

South Sudan: Lessons from developing a national education strategic plan

Morten Sigsgaard



SOUTH SUDAN

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Abbreviations

AES	Alternative Education System
CD	capacity development
DSA	daily subsistence allowance
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
EFA-GMR	Education for All – Global Monitoring Report
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
FHI360	Family Health International 360 (formerly Academy for Educational Development)
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GESP	General Education Strategic Plan
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
INEE	Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoGEI	Ministry of General Education and Instruction
MoHEST	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD-DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SMoGEI	State MoGEI
SSDP	South Sudan Development Plan
TA	technical advisor/assistance
TAP	Technical Advisor Programme
ToR	terms of reference
TVETE	Technical Vocational Educational Training for Employment
UK	United Kingdom
UKFIET	United Kingdom Forum for International Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WCARO	West and Central Africa Office

Executive summary

Lack of capacity is a major constraint to the development of education in South Sudan. UNICEF has helped provide education there since 1994 and is now supporting the development of a comprehensive national education policy and strategic plan for the government of the new Republic of South Sudan.

This study outlines the lessons learned in the development of South Sudan's first General Education Strategic Plan (GESP) by the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) in partnership with UNICEF South Sudan and the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). The aim was to develop the capacity of national planners as part of the plan development process.

Although there is strength and will to make a new beginning for the world's newest country, South Sudan is known as one of the world's most difficult places to develop government capacity, due to decades of ongoing armed conflict, illiteracy, and dire poverty, among other factors. What constitutes success under these circumstances? The knowledge about what works in capacity development in South Sudan's education sector is limited. Experience suggests that a planning process is a unique opportunity for capacity development, insofar as such a process can generate ministry engagement and ownership, bring development partners together, and result in learning planning by doing it. These are often more important outcomes than the finished plan.

This study is based on telephone interviews with seven South Sudanese MoGEI officials and 12 international advisors who were asked to describe the most significant changes resulting from the capacity development partnership. Due to the small number of respondents, and due to the interview methodology (semi-structured interviews with respondents speaking about their own perception of significant changes), some points raised in the study are based more on statements of single individuals than on patterns revealed by all respondents, and therefore cannot be generalized. Validation of viewpoints was limited to seven respondents reviewing the draft study via email. The research took place between November 2011 and February 2012.

IIEP, with UNICEF support, has been engaged in the GESP process since December 2010. IIEP hired two technical advisors to support MoGEI staff in Juba, and facilitated several national planning workshops in Juba. The intention was that eight technical working groups – each consisting of a majority of MoGEI officials and some international advisors – should drive the planning process. In reality, however, these working groups were not fully functional in between the planning workshops. Two additional key factors happened late in the process. In October 2011, the replenished Global Partnership for Education (GPE) announced that one of their 'strategic directions' would be support to fragile states. The resulting \$36 million pledge to South Sudan understandably increased interest in the process. In November 2011, a new Undersecretary for Education was appointed, resulting in stronger top-level political ownership of the planning process.

The analysis of the respondents' views of capacity development in the GESP process is structured around four levels: (1) system context, (2) public administration, (3) organizational unit, and (4) individual staff. A number of key obstacles to capacity development are located at system context level, for instance widespread illiteracy, and a legacy of clan/military-based politics. There are however also resources at this level, for example a unique political will to address conflict in planning, and the momentum for building back better, in the world's youngest nation. But the context requires adaptation, for example simplified guidance and training materials. International agencies play a key role in shaping the government's manoeuvring space, and should strengthen their

coordination to reach agreement on timeframes, approaches to planning, and demands for accountability with government.

At the public administration level, the main issue concerned decentralization. Several respondents felt that the entire planning process should have been initiated at state level instead of in Juba due to the inter-state disparities and low awareness of these in Juba. Further, some respondents felt that there was more responsiveness and drive for results as well as accountability at state level – although the process of developing working relations took time and effort. Another issue at this level was regulation of incentives such as daily subsistence allowances (DSA), which in combination with low civil servant salaries were found to exert a counterproductive influence.

