

Access to basic education in Jonglei state

By John Actually



Rebecca Atong Kuol Duom, who moved her child to a private school in Bor, narrating the challenges they faced as parents.

With only two months to full independence, Southern Sudan's education sector is in tatters, with most of its young citizens seeking education in neighboring countries due to a shortage of schools. Even the few schools operating within the country have seen a massive drop out rate due to lack of facilities, materials, and teachers, as well as growing insecurity. The lack of a proper curriculum in most primary schools in Jonglei state, combined with a shortage of trained teachers, has led to poor education standards. Some of the regions schools have been closed due to insecurity while in others, one teacher handles as many as 100 pupils. John Makuei Gai, a resident of Malualchat whose son was studying at Panapet primary school outside Bor town, said he had sent his son to Gulu in Uganda for better equality education after realizing local schools had very low standards. "I had invested in my son's education but I was shocked to discover that at grade six, my son could not express himself in proper English. I had to withdraw him," Gai said. He added: "I realized that children in that school were only being taught one or two subjects a week. I was told there were no teachers." He said the school, like many others in parts of Southern Sudan lacked classrooms forcing teachers to conduct lessons under trees. "Text books are inadequate and some schools open at 10am and close at 12 noon, giving the pupils only two hours to learn," Gai explained. Most of the locals, like Rebecca Atong Deng who cannot afford to send their children to foreign schools are turning to the few private academies. Deng initially sent her three children who earlier served as child

soldiers in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) to Bor public primary school but, later transferred them to a private school where she is paying 150 Sudanese Pounds per term. However, teachers in public schools have defended themselves against claims they were performing poorly. One of the teachers at Bor, Santo Majok Mach said: "We are not to blame. We try our best but lack of facilities makes our work very difficult. In fact the government should take full responsibility for the poor state of our schools." "The government is not building new schools and teachers are very demoralized. Many schools have no facilities," he said, adding that well trained teachers were leaving public schools for greener pastures. The situation worsened after a number of schools in Jonglei state had to be closed from 21 February to 28 March this year, after teachers went on strike demanding housing allowance. In 2008 a general teachers strike in Southern Sudan over poor wages paralyzed learning in most parts of the country and many schools have not recovered from the disruption. The government never affected the requested pay rise. Maluk said most teachers in public schools earned a gross monthly salary of 310 Sudanese Pounds (about \$100), an amount which he said was too little. Disruption of the school feeding programme has also forced many children to drop out. Some primary schools were getting food aid from the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and other NGOs in collaboration with the United Nations since 2005 until it was stopped in 2010. Many children, aged between 7-18 years old are found in various bus parks in Bor where they work as turn boys. Bor County Commissioner tried last year to bring these vulnerable children into a common centre under his close custody where they would be fed while engaging them in education, but the project did not succeed. Residents said insecurity has

also adversely affected learning in Jonglei state. Many primary schools in Pibor County were reported to have been closed following the recent clashes between Nuer Lou and Murle over cattle rustling, in which over 400 people were reportedly killed. Many children were said to have been abducted during the fights and as many as 9,000 people displaced. Pigi County

Commissioner, Mr. Aleu Majak, confirmed the communal skirmishes had paralyzed education in the region. Early marriages among school girls are also cited as a drawback to education in the region. Poverty stricken parents prefer getting cows in exchange for their daughters, rather than sending them to school.

SOUTHERNERS' WISH LIST TO SPLM.

BY AGELE BENSON AMOS.

