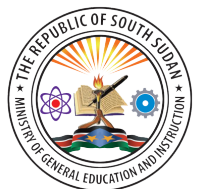




TRANSFORMING A GENERATION

10 Ways That GESS Advanced Education in South Sudan





The Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) programme ran from 2013 to 2025 with the aim of transforming the lives of a generation of children in South Sudan through education — so that all girls, including learners with disabilities, can go to school, stay in school, learn and complete school.

Working closely with the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI),¹ the programme reached over 1.25 million girls in approximately 6,000 government, community, faith-based and not-for-profit schools across the country. Most schools experienced positive change, not only in increased enrolment, but also in relation to retention, and equity.

This report is a summary of a more extensive paper on lessons learned over the 10 years of implementation. The full paper is available on [Research and Reports: Girls' Education South Sudan](#)

This report shares 10 initiatives that were groundbreaking in the South Sudanese context — providing inspiration for future education programmes, both in-country and elsewhere.

¹ Learn more about how GESS's funders and implementing bodies at [Girls' Education South Sudan - Transform the lives of a generation of children in South Sudan through education](#)



GESS AT A GLANCE

Gender parity index at secondary education changed from 0.43 in 2011 to 1.41 in 2025, according to EMIS



Schools with students who received cash transfers increased their enrolment by between 7–8% the following year



62,526 learners supported through a mentoring programme



Over 2.8m people over the age of 15 reached with radio programmes informing them of the benefits of education, especially to girls and children with disabilities

In total, some 5,700 schools (5,093 primary, 607 secondary) benefitted from capitation grants

Names and details of > 3.5 million individual learners collected on SAMS

1,694 stakeholders trained in the basics of Public Finance Management



207 Head Teachers and 1,911 teachers participated in the school-based teacher professional development pilot programme



Cumulative numbers of Learners with disabilities reached cash by transfers in 2024 and 2025: 7,066

(2508 Male, 4,558 Female)

4,838 school communities reached with community mobilisation

52 episodes of the radio educational programme 'Our School' produced in 12 languages



3,225 in GESS1 and over 5,900 in GESS2 school governing communities were trained annually

34,814 School Development Plans written and costed

Regular listeners are 1.6 times more likely to have a girl in school than non-listeners



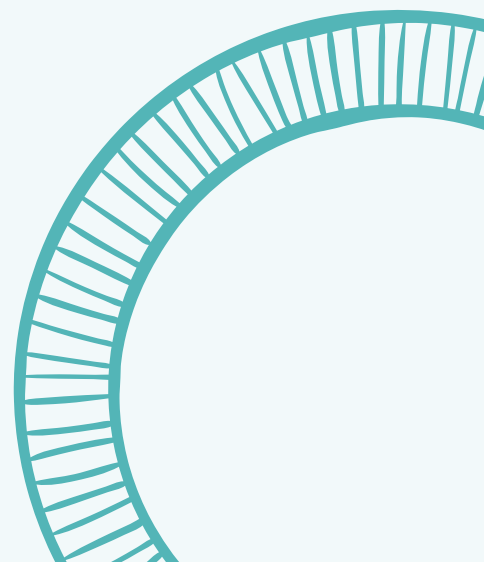
55,308 school committee members trained on school development planning, budgeting, and school governance

At least 1.3 million individual girls benefitted from at least one cash transfer



Over 2.9 million cash transfers paid in total

Payam Education Supervisors in all 592 payams were supported to reach and assist schools



1. Radio Programming as a Transmitter of Behaviour Change

Entrenched social and cultural norms around girls have traditionally limited their transition from primary to secondary school in South Sudan. GESS developed a communication strategy — incorporating radio programming — that championed the education of girls and children with disabilities at a family and community level.

Through a national Community Mobilisation programme, led by BBC Media Action, GESS supported 4,838 school communities and reached 2.8 million adults (aged 15+).

The flagship radio programme ‘Our School’ challenged the barriers that obstruct families from sending their girls to school. Across 52 episodes, in 12 local languages (Acholi, Arabic, Bari, Dinka, Lotuko, Luo, Madi, Murle, Nuer, Shilluk, Toposa and, Zande), the programmes proved popular in remote rural villages, where families discussed issues such as early marriage and sexual and reproductive health, which were typically taboo.

In addition, a series of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) were dramatised to reinforce positive attitudes and share key information, such as when schools were about to open or how to access cash transfers.

Regular listeners were found to gain a better knowledge of the school system and were more likely to prioritise the education of girls, and children with disabilities, than non-listeners.

“Girls do drop out from schools for earlier marriage, but after I listened to the good advice from the radio and listener club meetings, I am now trying my best to educate our girls.”

