



## Lessons from Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS)

**Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS)** is an initiative of the **Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI)** of the **Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS)**, funded by **UK aid from the UK government**, and GRSS. GESS will transform the lives of a generation of children in South Sudan – especially girls – through education.

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**. GESS works at the local level through six State-based NGOs, referred to as State Anchors.

Through a national Community Mobilisation (CM) programme, the Social and Behavioural Change component has supported 1,763 'school communities' as of December 2017 through CM activities. Research suggests that more than 50% of people participating in CM are taking action that is supporting girls' education.

Entrenched social and cultural norms in South Sudan emphasise the role of girls as wives and mothers, placing the burden of domestic work almost exclusively on their shoulders and reducing the time available for girls' education. Over 5 years, GESS Community Mobilisation (CM) has taken the conversation about girls' education to communities across South Sudan, targeting the people that control or influence decisions around the lives of girls. With girls growing up against this backdrop, the burden of domestic work is placed almost exclusively on their shoulders, diminishing the

perceived value, and resulting time and prioritisation given to their education by parents, alongside any support and validation for education provided by communities. These constraints have been exacerbated by economic collapse, food insecurity, and ongoing conflict, which, among other things, increase the risk of underage girls being married in exchange for a dowry. The correlation of early marriage and early pregnancy is contributing to some of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Such examples help explain why transition into secondary education for female students in South Sudan is so limited.

Using a mass media and communication approach, activities are comprised of radio programmes and community engagement. CM has taken the conversation about girls' education to communities across South Sudan, targeting those people that control or influence decisions around the lives of girls. Using creative approaches to generate locally relevant discussion about the benefits of girls' education for families and communities, listening clubs - where registered participants listen to radio programmes produced as part of the programme and engage in discussion - community dialogues and interactive drama play a key role in confronting potentially sensitive issues around barriers to girls' education. They also challenge participants to share opinions as well as discuss and plan tangible actions to overcome both social and practical barriers to girls' education.

Drawing on the experiences of GESS, this document provides an introduction to the design and implementation of a CM programme.

## Designing and Implementing a Community Mobilisation Programme

When designing and implementing a CM programme in a FCAS context there are multiple steps that need to be considered.

- Understanding your audience and their communication needs.
- Developing a coherent, consistent approach that contributes to overall programmatic outcomes.
- Designing and strengthening the delivery model.
- Quality assurance, monitoring, and evaluation.

### Understanding the audience and their communication needs. Audiences or beneficiaries?

To develop an effective CM component that is grounded in supporting behavioural and social change, it is important to think of target populations as audiences with whom we engage, rather than beneficiaries that receive aid. People in FCAS contexts have complex development and humanitarian needs that need to be unpacked in order to understand underlying causes. What sit behind these however, are often complex communication needs that significantly affect improvements in development and humanitarian outcomes.

Populations have diverse media and communication habits; they have preferences around communication sources they trust, or even just enjoy more than others; some have access to a range of different types of mass communication, and many may have none at all.

How do you go about understanding the above? The simple answer is research. This should ideally include primary research alongside desk research. This could be through qualitative 'formative' research, through methods including focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. If more financial resources are available, this may also include more representative quantitative studies.

On GESS, we have used a mixed methods research approach, gathering quantitative and qualitative insights to design a radio production component. Identifying target audiences when conducting research is crucial. A sense of who the target audience is may already exist, and research may be about confirming assumptions or building detailed insights around these.

### Designing a coherent approach that contributes to the overall programme

The success of the GESS programme is largely due to effective partnerships between a range of organisations, and a decentralised approach to delivery. This has however

generated its own challenges, one of which was in establishing a common understanding of, and approach to CM, particularly regarding delivery of activities on the ground.

After extensive discussion on GESS it was agreed that the rationale for Community Mobilisation was centred around shaping what households and communities know, think, feel and do in their daily lives to get girls into school. The goal is articulated as seeking **“to expand the reach and deepen understanding of the barriers to girls’ education and to work with the community to identify ways in which they can overcome those barriers”**.

GESS is generating significant insights on the role of CM in South Sudan, but during the design phase a wealth of literature published on the nature and effectiveness of such work did not exist. Drawing on existing work not only helps to avoid tried and tested pitfalls, but also strengthens the rationale for new work and provides a basis on which your programme might also contribute to the evidence base. Existing literature was supplemented by our own analysis and consultation process.

Partner consultation not only draws on experience and a range of relevant technical perspectives that lend themselves to the design, but can also help to ensure necessary buy-in and support for the approach among important stakeholders. Consulting partners working on the project is important to identify linkages between project components, and to affect a more holistic approach to implementation. Consulting country level partners external to the project is also valuable to minimise duplication, and increase coordination in the relevant programmatic area.