It is a Saturday morning and Mbaraza Emmanuel, a resident of Hai mission in Yei town Payam, Yei River County, looks despondent as he stands outside his makeshift hut and contends with the reality of facing yet another difficult day in his life. Emmanuel like most ordinary people has nothing to show for his involvement in the long struggle for Southern Sudanese independence. "I can tell you that a lot of people in Southern Sudan are languishing in adverse poverty, many people cannot afford even a daily meal, yet we see people driving big fuel guzzling vehicles", laments Emmanuel as he clasps a panga in his hands ready to look for a casual job. Emmanuel relies on casual jobs on people's farms and nets an average of 30 Sudanese Pounds on a good day (equivalent to ten US dollars). He says that there are basic services that he wished could be made available to the ordinary citizens in the rural villages by the government of Southern Sudan. "If we could have clean water, good roads and even schools for our children, I can tell you we would be very happy people. For now, as you can see, the majority of our kids are out of school, not because we have withdrawn them but, because there are no schools. I personally wish the government could divert some of the resources it has been using to purchase expensive vehicles to build schools everywhere", Emmanuel says with a ray of concern clearly written on his face. He admits that like the rest of Southerners, he decried the use of child soldiers to serve in the military. "Though many of the children were forcefully recruited into the military at any early age during the war, it is something that should be discouraged because it denied us a worthy

generation to help drive this would be new nation to the next level of development", Emmanuel says. He also says that even as Southern Sudan awaits the marking of its first independence day on July 9th, the government should work harder to create a better relationship between the army and civilians. Another local resident, Mr Abraham Ladu Joseph, 62, of Hai Gabat in Yei River County, said SPLA day should be treated with great importance in the new country's calendar since it ended 'slavery' in the South. Abraham said the government should now concentrate on infrastructure development to prove to the world that it was capable of managing its own affairs. "After July 9th, we should not continue begging for help from other countries. We must be seen to be independent," he said. The 62 year old man urged the government to create more employment opportunities for the youth, arguing that this would reduce the crime rate and idleness. Sony Aseino, a resident of Lomuku village, thinks that the government should invest in the empowerment of women, whom she said also played a big role in the war of liberation. Sony further says that youth empowerment should also be given a high priority in the government's strategic plan. "Without a proper strategic plan on the part of the government, I can tell you corruption will continue claiming all the gains we have made. It would be good if we consider the fact that this is a young nation devoid of tribalism and hatred", she observes. She says that the biggest challenges for Southern Sudan are tribalism, nepotism and corruption.

Thirsty Southern Sudanese villagers turn to dirty water for survival

By Abraham Machuor Lum

A visit to the sleepy village of Abyei Cok in Rumbek, Southern Sudan, reminds one of an old saying – "every one for himself, God for us all." In this sun-baked village, in Lake's state, it is survival of the fittest as villagers scramble for a very scarce commodity, water. The only source of water here – an old well owned by an individual – serves 596 families, together with their livestock. As the name suggests, the region should be by the lakeside but, this appears to be just a name, because the residents have been going thirsty for years due to a biting water shortage. The village is about 15 miles from state headquarters in Rumbek and is occupied by the sub clans of Pagok and Kongor that keep cattle in large numbers and cultivate cereals crops such as sorghum, millet, and groundnuts and during the rainy seasons. The owner of the well, Mr Manuo Magok Kolnyin, says he dug the well in 1979 to serve the community living in the area together with their livestock. The locals have named the well after him. The area has a

population of about 12,000 people and the majority of them draw their water from the Manuo well, while the rest walk several kilometres to the nearest river in search of water. "The state recognised my services and gave me one hand pump to help serve the residents with water but, it broke down soon after it was delivered in 2009 forcing us to draw the water manually from the well," said Kolnyin. In an interview, a local resident, Achol Akech Chol, 40, said she travels for 5 hours every day to get drinking water from the Manuo well during dry seasons. "Because of the water scarcity, we eat only one meal a

day. The little water I fetch from the well is also used by my goats," she said. The water shortage has forced families to use dirty water drawn from pools, resulting in a high prevalence of water born diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid and bilharzia. Achol said her family, including her, have on many occasions suffered from cholera and only survived by the grace of the Lord. The water problem and other hardships in the area have also forced many children out of school. Achol, for example says that none of her five children go to school because they live almost 10 miles from the nearest one.