The level of the organizational unit is particularly interesting because this is where capacity developers stand the best chances of having a lasting impact. This is the fundamental building block in developing the education sector. At this level, an essential human resource template to develop is job descriptions, but even when they exist, they are sometimes not followed. The formation of the eight Thematic Working Groups was seen as a valuable output from the GESP since these groups have developed trusting working relationships and a unique expertise in analysis and planning. These groups could strengthen the newly formed Local Education Group.

Several respondents highlighted the importance of high-level MoGEI involvement in speeding up the planning process. One reason is the limited number of senior and middle-ranking officials or high-ranking policy-makers who have received a higher education abroad and are able to hold their ground in a policy-making environment that can otherwise get dominated by international agencies. Furthermore, policy reform requires certain political powers. Respondents saw the MoGEI Undersecretary for Education as a key top-level official whose involvement was essential to moving the process forward. The Undersecretary took office in November 2011, and hence began reviewing the plan at a stage when the drafting process was almost finished. Convening a council of ministers to discuss the GESP was also viewed as important.

Some respondents strongly emphasized that before capacities for planning can be developed, fundamental skills like writing and arithmetic should be developed first in some cases. Core skills also include office management skills like filing, memo writing, time management, and creating simple plans, briefings, and logframes. Therefore, development partners should keep offering training in these basic skills to MoGEI officials. This would then enable technical advisors to focus on developing planning capacity. Interestingly, this does not mean that strategic thinking was missing – an international advisor stated that his MoGEI counterpart ‘knew what had to be done, what needed to be done – but not how to get there’. Finally, respondents emphasized that building relationships matters as much as technical capacity, which is why frequent staff substitution should be avoided, and why one-on-one trainings and coaching generally worked well. For the same reason, IIEP’s decision to place a technical advisor in the MoGEI from September to December 2011 was much appreciated. Skills in planning, coaching, and meta-skills such as talking to everyone and being a good listener, can make a positive difference despite the lack of a technical education planning background. Most of all, someone needs to accompany the process forward. One advisor suggested that ‘When we go away, the capacity building stops’.

This study was based on a fundamental assumption, namely that a strategic planning process is an opportunity to develop national education planning capacity. As mentioned above, one needs to be careful in judging capacity development after one year of engagement. If we look at whether MoGEI is now able to produce a Strategic Plan on its own, the answer is probably ‘not yet’. However, a draft plan has been produced with external help and can now be used as a starting point for policy dialogue with in-country

donors and to harness \$36 million of support from GPE. As one respondent commented, the draft GESP document is 200+ pages and in a context of pervasive illiteracy, its impact on MoGEI officials on the ground may prove to be limited. It may therefore be worth considering distributing the final plan in simplified formats, including via radio.

The participatory process to capacity development and IIEP's facilitation of the process was widely praised, and the insistence on an approach that gives voice to the MoGEI officials may well pay off in the longer run, as it has generated valuable trust in the working relations between people who may never have sat down together to do planning before. Ambitions of producing a conflict- and gender-sensitive plan were not mentioned much in the interviews, leaving the impression that perhaps basic planning concepts and methods need to sink in first before more sophisticated issues can be learned.

The study's recommendations are:

1. Participatory planning pays off.
2. Initiate the planning process at the state level.
3. Consider hiring a full time, in-country technical advisor.
4. Include basic administrative skills in the training menu.
5. Keep products simple.
6. Seek out outspoken advocates for conflict-sensitive planning, gender, and youth.
7. Help strengthen the Local Education Group by building on the work of the Thematic Working Groups.

1. Introduction

This is a study of lessons learned in capacity development (CD) in South Sudan's education sector, based on the development of South Sudan's draft of their first General Education Strategic Plan (GESP). The study was conducted by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) on behalf of South Sudan's Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI), and was funded by UNICEF South Sudan.

The South Sudanese have a strong pride and a desire to shape the destiny of their newly independent country. Yet South Sudan is known as one of the world's most difficult places to develop government capacity. This is due to, among other factors, a mix of dire poverty, low education levels, a past of armed conflict and ongoing tensions with (North) Sudan, and patronage-based forms of governance.

