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Concordis Papers



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## CONCORDIS PAPERS IV

### Access to Education in Sudan

*May 2007*

## Introduction

### *Rt Hon Viscount Brentford*

Since we started our Sudan peace-building programme in 1999, a host of consultations have been held on a wide range of themes, each with its own unique set of presentations, discussions, conclusions and recommendations. In keeping with Concordis International's overriding objective to build sustainable and just peace in areas suffering from war, these meetings have sought to address the root causes of Sudan's conflicts. They have built upon the peace-building work conducted by Concordis over the past eight years, which has focused on the facilitation of low-profile, inclusive and research-based dialogue in support of formal peace processes.

Participants have attended the consultations in a personal capacity and have included a wide range of key individuals linked with opposition groups and the government, civil society and women's groups, as well as academics and international consultants. The views expressed therefore represent a broad consensus of Sudanese viewpoints and are not necessarily the opinions of Concordis International.

This paper is the fourth in a series which seeks to build on the strengths of the Concordis approach through spreading the benefits of the multilateral consensus we have developed via our consultations. Our aim is both to summarise the presentations made and to draw together participants' discussions and recommendations into a succinct and readable form.

The Concordis Papers are available to be downloaded from our website and will be disseminated to Sudanese and international policy makers, practitioners and centres of learning. I hope you will find them to be a useful resource.



## ABOUT CONCORDIS INTERNATIONAL

Concordis International is a British non-profit organisation that seeks to achieve long-term transformation of relationships across conflict boundaries, by engaging all constituencies of a country or region in sustained examination of issues of common interest. These systematic and well-researched discussions move beyond the lines of confrontation to build on shared purpose and explore new possibilities for peace. Rather than becoming involved in official peace negotiations, we aim to build relationships of trust that pave the way for peace or contribute to post-conflict nation-building. The work is underpinned by values – such as justice and equity – that are shared by those of many faiths and traditions.

Concordis International's primary methodology involves a series of informal, low-profile consultations, held in a neutral venue and attended by key individuals linked to their respective leaders and constituencies. As they attend the consultations in a personal capacity, participants are not under pressure to maintain a particular party line. The consultations take place away from the public and media eye, and are carefully constructed on a solid foundation of in-depth research into the structural causes of conflict and consideration of the economic and social factors necessary to sustainable peace. Our wide network of academic contacts ensures that the preparatory research is of high quality.

Under the name Newick Park Initiative (NPI), the Concordis International team was instrumental in South Africa in establishing confidential dialogue between leading members of the ANC and the white establishment, contributing to the peaceful ending of apartheid. In the aftermath of Rwanda's 1994 genocide, NPI played a critical role in resolving issues of agriculture and justice, successfully bringing together senior Tutsis and Hutus to consider Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and traditional *gacaca* courts. In 1999, at the invitation of senior Sudanese, the Concordis team and the African Renaissance Institute launched the Sudan Peace-Building Programme and together ran six consultations. Subsequently, Concordis International has responded to requests from senior Sudanese to remain engaged, through facilitating informal dialogue aimed at developing consensus on post-conflict priorities for Sudan and contributing to the resolution of regional issues like Darfur and Eastern Sudan.

In addition to informal consultations, Concordis adopts other means of furthering peace processes – such as publications and capacity-building workshops – though always adopting a non-partisan approach. Peace-building work in countries other than Sudan – including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel/Palestine and Afghanistan – is currently in a development stage. The work of Concordis International is funded through contributions from private individuals, churches, NGOs, grant-giving trusts and foundations, and government agencies.

fact that the Interim National Constitution has in theory made it illegal for a woman to marry before the age of eighteen.

Cultural norms also play a significant role in shaping the expectations of female students themselves. The deeply ingrained role of women as wives and mothers who carry out jobs such as home-based manufacture is such that many girls also anticipate taking on the roles performed by their mothers. The result is that female students often have very few expectations of completing their schooling in order to gain qualifications. Such predisposed views on education often become a self-fulfilling prophecy for many girls in Sudan.

The high levels of insecurity in recent years have also prevented many girls from receiving an education. Many people in Sudan have been reluctant to send their children to school out of fear for their safety, for children are particularly vulnerable when travelling to and from school during a time of war. In addition, girls are sometimes made responsible for looking after their relatives if other family members have died during conflict.