Another villager, Nyibol Ciman Ater, whose family numbers 13 members, says she travels for about 4 miles daily to get to the nearest water well. One of her children fell sick from diarrhoea last month and was taken to Rumbek hospital for treatment. "I was lucky because my child survived. My neighbour was not so lucky as her child died of the disease while being rushed to the hospital," she said. A livestock farmer from the area, Mr Marial Majok Deng, blamed the state government for sidelining the residents. "I have lost many cows due to lack of water and the future still looks

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WHY YAMBIO HONEY DOESN'T SWEETEN THE THROATS OF LOCAL VILLAGERS

By Gift Friday

They are expected to sweeten the lives of Yambio County residents through the production of honey but, they are a dejected lot and are contemplating abandoning the activity altogether. Welcome to the world of Yambio County beekeepers whose work is being affected by a shortage of hives and packaging materials. Most have no carpentry tools with which to make the wooden hives and even those who do manage to construct them face another dilemma – no bottles to store and market the honey. Beekeeping is a major economic activity in Yambio County and residents are now calling on the government to help them improve production. The beekeepers have formed a beekeeping association to help them address the problems facing their operations but,



A farmer displays some of the makeshift beehives he uses in his farm

lack of support from the government is slowing down their progress. 'The People's Voice' visited the County recently and found the beekeepers in a crisis meeting, trying to chart out the future. One of the beekeepers is Emmanuel Enoka

Sakondo, 35 and a father of six. He is the Chairman of Nangbimo beekeepers' Association. Sakondo commented, "We have chosen beekeeping as our main economic activity to improve our livelihood." He added that beekeeping has helped to create more employment and reduce poverty in the County. However, he said lack of technical assistance was slowing the growth of the sub sector and cited the shortage of tools to make wooden hives and storage materials. The farmer is full of praise for World Vision

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the fifth edition of the People's Voice. Like the previous issues, this edition brings you the views and concerns of the ordinary people of South Sudan. On SPLM day, as Southerners celebrated the organization that brought them independence from the north, our seasoned reporter Agele Benson Amos asked people what they now wanted from the SPLM, now that the priority has shifted from liberation to state-building. We hear from thirsty residents in the sleepy village of Abyei Cok in Rumbek, where the villagers are forced to drink dirty water for survival. The only source of water here – an old well – has to serve 596 families, together with their livestock. We listen to their complaints about government inaction.

Agricultural issues are also looked into. Our reporters talk to Yei farmers who say that their bumper food crop harvests are not only going to waste but also, that they have nothing to show from their efforts. It is ironic that while most residents of the dry parts of South Sudan starve, crops from this region rot in farms due to poor roads and lack of modern storage facilities. In addition, we bring you a report on the difficulties and frustrations faced by beekeepers in Yambio County, as they describe how only a little government interest could make such a difference to the economy of their area. Our correspondent from Jonglei, John Actually, takes a closer into one of the most worrying issues affecting the future of our children and thereby the future of South Sudan; the terrible state of the education sector. The importance of the media being free to highlight issues such as those included in this edition cannot be overstated. Press freedom is a fundamental principle of democratic societies. The 3rd May was World Press Freedom Day and, in our fledgling state of South Sudan; journalists, government officials, and representatives from NGOs, gathered in a small hotel room to join the rest of the world in marking this important occasion. We bring you a report from that event where Mr Luka Biong, the Director General in the Ministry of Information, called on UJOSS to keep on pressing and reminding the government of its obligations to its people and he cited the 'The People's Voice' as a true living case of press freedom and UJOSS's efforts to help the government understand ordinary people's concerns. We thank the government of South Sudan for being willing to listen to the voices of its people, even if it makes unpleasant and difficult reading sometimes. Only by being honest and forthright about the problems this country faces can we hope to move forward to a better and more prosperous future for all, where hopefully South Sudan can serve as a beacon of hope to the rest of Africa on what can be achieved when a government listens to its people.