### Designing and strengthening the delivery model

The delivery model used to implement CM can be pivotal to the success of the programme, and careful thought must be given to the delivery chain. A decentralised delivery model on GESS with technical leads at the centre and 'downstream' State-based NGO partners, responsible for the execution of most of the components, including CM, lends itself to being scalable and adaptable. Throughout delivery the technical leads provide strategic leadership, training and tools, and ongoing guidance and steering during implementation; while 'State Anchor' partners are responsible for the provision of personnel to conduct CM. Ensuring roles and responsibilities are explicit during the design phase will save confusion and misunderstanding during implementation.

Putting effort into understanding your operating context is important to get an understanding of your financial resourcing needs, and also to help identify obstacles, and ways to bypass these. Whether it is a model similar to GESS or not, your programme should have people at the centre dedicated to the strategic and technical guidance to people on the ground,

as well as monitoring and quality assuring activities and outputs. Therefore, strong communicators with technical community engagement experience as well as operational grass-roots experience will be important. Such experience should also come with an ability to anticipate and forward plan for challenges, and use learning gained throughout the programme to adjust implementation and communicate this clearly with community teams. Consider whether you need a mix of management and operational staffing at the centre and the possibility of changing resourcing needs at the centre if the scope or scale of work increases.

Throughout the programme, Community Mobilisers have been provided with a combination of training, and feedback and guidance following observations in the field. A combination of such training and mentoring is not only more cost-effective than continuous training at the national level, it can also happen more frequently, and is more effective in managing individual performance.

Frequency, intensity and duration of CM can vary, and will depend very much on what the programme is trying to achieve and over what period of time. Over a five year project it was decided that activities would take place in each target community over a six month cycle. The design took the existing scale of CM, the number of Mobilisers in communities and the number of 'school communities' into account ensuring that the cumulative number of school communities reached would be appropriately ambitious and that such sustained engagement would help to build trust among the community in which change was being sought.

In South Sudan, geography and low population density have been a major operational issue that has required additional resourcing. Due to the geographically sparse population, it has not have been possible to walk or travel by bicycle between many of these communities and therefore either motorcycles had to be purchased for people, or transport budget was needed to hire motorbikes. Associated risk management and duty of care protocols have been applied.

#### Activities and tools

For CM, designing stimulating and engaging activities is fundamental for engaging and sustaining the interest of participants. When developing GESS, it was decided that a menu of different activities for Mobilisers to choose from would help tailor their approach to the sensibilities of their target communities. Listening clubs are a core activity where girls' education radio programme 'Our School' is played on solar wind-up radios to a school community.

While radio programmes in nine languages go some way to meeting the linguistic challenges in South Sudan, they do not account for all 65 languages in use. Therefore, visual storytelling prints have been developed alongside the radio

programmes that Mobilisers use in their local languages alongside, or independent of, the radio programmes. Community dialogues involve a larger number of people and a wider cross-section of the community, including parents, teachers, elders, chiefs, girls and boys. Radios and visual materials might also be used in community dialogues, but these options have allowed for wider discussion and for positive community decisions in support of girls' education to be made. Finally, to introduce more physical and energised activity while engaging in girls' education related issues, an interactive drama activity was developed in consultation with a local community theatre organisation and community theatre experts.

#### Adapting your programming

While planning against the existing operating context, it is useful to consider how programming could be adapted to account for a changing environment. In South Sudan, conflict has made a number of locations either temporarily or permanently inaccessible during the course of the programme. As such, the programme has been able to adapt, adjust target locations and to re-locate Community Mobilisers to those locations. Relocating staff could require additional budget, but plans could be considered early on around whether accommodation and other provisions would be needed for them.

#### Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation

The delivery model has allowed for continuous quality assurance throughout the course of the project. A dedicated technical lead with a workplan consisting of both delivery and training and mentoring of personnel has allowed regular oversight on not just the delivery of activities, but the quality of those activities. This also includes verifying whether the State Anchor management was following stipulated criteria to identify target school communities by using the South Sudan Schools Attendance Monitoring System' (SAMS - [www.sssams.org](http://www.sssams.org)), an GESS produced near real-time enrolment system. A mobile phone based data collection tool was also developed to monitor programmatic progress, and progress against intended outcomes.

Furthermore, registering the listening clubs and engaging the same participants over a period of time has allowed monitoring activities to review what changes have taken place in communities over six month cycles, and to what extent this may have been due to participation in listening clubs. In order to do this, the Research and Learning team have conducted pre and post-CM intervention research in a sample of school communities.

You can find research on Community ation on our website.<sup>1</sup>

1 <http://girlseducationsouthsudan.org/research-reports-2/>

**INSPIRE**

**EDUCATE**

**TRANSFORM**



## 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

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