#### *Priority areas and policy recommendations*

A key priority for the purposes of promoting gender equality in schools should be to integrate a clear gender perspective into mainstream education policy. The entire school curriculum - including its content, delivery and evaluation - should be deliberately designed to promote gender equality at all levels. The school curriculum could also include education about family planning in order to reduce teenage pregnancy.

On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that, for Sudanese parents, sending girls to school is not a decision to be made lightly. The mothers of girls who receive an education will inevitably be disadvantaged as a result, since many depend on the help of their daughters in order to carry out their daily responsibilities. In order to ensure that gender equality in education does not cause familial rifts, it is important for the government to provide practical incentives for mothers who will lose out as a result of their daughters' schooling.

Finally, much more needs to be done in order to facilitate education of Sudanese women living in remote, rural areas. In particular, it is vital to consult women in rural communities about how education can be provided most effectively within their local contexts.

## **Executive Summary and Recommendations**

The education system in Sudan currently stands in a perilous state. Centralisation by colonial and subsequent governments, decades of civil war and chronic underinvestment have taken their toll on educational establishments and pupils alike, reducing the accessibility, quality and egalitarianism of schools and universities. Despite this inauspicious legacy, the onset of relative stability across large parts of the country in the wake of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) presents a window of opportunity to begin to reverse this trend. In order to improve the education system in terms of its infrastructure, reach and academic standards, the Government of Sudan must learn to grapple with and resolve fundamental structural, financial, linguistic and cultural obstacles.

This paper is based on a series of three discussions which took place at a Concordis consultation held in London in July 2006, entitled *Access to Education in Sudan*. Participants analysed the current challenges and barriers to education in Sudan - within the broad post-conflict context, from the perspective of former child soldiers, and in terms of gender equality. They also identified several priority areas for the government to address and made specific policy recommendations about how best to proceed.

Barriers to education commonly identified included:

- The legacy of Sudan's civil war: a damaged educational infrastructure, massive internal displacement and an eroded culture of learning;
- Cultural expectations about the role of women, creating gender imbalance;
- Financial underinvestment: brought schools to a standstill in many areas.

Some of the priority areas for the government to address were:

- The importance of allowing schooling to be delivered in local languages;
- Redressing regional imbalances through decentralisation of education;
- Provision of trauma counselling and rehabilitation for former child soldiers;
- The need for Sudan's education policies to tackle gender inequality.

Specific policy recommendations included:

- Using innovative means to increase access to education, especially radio;
- Convening a national conference on education, with international input;
- Encouraging NGOs to be more proactive in piloting education programmes, training former child soldiers and donating resources to schools;
- Giving vocational training in income-generating activities to ex-child soldiers;
- Prioritising teacher training, e.g. through establishing community training centres.

## Discussion on post-conflict education in Sudan

### *Barriers to education in Sudan*

One obvious barrier to education over the past two decades has been Sudan's crippling civil war. Today, there are still around 4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the country, most of whom are deprived not just of education but also of shelter and healthcare. In the war-affected Nuba Mountains, probably 90% of the children have missed out on education in recent years.

War is not the only problem, however. The government's chronic under-investment in the education system in Sudan - last year, it spent just 1.4% of Sudan's GDP on education - has led to the widespread privatisation of schools across the country in order to provide them with a viable source of financing. As a consequence, access to education has been limited to the children of the richest members of society - such as civil servants and affluent businesspeople - thereby destroying the principle of free education in Sudan. Many universities have also been privatised, meaning that very few now prioritise egalitarianism in their admissions processes.

The government's financial neglect of the state school system has greatly undermined those schools that do continue to offer free education. Teachers are often not paid for six months at a time, forcing them to leave their jobs to carry out menial tasks such as woodcutting in order to support themselves and their families.

Another symptom of the lack of funding is that many schools across Sudan lack simple facilities such as exercise books. Whereas in the past, the government provided free stationery for all schools; pupils today are obliged to buy stationery, equipment, and sometimes even their own chairs.