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Thirsty Southern Sudanese villagers turn to dirty water for survival

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very grim," he said. Marial, 58, has four wives and 17 children. Two of his sons recently dropped out of school due to his inability to pay school fees. They are now helping him to look after the cattle. He explained that his family members suffer from stomach pains every time they drink water from the local rivers and wells. Like many villagers who have gone through the same predicament, Marial says

that the government should prioritise provision of safe drinking water because it would make such a huge difference to villager's lives. He insists that once safe drinking water is available to villagers, most problems affecting rural communities would be solved once and for all. "You can imagine that now we have many people suffering from water borne diseases, we also have many school age

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International who were supporting the local beekeepers. "World Vision has managed to support us in the training of personnel and on modern beekeeping. They have constructed a store and a honey processing center," he said. However, World Vision's project was short-lived and many things remain to be done to help the beekeepers fulfill the full potential of their industry. Sakondo said that following World Vision's pull out, farmers engaged in beekeeping plunged into troubles such as lack of transport and product labeling and packaging materials. "We have got our local manual honey extracting machine in our center but due to lack of bottling materials we only keep the processed honey in jerry cans," he explained. He said that Arab traders from North Sudan bought most of the locally produced

honey while the rest is sold to Wau and other parts of South Sudan. The local association has about 27 beekeepers. "We could do more but due to poor infrastructure, we have only managed to produce a very little quantity in the past one and a half years," Sakondo stated. Amjima Santo, 27, one of the few female beekeepers expressed concern over lack of materials and technical support. "Beekeeping is one of the most profitable economic activities and we are asking the government to help modernize it," she said. Another beekeeper, Justin Kabash, 45, has been tapping honey for the past five years but has little to show for it because of lack of modern facilities. He said that although the business has helped him pay school fees for his three sons, he could have earned more if he had modern facilities to

YEI FARMERS RAISE CONCERNS OVER INCREASED CHALLENGES

By Agele Benson Amos

It is a story of a farming community in dilemma. First, their markets were destroyed by the civil war forcing them to withdraw from cash crop production, such as growing coffee. Now, having switched to food crops, farmers are producing bumper maize and other food crop harvests but, due to lack of storage facilities and poor roads their efforts seem fruitless. Today, smiles among farmers in Yei River Payam are hard to come by because they have nothing to celebrate about their difficult decision of quitting coffee and tobacco farming for maize and other food crop production. Their bumper food crop harvests are not only going to waste but also, they have nothing to show from their struggle and efforts.

They say that their crops are either rotting due to the inability to get them to market because of the poor road network or have been destroyed by weevils due to lack of modern storage facilities. 52 year old Emmanuel Ludoru Zakayo is a farmer in Morsak in Otogo Payam River County, who was engaged in coffee farming for more than two decades. "Though the coffee used to take three years before harvest I had the morale for producing it because there was a market for it. Maize does well and harvests are good but there isn't enough support from those concerned to help us in the entire production process" said Zakayo.

After the civil war Emmanuel turned his attention to growing food crops such as maize, cassava, beans and groundnuts among others. "I resorted to food crops after the war because it doesn't take many years to

mature. They helped us to fight hunger and to pay school fees", he said. Much as Emmanuel involved himself in food crop farming to feed his family and educate his children, he regrets that most of his produce goes to waste because of poor roads and lack of means of transport from his farm to Yei town located some fourteen miles away, and low market prices. Emmanuel also attributed the falling fortunes in farming in the region to lack of capacity building for farmers on modern farming and storage techniques. "I really want to improve on my farming methods but, due to lack of any basic farming knowledge, I find it difficult to catch up with the modern farming methods", Zachayo lamented further. He accused the government of doing little to support farmers and urged them to help through provision of free seeds and agricultural implements. The situation has now compelled most farmers to return to traditional seed preservation methods such as smoking and open sun drying methods.

