants and the support of Oxfam project staff, the study was a success. There were nonetheless challenges, including:

- **Closed schools.** The postponement of schools reopening (until 3 May 2022) by the government significantly affected plans to conduct FGDs with girls in schools, including observing their interactions in the school environment. Nonetheless, with the mobilization by Oxfam and good

relationships with the community, a sample of girls and boys, including PTA and SMC members, was arranged, and interviews were successfully conducted. While this affected the scope of the study, including observing key aspects in schools during the regular class days, most schools were found registering learners in preparation for the new academic year, and a few schools had commenced with teaching.

- **Bad weather.** The field data collection in Rumbek and Pibor was affected by the onset of the rainy season. For example, some of the study area in Pibor County became inaccessible. A similar situation arose in Awerial County. Nonetheless, with the support of Oxfam logistics staff and the perseverance of consultants, more days in the field were undertaken to compensate for the lost days and complete the data collection.
- **Lack of statistical data.** In some schools and both government ministries, statistics on student enrolment and dropouts are either not recorded or updated. This was a big challenge for the consultants to understand the education gap clearly. Nonetheless, the study relied on the available school registers supplemented by interviews with school administrators.

### 3 FINDINGS ON ENROLMENT AND DROPOUT RATES AT SURVEYED SCHOOLS

Basic education is free and compulsory in South Sudan (General Education Act 2012). UNESCO (2017) observed that, after a prolonged period of conflict, South Sudan’s education system was gradually striving to meet its needs. However, its progress has been thwarted by high dropout rates and low enrolment rates in primary school among girls compared to boys.

According to the Pibor County Commissioner General, although an Education Management Information System exists as the country’s monitoring tool, recording and reporting educational statistics at both state and county levels is a challenge. The system is not regularly updated, and information is not collected and shared with relevant stakeholders. The same was observed in some schools, and as a result, the study relied more on enrolment statistics from 2020–21.

The enrolment and dropout statistics for the 16 schools visited by the study team are summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2: The gender enrolment and dropout rates of surveyed schools (2020–21)**

County	Payam	School	School enrolment statistics 2021			Enrolment for upper primary (P6–P8) 2021				Dropout for upper primary (P6–P8) 2021		
			Total	M	F	Class	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Juba	Gondokoro	St. Dominic P/S	245	146 (60%)	101 (40%)	Data not available						
		Luri	St. Peter’s P/S	421	238 (56%)	183 (44%)	P6	36	22	14	3	1
	P7						28	16	12	2	0	2
	P8						28	18	10	4	2	2
	Baraka Community P/S	441	198 (45%)	243 (55%)	P6	36	16	20	6	2	4	
					P7	37	21	16	4	1	3	
P8					37	12	25	4	0	4		

	<i>Rajaf</i>	<i>Rajaf West community P/S</i>	553	309 (57%)	244 (43%)	P6	34	18	16	2	0	2
						P7	27	16	11	3	0	3
						P8	20	11	9	3	1	2
		<i>Tokimani Community P/S</i>	760	339 (45%)	421 (55%)	P6	79	45	34	4	2	2
						P7	87	47	40	2	0	2
						P8	87	49	38	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,420</b>	<b>1,230</b>	<b>1,192</b>		<b>536</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>29</b>	
<b>Pibor</b>	<i>Pibor Central</i>	<i>Kondako P/S</i>	258	142 (55%)	116 (45%)	P6	32	20	12	3	0	3
						P7	24	16	8	3	1	2
						P8	14	9	5	5	0	5
		<i>Langachor P/S</i>	198	123 (62%)	75 (38%)	P6	26	18	8	3	0	3
						P7	22	16	6	6	1	5
						P8	12	8	4	6	2	4
		<i>Pibor Boys</i>	224	224 (100%)	0	P6	21	21	0	6	6	
						P7	16	16	0	6	6	
						P8	14	14	0	2	2	
		<i>Pibor Girls</i>	132	0	132 (100%)	P6	15	0	15	1	0	1
						P7	11	0	11	3	0	3
						P8	11	0	11	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>812</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>323</b>		<b>218</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>	
<b>Rumbek</b>	<i>Awerial</i>	<i>Mingkaman P/S</i>	312	244 (78.2%)	68 (21.8%)	P6	40	30	10	4	2	2
						P7	20	16	4	0	0	0
						P8	51	33	18	2	1	1
		<i>Kalthok P/S</i>	564	447 (71.6%)	117 (28.4%)	P6	37	25	12	12	5	7
						P7	55	36	16	10	4	6
						P8	No P8 class					
		<i>Dor P/S</i>	305	205 (67.2%)	100 (32.8%)	P6	17	10	12	3	1	2
						P7	No P7 class					
						P8	No P8 class					
	<i>Wulu</i>	<i>Domuloto P/S</i>	427	256 (60%)	171 (40%)	P6	42	27	15	3	2	1
						P7	28	18	10			
						P8	32	22	10	2	2	
		<i>Bidibadai P/S</i>	270	130 (48%)	140 (52%)	P6	55	25	30	4	1	3
						P7	75	35	40	10	3	7
						P8	No P8 class					
		<i>Morngency P/S</i>	821	510 (62%)	311 (38%)	P6	109	70	39	7	3	4
						P7	109	73	36	13	8	5
						P8	92	56	36	13	6	7
<i>Gulumaar P/S</i>	447	248 (55.5%)	199 (44.5%)	P6	50	27	23	5	3	2		
				P7	51	29	22	2	2			
				P8	30	18	12	4	3	1		
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,146</b>	<b>2,040</b>	<b>1,106</b>		<b>673</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	

Source: Field data collected from surveyed areas, 2022.

**Table 3: Summary of upper class (6–8) enrolment and dropout statistics by county and gender**

	Enrolment status (P6–8)			Dropout status (P6–8)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<i>Juba</i>	536	291 (54.3%)	245 (45.7%)	38	9 (23.7%)	29 (76.3%)
<i>Pibor</i>	218	138 (63.3%)	80 (36.7%)	47	18 (38.3%)	29 (61.3%)
<i>Awerial</i>	222	150 (67.6%)	72 (32.4%)	31	13 (41.9%)	18 (58.1%)
<i>Wulu</i>	673	400 (59.4%)	273 (40.6%)	63	33 (52.4%)	30 (47.6%)

Source: Field data, 2022.

These statistics suggest that the overall gender enrolment gap is not wide in all the surveyed areas. Compared to previous years, the recent statistics show an improvement in girls' enrolment.

However, the gender dropout rate in the upper classes seems imbalanced, with girls having a dropout rate twice as high as boys in Juba and Pibor Counties. However, in Rumbek, both boys and girls have a similar rate.

Overall, the study confirms that enrolment and dropout rates vary from one county to another and are influenced by different aspects of life at individual, family, school, community and state levels.

In terms of teacher–learner ratios, most schools surveyed have between eight to 11 teachers, roughly a 1:20 teacher: learner ratio. However, over 70% are volunteer teachers who are secondary school dropouts with no training (see **Section 4.2.6**). These volunteers are not on the government payroll and are remunerated by the money collected as parent contributions.

During the study period, the security situation was calm, and more than 60% of schools sampled mentioned that more learners had been attending school last year, with a third of schools keeping more or less the same number of learners. Most teachers, though, seemed worried about 2022's enrolment, as few students had registered. They attributed this to the ongoing financial and food insecurity crises at the household level, the phasing out of feeding programmes by humanitarian workers, and an increase in the cost of registration to 5,000 SSP (\$12).

While the study relied on school registers or attendance records, it was unfortunate that some schools were not updating these statistics. A few included dropout information in the school register and mentioned that they use the information for follow-ups. However, the majority of schools in Pibor, Rumbek and a few in Juba County did not record absence or dropouts, with staff stating that they have no control over students once they are out of school and that following up would be a waste of time, since they could not address individual learners' needs. They also said that the issue of culture is beyond their control.

## 4 SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS

Dropping out of school means an individual missing out on the benefits of education, but also has an adverse effect on society (Kronick, 1994). Many studies show that dropouts are more likely to become unemployed, work for low wages, have health problems and have criminal records than non-dropouts (Belfield and Levin, 2007). While international organizations are pushing to close the gender gap in all sectors, South Sudan's education gap between boys and girls remains unaddressed. As a result, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of 'ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UN SDGs, n.d.) is far from being realized.

Across the surveyed areas, categories of girls at risk of dropping out or failure to re-enter school were identified. These include:

- Orphaned children (all locations)
- Girls from female-headed households (all locations)
- Girls living with elderly parents (all locations)
- Girls from a family where the majority are male members and girls have to perform household chores (all locations)
- IDPs (all locations)
- Girls who contribute to household incomes (all locations)
- Learners who work at the same time as studying (all locations)
- Children with disabilities (all locations)
- Pregnant and lactating young mothers (all locations)
- Girls who live far from school (all locations)
- Girls from locations with no access to upper primary classes (Gondokoro in Juba, and Rumbek and Pibor)
- Girls from locations where early and forced marriages are normalized (all, but mainly Rumbek and Pibor)
- Girls from families where gender prioritization in education is practiced (all locations)
- Girls from food-insecure households (all locations)
- Girls from locations affected by floods (Gondokoro in Juba, and Rumbek and Pibor)
- Girls from locations suffering insecurity (mainly Rumbek and Pibor)
- Girls from locations with few educated women and girls to serve as role models and change agents (Pibor and Rumbek).

Through interviews and FGDs, this study investigated the factors contributing to the high dropout rates for girls in Juba, Pibor and Rumbek. These factors are categorized in this chapter as 'individual and family-level, school-related, community-level and system-level.

## 4.1 INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY FACTORS

### 4.1.1 POVERTY

UNDP (2020) reports that, out of South Sudan's 12 million people, at least 80% are living on the equivalent of less than \$1 per day, which is considered the absolute poverty line. This is mainly due to long-term conflict, violence, economic fluctuations, illiteracy, instability and the recent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy. The majority of households engage in hand-to-mouth jobs and lack real livelihoods. In Juba County, for example, households have to pay for rent, healthcare and transport in addition to food. The majority of community members in Juba County are casual laborers with big families to look after.

Across all the respondent categories in all three study sites, study participants mentioned that their main reason for not being in school was a lack of school fees, which are 5000–7000 SSP per term, and 12,000–25,000 SSP for P8.

#### Case study 1: Poverty and education

18-year-old Abdu completed P8 in 2020, but has no hopes of joining secondary school. Her father is a casual worker who can only afford to pay rent, while her mother works in a restaurant to be able to feed the family. Abdu, the first of six siblings, was forced to work as a housemaid from when she was in P5. She used the money from this to pay for her school costs. She could also pay for her two siblings out of her monthly earnings. When her former boss moved to a new location, Abdu and her siblings were forced to drop out of school. While Abdu would have liked to join secondary school, her hopes are dwindling. Recently, both her parents have been pushing her to find a man who can give them money in the form of a dowry.

