

Getting southern Sudanese children to school

by Sibeso Luswata

The Government of Southern Sudan's Go to School Initiative, supported by UNICEF, which seeks to get 1.6 million children back in school by the end of 2007, incorporates key elements of the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction.

So far, unofficial reports show that 558,713 primary school pupils have enrolled for the 2006 academic year and 16,614 teachers are working throughout southern Sudan. Four million textbooks and teachers' guides are being delivered. Basic school supplies for up to 1.6 million children have been purchased and are being delivered to schools. Accelerated training is being developed for the 9,000 new teachers required to ensure the success of the initiative. There is special emphasis on intensive English language training. The Ministry of Education,

April 2006
launch of 'Go
to School'
campaign, Juba,
southern Sudan.



Science and Technology is being helped to develop a standardised curriculum, school calendar, syllabus and examination schedule, as well as a clear language policy. Planning has begun for an Institute of Education to ensure long-term technical expertise in rebuilding the education system. Public awareness campaigns are mobilising communities to send children to school, especially girls.

A central element of the Go to School Initiative is the Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces exercise currently underway in all ten states of

southern Sudan. Survey teams are crossing the vast region, recording even the smallest schools under trees to produce a comprehensive list for planning purposes and to know exactly how many children are attending school. The RALS exercise will provide badly-needed baseline data on: locations of schools/learning spaces; access to schools; presence and condition of physical structures; access to water and sanitation facilities; enrolment numbers, disaggregated by gender and grade; numbers of teachers, disaggregated by gender and qualification; availability of learning/teaching materials; and languages taught and used for instruction.

Special provisions are being made to address the needs of IDPs, former child soldiers and others directly affected by the war. There is intensive focus on supplies to regions reporting high numbers of returnees. UNICEF education staff are liaising with protection colleagues to keep track of demobilised ex-child combatants. Adult learning and vocational classes are being planned for those who did not have a chance to attend school during the conflict. Children with disabilities are being identified with the help of WFP and will be provided with additional support through school feeding programmes.

Key decisions are being made by the new government rather than UNICEF or other external agencies. Decisions about school locations and facilities are taken with substantive community input. UNICEF is promoting children's participation by:

- mobilising girls and boys to act as advocates within

their communities through 'creative facilitation'

- helping to publicise children's voices in the media
- ensuring children's visibility in Go to School launches, marches and other public events.

Following the national launch of the Go to School campaign on 1 April 2006, a series of local events has helped to raise visibility for education and generate enthusiasm in each of the ten states of southern Sudan. In Rumbek, the capital of Lakes State, tangible results are already being felt. During the campaign launch, the town square overflowed with people who had gathered to celebrate the initiative and listen to local leaders call for free primary education for all children. As banners waved, folk dancers twirled and thousands of schoolchildren marched proudly to the sound of beating drums, the crowd chanted in unison: "My child, my daughter, my son, my brother, my sister, my mother, my father – all of us, go to school!"

As politicians debate the shape of southern Sudan's new education policy, the rising calls for free primary education have led many schools to abolish school fees. Last year, it cost about \$5 annually for a child to attend the Ager Gum Primary School in Rumbek. But in 2006 the school eliminated even this minimal requirement. "We heard that education should be free," says Samuel Deng Majur, a teacher at Ager Gum. "This is what was told to us at the launch, and this is how we want our country to be. So we must follow, although it is not always easy."

Sibeso Luswata is UNICEF South Sudan's Chief of Education. Email: sluswata@unicef.org. For further information on the Go to School campaign, visit: www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sudan_34784.html