This has compromised the quality of the seeds used by farmers. "I have been using local seeds that I smoked and stored in my house to keep away the weevils but the seeds were not the best quality," Zachayo added. But despite these challenges, Emmanuel has continued urging his fellow farmers not to quit farming, especially food crop production, as it assured them of food security. "When we fail to produce more food, we shall for



Emmanuel working under his maize plantation in Morsak village of Yei county

ever depend on expensive imports and many of us will go hungry," he said. Joseph M a w a Malembe of K a n y a r a village in M o r o b o County who was previously engaged in coffee production but, has now shifted attention to potatoe and maize production, said people should consider food crop production as the first priority instead of cash crops. "I must have enough food in my house before thinking of growing cash crops like coffee that takes three years to harvest", he advised. "Because of poor roads and bridges I have been using my old bicycle to transport my crops to the market and it is very tiresome," he said. Joseph also complained about low prices in the local market. Like Emmanuel and Joseph, Oliver Abayi John is a farmer, in his forties, in Panyume area Panyume Payam in Morobo County, who also used to be involved in growing coffee. He appealed to the local Non-Governmental Organizations like Action Africa Help (AAH), GTZ, and the government to consider repairing the local roads to help solve the market accessibility problems faced by farmers. ■

World Press Freedom Day provides opportunity for debate in South Sudan

By Paul Jimbo

The 3rd May is the date set aside annually to celebrate World Press Freedom Day. This date was established by the United Nations General Assembly to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and to remind governments of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year, deep in the African continent, in the fledgling state of Southern Sudan; journalists, media practitioners, government officials, and representatives from international organizations and civil society, gathered in a small hotel room to join the rest of the world in marking this important occasion. The event is meant to affirm fundamental principles of media freedom - the ability of the press to voice their opinions and access diverse, independent information sources. Speakers at the event indicated that despite spirited efforts by the media to break traditional information barriers, very little seemed to have been done by the government, and security agents in particular, to help the media in walking this path. They asked the media not to relent in its quest for a truly democratic environment where access to information is not limited. "We have nothing to celebrate about, nothing to boast of, and

nothing to take pride in, when our journalists are working under such difficult conditions. Our journalists are arrested daily and media houses are raided daily; papers are confiscated; while we work under constant threats issued by security agents" said Oliver Modi, UJOSS Chairperson. Addressing a pensively listening gathering, Mr Modi challenged the government to state clearly its position with regards to press freedom in Southern Sudan. "We are not waging any war against the government but, we are simply demanding what is rightfully ours. If we gag the media at its nascent stage, I am beginning to sense a lot of danger lying ahead of us. As we come up with the youngest country in the world it must uphold the principles of democracy" he added. Mr Modi further called on the South Sudan Legislative Assembly to speed up passing of the pending media bill to help the media regulate itself. "We prefer to do things the right way but, how do we do this business without any laws in place? What is the motive of delaying the media bill if it means well to all of us?" he asked. Amongst the dignitaries who attended the event were Mr Luka Biong, the Director General in the Ministry of Information, Mr Richard Korbandi, Country Director of Norwegian People's Aid, and Joy Kwaje, the Chairperson of the

Human Rights Commission in Southern Sudan, among a host of other organization's representatives. In his speech, the NPA representative asked the media to lead from the front in championing for human rights in Southern Sudan. "This is your role and we will support you in every way possible as long as you achieve this course" Korbandi said. On behalf of the GoSS Minister of Information, Mr Mustafa Biong called on UJOSS and its partners not to relent in their fight to ensure those in authority understand the role of media in a democratic society. He called on UJOSS to keep on pressing and reminding the government of its obligations to its people and he cited the 'The People's Voice' as a true living case of UJOSS's efforts to help the government understand ordinary people's concerns. Mr Biong emphasized that while the government had obligations, so too do the media, particularly with regard to ensuring professionalism amongst its membership. He said that the government was not hell bent on harassing the media but, instead felt that the media had failed to live up to its expectations. "We are not against a free media but, we abhor lack of professionalism" he stated. ■