Moreover, even if there were sufficient financing for education, the fact that Sudan is made up of many distinct tribes, cultures, religions and dialects has never been effectively addressed within the education system. It is therefore imperative that the needs of Sudan's multiple identities are sufficiently catered for. In particular, Sudan's multilingual nature - at least ten of its languages have over a million speakers - makes it extremely complex and potentially destructive to create a uniform education system. It could be argued that Nimeiri's attempts to carry out the 'Arabisation' of the school system was disastrous for this very reason.

It is particularly important to prioritise the education of nomadic populations in Sudan, whose marginalisation has fuelled conflict. During the rule of President Ismail al-Azhari in the late 1960s, the government introduced successful trials of a system of mobile education for nomads, whereby schools were opened

## Discussion on addressing gender imbalances in education

### *Current gender imbalances in education*

The large gender imbalance in Sudan's education system is manifested, *inter alia*, by school drop-out rates which are historically far higher for girls than for boys. Indeed, the current school curriculum, including text books themselves, in some ways illustrates embedded gender imbalances and discriminatory attitudes.

Addressing this imbalance should be a key priority of Sudan's education policies as they move forward. It is hugely important that girls receive an education in Sudan - one participant noted that if one educates a man, an individual is educated, but if one educates a woman, an entire nation is educated! Where a mother of a family is herself educated, her children are far more likely to perform well in schools and their attendance is likely to be more consistent.

### *Barriers to gender balance in education*

One key barrier to gender equality is the disparity between education in rural and urban centres. Currently, regular schooling of an adequate standard only really takes place in urban centres, while women living in villages and in rural areas often miss out on schooling.

Gender inequality is caused in large part by inherent prejudices within the education system itself. Historically speaking, girls have tended to be confined to studying subjects which are perceived as less prestigious - such as languages and history - rather than subjects like maths and physics which traditionally have a more high-profile status.

Such discrimination is a direct consequence of cultural norms within Sudanese society, which dictate that girls are not expected or encouraged to be educated for the sake of acquiring a job requiring academic qualifications. To a great extent, it is the cultural expectations of parents which make it difficult for a girl to complete her education. In nomadic rural areas, for example, a Sudanese father is extremely unlikely to be prepared to permit his daughter to be taught at a boarding school, for to allow her to leave his household before she is married would be to part with his honour. Moreover, the domestic responsibilities of girls from poorer families in rural areas often make it very difficult for them to study. Early pregnancy also sometimes causes female students to miss out on their education.

In addition, there are often significant economic benefits for parents in marrying a daughter off at the earliest opportunity, which in turn makes it practically very difficult for her to continue her schooling. Such practices continue despite the

who both understand the need of local communities and can command trust amongst the child soldiers.

#### *Policy Recommendations*

Education must be made accessible to former child soldiers through innovative means such as radio. Vocational training should also help ex-combatants to make a living in a realistic and relevant way; through training in local enterprises, farming and agriculture, or through introducing them to large industries in regional areas of Sudan.

NGOs have a potentially important role to play in training former child soldiers in vocational skills. NGOs should perhaps begin to pilot such vocational training projects, and then consolidate and increase their number if they are successful. Ultimately, however, the training of former child soldiers is such a huge undertaking that it should also be sponsored and administered by national governments.

Though important for the future, it might be the case that helping former child soldiers to earn a living through training them in IT is a far-fetched idea at the current time. In the case of female ex-soldiers, training should focus on enabling them to develop skills which they already possess - such as the production of traditional items like clothing and baskets. Education both for boys and for girls must take account of their trauma recovery needs.

along migration routes and some nomads were trained to become teachers to compensate for their loss of income.

#### *Priority Areas*

The Government of Sudan must make education one of its top policy priorities and commit to increased spending on it if the system is to improve over the next few years. Once it has been given the precedence it deserves, education should be developed in the context of a cohesive national development plan, which has clear objectives and avoids fragmentation of government policy.

In order to establish an effective and sustainable education system in Sudan, the government must create a credible body in Sudan which can map out the current problems facing the education system, suggest solutions and make key decisions such as the content of the curriculum. This body should then proactively address key issues such as education in rural areas, selection criteria, curriculum and language, and funding of the education system.

A key government priority should be to address the regional imbalances in terms of education; in some regions the quality of education is extremely poor, particularly in the South. It is also important that the government prioritises the improvement of literacy levels at grassroots levels, rather than focusing exclusively on higher education.