A story told by Abdu, Juba County, April 2022.

The majority of those paying school fees for children in schools were women who did not have reliable livelihoods; most of them were illiterate and shouldering caregiving burdens for other household members. Community leaders attributed the loss of livelihoods to conflict, floods, the closure of businesses during COVID-19 and high inflation.

In both Rumbek and Pibor, poverty was attributed to the loss of cattle due to frequent raids, and the effect of floods. The differences in contexts have contributed to the economic crisis among some households. For example, Rumbek and Juba host many IDPs, who have limited livelihood opportunities, including access to land, and thus rely on humanitarian assistance.

Some parents mentioned that they have been forced to forego the education of some of their children because they cannot afford the cost of educating all of them. As a coping strategy, others have used young daughters to provide an alternative source of livelihood through early and forced marriages. Indeed, in Pibor County, some parents said that they had to prioritize some children for school and others as a source of income through dowries.

*We study in turns. I had to stay home for a year for my sister to complete P8. Now that she has finished, my two brothers and one sister have to wait until I finish P8. – P7 pupil, Juba County.*

The cost of essential educational materials (e.g. school uniform, books, bags and shoes) have hindered many learners from accessing education.

## 4.1.2 TEENAGE PREGNANCY

South Sudan has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy globally. A third of South Sudanese girls begin having children aged 15–19 (Vincent & Alemu, 2016). In all study sites, respondents mentioned unwanted/early pregnancies as one of the significant contributors to the high rates of school dropout among adolescent girls. While schools and education policies allow girls and women to stay in school even when they are pregnant, findings revealed that pregnant girls are usually forced by their families to marry the perpetrator to avoid shame befalling the family. Also, some girls face stigma in schools from their peers and the community. In most cases, pregnancy comes with other health complications that can force girls out of the education system. After giving birth, most find it challenging to go back to school due to childcare responsibilities.

While early marriage and teenage pregnancy were common among adolescent girls in South Sudan, respondents in Juba County attributed the rise in teenage pregnancy to the closure of schools between March 2020 to May 2021. The Support Peace Development Initiative Organization's 2021 report confirmed that more than 1,500 teenage girls in South Sudan were married off or became pregnant during the closure of schools to alleviate household economic stress through dowries (Xinhua, 2020). Oxfam's research found that, when schools reopened, increased poverty, domestic care work, early and forced marriage, and pregnancy made it difficult for many female learners to return to schools (ISPR, 2021). A similar study by Windle Trust International (Masua, 2021) on the impact of the COVID-19 school closures on girls' education in South Sudan revealed that all teachers and parents from 92 sampled schools reported that early and unwanted pregnancies were the most significant factor behind the drop in the number of girls who returned to school upon reopening.

## 4.1.3 FOOD INSECURITY

The 2022 HNO for South Sudan (UN OCHA, 2022a) notes that an estimated 8.3 million people, including refugees, were expected to experience severe food insecurity at the peak of the 2022 lean season (May–July). This represents a 7% increase from the 7.7 million in 2021. The IPC's April 2022 findings categorized Pibor as being in Phase 5 (Catastrophe), and Juba, Awerial and Wulu counties in Phase 3 (Crisis) (FEWS NET, 2022). The key drivers of food insecurity in these areas are insecurity, floods, inflation and the recent decrease in World Food Programme (WFP) food assistance.

A discussion with community members revealed that parents would prioritize food over education during the economic crisis, and it is no wonder that many children have been forced to join the labour market to support their families, mainly to put food on the table.

*A hungry stomach is an empty mind.* – Learner, Awerial County

For those in school, hunger is a crucial barrier to education, resulting in poor academic performance, inconsistent attendance and eventual dropout. The study found that most learners do not get a meal before school, and most of the assessed schools do not provide food for learners. Recently, the WFP has cut food assistance for more than 100,000 IDPs in South Sudan (WFP, 2021), which has dramatically impacted feeding programmes in schools. Most children in the surveyed sites come from IDP homes.

*Previously, most parents would send their children to school, hoping that at least they would have a meal. But recently, this programme has stopped, and parents would instead send children to work than school.* – PTA member, Pibor County

## 4.1.4 CHILD LABOUR AND WORKING PUPILS

The International Labour Organization (ILO) recognizes that some forms of work that boys and girls engage in can help personal development, but it uses the term 'child labour' to describe harmful work that interferes with children's schooling. ILO and UNICEF's 2021 report found that, globally, more than one-third of all children performing child labour are out of school (UNICEF and ILO, 2021).

Most learners interviewed mentioned that some school-going children sell cold drinks, food products, vegetables and fruit; some work in tea shops and small restaurants; others sell water and local bread (*mandazi*), and a small number provide home help. Working children the study team spoke to mentioned that balancing work and school is tiresome and challenging. School performance is affected, students have irregular attendance and are sometimes exposed to SGBV that can lead to pregnancy, early marriage and disease, which eventually leads to dropping out.

Teachers confirmed that working children do not perform as well in class as their non-working peers, and are more likely to drop out of school.

Interviews with key informants confirmed that the closure of schools during the pandemic pushed many learners into the labour market to support their families, and some have not re-joined since schools reopened. Additionally, children from some marginalized families have become household breadwinners regardless of their age and schooling status, as documented in the case study below.

### Case study 2: Child labour

Rose (not her real name) is 18, currently registered in P8. Rose is unsure of whether she will sit her final exams. The third of nine children (eight girls and one boy), Rose's life has been difficult. After her father abandoned them to go to Khartoum and her mother was only able to sell charcoal to buy food, Rose's dream of becoming a teacher seems impossible. Since P1, Rose has been paying for her own school fees by plaiting hair on weekends and after classes. She only manages to revise her books at night. In addition to meeting her school needs, Rose also contributes to meeting the needs of her other family members. Rose sobbed as she shared how it seems no one understands her situation, as her grades have declined.

A story told by 'Rose', Juba Payam. April 2022.

## 4.1.5 COVID-19

The negative impact of the 14-month school closures as a COVID-19 prevention measure was mainly reported in Juba, as those from other counties claimed that COVID-19 was 'in the urban areas'. As a result of the economic crisis, girls were married off, many children were forced into work to supplement household incomes, and some girls were sexually abused, which explains why the number of unwanted and teenage pregnancies rose between 2021 and 2022 (ISPR, 2021). Many teachers left the profession to find alternative means of survival. When schools reopened in May 2022, many recorded a high student dropout rate and significant turnover of teachers.

## 4.1.6 HOUSEHOLD WORK BURDEN

*Girls have a lot of work at home and little time to study.* – Female Learner, Awerial County

Girls' low enrolment and high dropout rates are reflected in the heavy domestic work burdens that they bear compared to boys. Female learners in an FGD revealed that they have to perform household tasks early in the morning before school and late in the evening afterwards. Many girls said that they usually report to school late. Boys admitted that they have fewer tasks. Most girls shared that their tasks include cooking, fetching water and firewood, milking cows and caring for

family members. When female adult caregivers are away or indisposed, girls are expected to assume their tasks automatically. All this work leaves girls exhausted and with little time to revise and complete school assignments. They sometimes stop going to school, attend irregularly, miss classes, perform poorly or drop out. Some reported that, if they fail to fulfil their domestic duties, they are punished by not only parents but also male relatives.

#### **4.1.7 LACK OF PARENTAL SUPPORT**

Repeated shocks have weakened community-based structures and services, pushing families to adopt harmful coping mechanisms. These expose vulnerable people, particularly children and women, to violence, exploitation, abuse, recruitment into age sets, trafficking, child labour and forced marriage. Children and parents mentioned that they lack money for school fees and basic needs such as sanitary pads, school uniform/clothes, underwear, and Vaseline to use as lotion. Without these, adolescent girls are vulnerable to negative coping strategies such as sexual exploitation, early marriages, unwanted pregnancies and emotional violence, contributing to dropping out. Teachers also reported that many learners who drop out lack an adult caregiver to inspire, motivate and support them.

*In this community, when a girl gets pregnant, usually parents send her away to the perpetrator regardless to avoid shame. – PTA member, Juba County*

On a positive note, most teachers interviewed mentioned that they understand the situation of single parents, and usually, when parents do not have the money for school fees, the school administration will not send away their children. However, teachers decried parents' negligence of their responsibilities, and as a result, they are at times compelled to send away pupils.

*If a parent brought a child and talked to the administration, we let them continue learning because we want them to study. If a parent has four pupils in school, they can pay registration fees for two, and two will be exempted. Besides, orphans do not pay the registration fees. – Headteacher, Pibor County*

#### **4.1.8 GENDER BIAS**

Cultural norms coupled with financial constraints have led to the prioritization of boys over girls for education. There was a general assumption across all the study sites that an educated male child is more valuable to his family than a girl, who they consider will sooner or later be married off and instead support their husbands' family. As a result, most of the parents confessed that they would prioritize education for boys over girls during times of scarcity. In Pibor, for example, many girls are culturally perceived as future wives while boys are culturally perceived as leaders. Indeed, many community members said that they see girls as a source of income. For example, in some instances, boys have to wait for their sisters to be married in order to be able to pay school fees.

*My parents forced me out of school in P5 to provide a chance for my younger brother, who is currently in P5, to study. My parents believe that he will be able to support them in the future. – Female dropout, Juba County*

*Boys don't get pregnant. – Male student, Pibor County*

#### **4.1.9 AGE**

Across the three study sites, girls, teachers and community members attributed the high dropout rate among girls in upper primary classes to age. The respondents mentioned that when a girl is much older than her peers (usually above 16 years) in a class with young girls, she tends to feel stigmatized, at times discriminated against and bullied by other pupils and community members. This demotivates them and can contribute to dropping out.

*I am currently 19 years old and dropped out of school at the age of 16. I missed exams due to poverty and, as a result, was made to repeat classes. I was 16 years old in P3 and the eldest in the whole class. The whole school made fun of me, and I decided to leave.* – Female former learner, Juba County

#### **4.1.10 MOTIVATION**

At times, a lack of interest and motivation among both pupils and parents can contribute to the former dropping out. Pupils' poor motivation is attributed to peer influence, and a lack of basic school requirements such as books, school uniform or registration fees resulting in them being sent away from school.

*When sent to school, some girls decide to spend time with boys instead. As a result, they never step into class. Eventually, they miss out on exams, are impregnated and drop out of school from fear.* – Female community member, Juba County

#### **4.1.11 EXAMINATION FAILURE**

While class-based tests and exams are meant to motivate and encourage learners to assess their strengths and weaknesses and motivate them to strive, studies indicate that failing an exam is more likely to discourage a low-achieving student from staying in school (UNICEF, 2017b). According to interviews with learners in all three counties, poor grades, repeating classes and failing a class-based exam or test significantly contributes to dropout in schools. While this affects both boys and girls, it is worse for the latter, as they have to combine school with household tasks, leaving them with little time to concentrate, including finishing school assignments.