Under such circumstances it is difficult to define what would constitute 'success' for an education sector planning process, and for related capacity development. Is success an impressive sector plan written by international advisors? Many development partners would disagree with that, emphasizing instead the value of ministry participation and ownership, and learning by sitting down and doing planning together.

As a consequence, the study will employ a strengths-based approach, looking at constructive examples of what respondents feel works in building capacity in South Sudan's education sector. It is hoped that this can be more productive than just focusing on 'gaps'.

The study begins with a brief, literature-based overview of lessons learned from capacity development in South Sudan's education sector between the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and independence in 2011. It then turns to a specific case study of CD lessons learned from the process of developing the draft GESPs, from December 2010 to December 2011.

A key question guiding the study is: If the MoGEI, IIEP, UNICEF, and other stakeholders such as Family Health International 360 (FHI360) were to engage in a plan development process again, which elements of the 2011 process should then be built on and strengthened?

IIEP always intended the 2011 plan development process to be different from the more formulaic, 'parachute' approach that is sometimes carried out by external consultants in isolation. The idea was that the GESPs development process would be led and directed by the MoGEI in order to ensure national ownership, and that planning would be adapted to the context, rather than to external templates. The process would, for example, attempt to address conflict risks in the education sector. This study will be a critical examination of whether this approach actually worked.

1.1 Short background on South Sudan and its education sector

Southern Sudan's decades of war with (North) Sudan ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, leaving a devastated country with just shreds of an education system. When South Sudan gained its independence six years later, on 9 July 2011, the war was over only officially – fighting was still ongoing in some areas, and territorial disputes remained unresolved. Human development indicators (health, poverty, education, water, sanitation, etc.) remained among the worst in the world. The country is still operating in emergency mode, and large parts of the country are difficult to access. Yet, in spite of this, there was also a real sense of hope and opportunity in the world's newest nation. These factors have been discussed in detail elsewhere; see for instance World Bank (2012), Watkins (2011), and IIEP (2012). One of the most important documents in this regard is

the draft GESP document (MoGEI, 2012), which also discusses South Sudan's capacity development successes in the education sector and across sectors. These success stories are few and sparsely documented; the evidence base concerning what works in developing capacity in South Sudan's education sector is still very thin.

1.2 A strengths-based approach

It remains an open question how to define 'success' in a meaningful way under the conditions outlined above. Externally predefined success criteria can, in the words of one international advisor, 'set them [the MoGEI staff] up for a sense of failure from the outset'. In developing ministry capacity in conflict-affected countries, IIEP finds it more useful to strengthen ministry officials' confidence and build on what they perceive as successes.

Given South Sudan's unusually difficult situation outlined above, it was decided that this study would employ a strengths-based approach. Inspired by the approach to evaluation known as Most Significant Change (Davies and Dart, 2005), this meant looking at, and taking seriously, the participants' perceptions of what they liked and did not like about the CD process, and what in their eyes was the most significant change generated by the CD interventions.¹

It therefore also meant that the respondents were not asked to conduct a capacity gap analysis, which can be a rather overwhelming exercise when the list of gaps is long. Instead they were asked to look at the process from a more subjective point of view, and speak about what actually worked and was meaningful for them.

1.3 Methodology

This study was a desk study conducted by an IIEP consultant between November 2011 and February 2012. The methodology was based on a short literature review, combined with telephone interviews to respondents in Juba as well as other cities in Africa, Europe, and North America. An introductory email (see Annex 1) including interview protocol was emailed in advance to respondents with a fixed time for a phone interview (some re-negotiated). Nineteen interviews were completed with a total of seven South Sudanese respondents and 12 international respondents (see Annex 2 for list of respondents). Low-quality phone connections made communication with some respondents difficult.

The findings of the study should be read with some caution due to the small number of respondents, and to the semi-structured interview format, where respondents spoke about their own perception of significant changes. Therefore, some points raised in the report are based on statements of single individuals and cannot be generalized to all respondents. Validation of viewpoints was limited to those respondents who reviewed the draft study by email, who turned out to be few in number.

