

INSPIRE

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AIM

Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) is a programme that will transform the lives of a generation of children in South Sudan – especially girls – through education. South Sudan, the newest country in the world, has some of the lowest educational indicators, with education of girls being among the lowest. Very few girls who begin primary education continue to secondary school; in 2016, 128,000 girls started primary school, but only 2,700 completed secondary school. GESS is determined to change this, so that all girls can go to school, stay in school and achieve in school.

MANAGEMENT

Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) is an initiative of the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI), Government of the Republic of South Sudan, funded by UK aid from the UK government, and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. In order to realise its strategic objectives of eliminating barriers to girls' education and promoting gender equality throughout the education system, MoGEI is supported by a consortium, led by BMB Mott MacDonald/Cambridge Education, and including BBC Media Action, Charlie Goldsmith Associates and Winrock International.

The programme began in 2013, and will last until 2018.



RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 08 - 2016

PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SURVEY: Midline



Knowledge, Evidence & Research

The **Knowledge, Evidence and Research (KER)** component of the **Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS)** programme aims to generate increased knowledge and evidence for policymakers of what works to promote girls' education in South Sudan, about programmatic causality and impact, and to provide evidence about what may be scaleable and transferable to other contexts. The KER develops an evidence base for the project interventions, linking inputs to outcomes and impacts, and gathers broader information about what works in girls' education. The programme gathers data continuously through the South Sudan School Attendance Monitoring System (SSSAMS), twice yearly through LQS, yearly through school sample survey, and then has set piece Baseline (2014), Midline (2016), and (2018) survey waves.



Methodology

The study included the following procedures:

Administration of questionnaires to State Ministries of Education (SMoEs), County Education Departments (CEDs), Payam Offices (POs), and primary and secondary schools. When available, supporting documentary evidence of Public Financial Management (PFM) policies and practices were collected and scanned. The findings were derived from an in-depth analysis of triangulated data gathered from research rolled out in July-August 2016 across all former States and included site visits to 28 primary and 17 secondary schools, 17 Payams, 12 CEDs, and 5 SMoEs.



Public Financial Management Survey Objectives

The PFM survey aims to understand Public Finance Management practices and challenges at decentralised levels of the education sector in South Sudan. The main original purpose of the study was to produce an overview of PFM standards in education at State, County and Payam levels, and in selected schools and measure changes since in the Baseline in 2014.

As GRSS resources have reached subnational levels, including schools, less reliably, and as they have come to be worth so much less than they were at the Baseline, and as GESS had, by 2016, become the principal funder of the South Sudan education sector by value, the scope of questioning has been expanded and refocused at Midline to cover specific analysis of quality of operation of Capitation Grants and Cash Transfer systems at SMoE, CED, PES and school level, including:

- general quality of planning and budgeting
- the quality of the conditional Cash Transfer system (regularity, reach end-beneficiaries, frequency, according to schedule, bank accounts etc.).
- impact of the Cash Transfers on school fees.
- the quality of planning and budgeting practices at the different levels of the system, including schools with particular attention to priority action plans, roles, decision-making processes, etc.
- the quality of the spending - this may include progress (or not) on transparent/accountable management (as part of the achievements).
- the quality of the reporting (bookkeeping, minutes, feedback etc.).



Key Findings

Pushing resources and accountability to the lowest effective level – schools and families – empowers and delivers good value

The provision of public resources (Operating grants) seeks to institutionalize a shared responsibility model where State and non-State actors are committed to deliver education services in a concerted way: access to public resources allows local actors to improve teaching and learning conditions and, eventually, the quality of education services in their respective States, Counties, Payams and schools.

Optimum use of existing resources requires relevant allocation choices between competing demands. Analysis of current planning and budgeting practices shows a need for targeted training to improve the relevance and impact of local policies; this includes capacity to prioritize the highest needs and then make the right choices within a wider context of PFM improvement and consolidation.

GRSS funds are reaching County and Payam Education Offices, despite administrative upheavals; Local Education Officials are still taxing school fees

Reportedly, only 71% of the CEDs and 47% of the Payams receive their GRSS Operating grants (2014-16 period). Since 2014, actual flow of transfers seems to have improved, but not everywhere. This shows remarkable resilience given the repeated administrative upheaval resulting from Presidential redivisions of the subnational governmental map. The effective value of the resources have been reduced.

Findings seem to indicate States may treat Counties in varying ways, paying some, others not. CEDs of a same State may or may not allocate resources to their respective Payams, showing non-uniform local policies.

Operating grants: FY 2014/15 saw irregular transfers to CEDs, but this seems to have been improved since. Mixed picture on transfers from CEDs to their respective Payam offices: in some States, Payam offices do not receive operating costs.

Cost-sharing practices (upwards flows of school fee income to Payam and County officials) prevail in some States despite dedicated transfers funding. In a context where schools face teacher shortages and low salaries and, as a result, continue relying heavily on additional resources to pay volunteer teachers and teacher incentives.

Accountability practice: Where operating grants flow regularly, emergence of improved accountability practices. However, there is an overall lack of transparency at County and Payam level about income; this includes (i) absence of formal written directives (cost-sharing); and (ii) lack of accountability on the collection/use of fees that flow upward.

Exam fees (P8 and S4) are still paid by students. These flow upwards to State or National level, respectively. Exam participation usually requires prior payment; this seems to be the case in schools and is compulsory for national exams. It

is evident the current system puts additional and repeated stress on the child and household; missing an exam may result in missing a school year.