Learners mentioned that community members celebrate those who perform well and mock those who fail. This creates a sense of rejection, stigma and stress, leading some learners to change schools or drop out entirely.

#### **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

It was also discovered that children who fail a test or exam can be punished or beaten by teachers in front of their peers. While teachers felt that such punishments are intended to motivate the learners, the pain and embarrassment it causes has the opposite effect.

#### **4.1.12 POOR HEALTH**

Studies indicate that learners' health influences their ability to participate in and complete school. UNICEF (2021) notes that poor access to health services and the limited number of health workers significantly contribute to children's poor attendance in school. The report further notes that South Sudan has some of the worst health indicators globally. Around 75% of all child deaths in South Sudan are caused by preventable diseases, such as diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia. A discussion with study respondents across all categories confirmed the above findings. Most mentioned that the most common illnesses affecting children's school participation are malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid. Health services in Pibor and Rumbek are in a poor state, with no drugs or health personnel. The counties rely on humanitarian staff to provide health services.

None of the schools visited had a first aid box or school nurse to provide first-line treatment in case of emergency or sickness. Teachers confessed that whenever a learner falls sick, the only support provided is to send them back home. Those able to recover within a few days return to school, while those unable to access healthcare services or who have long-term illnesses drop out. The Pibor County Department of Education recommended that education partners should integrate healthcare assistance in all their programmes, stating, 'a healthy mind and good health lead to increased enrolment, attendance and school completion'.

### 4.1.13 COST OF SCHOOLING

The study found that other associated education costs limit female learners from participating. These costs are mainly termly registration fees of 3,000–5,000 SSP (\$8–12) per term, and education-related materials such as school uniform, shoes and textbooks. Even with financial support from partners to cover teachers' incentives, learning materials, feeding programmes and WASH assistance, without meeting the school-related costs levied on learners, girls' enrolment, retention and completion rates are reduced. In almost all the schools surveyed, the Government of South Sudan is implementing the Girls Education of South Sudan programme to assist girls in upper primary (P5–P6) in meeting other basic and unique needs. An impact evaluation on why girls have continued to drop out of school despite the cash grants could guide Oxfam's future inclusive education programmes.

### 4.1.14 EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

The latest HNO (UN OCHA, 2022a) reports that early marriage is common in South Sudan, with half of girls getting married before they turn 18. Evidence suggests that girls with little or no education are up to six times more likely to marry as children than girls with secondary schooling (World Bank). While early marriages are a common practice in Rumbek and Pibor Counties, a few cases were also reported in most FGDs and in the key informant interviews in Juba County. Community members in Rumbek and Pibor reported the belief that education delays marriage, and educated girls are at risk of not finding a husband.

The cultural practice of 'booking on' (i.e. arranging marriage with) girls as young as eight years is normalized across all the study sites. The onset of menstruation is closely connected with marriage. In Rumbek, for example, the first menstrual period is celebrated as a symbol of a girl's adulthood and readiness for marriage. In all the study locations, it was found that whenever a girl is booked on, her husband has the liberty to pick her up at any time and from anywhere. Even in Juba County, which is peri-urban, this practice is seen among businessmen who may travel some distance to pick up girls they have booked on, regardless of their age and participation in school.

*It happens here. We have some girls who are booked on. When their time comes, their husbands to-be will pick them up. We have nothing we can do. It's the culture.*  
– Headteacher, Juba County

*This girl was paid for when she was 12 years. When she reached 16 years in primary six, her husband came and picked her up right here from this school.* – Head teacher, Luri Payam

*This is part of our culture. Men do not consider girls' education important but rather a woman to produce for their children. Once booked on, she is someone's wife, and the husband can storm the home or even school at any time and collect her.* – Teacher, Pibor County

*We are also doing it, and even teachers do it. How then can we stop it? You can't even dare, else, you can be targeted and killed.* – PTA member, Pibor County

### 4.1.15 PATRIARCHAL DECISION-MAKING NORMS

In a patriarchal society such as South Sudan, a woman or girl cannot choose whether to stay in school or at what age she would like to be married and to whom. These are decisions for their parents. In Rumbek, Pibor and some households in Juba County, parents look to their daughters as a source of money during straightened times, as described in **Section 4.1.1**.

*Even when your brother wants cows to marry, he will force you into getting married.* – Female learner, Pibor County

*I am a poor woman who has to take care of 8 children. Why should I suffer yet I have my 13-year-old daughter? I am preparing her and waiting for any man to marry her off. – Female parent, Pibor County*

A discussion with out-of-school girls who are already married revealed that, while they would have liked to go back to school, the decision lies with their spouses and has to be supported by his relatives.

*Even if I wanted to go back to school, my husband would never let me. I am already a woman, and he has the final say. – Out-of-school female, Pibor County*

This calls for cultural sensitivity in designing education programmes and the need to involve those with power and authority to influence interventions aimed at benefiting girls and women in a patriarchal society. If not designed carefully, such programmes may expose them to more harm in the form of SGBV or are likely to face resistance from the community.

#### **4.1.16 DISTANCE TO SCHOOL**

The findings revealed that the long distances to access school contribute to girls' dropout rates, especially in insecure locations. In Pibor and Rumbek Counties, adolescent girls and parents said that, given how few schools have upper primary classes, parents fear that their children will be abducted along the way – especially in Rumbek, where some children walk more than 5km to school.

In Gondokoro Payam, Juba County, there is only one government primary school with P8. In Luri and Rajaf Payams, Juba County, only two government schools exist. Pibor County only has a total of four government schools, and Awerial County only has four schools with classes up to P8.

There are other challenges to physically reaching schools. For example, in Wulu Payam, Rumbek, there are no homes between students' homes and the school that they could use for shelter; as a result, survey participants indicated that the majority of learners refrain from going to school during the rainy season.

#### **4.1.17 THE LOW PERCEIVED VALUE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION**

In South Sudan, a major challenge for education has been changing communities' perceptions about female education in a patriarchal society. In all the surveyed areas, girls are perceived as low value compared to boys, and as needing more resources (food, clothes and general upkeep) as they grow up. As a result, female and male learners are not given the same opportunities to prove their abilities, which justifies gender bias or prioritization in regard to limited resources for access to education. Even at the community level, boys are considered superior to girls, and there is a belief that boys perform better than girls.

#### **4.1.18 DEATH OF PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS**

Orphans are identified as a vulnerable category in the education sector. In all the study sites and across all respondents, the death of a parent or caregiver was found to significantly affect a learner's continuity in school.

*I was then studying in Juba, but when my father died, his relatives brought me to Pibor and married me off at the age of 16 to an NGO worker aged 33 years as his second wife. Whenever I ask him to take me back to school, he reminds me that he wanted a wife, not a student. – Female school dropout, Pibor County*

The loss of a parent not only affects a child emotionally, but it also reduces a family's capacity to provide for basic needs, including parental guidance. This, at times, pushes learners into child

labour, bad peer groups, or increases the need for them to take on increased household roles. In addition, with the death of a parent or caregiver, some children become heads of household, which is worse for girls if the deceased parent was a mother, as this usually results in them being expected to assume a motherly role at a tender age. It is difficult to balance such responsibilities with education.

## 4.2 SCHOOL FACTORS

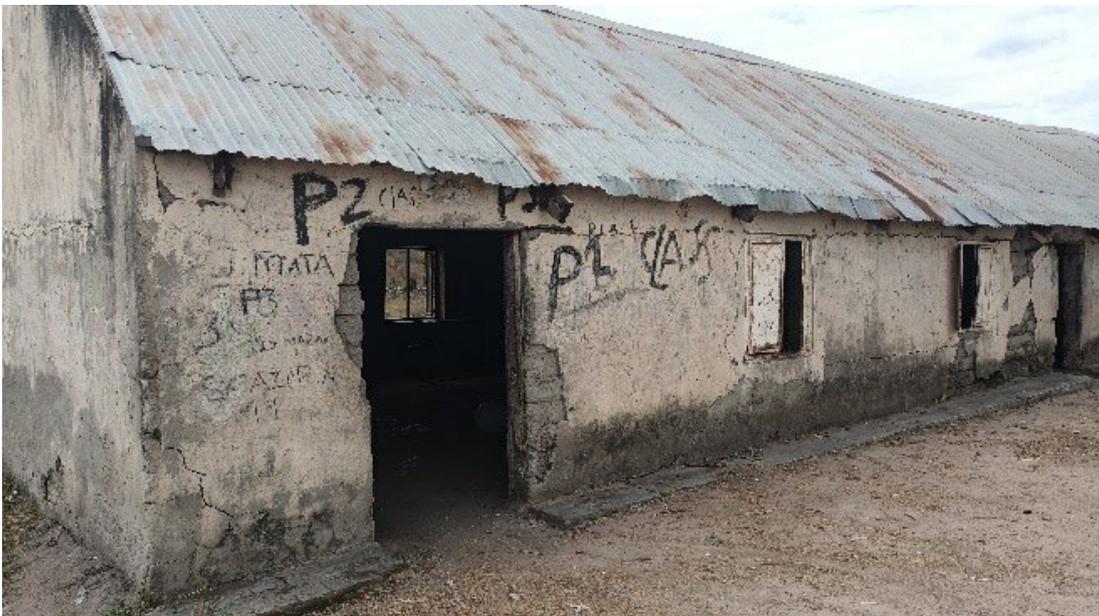
According to UNHCR (2018, p.35), poor learning environments, insufficient and underqualified teachers, inadequate teacher training, and outdated curricula and pedagogy are the main barriers for learners and are increasing the risk of dropout. The study confirmed this.

### 4.2.1 LIMITED NUMBER OF SCHOOLS, CLASSES AND BUILDINGS

Few schools in the surveyed areas have upper primary classes. For example, in Gondokoro Payam, Juba County, only St. Dominic Primary School (P/S) has a P8. Kalthok, Dor and Bidibadai P/S in Rumbek do not have P7 and/or P8.

In addition, most of the schools surveyed, especially in Pibor and Rumbek, lacked school structures. In Rumbek, for example, some classes take place under trees or in grass thatched huts that are affected by rain.

Some schools have been destroyed by insecurity and/or floods, or are poorly constructed and maintained, putting learners' lives at risk. In Pibor, for example, Kondako and Langachor Primary Schools are in terrible condition. In Juba County, St. Peters and Baraka Community Primary schools in Luri Payam, and Dor Primary School in Awerial have semi-permanent and temporary structures (see **Section 5.1**). Learners said that some classrooms flood during the rainy season, and they fear that the building could collapse on them, so would rather not go to school in order to avoid the risk.



A classroom block at Kondako P/S, Pibor County, April 2022. Photo: Sherrie Lillian.

Few or no secondary schools and vocational institutions exist in each area, which demotivates pupils who feel they are unlikely to continue beyond P8. For example, Pibor County's only secondary school recently closed due to low enrolment coupled with a lack of teachers and high maintenance costs.