Giban Koka, grandfather and community elder

2. Putting Cash in the Hands of Learners Opens Doors to Education

The heavy financial pressures on South Sudanese families increase the risk of underage girls being married off in exchange for a dowry. Parents also prioritise the education of sons over daughters.

By putting cash directly into the hands of girls and children with disabilities — in exchange for their school attendance — GESS successfully overcame the immediate economic barriers to school enrolment. During those grades when dropout rates are highest, girls could pay for their school necessities, such as uniforms, shoes, notebooks, and sanitary pads to help manage menstruation.

Data received in 2011, 2 years prior to the GESS programme, showed the gender parity was 0.64 and large numbers of children were out of school. In 2024, gender parity stood at 1.00. Despite logistical, security and inflationary challenges, GESS made 2.9 million payments, with more than 1.2 million individual girls benefitting from at least one cash transfer.²

Girls who received cash transfers were shown to remain in school for longer and attend school more frequently. Further, schools with cash transfer recipients reported increased enrolment by between 7–8% the following year.³

“I always looked forward to receiving the money to pay for everything needed at school so that I could study without any interruption. When I was in Primary 8, I used the money to pay for my examination fees, and I was able to concentrate and study.”

Mary, cash transfer recipient

² Source: GESS Progress Reports

³ [Lessons from Girls' Education South Sudan](#)

3. Relieving the Economic Burden on Schools With Capitation Grants

In South Sudan, education was traditionally funded through school fees, which often prohibited parents from sending their children to school. Girls, especially, were disadvantaged by this economic hurdle to education.

Throughout the GESS programme and MoGEI, capitation grants (CGs) proved an effective tool for encouraging the enrolment and retention of children in school. The regular cash injection helped give schools greater financial security and confidence to plan.

Regular payments were made available to all not-for-profit schools to help supplement running costs, improve learning environments (including for children with disabilities), pay incentives to volunteer teachers, and reduce reliance on parental contributions to education by removing registration fees for learners.

GESS was responsible for providing CGs to secondary schools, while MoGEI committed to covering primary schools. By the end of the programme, some 5,700 schools (5093 primary, 607 secondary) schools across South Sudan had benefitted from the initiative. Studies showed that CGs had a statistically significant impact on schools being open, as well as learners' enrolment and attendance.

4. Providing Up-to-the-Minute Information With Monitoring and Evaluation

GESS needed to employ a mindset of 'expect change' throughout the 12 years of the programme. Our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team were vital for gathering and analysing information on the ground, so the programme could revise indicators and set new milestones as parameters shifted.

Through our M&E activities, we could report on what was happening across the country, such as social-related issues, conflict, economic change,

flooding, and outbreaks of disease. We used a heat mapping tool to capture this information, allowing the programme to reposition as needed. For example, when conducting major activities like cash transfers, we could gather information on potential risks and recent incidents to help with planning and safeguarding.

Despite local barriers to access and poor connectivity, our State Anchors (six locally based NGOs) compiled weekly operational updates on the safety of staff, assets, and accessibility of the schools concerning security and road conditions. Collected by either SMS, e-mail or phone call, information was analysed, summarised, and then shared with the MoGEI and donors to inform next steps.

5. Establishing a High-Quality Data Ecosystem for Time-Critical Decisions

Prior to GESS, there was a severe dearth of education data. Over the last 12 years, GESS has progressed in capturing data, both in volume and quality. No other nationwide programme has managed to consolidate data with such success.

At the heart of this push towards centralised, accessible data is SAMS (the South Sudan Schools' Attendance Monitoring System). Starting from a blank spreadsheet with just a couple of schools and a few learners, SAMS is a near real-time data management information system, designed to function in fragile contexts where beneficiaries have limited resources and low connectivity.

SAMS is used by national, state and county officials to support the management of schools, and the allocation of resources. Since 2013, the system has collected and disaggregated the names and details of more than 3.5 million individual learners.⁴

Far more than numbers on a screen, each entry tells a real story about a learner, teacher, community member or school, resulting in a real impact. For example, due to SAMS, GESS could pay cash transfers earlier — which directly increased the likelihood of keeping girls in education.

⁴ emis.mogei.gov.ss/dashboard

6. Opening Eyes to Accountability Through Public Finance Management

Public Finance Management (PFM) is the set of procedures that allows a government to allocate and account for public resources, with the aim of reducing monetary waste and fraud. In 2022, the MoGEI asked GESS to set up a PFM team, as too many financial transfers to the sub-national levels were untracked, unaccounted for and unreported.

To address accountability, the PFM team gave officials the necessary frameworks and enforcement policies to guide their actions. To improve coordination, GESS helped the ministry to establish Education Transfer Monitoring Committees (ETMC) at a national level, in the 10 states, the three administrative areas, as well as all 81 counties.