1.4 Short history of the General Education Strategic Plan process

UNICEF has helped provide education in South Sudan since 1994 (Sommers, 2005: 87). The GESP process formally began in December 2010 when UNICEF's Juba office contracted IIEP to support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, as it was called then) in developing South Sudan's first five-year education sector plan. This was intended as a sector-wide plan encompassing both the education and the higher education subsectors. Throughout most of 2011, the plan carried the title Education Sector Strategic

1. The Most Significant Changes (MSC) approach was used as inspiration; however it was not possible to adhere to the MSC approach in its full version, since it was not an integral part of the project design from its inception. The MSC approach is described in detail in Davies and Dart (2005).

Plan (ESSP) and involved the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) as well as the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MoHEST). IIEP's first mission took place in December 2010, and in February 2011 IIEP and UNICEF organized the first of a series of planning workshops with MoGEI and MoHEST officials in Juba. Eight working groups were formed, and each group was supported by development partner staff. One of the eight groups focused on higher education. The intention was that the working groups should convene in between the workshops, but in reality this rarely happened.

At this stage, IIEP did not have a technical advisor permanently placed in Juba to push the process along – instead IIEP advisors came to Juba on missions typically of one to two weeks duration. Meanwhile, MoGEI planners were busy working on the education component of the South Sudan Development Plan (SSDP), a highly important document which took priority. These factors in combination delayed the plan preparation process. However, subsequent planning workshops were held in June and August 2011, and the process was galvanized once the working groups started coming together more regularly. On 9 July 2011, South Sudan celebrated its independence day. IIEP hired a full-time advisor to work in Juba between August and November 2011. The first draft of the ESSP plan document was ready in September 2011. A newly appointed Undersecretary for Education became strongly involved in the plan revision in November 2011. This, combined with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) indicating that they would be able to support a \$36 million indicative allocation² to South Sudan, galvanized the process further. The MoGEI released a revised draft plan in end-February 2012. At this stage, higher education was no longer part of the plan, and as a consequence the plan was renamed General Education Strategic Plan (GESP).

1.5 IIEP's capacity development principles and analytical framework

IIEP's approach to capacity development is based on a number of key principles. These include:

1. A participatory approach. In principle, the MoGEI should lead the process with IIEP accompanying. As described in IIEP's project proposal to UNICEF:

The MoEST [former name of the MoGEI] will be responsible for the development of the Sector Plan. It will appoint a Core Team to work with the consultants, and supplemented by additional personnel from other ministries (e.g. Finance) as required. The Core Team will work as a group on overall sector issues but will break up into sub-groups to address specific sub-sector plans. Templates and Guidelines will be provided for the team members. IIEP technical assistants will provide technical guidance and support and ensure that all issues are adequately addressed and backed up by relevant data (where available). The Core Team Leader and the IIEP consultants will meet on a regular basis with the most senior people in the Ministry to report on progress and seek guidance on key policy issues (IIEP-UNESCO, 2010).
2. Learning by doing. By working in technical working groups with technical assistance from IIEP, the MoGEI officials should learn planning techniques through working on their plan.
3. Integrating crosscutting themes such as gender and youth, and a conflict- and disaster-sensitive lens. IIEP aims to follow the first OECD-DAC fragile states principle, 'Take context as the starting point'. IIEP also has been a leader on conflict- and disaster-sensitive programming, youth, and gender, among other topics.

2. Source: www.globalpartnership.org/indicative-allocations

The analysis in *Chapter 2* will investigate to what extent the project succeeded in adhering to these principles.

Following IIEP's standard approach to analysing capacity development, the analysis in *Chapter 2* is structured around four levels: (1) system context, (2) public administration, (3) organizational unit, and (4) the level of the individual staff (De Grauwe, 2009: 151). This approach is further elaborated in IIEP's study on capacity development for education in South Sudan (IIEP, 2012).