*After all, what happens after P8? Isn't it marriage? Schools are simply a waste of girls' and parents' resources. – Community leader, Wulu County*

## **4.2.2 MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT**

A lack of menstrual health management is a significant barrier to female learner retention and progression. Out of the 16 surveyed schools, only seven (44%) have a changing room or bathroom for girls. The rest did not have these facilities, despite having gender-specific latrines. Even at those schools with a separate bathroom/changing room for female learners, most were found to lack water, and there are no provisions for a bucket for adolescent girls to collect water and take a quick bath. The bathrooms are dirty and poorly maintained.

In addition, the majority of the female learners interviewed mentioned that they did not have access to dignity kits when they needed them. This was confirmed by teacher. As a result, most students use old clothes, while a small number can afford to buy sanitary products.

Some humanitarian agencies have supported girls with dignity kits over the years; for example, Plan International provides all schools in Pibor with dignity kits on a termly basis. Unfortunately, the study found that the community in Pibor has not embraced the type of sanitary pads provided – women and girls shared that the majority have stopped using them, claiming that they are too large and uncomfortable. A further study should be conducted on the effectiveness and appropriateness of reusable sanitary pads, and the feedback could be used to redesign or improve provision to better fit the context.

In most schools where menstrual hygiene management is not supported, the study revealed that, when a girl gets her menstrual period, she is permitted by the teacher to go home. Most girls reported staying home during their periods due to fear of being mocked, the probability of staining, and the lack of a private space for bathing and changing.

The lack of a female teacher in many schools worsens the situation. In such schools, female learners do not receive advice, counselling and encouragement.

*When a girl says she feels a headache, we know her problem and immediately send her home to return when she is okay. This is because we don't have hygiene kits in school. – Female teacher, Juba County*

## **4.2.3 LIMITED ACCESS TO WATER**

Only six of the 16 surveyed schools have clean water in their bathrooms and latrines. For example, Tokimani Community Primary School in Juba County reported that they previously relied on a solar-powered water system provided by Malteser International, a humanitarian partner. Recently, the solar panels were stolen, so there is no provision of water for female learners. In addition, even with those schools that had water within a short distance, the bathrooms for female learners do not have running water. Instead, students have to walk to collect water, and the majority of the female learners confessed that this creates suspicion among their peers that they are on their period, resulting in bullying and humiliation. In other schools, especially in Juba County, water is scarce and usually schools buy water from service providers. Given the financial challenges of schools, they are unlikely to prioritize water for female learners.

## **4.2.4 LOW AND DELAYED PAY FOR TEACHERS**

The study found that teachers are poorly paid (1,254–4,000 SSP, which is less than \$10 a month), with payments not adjusted for inflation for over a year. Teachers at most schools also said they had not received salaries since December 2021, when asked in April 2022. This explains why the teaching profession in South Sudan has seen an exodus, with most trained teachers joining

humanitarian agencies or becoming self-employed, meaning the public education sector is currently relying on unqualified teachers and volunteers [see **Section 4.2.6**]. Humanitarian partners implementing education programmes provide incentives to teachers to motivate them to teach learners. Low pay was also linked to a lack of female teachers in most of the schools surveyed, as students have shunned the teaching profession.

## **4.2.5 POOR CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS**

None of the surveyed schools provide accommodation or transport, and only a few provide food for teachers. Some mentioned that they walk for over 10km to reach the school. This means that they arrive late and leave early – and are often hungry. This all affects their motivation and commitment.

## **4.2.6 INADEQUATE AND UNQUALIFIED TEACHERS**

In all the schools surveyed, people complained about a lack of qualified teachers. While most headteachers in Juba County had a diploma or degree in education, most in Rumbek and Pibor are either students in higher education institutions or senior four dropouts who are not licensed as teachers.

Across all the surveyed schools, only 10% had legally required teaching qualifications. The majority of the schools rely on secondary school dropouts, commonly referred to as ‘volunteer’ teachers. This means that the teachers provide a lower standard of teaching and also have less commitment and motivation. Most volunteer teachers lack training and usually break the teachers’ code of conduct, including exposing learners to SGBV through teacher–learner relationships. Learners also mentioned that they know of volunteer teachers who use corporal punishment, come to school under the influence of alcohol, and are physically abusive, which has pushed some learners out of school. This behaviour taints the image of the school in the community, resulting in some parents not wishing to send their children to such schools.

Studies have shown that female teachers play a crucial role in the lives of female learners as counsellors, support systems and role models (Global Partnership for Education, 2016). Unfortunately, study findings indicate that there are few or no female teachers in the schools surveyed. For instance, only three (19%) of the 16 surveyed schools had a female teacher, though none were teaching upper primary classes. This is attributed to low female literacy rates, poor pay and poor conditions. Some received their education in Arabic, yet South Sudan’s language of instruction is English.

## **4.2.7 VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL**

Violent school environments are a barrier to education (UNICEF, 2018). According to study participants, bullying, humiliation, physical abuse, psychological distress and discrimination have been crucial factors behind both male and female learners dropping out. Violence was widespread in the schools surveyed, with some of the children interviewed reporting missing school at times due to the fear of bullying or being physically attacked, facing corporal punishment, unfriendly teachers, and some girls’ fear of humiliation by boys during their menstrual period.

Some female learners shared that they do not like sharing benches with boys simply because they make them feel uncomfortable, and sometimes when they know they are menstruating, they mock them. This is another reason why the majority of female learners prefer to stay home during their periods [see **Section 4.2.2**].

It was also discovered that there are family issues that some learners bring to school, and this can also contribute to those involved dropping out of school, or getting in fights and being chased away from school. For example, if there is a quarrel between two families, children tend to get involved and sometimes they bring the problem to school.

It should be noted that many South Sudanese children have undergone traumatizing events during the country's numerous conflicts. They have witnessed their families become homeless; many are SGBV survivors and are food insecure due to violence in their communities. Unfortunately, psychosocial support services have not been integrated into the MoGEI's programmes, and few humanitarian organizations provide such services.

*You are at school, but thinking about problems back home, including domestic chores waiting for you. So, not paying attention.* – Female learner, Pibor County

*Because of the many problems at home, we think about marriage, hoping that marriage can solve them.* – Female learner, Juba County

Moreover, some learners are survivors of domestic violence, child labour, denial of resources for girls, teacher–pupil relationships and abductions, etc. This calls for humanitarian partners to integrate psychosocial support in all programmes intended to benefit children.

The study also found that SGBV was common in almost all schools yet underreported due to its sensitivity and the lack of a proper confidential feedback mechanism. As mentioned earlier, most volunteer teachers have not received any training in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; they are young, lack professionalism, and due to the weak enforcement of policies by MoGEI and headteachers, some have become SGBV perpetrators. While many schools mentioned that they have had to dismiss teachers reported by female learners, a discussion with learners revealed that the practice is prevalent, yet there is no confidential and secure mechanism for reporting. The study discovered that some volunteer teachers have impregnated or married their students, forcing them out of school, while the female learners who refuse to engage in relationships have faced corporal punishment as a form of revenge, or have even been chased away from school, yet they keep silent about it.

*If you accept him, he will shower you with favours and praise, including giving you good marks. But when you refuse, even over a small mistake, he will double the punishment or even send you out of his class or school. We can't tell our parents, but rather give an excuse for not going back to that school.* – Female learner, Juba County

*Here, some teachers marry their students. A teacher is part of our culture.* – Community Leader, Rumbek County

## **4.2.8 LIMITED FACILITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

In South Sudan, children with disabilities face numerous challenges in accessing education. For example, the Education Needs Assessment (MoGEI and SSEC, 2021) notes that most schools have no trained teachers for people with special needs, lack mobility and assistive devices, and the majority of the schools do not have accessible latrines or buildings. These claims are corroborated by this study.



The design of Tokimani primary school's steps makes it difficult for children with disabilities to access. Photo: Sherrie Lillian.

Despite Article 30 of the 2011 constitution of South Sudan clearly articulating the rights of people with special needs, the government has not made efforts to support schools and train teachers to foster or deliver inclusive education. As a result, school communities are not sensitized, and children with disabilities are discriminated against, and forced to drop out of school when they cannot find the support they need to continue.

*In 2021, we had five children with disabilities, but due to a lack of trained teachers to support their educational needs, we advised the parents to send two of the five learners to a school that could handle their needs. Unfortunately, given that the school is far from home, these kids are now at home, not studying.* – Headteacher, Juba County

## 4.2.9 LACK OF LEARNING AND TEACHING MATERIALS

A discussion with teachers and PTA/SMC members revealed that many schools lack teaching materials such as chalk, blackboards, textbooks and stationery because of insufficient financial support from the government. While a few schools are supported by humanitarian organizations (see **Chapter 7**), the majority of schools do not receive any financial support to purchase learning materials. As a result, they have been forced to introduce other costs in addition to the already restrictive examination and registration fees and related expenses that have pushed some learners out of school.

## 4.2.10 INSUFFICIENT FURNITURE

While there were areas where pupils learned under trees due to lack of classrooms, there were other areas that had classrooms but had insufficient furniture for learners and teachers. In Pibor County, for example, school furniture was destroyed by conflict, when schools were turned into temporary shelters. Due to the lack of security, much of what survived has been stolen. As a result, learners squeeze onto the available seats, and those who fail to find a seat prefer to



Broken furniture at Langachor P/S, Pibor County, April 2022. Photo: Sherrie Lillian.

go back home. Some adolescent female learners confided in the study team how sharing seats with a learner of the opposite sex makes them feel uncomfortable. The lack of provision of comfortable seating should be considered a significant barrier to girls' participation in education.

## 4.3 COMMUNITY FACTORS

Community plays a vital role in childhood education. The community environment is where the school is located, so is greatly influenced by community members, the roles of community leaders, and the availability of financial, social and human resources that provide support networks (Alam, 2015). It should be noted that children learn from community members (such as adults, peers and religious leaders), and it is within their community that they find role models to inspire them.

The study explored how the community environment contributes to girls' dropout rates or limits their desire to re-enter the school system.

### 4.3.1 INSECURITY AND INTERTRIBAL CONFLICT

The recent South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan (UN OCHA, 2022b) notes that conflict throughout 2021 in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Lakes, Upper Nile, Central Equatorial, Warrap, Unity, and Western Equatorial and Jonglei areas led to school closures. The latest Education Needs Assessment (MoGEI and SSEC, 2021) cited insecurity in and around schools as a significant reason for learners' absence and dropout rates in 2021. Ongoing conflicts continue to displace hundreds of thousands of people across a number of states. For example, in Pibor County, the youth groups commonly known as 'age sets' (see **Section 1.2.2**) and the cattle camp youth in Rumbek County have caused insecurity that has significantly impacted the functioning of schools. In Juba County, there are many displaced and returnee households.

In Pibor County, for example, during conflict or insecurity, community members find shelter in classrooms in schools, where it is considered safe. However, classes are suspended until the village becomes peaceful again. This prevents both girls and boys from continuing with school and puts them at risk of SGBV due to overcrowding, economic challenges and idleness. As mentioned in **Section 4.2.1**, conflict has resulted in the destruction of some educational facilities. It has also resulted in teachers and learners being killed, and girls and women targeted and abducted as part of a cycle of revenge.