Capitation Grants are reaching schools nationally, and driving accountability improvements; they need to flow quicker, and more reliably

CGs have been flowing and reaching schools which is in itself a major achievement. Also, Capitation Grants have initiated accountability practices in schools.

Current relatively unsmooth CG submission-approval-payment cycle often generates an irregular flow of resources and carries a risk for frustration and disappointment. When the flow of public and partner resources is unstable (untimely, unpredictable) schools look for alternative revenue (fees) to ensure their basic operating costs. There is widespread use of school fees (including registration fees) and lack of transparency about their collection/use.

Schools still build their development plans around CGs only (not the entire school budget that includes e.g. income from school fees, as they are asked to): SDPs are developed as a condition for receiving a grant (project-focused process) not as an institutional routine activity. Local actors may lack understanding of how to efficiently prioritize resource allocation within a limited budget.

Cash Transfers are being used by girls to enable education; they just about cover basic education suppliers – but would make more impact on the economic barriers to education if they were larger

Girls interviewed during the pilot phase (WES) said they mainly spent CTs on uniforms and school ‘supplies’ (including shoes); some used the money to pay the P8 mock/end exam fees. For that reason, Cash Transfer levels should at least reflect the cost of basic school supplies: in P1-3, the average cost is estimated at USD 16; in P4-8 at USD 20 and in S1-4 at USD 35 (compared to CTs currently worth around USD 31). School uniforms are included because they are usually mandatory. This shows that Cash Transfers are not too high, and could reasonably be increased to offset other costs of education.

Challenges related to Cash Transfer payment reported included: omission of eligible girls, inefficiency of payment agency, late payment or issues being unaddressed.

One approach to CT sustainability and GRSS ownership could be to integrate CTs process more closely with CGs.



15 year old Biki and her older sister Ester, 17, show what they purchased with their Cash Transfer: new shoes, exercise books and a light to study by in the evening.

Recommendations: Capitation Grants and Cash Transfers

Recommendations: availability and flow of funds

- Review and streamline the Capitation Grant submission-approval-payment process to ensure a more predictable and rapid flow of resources.
- Ensure timely Capitation Grant transfers at the start of the school year to limit the use of school fees and allow schools to implement their School Development Plans (SDP) efficiently.
- Consider incorporating Cash Transfers (CTs) as a vulnerability component into the Capitation Grant (CG) program to ensure the sustainability of the model, transfer accountability of Cash Transfers to schools.
- Cash Transfer levels should at least reflect the cost of basic school supplies.
- GRSS should make direct ('straight through') transfers to CED/Payam bank accounts to avoid intermediate levels and limit the risk of operating grants being diverted.
- Enforce the existing ban on cost sharing (upward flow of school fees) practices in line with the principle that public resources should replace household contributions with time.
- Exam fees are a barrier to access to education: Capitation Grants, national funds, SMOE/State and CED operating grants ought to finance the cost of school exams: exams are an integrated part of the learning process.

Schools are planning and budgeting using the templates GESS provides

The majority of schools started designing School Development Plans since 2014 as part of the CG approval process. This is in itself a major achievement as it introduced structured thoughts around teaching and learning conditions and how to improve them. Schools use pre-printed formats that provide guidance and reportedly received some training from INGOs (State Anchors) on SDP design. The School Development Planning & Budgeting Pack templates (2015 and 2016) have been simplified.

At County and Payam levels, it has been challenging to collect strong supporting evidence of current practices. About 70% of the CEDs claim to have developed a strategic plan but only 20% could produce one; 40% are aware of a strategic plan at State level but have not seen a copy. These figures are not surprising in light of the number of CEDs receiving Operating grants (71%). Similar findings prevail at Payam levels.

Recommendations: planning and budgeting

- Build a common understanding of School Development Plans (SDP): develop a standardized SDP guide to ensure efficient resource allocation within limited budgets (see below).
- Ensure minimum teaching and learning conditions are in place: schools receive a mandatory list of learning and teaching conditions that need to be prioritised in their use of CGs.
- Disconnect SDPs from project-related requirements (CGs)

and ensure a systemic shift to routine PFM activities.

- Use all available resources to implement SDPs: schools mobilize all available resources regardless of their provenance to address the needs.
- Design and distribute easy-to-use guidelines on planning and budgeting that are available in all SMOEs, CEDs and Payams.

Schools are reporting using the templates GESS provides

Beyond (mandatory) accountability reports submitted for the release of a next CG tranche, schools need to routinely report on all income and expenditure following the basics of bookkeeping and recordkeeping. Findings show shortcomings but also progress where trainings have taken place.

At Payam and County level, strong documented evidence of accountability patterns has been difficult to collect. However there were some positive examples of where Operating grants flow, CEDs and Payams have been reporting on expenditure. Findings in (former) Western Equatoria and Jonglei show a practice of bookkeeping and accountability reports; this includes financial reports on expenditure, receipts of invoices, signed paysheets, etc. This is a positive result, and spending of previous grants is justified before requesting new ones.



Recommendations: reporting

- Organise targeted and coordinated training at Payam, County and school levels. Trainings may need to be prioritized in terms of subject and content.
- Develop simple guides on effective PFM practices:
 1. A standardized School Development Plan guide in schools and a Planning, Budgeting and Reporting guide for SMOEs, CEDs and Payams.
 2. Bookkeeping and recordkeeping basics guide for SMOEs, CEDs, Payams and schools.

This research was designed and conducted by Johan Verhaghe, supported by enumerators from Charlie Goldsmith Associates and MoGEI.