Public administration reform is notoriously slow and difficult; and 'basic governance changes may take 20-40 years', as suggested in the *A new deal for engagement in fragile states* (IDPS, 2011). At the same time, the key distinction is between the factors that capacity developers can influence and those they cannot influence. To be successful, capacity development must create changes not only at the individual level, but also at the organizational level. This is why donor coordination and strategic alliances between capacity development agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government, parliamentarians, civil society, religious groups, and the private sector are so important. Creating durable capacity development in South Sudan's education sector will require more political will, expertise, and effort than any single actor can possess.

These levels are nested. For instance, South Sudan's informal systems of governance (at the system context level), and a government leadership with a strong representation of former liberation war soldiers (at the public administration level), are both factors that impact on IIEP's and UNICEF's work at the organizational and individual levels. Improving communication, clarifying mandates, drawing up organograms and terms of reference (ToR), and providing office infrastructure and vehicles, take place at the organizational level. Increasing individual staff's planning capacity through workshops, training, and coaching takes place at the individual level.

2. Lessons learned from the General Education Strategic Planning process, December 2010 – December 2011

This chapter synthesizes the lessons on capacity development with the MoGEI that respondents learned from the GESP process. The following sections are structured around the four levels mentioned at the end of *Chapter 1*: (1) system context, (2) public administration, (3) organizational unit and (4) individual staff.

2.1 The system context of South Sudan

The interview protocol did not focus directly on this level. Yet, respondents often referred to it indirectly, usually by highlighting constraints rather than opportunities for capacity development.

2.1.1 Hypothetical hopes versus evidence-based planning

One overarching challenge has to do with the way in which development in South Sudan is conceptualized and framed by development partners, media, the Government, commentators and others.

A pessimistic view of South Sudan emphasizes the traumatic history of war and ongoing insecurity, and its human development indicators, which rank among the world's lowest. A more optimistic, but also hypothetical, viewpoint emphasizes the possibility of 'building back better', and the high hopes for the world's youngest nation. The views are sometimes combined, for instance in advocacy contexts. They are not mutually exclusive, since the first concerns the past and the second looks to the future.³

Yet, as an international advisor pointed out, this type of hypothetical discourse about what could be done can also have a downside. It can create confusion or tension between on the one hand wanting to look good (and live up to these high hopes and expectations), and on the other hand, planning for what is actually feasible, based on the current conditions and the available evidence.

Planning should be based on evidence and data, and a strategic plan should be realistic and implementable. On the other hand, there is also a need for – and a specific utility in – creating a strategic plan that inspires hope across the Ministry, provides a vision of how things could be, and thereby can become a tool for internal mobilization, fundraising, and development partners' alignment. Both positions can be defended, and the Ministry may find utility in both approaches.

The utility of the standard five-year timeframe can also be questioned, particularly in conflict-affected contexts where rapid political, security, and economic changes can carry drastic consequences for education service delivery and planning. One international advisor pointed out that a strategic plan can also look 10 or 20 years ahead, if so desired. The balance between vision and feasibility is then addressed in the implementation of the

3. Take as an example the very first paragraph of the special EFA-GMR report on South Sudan: 'In July 2011, South Sudan will become an independent nation. It will start life at a crossroad. The new country faces immense challenges and immediate threats. Yet it also has a unique opportunity to break with a past blighted by war and chart a new course. Decisive leadership by the Government of South Sudan and resolute support from the international community could transform the lives of southern Sudan's people and make the new nation a human development success story.' (Watkins, 2011: 1).

plan. It could be argued that the drafts of the plan were feasible and also realistic, just not in the five-year period identified.

2.1.2 Readiness to discuss conflict ...

In some conflict-affected countries, governments downplay, or shy away from discussing armed conflict. Often, armed conflict is a politically contentious issue as it can imply, for example, that not all groups in society are equally satisfied with the government.⁴ In educational planning, silence on this issue can lead to difficulties in taking conflict risks for education properly into account. This is problematic in countries where ongoing conflict is indeed a main threat to meeting Education for All (EFA) goals. Fortunately, this was not a problem in South Sudan, where according to one international advisor, government officials talk openly about conflict, acknowledging their past instead of denying it. This is demonstrated by the willingness for South Sudan to sign up as one of the pilot countries to implement the *New deal for engagement in fragile states*.⁵

‘... if we could bring, later on, the aspect of life skills in[to] the education sector – because we still don’t have it there ... Introducing things like talking about peace education, how to live together. It needs to be integrated into curriculum. Another example would be giving skills through vocational training, for people to survive.’