### 4.3.2 ABDUCTION OF GIRLS

Abducting children is very common among the Murle community in Pibor and Rumbek. UNICEF (2021) reports that more than 680 children were abducted in South Sudan in 2020. Women and girls are abducted to bear children, and boys trained as warriors to join inter-communal conflicts and cattle raids. This study also found that, in Pibor, girls are abducted in broad daylight. In some settings, particularly in Rumbek and Pibor, the loss of cattle wealth has led to an increase in raids and girls' abduction by men who do not have enough cattle to pay the bride price for marriage (Ellsberg, 2020). In Rumbek County, some girls are withdrawn from school by their parents and sent to the cattle camps to look after cattle. No formal education is provided in cattle camps.

### 4.3.3 FLOODS

Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile and Pibor Administrative Area were worst hit by the 2019–21 floods. In Rumbek and Pibor, for example, schools are usually flooded during the rainy season, preventing children and teachers from accessing education. In Pibor County, even walking in the water is precarious due to the risk of snake bites, and the majority of people do not own a boat to access the few schools. Similarly, in Juba County, during the rainy season, teachers told us that student

absence is high, mainly among girls. They said this is because some girls, and their parents, do not value education. In addition, as mentioned in **Section 4.2.1**, many classrooms and buildings have been destroyed and learning materials spoiled by floods.

### **4.3.4 LIMITED ACCESS TO WATER**

In all three study areas, the responsibility for collecting water falls to women and girls. Unfortunately, water scarcity is still a major challenge, despite humanitarian organizations increasing WASH assistance. In Pibor County, for example, women and girls queue for up to three hours to access the few available boreholes. Some sell water to earn a living. The time lost while queuing affects their participation in school. Some learned involved in fetching water as a source of livelihood mentioned that it is challenging to balance this activity with school, but if they were to abandon it, their households might not be able to afford food or school fees. Thus, they prioritize selling water over education.

### **4.3.5 LACK OF ROLE MODELS**

Role models can be important people in someone's life or people who are peripheral to them. They can be parents, relatives, non-related adults and peers. They can even be someone the individual does not know personally, but has encountered, for example, through the media. Role models can be a powerful force for social learning, aspiration and transformation.

Unfortunately, children from rural areas and low-income backgrounds are less likely to have economically successful role models and mentors in their own families and neighbourhoods. The study's findings confirmed this. Girls from Pibor and Rumbek, when asked who their role models are, were quick to mention humanitarian workers, their own sisters or to say they did not have one. In Juba County, which is more peri-urban, girls could mention key female celebrities, ministers, doctors and teachers, among others. The lack of role models in Pibor could be due to the many women and girls who have been able to finish secondary school that then decide to move away from their rural communities in search of a better life. Others are forced to leave by insecurity, food crisis or harmful cultural practices that do not value women and girls. These leave the young generation with no one to inspire them.

*Even for those in school, our end result is marriage and living a similar lifestyle. So what is the difference between me and them (students)? They are wasting their time and resources.* – Out-of-school female respondent, Awerial County

## **4.4 SYSTEMIC FACTORS**

### **4.4.1 INADEQUATE POLICIES ON SCHOOL ACCESS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

The latest HNO (UN OCHA, 2022a) reports that 15% of South Sudan's population in need are persons with a disability. Article 29 of the South Sudan Constitution (as amended in 2013) recognizes the right to education for all citizens and states that all levels of government must provide access to education without discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, health status, gender or disability. However, access to education by children with disabilities is still limited in South Sudan.

School enrolment for children with disabilities was low in all surveyed schools, while attendance varied. The dropout ratio in upper classes is very high, given that few of the schools registered children with disabilities in upper classes. However, there is no available data on their completion rate. This indicates a high dropout rate, and the reasons could be linked to poorly designed school structures, limited financial support, lack of mobility devices, lack of trained teachers to meet their

educational needs, and access issues, among other factors. If these barriers are left unaddressed, children with disabilities will continue to miss out on educational opportunities or even drop out, regardless of gender.

#### **4.4.2 POOR CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS**

According to a UNICEF study (Karamperidou, 2020), the highest national rates of staff absence in sub-Saharan Africa were reported in South Sudan, with 15.5% of surveyed teachers being absent from school at least once a week. The findings of this study reveal that teachers' attendance problems are a result of weak monitoring systems; limited training, poor salaries, benefits and career development; a burdensome workload; and poor infrastructure, alongside non-system factors, such as health, family obligations, the weather, community infrastructure and conflict. This study also found that the Government of South Sudan has not taken initiatives to create a conducive environment for teachers. For example, most teachers earn 1,254–4,000 SSP (less than \$10 a month), which has not been revised for over five years, despite inflation. This demotivates them, and as a result, they are not committed to the teaching profession.

*Despite the economic situation, the government has not adjusted teachers' salaries, with the education sector allocated just 6% of the national budget. Moreover, payment by the government is often delayed, which demotivates teachers. Many have had to abandon the teaching profession. Do not be surprised to find many schools closed, which denies children an opportunity to study.* – Director-General, Ministry of Education, Pibor County

While teachers' attendance is supposed to be monitored by both the headteachers and PTA members, there is no proper government system to track this. As a result, many report to school late, leave early or sometimes do not show up at all.

#### **4.4.3 INADEQUATE POLICIES ON SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

While the MoGEI provides the teachers' code of conduct on teacher–learner relationships, its implementation is weak. For example, in Rumbek and Pibor Counties, culture overrides all other child protection policies and guidelines. It is therefore unsurprising that some teachers impregnate and marry their students, and even when dismissed by the administration, quickly find work in another school. The national teacher monitoring system needs to be strengthened to track such perpetrators and protect students by excluding perpetrators from the education system where appropriate.

#### **4.4.4 WEAK LEGISLATION ON HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES**

Some cultural practices, such as child and forced marriages and abductions, have been recognized by the government and communities to be harmful to children's lives and as a rights violation. However, little effort has been made by governments to end these vices by enforcing strict penalties and creating rescue plans for survivors. Without the government's intervention, the only thing humanitarian workers and academics will be able to do is continue to document and disseminate information about these violations.

#### **4.4.5 INSUFFICIENT EFFORT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**

Some areas of South Sudan host inclusive education programmes, such as Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP) and Financial Adult Literacy (FAL) courses implemented by humanitarian partners. However, in the areas studied, many adolescent girls and women have not been able to re-enter

education due to the lack of such flexible programmes in their locations. Nonetheless, an FGD with out-of-school respondents revealed high demand for such interventions, even though they felt they were likely to miss out anyway because they have challenges in accessing information about the availability of such services. They advised that information could be shared through churches or women's centres, places which they usually easily access. This calls for scaling up flexible education programmes in the study locations to promote education for all and ensuring that the channel of communication is contextualized to meet the needs of the target groups.

## 5 SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS

An observation checklist was administered at all 16 primary schools (see the full list in **Chapter 3**) surveyed to assess functionality and supplement the information collected through the focus groups and interviews with community members, learners, teachers and key partners. The focus areas for observation included:

- the structure of school buildings;
- the number of students per class;
- furniture;
- WASH facilities, including functioning water points;
- gender sensitivity;
- security; and
- the monitoring of learners' attendance.

### 5.1 BUILDINGS

#### 5.1.1 ACCESSIBILITY

All the surveyed schools in Juba County are accessible throughout the year, except St. Dominic P/S in Gondokoro Payam, which is close to the River Nile and is usually affected by floods during the rainy season. These schools are located in the middle of their communities, which provides extra security for learners.

However, all schools in Rumbek and Pibor County are only accessible during the dry season – and only when the security situation is calm. During the rainy season and intertribal fights, these schools are usually flooded or used as temporary settlement sites, respectively.

#### 5.1.2 SCHOOL STRUCTURES

The Pibor Boys and Girls schools have old buildings, but they are both permanent and sizeable. However, Pibor County's Kondako and Langachor P/S have a mix of semi-permanent and temporary structures, all of which are weak and susceptible to weather damage.

In Juba County, St. Dominic, Tokimani and Rajaf West P/S have permanent solid structures, while Baraka and St. Peter's P/S both have a few classroom blocks that are semi-permanent and temporary.

In Rumbek, only Mingkaman P/S is sturdily built. Kalthok and Dor P/S have poor buildings, with some classes conducted under trees and in grass-thatched houses. Domuloto, Bidibadai and Gulmar P/S have both permanent and temporary structures.

### 5.1.3 CLASSROOM CAPACITY

Pibor Girls and Boys schools both have spacious classrooms. Kondako P/S does not have enough classrooms, while those at Langachor P/S have been affected by floods and require emergency repair.

In Juba County, St. Dominic, Rajaf West, Tokimani and St. Peters P/S all have enough classrooms, but Baraka P/S was found to need more classrooms.

Except for Mingkaman P/S, the surveyed schools in Rumbek County had insufficient classrooms.

### 5.1.4 FURNITURE

As Pibor County's schools are used as temporary settlements when there is insecurity, the furniture in Kondako and Lanangachor P/S has been destroyed or looted. Pibor Boys and Girls schools, on the other hand, have been supported by Plan International, which has provided furniture for teachers and upper classes, though still not enough for the number of students.

In Juba County, St. Dominic, Tokimani, St. Peters and Rajaf West P/S have enough furniture, while Baraka P/S had insufficient for both upper and lower primary classes.

In Rumbek, Kalthok, Gulmarg, Morngency and Bidibadai P/S have no furniture, while Mingkaman, Dor and Domuloto P/S have at least some, though much has been destroyed or stolen.

### 5.1.5 TEACHERS' HOUSING

None of the schools surveyed provide housing for teachers. This means teacher absence will remain a barrier to teachers' and learners' participation in school (see **Section 4.2.5**).

## 5.2 FACILITIES

### 5.2.1 HYGIENE AND SANITATION FACILITIES

In Pibor County, humanitarian agencies such as Polish Humanitarian Action have constructed latrines to WASH cluster standards (Sphere, 2018). However, in Pibor Girls School, although teachers' exclusive latrines are lockable, students share theirs with the community. Although gender-separated, some latrine doors have been destroyed, which does not allow privacy for girls and exposes them to SGBV risks. At Pibor Boys, the latrines are not gender-separated. The student latrines at Langachor and Kondako P/S are well-constructed and gender-separated, but also shared with the community. As a result, all latrines observed in Pibor County are in a dire hygiene and sanitation state, and open defecation was observed around the school, including the paths to the latrines and bathrooms. This limits their use by adult female learners and poses health risks.



The latrine at Kondako P/S. Photo: Sherrie Lillian.

In Juba County, some schools surveyed, such as Baraka P/S, did not have separate latrines for female learners and the bathrooms have no water.

