

EXCORCISING GHOST TEACHERS TO FREE RESOURCES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS

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Sector: Education

The sight of Mary may seem to be nothing out of the ordinary: a schoolgirl walking on muddy footpaths to her school in Ikotos County, in Southern Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State. Like her school friends, she carries a bright blue UNICEF satchel with new text books recently distributed to all schools in the area by the local education office. Although heavy rains make the going slow, she is determined to get to Chahari Primary School to take part in classes. Teaching standards have recently improved, with teachers becoming more serious with their work and friendly towards pupils – and come to the classroom well prepared.

Yet it is a very different story from that of Mary's brother Jonathan, who dropped out of school two years ago and now, looks after cattle. Jonathan dropped out of school because he often went to school not to find his teacher, and when he found him, he was often in a sour mood and loudly complained to the class about his salary which never came. Frustrated by his teachers' sour mood and habitual absenteeism, Jonathan dropped



out of school and headed for the comfort of the cattle camp.

Education standards have improved.

CHALLENGE

The education system in South Sudan, a country emerging out of a protracted civil war, faces multiple challenges; a fragile security environment, budgetary constraints, policy deficiencies, crippling staff shortages, and weak coordination within the decentralized education delivery system. These systemic challenges have often militated against all efforts by the new government, created after the CPA¹, to set up a functional education system in the country. In Eastern Equatoria state, one of 10 states in South Sudan, SNV has since 2006 adopted a systemic approach in addressing the challenges faced by the education system in this post conflict country.

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

At a sector level, SNV has actively facilitated capacity development processes to strengthen the decentralized education service delivery system at state, county and school levels. To this end, SNV has provided capacity development support at meso levels (state and county) aimed at improving education planning and coordination, EMIS data collection and utilization, and education quality improvement. Through our GfE² engagement with central planning Ministries of Finance and Local Government, SNV has also been able to facilitate robust linkages between the education sector planning and broader national level resource allocation processes at state and national levels. At the micro (school) level, the focus has been on mobilisation for enrolment through the Girl Education

¹ Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the North and the South

² Governance for empowerment

Movement (GEM), improving school management through establishing and capacity building of PTAs, and improving the quality of teaching. All these capacity building initiatives have been closely linked to SNV's broader sector objectives of increasing equitable access to education particularly among girls.

Unpaid teachers' salaries and Volunteer teachers

According to the state education office in Torit, the state capital, there were more than 300 teachers on the payroll in Ikotos county alone. Month after month, the state education office transferred the salaries, received from the mother ministry in Juba, to the local education office. The money transferred should have been enough to meet all salary payments to teachers. Yet month after month there were persistent complaints of teachers not being paid, while the planned upgrading of volunteer teachers also stalled. It remained a mystery where the money was going.

In the case of Mary and her brother Jonathan, their teacher had every reason to complain. As a volunteer, he spent at least two hours every morning working his garden to find food for his family and often arrived at school not only late but also tired and irritable. In most cases the teacher had to try and make some small money to survive. Like many, he was driven by a hope that the new government would upgrade and officially employ him. This meant hard work but no salary. He had been a volunteer for many years during the civil war, when most of his colleagues were also not paid, but all were proud to help the country. The failure of the local education office to upgrade and formally employ volunteer teachers, let alone pay their salaries not only frustrated them, but also alienated them from their pupils leading to school drop outs like that of Jonathan.

The problem of volunteer teachers is real in South Sudan; in Chahari Primary School there were 12 teachers, but only one had finished teacher training college. He had studied in Uganda, where he was a refugee during the war. Some colleagues had finished secondary school, but two of them finished Grade 8, and had only practical experience in teaching. Many wanted to join the in-service training organized by the government, but the demand was much higher than the number of places available.

Counting staff

The non-payment of teachers' salaries and delayed upgrading for volunteers resulted in frustration and low morale among teachers whose impact at school level was manifested in higher drop out rates –the fate of Jonathan.

Realising that the problem was not only occurring in Ikotos, but also in other counties in the state, as well as in the other states, the national Ministry of Education sanctioned a head count of teachers suspecting the existence of "ghost" teachers on the payroll.



A consultant was hired to that effect to 'clean' the payroll. The consultant had the unenviable task of trying to find out who was really teaching the children in Eastern Equatoria. There was a lot of information available, including data gathered by the state ministry, Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, and the payroll data from the state finance ministry of finance. The problem, however, was that there were serious discrepancies in the available datasets rendering them incomparable and neither could be used for control purposes.

Teachers are now real, not 'ghosts'.

The role of SNV

SNV came to be involved in the 'ghost' teacher debate through our participation in the State Planning and Development Committee (SPDC)³ where the issue was tabled in a bid to find a state wide solution. In the subsequent state planning and budgeting meetings SNV argued for the teacher rationalization exercise to be done at school level where education partners working at that level would provide useful data on the actual number of teachers. For SNV, this was a logical way of bridging this micro-macro information divide since SNV sector advisors would come in handy to provide school level data to cross check with state level data sets. SNV sector advisors worked hard to support the state education ministry to mobilize their staff both at state and county level to visit all schools and come up with actual school level data for counties. By the end of the exercise, about 500 'ghost' teachers were identified and exorcised from the payroll saving the ministry about \$80,000!

OUTCOME

Reallocating resources

Officials from the ministry and the state planning and budgeting committee were ecstatic about the result, and the opportunity to reallocate the financial resources freed by exorcising 'ghost' teachers to other priority areas within the education system.

Top on the list was to clear the salary arrears for volunteer teachers who had survived the exorcising exercise and to formally employ the committed and qualified ones. Thanks to the rationalization exercise; Mary's volunteer teacher is now formally employed, gets his salary on time, and is proud of his job.

All this was done after a proper screening and selection process at the end of which 600 additional teachers were formally employed across the state, creating new commitment from the teachers and sufficient momentum to keep the 30.000 enrolled children in classrooms. The way in which the State ministry in Eastern Equatoria had dealt with the issue gave other donors and education partners a lot of confidence in the capacity of the ministry and the value of remaining 'connected' to the micro level county structures to get a better idea of the actual situation on the ground.

This new confidence was translated in further support for the education sector from donors and partners to the extent that the state education office was soon able to procure and distribute text books, desks, and other learning materials which have now transformed children's learning experience and brought a smile on Mary's face.

IMPACT

Creating links

This story is illustrative of the complex capacity development environment in which SNV works to deliver impact - and put a smile on child's face. The post conflict nature of South Sudan makes delivering development results even more complex and challenging, given the weak public sector capacities, multiplicity of uncoordinated actors, and weak social capital at community level. Through the relentless pursuit of our GfE objectives, and our multi-actor and multi-level approaches, we have been able to bridge the micro-macro divide by connecting the community to the county, and the county to the state, and subsequently facilitate delivery of pro-poor policy and change.

By linking all institutions and people at the different levels, we are able to create development impact at the community level, be it in education, water and sanitation or in income generation. In this case we were able to make sure that

³ A state level organ responsible for planning, budgeting and coordination

salaries were only paid to people who were actually teaching. As there were many “ghost” who used to receive a salary but not actually teach now the many children are taught by more committed teachers, who now receive a salary and no longer have to spend time to find resources to survive but can commit themselves to the development of the next generation. It remains an important way in which we will continue to deliver real change and impact in post conflict Sudan.