It is crucial to allow Sudanese of all languages to be taught in their mother tongue - particularly at primary school level - in order to avoid the mistakes of the Arabisation of the education system. Indeed, if the multiple languages of the country were permitted to flourish then Sudan may be able to become a multilingual country like India. One possible approach would be to employ the Kenyan curriculum in Southern Sudan, with appropriate provision for teaching in local languages.

A broad view should be taken when considering the problems facing the education of former child soldiers, which should focus on vocational needs. Community-based income-generation projects could play an important role in allowing local people themselves to generate the money necessary to pay for their children to go to school.

#### *Policy Recommendations*

The current educational system in Sudan is such that it might benefit greatly from technical assistance from international experts. A national conference on education in Sudan, aimed at bringing together educationalist experts from Sudan and across the world, might provide impetus to the reform of the current system. The recommendations from such a conference could then help to inform policies on key issues such as conflict sensitivity within the Sudanese



school curriculum.

Taking into account the low levels of infrastructure and the number of IDPs across the country, it is particularly important to facilitate access to education in innovative ways, through methods such as utilising forms of communication such as radio and developing distance-learning programmes. One possible innovative approach would be for government to provide incentives for nomads to send their children to attend boarding houses so they can receive regular schooling, with separate provision for boys and girls.

The government should also prioritise the re-establishment of teacher training colleges across the country, in order to start filling the gap left by thousands of teachers who left Sudan as a result of civil war. Key areas of focus for vocational training programmes should be primary healthcare work, traditional midwifery and tailoring. Community training centres could also be established in more rural areas in order both to train teachers and to encourage inter-tribal dialogue.

The government should also encourage more Sudanese to become teachers by making the profession more secure in terms of income and regularity of pay. In order to promote a multilingual education system, the government should prioritise teacher training in local languages.

International NGOs could play an important role in supporting the education system in Sudan through helping to devise relevant education models for Sudan, perhaps working with the Sudanese diaspora to devise an appropriate curriculum. Charities could also play a useful role in donating books - and even seats - to poorer schools. At the same time, however, it is important to avoid excessive reliance on NGOs and external assistance, in order to ensure that Sudan does not become a country which is in part sustained by NGOs and charitable activities.

Finally, international companies could also play an active role in supporting Sudanese education and in helping to develop IT capacity, by donating computers to schools and/or students.

## Discussion on educating former child soldiers

### *Barriers to the education of former child soldiers*

The experience of thousands of children involved in fighting in Sudan's civil war has undermined the appeal of education for a whole generation. Conscription has served to prevent many boys from being educated, for example, often preventing them from being able to sit their exams. The insignificant and often non-existent role played by education in the lives of children on both sides of the conflict has conditioned boys to seek to earn a living in the marketplace rather than focusing on schooling or vocational training.

Many Sudanese who fought in the civil war - particularly children but also adults - suffer from ongoing psychological trauma. Before former child soldiers can be educated, it is important that they undergo trauma therapy to enable them to deal with their past and arrive at a psychological and emotional state of mind which is conducive to learning. Bearing in mind the experiences of former child soldiers, it should be borne in mind that introducing child soldiers into the mainstream educational system is a gradual process which will probably take several years, since a child soldier has specific needs not met by a normal education system.

One should also be mindful of the fact that female child soldiers were involved in the civil war as well, often taking on logistic and other roles.

### *Priority Areas*

It is of paramount importance that former child soldiers who remain in Sudan are demobilised and then reintegrated into their communities as soon as possible. Those child soldiers who are now living abroad and in refugee camps - such as the 'lost boys of Sudan' living in the Kakama refugee camps - should also be brought back to Sudan. Once the former child soldiers have returned home, they should receive education and vocational training so that they can earn a living and make a positive contribution to society, particularly in the case of the older children.

A key focus of the education of former child soldiers should be rehabilitation; designed to enable children to replace their war mentality with the mindset of a citizen. It should also enable them to become self-sufficient - taking away their reliance upon food aid - and teach them how to raise and support a family within the context of peace.

In addition, education programmes should be decentralised so they can be carried out where the former child soldiers themselves are located, thereby ensuring that even those living in remote areas receive the chance of schooling. It was proposed that these programmes be run by local Sudanese