In Rumbek, Domuloto, Gulmarg and Morngency P/S have gender-segregated latrines. Bidibadai, Mingkaman, Kalthok and Dor P/S do not, and the sanitation facilities were filthy. Adult female learners told the researchers that they prefer instead to go home.

## 5.2.2 WATER POINTS

In Pibor County, all the surveyed schools have a functional water point less than 100m outside the school compound, shared with the community. However, the region is currently experiencing water scarcity, meaning students do not have easy access to water. As a result, they do not wash their hands after using the latrine, which poses health risks.

In Juba County, Tokimani P/S has access to water points. However, in Raja West, St. Dominic and St. Peters do not, so the school administration can only buy water from service providers. This is costly, and given the schools' financial challenges, water for latrine usage is not prioritized.

In Rumbek, all the surveyed schools except Domuloto P/S have easy access to a functional water point.



Rain harvesting at Mingkaman P/S. Photo: Sherrie Lillian.

## 5.2.3 MENSTRUAL HYGIENE ASSISTANCE

In Pibor County, Plan, Polish Humanitarian Action and other agencies provide sanitary pads and support to schools monthly, including talks with female learners.

In Rumbek, except for Dor P/S, the surveyed schools receive sanitary pads from agencies, albeit not regularly.

In Juba County, WASH and gender partners have supported schools such as St. Dominic (Japan International Cooperation Agency), Tokimani and Rajaf West (Malteser), Baraka and St. Peters P/S (Oxfam), and female learners at least have access to sanitary pads.

## 5.2.4 SECURITY

While schools in Pibor County were previously fenced in, the community has broken through to create shortcuts to the latrines and the market. This contributes to the poor usage of the available latrines, disruptions during classes, and learners' exposure to SGBV. It is no wonder that school administrators reported that community members are known to enter the school and take away booked-on girls (see **Section 4.1.14**).

In Juba County, St. Peters and Baraka P/S are fenced and have security guards; St. Dominic, Tokimani and Rajaf West P/S have no fences. Staff at Tokimani P/S reported that the school's solar panels were recently stolen.

In Rumbek, only Mingkaman P/S is fenced. The rest of the schools are not fenced, exposing learners to various protection risks.

## 5.3 STAFF

### 5.3.1 AVAILABILITY AND CAPACITY OF TEACHERS

Teachers in the schools surveyed complained that the low number of teachers was a significant challenge. Most had between eight and 11 teachers, with sometimes only two or three for the upper primary classes. Over 70% of teachers were volunteers (i.e. secondary school dropouts, see **Section 4.2.6**), including those heading schools.

Only Pibor Girls had female staff – including the headteacher.

In Juba County, Rajaf West had no female teachers, while St. Dominic and Tokimani P/S had a few teaching in lower classes, because of their level of education. Baraka P/S and St. Peters P/S have female teachers who double as matrons and class teachers. They play an essential role in the lives of female learners, for example by hosting 'girl talks' at least monthly for adolescent girls.

None of the schools surveyed in Rumbek County had a female teacher.

### 5.3.2 SCHOOL MONITORING SYSTEM

In Rumbek, all surveyed schools took students' daily attendance, with the information displayed on the school noticeboard. However, in Pibor County, although staff claimed to do the same, no evidence was in place to show this. In Juba County, only Baraka and Tokimani P/S take daily student attendance, including registering those who have dropped out, with PTAs and teachers using the list to follow up on learners who have been absent for five consecutive days. The study revealed that PTA members play a crucial role in monitoring and supervising both teachers' and learners' school attendance.

## 5.4 STUDENT PROVISION

### 5.4.1 FOOD

Food provision significantly contributes to learners' enrolment, retention and attendance in school. While all schools mentioned that humanitarian agencies had previously supported feeding programmes in schools, only Tokimani P/S had received confirmation that they would receive support in the upcoming school year (beginning in May 2022). This is likely to influence not only school enrolment but also attendance, completion, and the motivation of students who have

dropped out to re-enter. In Pibor County, for example, the Director-General General of Education attributed the high dropout rates registered the previous year to the phasing out of feeding programmes in schools by WFP.

## 5.4.2 COUNSELLING SERVICES

While there is evidence that children in South Sudan have experienced trauma and emotional stress due to conflict and SGBV (Sudan Tribune, 2018), none of the schools surveyed – nor humanitarian partners – provided services to support learners. Teachers are not trained in identifying and addressing the psychosocial needs of their students. This could indirectly influence the attendance and performance of learners in school, their retention, motivation and re-entry into the school system. This is an area that humanitarian actors need to invest in.

Extracurricular activities can help address trauma (Gurwitch, R., 2017). However, except for Tokimani P/S in Juba County and some schools in Awerial (Dor and Kalthok) and Wulu (Bidibadai), they have not been prioritized, and schools do not have play materials or sports fields. Nonetheless, most of the schools surveyed have clubs (sports, debating, drama) aimed at building learners' confidence, self-esteem and life skills, although there is a need to introduce specific activities and topics aimed at empowering girls and women to stay in school.

# 6 SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR GIRLS

The study mapped out the existing services and assistance for girls including ensuring their protection. Across the three study locations, it is clear that there are specific categories of children, and unless stakeholders devise measures to protect them, they will remain invisible. These categories include:

- children with disabilities;
- girls from marginalized families;
- orphans;
- children responsible for providing for their families, including those leading child-headed households; and
- children entangled in harmful social practices in which girls are not valued.

The study identified support available, although community members demonstrated that there is an information gap, as many were unaware.

## 6.1 FAMILY SYSTEMS

Even where culture does not support or favour girls' education, the family system can play a significant role in challenging harmful cultural norms, practices and perceptions. Girls need the support of their family members to meet the cost of education, support with household chores, protect them from early and forced marriages, monitor their school attendance and participation, and ensure that they have access to food. For those who wish to re-enter after dropping out, girls need the permission of their spouses and family members. In Rumbek and Pibor County, girls shared that they can only be safe in school or even complete school if they have their family support.

*I am an orphan and living with my brother. While the community has continuously advised my elder brother to marry me off, he has refused and assured me that I would decide on my own when I feel I am ready. – Student, Pibor Girls School*

Family engagement is a significant factor in a learner's success (Waterford, 2022). When parents support a child's education and academic life, the child is more likely to attend school regularly, earn higher grades and scores on tests, develop realistic goals and plans for the future, graduate from school and enrol in post-secondary programmes.

Some family systems have supported the protection of children. For example, women and girls have developed SGBV-prevention mechanisms, such as walking in groups, limiting movements to the daytime, and restricting firewood collection to older women in some parts of Rumbek and Pibor County. Girls across the study sites also told the researchers that they inform their parents and brothers of where they are going at all times. In addition, some parents and relatives provide psychosocial support and guidance to children.

## 6.2 SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Research has shown that a positive school climate leads to less student aggression, stronger psychological well-being and better academic outcomes (Mehta, et al., 2013; Shochet, et al., 2006). A positive school climate is associated with less bullying and greater commitment to school (Bosworth and Judkins, 2014; Mehta, et al. 2013), reduced extreme and delinquent behaviors, better academic outcomes, psychological well-being (Shochet, et al., 2006), and an overall increase in feeling connected to school (Townsend and McWhirter, 2005).

Across the study areas, learners attested to good relationships with teachers. However, they also reported bullying, discrimination and SGBV. Teachers play an essential role in ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment in all the surveyed schools. Some teachers foster positive, trusting relationships with learners, provide extra support and encouragement for those whose grades are low, and follow up on those who are absent from school. Some girls also mentioned that being in school keeps them away from the eyes of 'admirers', giving them the opportunity to be viewed as children, not women.

Headteachers mentioned that they can be lenient with payment deadlines for registration fees when parents approach the school. Some exempt learners with a number of siblings already in school, as well as those from marginalized groups, such as orphans and children with disabilities. Schools such as St. Dominic P/S in Juba County and Pibor Girls School also provide incentives and gifts for good performance, as well as secondary school scholarships to encourage girls to aim higher and complete P8.

In addition, there are various student clubs in schools, such as agriculture, drama, debating and health, aimed at empowering learners and building their self-esteem and confidence. Adult peers and female teachers play a crucial role in supporting or providing guidance to female learners, especially around menstrual hygiene, including delivering sex education advice and addressing their emotional needs.

Some schools – such as St. Peters and Rajaf West in Juba County, Pibor Boys in Pibor County, and Mingkaman in Rumbek – provide adult literacy programmes to cater to those who have previously dropped out.

## 6.3 COMMUNITY SYSTEMS

The role of community in schools consists of the connections between schools and individuals, businesses, formal and informal organizations, and institutions that can leverage community resources and assist students in achieving positive outcomes. In all the surveyed areas, the community plays a vital role in providing work to parents and children to earn a living and meet learners' school needs. There are also social savings groups that women in particular rely on in times of need. Community leaders also play an important role in providing guidance, and promoting

law and order, including solving cases of SGBV. They sensitize the community on the importance of education for girls and women. Some community members serve as role models to the learners. Other community structures that play a significant role in promoting girls' education include the PTAs and SMCs.

## 6.4 PARENT–TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Every school surveyed had a PTA of 11–13 members, and an SMC of five to six people. Among other duties, PTAs:

- play a significant role in mobilizing communities to bring back learners to school;
- follow up on students who have dropped out or have been absent frequently;
- convene meetings between schools and parents;
- supervise school activities, including making decisions on the use of money;
- oversee and monitor pupil participation and performance in schools;
- manage school programmes;
- identify and address challenges faced by schools, including SGBV; and
- fundraise for the payment of volunteer teachers.

In Pibor County, PTA members even help clean the school, cook for pupils (when there is an ongoing feeding programme), and sometimes take on teaching roles to fill gaps.

SMC members make decisions for the school and forward school challenges to the government through the Ministry of Education, and are responsible for fundraising initiatives in school.

## 6.5 RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Two schools in Juba County (St. Peter's and St. Dominic's P/S) were founded by the Christian Church, and built on land donated by them. The Church provides training programmes for teachers, including the provision of incentives for teachers and learning materials. The Church also provides bursaries and scholarships for marginalized children.

## 6.6 GOVERNMENT

The Government of South Sudan has worked with other stakeholders to revamp the education sector, including:

- the provision of school facilities, (although many school buildings are in bad shape);
- recruitment and payment of teachers at government aided schools;
- enacting and formulating inclusive policies, as mentioned above; and
- advocating for the rights of marginalized groups through the Ministry of Education.

With current efforts by the government to foster peaceful means of resolving conflicts, sustainable education outcomes have a better chance of being achieved. MoGEI and MoGCSW play a vital role in monitoring education and gender-related programmes, respectively, providing financial support (e.g. Girls Education South Sudan) and in-kind support (e.g. educational materials in partnership with UNICEF). MoGEI has developed policies (e.g. the National Inclusive Education Policy 2020) and

programmes such as the ALP and FAL for low-income adult and youth dropouts as flexible strategies to increase the literacy rate among women and girls.

