

UNICEF Education – Education Case Study

South Sudan – Getting girls back to the classroom after COVID-19 school closures

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Even before COVID-19, 2.2 million children, most of whom are girls, were out of school in South Sudan. Protracted conflict has devastated the country's education system, and the recent pandemic left an additional 2.1 million children out of school. For girls, COVID-19-related school closures have triggered a heightened risk of gender-based violence and exploitation. Correspondingly, child marriage, affecting 51.5 *per cent* of girls in the country, is also on the rise along with early pregnancy, which dramatically increases the risk of dropout. These girls may never return to school, ultimately limiting their opportunities for vocational advancement. Other essential services that help keep girls in school – such as school meals, extracurricular activities and psychosocial and pedagogical support – were also interrupted. All of this occurs against the backdrop of learning outcomes that [favour boys](#); in primary schools, 83 *per cent* of boys passed examinations in 2019 compared to 75 *per cent* of girls, and girls accounted for only 34 *per cent* of candidates sitting in those exams.

On 5 October 2020, in person schooling resumed for children in examination classes in the last grades of primary and secondary. As of March 2021, these students are taking their final exams. UNICEF is working closely with the Government and other partners to advocate for a complete, safe return to school for the 2.1 million children who dropped out due to COVID-19. Of these children, nearly 900,000 are girls and require particular attention to reengage with their learning.

RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Despite ingrained challenges, prior to COVID-19 school closures in March 2020, UNICEF South Sudan helped 794,265 children (343,998 girls) in humanitarian situations to access face-to-face learning in 1,300 primary and secondary schools.

- **Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene, including menstrual hygiene management, keep girls in school.** Girls can struggle to attend and stay in school if they lack safe, single-sex and clean facilities. At [two schools in Torit County](#), with support from the Federal Republic of Germany through KfW Development Bank, UNICEF rehabilitated, repaired and cleaned latrines so that girls could access their own toilets. Both schools also had proper handwashing facilities installed, which contribute to healthier students and thereby enhance regular school attendance. In tandem, UNICEF also provided 38,264 dignity kits to adolescent girls which contain sanitary pads, underwear, a torch and soap. When girls can [better plan for their menstrual cycles](#) and have the appropriate tools at hand, they do not have to miss school.
- **Female role models are crucial to reach girls.** Given the overall [shortage of female teachers](#), UNICEF South Sudan works with communities to establish mothers' groups in select schools to raise awareness around girls' education as well as to provide a safe space for girls to express their concerns. Additionally, UNICEF South Sudan helps establish girls' clubs and engages senior female students in school leadership. Here, select girls serve as role models to motivate and encourage girls to return to school. UNICEF helps empower these young leaders and trains them on how to be good communicators and how to advocate for girls' education inside schools and within their communities.
- **A comprehensive Back-to-School campaign is underway with tailored programming for girls.** On 5 April 2021, UNICEF South Sudan, together with UN Agencies, the National Task Force on COVID-19 and local non-governmental organizations, is launching a comprehensive Back-to-School campaign for all schools to open and stay open. Social mobilisation at the state and county levels – also activating Parent Teacher Associations, School Management Committees and Board of Governors – is fundamental to connect with families directly. Upon reopening, catch up programmes will aim to reach adolescent mothers and other girls unable to travel to school every day to provide them with alternative forms of education, focusing on skills development.
- **Partnership is key to advancing the girls' education agenda.** UNICEF South Sudan works hand-in-hand with the Government in education policy formation, planning, budgeting and execution, also contributing to the [General Education Strategic Plan 2017–2022](#) and the second National Girls' Education Strategy (2018-2022) which addresses critical bottlenecks that impede girls' learning. UNICEF South Sudan is also grateful for the Global Partnership for Education's generous US \$7 million contribution to reopening schools safely following COVID-19. Other long-standing education partners include the African Development Bank, Education Cannot Wait, the European Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Government of Canada, the Government of Norway, the Government of Sweden, the U.K. Department for International Development and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

NEXT STEPS

So far, 2021 is seeing UNICEF South Sudan and partners engrossed in the extensive Back-to-School campaign. In April, UNICEF is planning to distribute 2 million textbooks to 5,000 schools in the country. UNICEF is also working with the Government and partners to operationalize the National Girls' Education Strategy, which includes publicity, advocacy, marketing, public relations, branding, the arts (music, song, dance, theatre) and community social mobilization at all levels.

Cost effectiveness

After school closures in March 2020, UNICEF South Sudan, with funding from USAID, invested approximately US \$450,000 for nine months to support distance learning through radio and TV broadcast reaching a total of 1.5 million in and out-of-school children (630,000 girls) from pre-primary to secondary. UNICEF also trained 26,000 senior female students from 1,300 targeted schools to serve as role models and advocate for girls' education in the country.

For more information:

[Contact the UNICEF South Sudan Country Office](#)

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