MoGEI official

2.1.3 ... But addressing conflict programmatically is difficult

For a number of years, IIEP has invested in developing tools for sector planning that use a ‘conflict lens’. This has taken place in IIEP’s various partnerships with the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), including the INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility, as well as the Global Education Cluster. This type of analysis and planning was among the ambitions outlined in UNICEF and IIEP’s programme document for the GESP process (IIEP-UNESCO, 2010). South Sudan’s GESP process was IIEP’s first real attempt at applying this “conflict lens” in a full sector planning exercise. Yet, despite the effort to organize an INEE consultative workshop in Juba on the subject in February 2011, and although conflict mitigation terminology is included in the draft plan, the critical analysis and awareness to implement strategies for conflict and disaster risk reduction are lacking.⁶

There could be several reasons for this. As pointed out by respondents (concerning other topics), materials for this work need to be short and concise; currently they are not.⁷ Perhaps basic educational planning concepts and skills need to sink in before more sophisticated techniques can be taken on board.

2.1.4 Low capacity in planning, illiteracy, and innumeracy

In a country such as South Sudan that had to develop its first education sector plan after decades of war, nothing can be taken for granted.

The fact that there are very few education planners in the MoGEI means that the same few people get overworked. For example, it was the same small group of MoGEI officials who had to do the planning work on the South Sudan Development Plan (SSDP) and the GESP documents simultaneously, because they were the only individuals capable of doing it.

Different types of strategies are required to support understanding of concepts as well as development of skills. How can you plan for something you do not understand? Although working groups were provided with a number of sector plans from other

4. There are numerous examples of this. One would be certain governments’ reactions to the UNESCO report *Education under Attack 2010*.

5. Source: IDPS (2011).

6. Several among the South Sudanese participants for this INEE workshop unfortunately did not participate in the later ESSP development workshops.

7. A good example is IIEP’s and UNICEF WCARO’s current material, the draft *Guidance notes for education planners on integrating conflict and disaster risk reduction into education sector planning* (2011). While there is no doubt that conflict-sensitive education planning is important, the ‘how to do it’ message needs to be brief and straightforward to implement.

‘If you take away two or three people, there’s not a lot of people left in terms of real talent. And there were certain days where the MoGEI just could not give away those people.’

International advisor

African countries as examples, they were rarely used by participants. A more expensive solution suggested by a respondent was study tours abroad to countries like Angola or Mozambique. Another alternative is to use advisors from such countries, as IIEP has done in other countries.

Low numeracy and literacy levels result in a need for (but also innovation in) different types of training methods and materials. For example, instead of using PowerPoint presentations, FHI360 and UNICEF developed sets of A0-sized flipchart-style posters for the purpose of training head teachers in the field. These trainings were conducted jointly by local South Sudanese consultants and State MoGEI focal points for EMIS (Education Management Information System), who would exclaim with excitement: 'I can actually use this to teach', according to one international advisor.

On the other hand, while widespread illiteracy is a fact, it does not mean that illiterate people cannot contribute meaningfully. When asked about what he liked about the GESP development process, one MoGEI official stated: 'The discovery of hidden treasure in our elders though [they are] illiterate'.

2.1.5 Clan-based and military politics

Clan-based and military affiliations from past service in the liberation army are factors that matter in the Government of South Sudan.

In the words of one international advisor:

The institutional culture needs to change. There is a situation of resource constraint. There is mistrust and suspicion around corruption, misallocation of resources, patronage, and ethnic differences. There is high turnover of staff at senior level, and experience and relationships lost takes time to build up again. This multitude of issues militates against a fully functional organization and contributes to its fractioning.

'There's a limit to what you can do ... it's such a fragile political balance.'