## 6.7 HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Humanitarian and development agencies have played a critical role in transforming South Sudan’s education sector. They have provided teacher incentives, school materials, textbooks and WASH facilities in all the surveyed sites (for a full list of interventions, see **Chapter 7**). In Juba County, for example, national NGO Confident Children has targeted orphans for school/education support, and Malteser International has provided a solar-powered water system to Tokimani P/S. Oxfam has supported the ALP and FAL initiatives in all three study areas.

Gender and protection partners have established spaces for women, girls and children to provide psychosocial support for SGBV survivors, platforms to sensitize and economically empower women, and a referral pathway for information about existing services. Humanitarian partners also provide psychosocial support and referrals to other services, such as case management, health care and legal aid around SGBV. The WFP has supported feeding programmes in schools. Some schools also reported that they have received sports materials from humanitarian partners.

## 7 HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES SUPPORTING EDUCATION

The researchers mapped out the different partners providing specific services that could foster and promote girls’ school enrolment, retention, completion, and motivation for those who have dropped out to re-join the system. The aim is to establish possible synergies and proper coordination mechanisms for Oxfam during the implementation of the SIDA project in the study sites (see **Section 1.3**).

**Table 4: Partner presence, services offered and possible synergies in the study locations**

County	Partner	Services offered	Current status	Possible synergies/coordination
Juba	World Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeding programme through WFP</li> <li>Teacher incentives</li> </ul>	Feeding programme ongoing in Tokimani P/S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liaise with the partner to scale up feeding programmes in other schools</li> <li>Share education-related information with the community</li> </ul>
	Malteser International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WASH</li> <li>Healthcare</li> </ul>	Tokimani P/S Rajaf West P/S	Follow up with the partner to ensure that the water system for Tokimani P/S is repaired after the solar panels were stolen
	SPEDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education</li> </ul>	Phased out ALP in Gondokoro	Coordinate on best practices and lessons learned

	WFP through World Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School feeding programme</li> <li>• Plan to construct primary health care centre</li> </ul>	Tokimani P/S	Share study findings and advocate for scaling up of feeding programmes in schools
	UNICEF through MoGEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School materials</li> <li>• Girls Education South Sudan (cash grants)</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with schools to avoid replication</li> <li>• Share this information with the community</li> </ul>
	Oxfam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WASH</li> <li>• ALP (registration ongoing)</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate a risk and safety audit assessment of the critical WASH areas into the overall project monitoring</li> <li>• Establish a robust monitoring system to track enrolment, attendance and dropout rates</li> <li>• Establish complaint and feedback mechanisms to identify the needs of girls in schools</li> <li>• Explore further synergies with other projects implemented by Oxfam</li> </ul>
<i>Pibor</i>	Plan International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hygiene kits</li> <li>• School materials</li> <li>• School furniture</li> <li>• Teacher incentives</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and share referral mechanisms with the community</li> <li>• Share findings of assessments to highlight the key gaps</li> <li>• Coordinate to avoid overlapping</li> </ul>
	Polish Humanitarian Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of latrines in schools</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a safety audit assessment and share findings with the partner to monitor WASH facilities and address gaps</li> <li>• Integrate WASH into education interventions</li> </ul>
	Oxfam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of dignity kits</li> <li>• Feeding assistance, ALP, learning materials and facilitator allowances</li> </ul>	Pibor Girls and Boys schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for feeding programmes in schools</li> <li>• Provide income-generating activities and seeds to address food security and livelihoods (FSL) for caregivers of vulnerable learners</li> <li>• Provide teacher incentives</li> <li>• Explore other synergies with other projects implemented by Oxfam</li> </ul>
	Christian Mission for Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly incentives for teachers (\$15)</li> <li>• Capacity building of teachers</li> <li>• Peace clubs</li> <li>• Provision of hygiene kits</li> </ul>	Schools outside central Pibor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate on best practices, lessons learned and networking</li> </ul>

<i>Pibor</i>	ACROSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher training</li> <li>• Food security and livelihoods</li> <li>• Nutrition assistance</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network with the partner to share lessons and avoid overlapping</li> <li>• Referral for nutrition assistance</li> </ul>
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of women's centre</li> </ul>	Central Pibor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network to establish a forum for discussing women's issues</li> <li>• Introduce women's empowerment programmes</li> <li>• Use the centre for community-level sensitization programmes</li> </ul>
	UNICEF through MoGEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls Education of South Sudan (incentives for girls to meet their basic needs)</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information with learners, so that they are able to access assistance</li> </ul>
	Intersos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGBV prevention and response</li> </ul>	Pibor County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGBV referrals</li> </ul>
	Nile Hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conditional and unconditional cash grants</li> <li>• Distribution of seeds</li> <li>• Village savings and loan association</li> <li>• SGBV prevention and referrals</li> <li>• Peacebuilding through sports</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>	Pibor County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referrals for FSL, SGBV and healthcare assistance</li> <li>• Network</li> </ul>
	Livewell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition response</li> </ul>	Primary Health Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish referral networks</li> </ul>
	Medair, Voice of Peace, Non Violent Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGBV prevention and mitigation</li> </ul>	Pibor County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate to establish a strong referral pathway</li> </ul>
<i>Rumbek</i>	HELP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Latrine construction</li> </ul>	Awerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WASH assistance</li> <li>• Establish a strong monitoring system</li> <li>• Coordinate with other partners to share information and avoid duplication</li> <li>• Implement integrated education programme</li> </ul>
	Plan International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School feeding programme</li> <li>• Hygiene kits</li> </ul>	All surveyed schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate to scale up the programme in all supported schools</li> </ul>
	Malteser International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• WASH</li> <li>• Psychosocial support</li> </ul>	Wulu and Awerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish linkages for WASH and psychosocial support for SGBV survivors</li> </ul>
	IRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hygiene kits and school materials</li> <li>• Latrine construction</li> </ul>	Wulu and Awerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WASH linkages and networking</li> </ul>

AVSI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutritional assistance</li> <li>Healthcare</li> <li>Incentives for teachers</li> <li>Food security</li> </ul>	Wulu and Awerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate for healthcare, nutritional and food security referrals</li> </ul>
Charity and Empowerment Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child protection</li> <li>Education assistance</li> <li>Psychosocial support</li> </ul>	Mingkaman IDP settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Network for context-sensitive programming</li> </ul>
Voice of Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management of SGBV cases and referrals</li> <li>Psychosocial support</li> <li>Family reunifications</li> </ul>	Mingkaman IDP settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referrals and networking</li> </ul>
UNICEF through MoGEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School materials</li> <li>Girls Education of South Sudan (incentives for girls to meet their basic needs)</li> </ul>	Mingkaman IDP settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share information with learners about the existing support</li> </ul>
Catholic Relief Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WASH</li> <li>FSL</li> </ul>	Mingkaman IDP settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linkages for WASH programming</li> </ul>
ICRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cash assistance for shelter and other basic needs</li> </ul>	Awerial IDP camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referrals</li> </ul>
Windle Trust International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education assistance (learners and teachers)</li> </ul>	In all schools surveyed in Awerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate and share information to avoid duplication</li> </ul>
Diocese of Rumbek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction of schools</li> <li>Supporting vulnerable children</li> </ul>	Same as above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate to avoid duplication and to build sustainable approaches for the project</li> </ul>

This table is intended to help inform the future programmatic decisions of Oxfam and partners.

## 8 ANTICIPATED CONSTRAINTS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

Based on the context analysis and the identified factors limiting girls' access to education, a number of constraints on girls' education could be identified. Oxfam in South Sudan could use this list to inform their next course of action and guide the 'Building Resilience through gender and conflict-sensitive approaches to education, skills development, and sustainable livelihoods in South Sudan' project (see **Section 1.3**) in developing mitigation measures, and redesigning some interventions to ensure the project is responsive to the needs of the target population.

- Culture.** Promoting girls' education requires an approach that addresses the harmful sociocultural practices and perceptions that discriminate against girls (i.e. gender-transformative programming). Without this, gender-focused education interventions may suffer a backlash, especially in Rumbek and Pibor County. It is, therefore, recommended to apply the 'do no harm' principle, with community leaders involved in all activities and embracing the project.

- **Factors behind low enrolment.** A description of the factors behind girls' relatively lower rate of school completion is given in **Chapter 4**. Family finances lie behind many cases, so Oxfam may need to find ways of supporting livelihood activities for caregivers, and/or provide cash incentives to learners to meet other basic needs. For issues around teenage pregnancy and early marriage, community sensitization campaigns about the importance of education for girls and women might be suitable.
- **Lack of family support.** A discussion with girls who dropped out of school revealed that, while some would like to re-enter school, the decision is not theirs but that of their husbands or parents. One male respondent bluntly responded, *'I did not marry a student but a woman'*, when asked if he would support his 16-year-old wife going back to school. This calls for the engagement of key decision makers during the registration of dropouts, especially married women and those with the sole responsibility of taking care of the family, to seek their individual consent.
- **Insecurity.** The security situation in Rumbek and Pibor County is unpredictable. Cattle raids and age-set fights (see **Section 4.2.1**) are likely to hinder programme implementation.
- **Seasonal floods.** Gondokoro Payam (Juba County), Rumbek and Pibor County are susceptible to seasonal floods. Due to the expected rains from May to July, access was predicted to be difficult. This was likely to negatively affect learners' enrolment, attendance and motivation – and it would be the same for those who wished to re-join. Moreover, assistance delivery and project monitoring activities were likely to be affected.
- **High expectations from teachers and learners.** The study found that in some schools, humanitarian partners have been paying for teacher incentives, and providing learners with hygiene kits, school materials and/or cash grants. Based on interviews and FGDs, it is likely that communities will expect similar or even better services from Oxfam. These expectations need to be managed from the start during community introductory meetings, and by establishing proper coordination channels with partners to find out who is doing what, avoid duplication in programme participant lists, and preferably using successfully tested approaches.
- **Unreported SGBV in schools.** The study found that some forms of SGBV, such as sexual harassment by teachers, are unreported. There are no systems to identify, report and address them. Failure by Oxfam to establish a confidential feedback mechanism to identify and handle these SGBV forms would likely continue to push girls out of school.
- **Partner coordination gaps.** Failure to establish effective synergies and coordination mechanisms to share information will lead to duplication, overlapping and conflict among partners.
- **Limited support from the government.** Implementing an inclusive education programme requires support from the government. Oxfam will need the government's help in improving school facilities, recruitment and payment of teachers; enforcing policies on punishing SGBV perpetrators; ensuring that female teachers are recruited and paid; and considering children with disabilities in all education programmes, among other areas. Without government support, Oxfam's impact on structural and systemic barriers to girls' education may be limited.
- **Lack of experienced female teachers.** While the ability of teachers influences the quality of education, most schools are employing secondary school dropouts. Most of the schools surveyed do not have female teachers. This means that support for female learners' education and adolescent girls' needs may still pose a big challenge. There is a likelihood that Oxfam's project will have to rely on inexperienced teachers (who are often the only ones available) and then finding ways of building their capacity.
- **Limited funds.** While the findings call for an integrated approach to addressing the identified needs, the limited funds for Oxfam's project mean that it is likely to forgo some elements that may be important to female learners. Similarly, if partners are not available to provide the necessary support, the persistent needs gap is likely to push girls out of school.
- **Child labour.** Some learners have become breadwinners for their families or even pay their school fees. The decision to quit work and re-join school will require Oxfam to employ innovative

strategies, ensuring that the learner is in a position to continue meeting her family needs while in school.