Regarding transparency, officials at a sub-national level now know the budget amount that is supposed to come to them monthly, which was not the case before. GESS has also trained over 1,600 stakeholders in the basics of PFM.

Changing the system will not happen overnight. The next step is to extend high level political support and draft a national Public Financial Management and Accountability Act that would give PFM sharper teeth.

7. Amplifying Diverse Voices With Inclusive School Governing Bodies

Prior to 2013, school management in South Sudan was solely controlled by head teachers. The views of teachers, learners, parents, women in the community, and persons with disabilities were rarely taken into account.

The MoGEI asked all schools to form more inclusive school governing bodies — and GESS supported with the drafting of the School Governance Policy, which led to the establishment of over 6,000 School Management Committees (SMCs) in primary schools and Boards of Governors (BoGs) in secondary schools through democratic elections.

Approximately 40% of members were women. By the end of 2024, more than 4,648 SMCs/BoGs and over 55,308 committee members had been

trained on topics ranging from election of members, through school development planning and budgeting to fundraising, financial management and disability inclusion.

Previously, the head teacher was the master of everything. Now, strategic decisions, such as the direction of school development, are made by the SMC/BoG members, who include parents, teachers, representatives of community organisations, persons with disabilities and even head boys and girls.

8. Showing the Potential of Mentoring to Increase Transition Rates

Mentorship is effective in helping young girls achieve their full potential, with regards to academic achievement, delayed sexual activity and protection from STIs/HIV and unplanned pregnancy, reduction of early marriage, and gains in self-confidence.

Overall, 62,526 learners across South Sudan were reached with the GESS mentoring component. The aim throughout was to increase transition rates to secondary education, reduce drop-out and improve access to knowledge about adolescence and related life-skills.

The model evolved from a teacher-led to a youth-led programme in the second phase of the programme. Despite starting with no professional experience, the young mentors were empowered to enter higher education, launch their own businesses, or proceed with other jobs of a similar nature.

GESS also published the inspiring *Teens Ta Guwa* (Teens of Power) magazine with a print run of 20,000 copies that was circulated to schools nationwide. This was followed up by an online version. The magazine spoke respectfully about topics affecting young people, for example menstruation, which were rarely discussed in the home.

Although the mentoring programme was designed for five years, it was only implemented for a year due to programme redesign. However, there was enough anecdotal evidence to show that a mentoring programme would work very well if implemented as planned.

9. Offering Second Chances With Accelerated Learning

The minimum requirement for qualification training for primary teachers is a secondary education certificate. Those without cannot access teacher training and are often not permitted to take part in professional development opportunities. That leaves 22% of school personnel — while still teaching and supporting schools — without any route to improve their skills.⁵

GESS launched the Accelerated Secondary Education Programme (ASEP) in 2019 to allow primary school teachers to complete their secondary education in two years, rather than four. In total, 1,995 participants completed the programme.⁶

Priority was given to the recruitment of women, giving them a guaranteed place. This approach resulted in 32% of all places filled by women, a remarkable achievement in the context of South Sudan.⁷ The government has indicated that a similar programme could also benefit health practitioners, police, and other governmental workers.

While ASEP remains successful, it is important that the accelerated model does not undermine formal secondary education nor accidentally create an incentive for dropping out from formal secondary education.

10. Starting the Long Journey Towards Disability Inclusion

The levels of need around disability support are extremely high in South Sudan. While GESS has only scratched the surface of understanding the support required, it has achieved the core aim of creating the systemic building blocks for disability inclusion: mainstreaming disability across the programme, working closely with the MoGEI and building robust data systems.

The Disability Inclusion Team (DIT) made some significant achievements such as contributing to the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2024–2030), which is now being implemented, and helping the government to establish a Technical Working Group on Inclusive Education.

GESS DIT also engaged with the behaviour change communication team about the content of the ‘Our School’ radio programmes, to ensure the messages concerning disability rights, gender and education were widely broadcast, reaching a significant number of people with disabilities.

Another major milestone was the introduction of the Washington Group Questions (WGQs) during registration and enrolment of learners. For the first time in South Sudan — there is access to quality disability disaggregated data available to inform budgeting and resource planning within the education sector.

“Previously, communities had negative attitudes and misconceptions towards disability and most parents in South Sudan would not even consider spending scarce household resources on sending a child with a disability to school. Now, there is a growing sense of pride that schools are teaching children with disabilities in their community.”

GESS DIT team member

In 2024, GESS identified more than 17,882 learners with disabilities, across primary schools (15,893) and secondary (1,989). Last year, for the first time, GESS included boys with disabilities in cash transfer payments. An ever-increasing number of schools are trying to allocate 5% of their capitation grants to disability inclusion, while more children with a disability are staying in school through to completion.

⁵ EMIS 2024

⁶ GESS Progress Reports

⁷ GESS Progress Reports

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