- **Lack of clothing.** Some of the girls in Rumbek and Pibor County said that they have failed to join or dropped out of school due to a lack of clothes. This might call for cash grants to be given in identified cases to meet individual needs for clothes.
- **Displacements and migration patterns.** Attendance will continue to be impacted by displacements and migration of families, especially cattle keepers in Rumbek, the effect of floods, and the temporary residence of many families in Juba County. These movements also pose a challenge for following up on students who have dropped out.

## 9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, we can draw several recommendations for Oxfam, working closely with key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in implementing the 'Building Resilience through gender and conflict-sensitive approaches to education, skills development, and sustainable livelihoods in South Sudan' project (see **Section 1.3**).

**Monitor school attendance and absence.** Emphasize regular recording of school enrolment, daily attendance, completion and dropout rates for all schools. Ensure that teachers and PTA members follow up on absenteeism and dropout, and a report on the action plan is shared with project staff.

In addition, Oxfam could lobby the government to establish a monitoring system that tracks SGBV perpetrators so that they are not redeployed in the education system.

**Community sensitization.** There is a need to sensitize communities on the importance of educating girls and boys, and protecting them from the challenges that are likely to limit or prevent them accessing education. Oxfam needs to develop a sensitization plan that addresses all the issues raised around cultural norms and practices that act as barriers to girls' enrolment, retention, completion or re-entry into the education system. This could be done through community discussion tables or community dialogues in which women and girls take the lead in discussing issues that affect them, and/or the launch of 'back to schools' campaigns across all the project sites. Alternatively, Oxfam could use the 'gender champion' approach, targeting community leaders or men as change agents to fight the harmful cultural practices and perceptions that discriminate against girls and children with disabilities in education. Oxfam could also identify and use the 'role model' strategy to pass on this information with context sensitivity.

**Implement gender-transformative education approaches.** Gender-transformative education requires strategies and programmes that intentionally challenge inequalities in gender roles and power dynamics, both in education and communities. Oxfam could implement a gender-transformative education approach in two ways. Firstly, it could use the 'behavioural approach', promoting women and girls into leadership positions, and using gender champions, change agents and role models. This approach could then support local leaders and those in power to transform policies and interventions that promote gender inequality at all levels, promoting adult literacy programmes, and empowering adolescents with sexual and reproductive health skills, financial literacy and life skills.

**Implement flexible education and life skills programmes.** Given the different barriers (e.g. domestic chores, caregiving roles, age) that affect girls' school attendance, Oxfam should implement education programmes inclusive of all categories. These include ALP and FAL, revising the language of instruction, and integrating life skills into curricula.

**Address poverty at the household level.** Poverty was identified as the primary barrier to education for adolescent girls and a push factor into early and child marriages, child labour and the increased

dropout rate among female learners. Oxfam could support caregivers with income-generating activities and provide financial support to selected marginalized learners or households. This would also address the food security needs of the households.

**Implement women- and girl-friendly spaces.** A women- and girls-friendly space is a place where women and girls can feel safer, access information and support, participate in activities, build their networks and strengthen relationships with peers. Given the effect of cultural practices on women and girls in the study sites, especially Rumbek and Pibor County, Oxfam should consider actions that can restore hope and provide an avenue for information-sharing on services and support, as well as a safe space for survivors of SGBV to disclose incidents and receive support that is culturally appropriate and tailored. Oxfam could also integrate psychosocial support, such as support groups, recreational and skill-building activities, and SGBV case management in these safe spaces.

**Menstrual hygiene management.** Oxfam could distribute sanitary pads to women and girls of reproductive age regularly. In Pibor County, there is a need to consult with women and girls to understand their concerns and perceptions about the sanitary pads currently being distributed by partners (see **Section 4.2.2**).

Additionally, Oxfam should emphasize and promote safe, sufficient and gender-separated user-friendly latrines, ensuring that they are sensitive to children with disabilities. Oxfam could also advocate for the integration of sex education in the school programme/activities.

**Capacity building.** Build the capacity of teachers, PTA and SMC members, community leaders and staff in inclusive education, the prevention of SGBV and children's rights.

**Provide incentives to teachers and learners.** Provide incentives to both teachers and learners as motivation aimed at retaining girls in schools. This could be paid monthly for teachers, and termly for students.

**WASH activities.** Integrate WASH in all education interventions. Oxfam could sensitize communities on proper practices, such as the appropriate use of latrines and regular handwashing, and could form hygiene clubs in schools to train girls on improved hygiene practices, who could, in turn, transfer the knowledge to their families. The availability of water is crucial for the retention of girls in schools. Therefore, Oxfam could coordinate with WASH partners to ensure all sanitation facilities have water, or implement rainwater harvesting approaches in schools.

**Lobbying and advocacy.** There is a need to advocate for improved conditions for teachers, not least through the revision of and timely payment of their salaries. There also need to be more female teachers and those trained to work with children with disabilities. There is a need to liaise with WFP and advocate for the reinstatement of school feeding programmes. At the state level, there is a need to advocate for the enforcement and implementation of policies and guidelines aimed at inclusive education, such as those on child labour, disability inclusion, the teachers' code of conduct, and early and child marriages, among other issues. At school level, ensure that all schools implement and comply with MoGEI guidelines specifying that all schools latrines are gender-separated.

**Provide learning materials for both teachers and learners.** There is a need to support schools with learning materials such as textbooks, cabinets, chalk, pens and paper. Learners could also be supported with materials, including books, pens, bags and textbooks.

**Establish functional referral pathways.** For the provision of holistic services, there is a need to establish a referral pathway by mapping out and regularly updating the information to provide the target group (adolescent girls and women) with information on where they can access assistance with health, SGBV, psychosocial support, education, food and nutrition, and WASH. This can be done by building synergies with other partners (see **Chapter 7**) and continuously sharing information in different forums.

**Community participation.** As part of accountability to the affected population, engage the communities in all activities. This can be through consultation, sensitization campaigns, behavioural change activities, and information sharing. In addition, to mitigate the possibility of women and girls suffering SGBV as a result of their re-entry into school, there is a need for Oxfam staff to engage their immediate caregivers/spouses, including involving them in project activities. Oxfam should engage community leaders to formulate bylaws (i.e. customary laws) that protect girls from early and forced marriage, including emphasis on parents taking girls to school, ensuring they provide support with school enrolment. Another approach could be ensuring that each PTA committee has a community leader (such as the Payam Chief).

**Strengthen the security of all learners in all schools.** Mobilize the community to fence all schools to create a secure learning environment with less interference and fewer interruptions.

**Integrate psychosocial support and peacebuilding activities.** Given that the project is to be implemented in conflict-affected areas, it is paramount to integrate psychosocial support and peacebuilding activities into the project. This can be done through facilitating school clubs and introducing activities that support the mental wellbeing of learners. For example, introduce or promote social cohesion activities such as sports and drama to promote peace between tribes.

**Revise the project targets.** Based on the study findings and the anticipated constraints, if Oxfam does not revise the target numbers or population, there is a likelihood of not achieving them. For example, there are few government-aided schools in some counties, while in other instances, some schools do not have upper primary classes (P7–8), the project target. Oxfam could reconsider including learners in P5 and schools supported by the Church or communities.

**Establish a complaint feedback mechanism for SGBV reporting.** Oxfam should implement confidential and accessible feedback mechanisms in schools for learners to freely report any acts of SGBV in schools. SGBV partners could integrate the feedback mechanism into robust project monitoring systems.

**Further research needed.** Given the large population of people with disabilities in the country – about 15% of the population of South Sudan (UN OCHA, 2022a), further research is needed on the specific needs and barriers this vulnerable group is experiencing. At a minimum, disability-inclusive education should be considered.

## 10 CONCLUSION

The study findings reveal that while the gender enrolment gap is not vast in all the surveyed areas, the dropout rate is almost twice as high for girls as boys in upper primary classes. In addition, enrolment rates vary between counties, influenced by aspects of life at the individual, family, school, community and state levels. The highest enrolment rate was recorded in Rumbek and Juba County, with lower rates in Pibor County. Similarly, Pibor and Rumbek have higher dropout rates than Juba County. This gender gap is attributed to poverty, cultural practices and perceptions, insecurity, floods, lack of schools, household chores, and the loss of parents or guardians.

Across the surveyed areas, the categories of girls at risk of dropping out or failing to re-enter school include orphans, children from female-headed households, children living with elderly parents, children from a family where the majority are male members and the girls have to perform household chores, IDPs and working children, among others.

To address the barriers that limit girls participating in education, it is the responsibility of all the stakeholders, including the government, development partners, humanitarian agencies, schools, family members, and the community, to implement the Leaving No One Behind commitment as part of SDG 4 (UN Sustainable Development Group, n.d.).

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# ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for the study can be viewed here:

<https://oxfam.box.com/s/rgr6p4r8jig8odok0c0bor4seedu04qw>

# ANNEX 2: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED

County	Title or Position	Organization/Department	Total		
			Total	M	F
Juba	School Teachers	Ministry of education	7	5	2
	Oxfam staff	Education and WASH	3	3	
	County social worker	Ministry of Gender	1		1
	WASH Officer	Malteser International	1	1	
	Health Officer	Tokimani Health Centre	1		1
<b>Total</b>			<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>
Pibor	Teachers	Ministry of education	4	4	
	County Director-General of Education	Christian Mission for Development	1	1	
	Schools supervisor	Christian Mission for Development	1	1	
	Education Coordinator	Plan International	1	1	
	Protection Manager	Nile Hope	1	1	
	Project Officer	Intersos	1	1	
	Education Officer	Oxfam	1	1	
	Monitoring & Evaluation Officer	Oxfam	1	1	
<b>Total</b>			<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	
<i>Rumbek East</i>	County Education Director	Ministry of Education	1	1	
	Education Officer	Oxfam	1	1	
	Gender Inspector and Social Worker	Ministry of Gender-Awerial	1	1	
	Protection Assistant	Ministry of Gender-Wulu	1	1	
	FSL Officer	Oxfam	1	1	
	School teachers	Ministry of Gender	6	4	2
<b>Total</b>			<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overall total</b>			<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>

# ANNEX 3: MORE DETAILS ON THE METHODOLOGY, INCLUDING DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

All documents can be viewed at this link:

<https://oxfam.box.com/s/41qvczqzwp58kdiliedygwdz8dss8enn>

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