International advisor

Some advisors experienced a lack of initiative from the MoGEI counterparts. It was explained by an international advisor as a cultural issue – waiting for someone with wisdom – as well as perhaps an issue related to war politics: 'If you stood out [during the war], you risked getting punished.' Arguably, the Ministry leadership might benefit from developing a culture where positively outstanding individuals are rewarded.

2.1.6 Development partners need better internal coordination

The MoGEI relies on IIEP, UNICEF, the World Bank, FHI360, and other development partners for funding and technical expertise. Hence, the development partners play a major role in shaping its manoeuvring space.

But the government has power in that relationship too, since the development partners ultimately depend on its collaboration in order to be able to show results to their home constituencies. This is why it is so important that the development partners coordinate, especially considering the political flux and issues with misappropriation of funds in South Sudan.

There was strong pressure from various quarters for a pre-independence GESP plan, despite the insistence within some quarters in the MoGEI that delivery of a final plan was unlikely to happen within this short time frame. The lengthier 'IIEP model' that prioritized process and bringing people together, including from the state level, was compromised by the ongoing work on the SSDP and the desire for a product before Independence. As the same staff had to work on both plans, especially during Spring 2011, there was a competition for time and capacity to complete both plans within the agreed time-frame. Here the issue would seem to be lack of synchronization or coordination between development partners and within the government.

'I think the GESP was done too late – by that time, all the donors had already made their strategic plans and funding in place – so the MoGEI could not take leadership. Donors decided what to do, and then as a token, the MoGEI decided to do that.'

International advisor

'In the future, it would be nice to see donors look at the plans and having them fall in line with the plans. Have them plug the gaps in the plans. I know it is difficult. ... For the European Commission, it's Brussels. But Brussels have never been here to look at what the priorities are.'

International advisor

The World Bank, after producing the draft of the Country Education Status Review, did not fully engage in the GESp process. According to one international advisor, given the World Bank's significant experience from South Sudan including the analytical work done on its Education Status Report (World Bank, 2011), and its expertise in institutional development, its non-involvement in the GESp process was a wasted opportunity.

When IIEP assists an education ministry in preparing its national education plan, the ministry normally leads the planning process, using its own staff. This is an approach that is particularly useful where there is stronger capacity for ministries to drive the process alone. However several respondents agreed that this approach would not work in a fragile context such as South Sudan. Placing a longer term adviser in-country became a necessary alternative.

2.1.7 Engagement of the Global Partnership for Education

An external factor that probably contributed to the initial lack of top-level involvement is that during Spring and Summer 2011, the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was busy reflecting on its future, including the question of whether to engage with so-called fragile states or not, and if so, on which terms. As a result, the FTI could not at the time make any funding pledges to the new Republic of South Sudan around independence. This changed in November 2011 when FTI transformed itself into the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), with replenished funds and a clear policy to prioritize support to education in fragile and conflict-affected states. In March 2012, the GPE offered an indicative allocation to South Sudan of \$36 million given a credible transition plan, a factor which naturally increased the political interest in the GESp.

2.2 The public administration

Issues at the level of the public administration relate to, for example: (1) the structure of the public administration, such as autonomy and distribution of roles, e.g. between different ministries responsible for subsectors of the education sector; (2) policy – its existence, and the clarity and knowledge of it; and (3) staff management – recruitment, evaluation, and career prospects for staff (De Grauwe, 2009: 151).

2.2.1 (De)centralization

There was consensus among several respondents that the entire planning process should have been initiated at state level instead of in Juba.

A process allowing the states to develop their own plans first could have taken between two and three years. With independence coming up in July 2011, this timeframe was not viewed as an option when the project was launched in late 2010. Instead, the planning process was initiated in Juba, followed by attempts to consult with the states through the national planning workshops and through the Technical Advisor Programme (TAP) advisors employed by FHI360. According to one international advisor, this process went better in some states than in others depending on capacity, and resulted in uneven data quality. The data collation and analysis left much to be desired; and the result ended up being more of a shopping list than real analysis. However, there was considerable awareness in the states about the GESp and its priorities. There are vast disparities in education indicators between the states, which central-level education planners and decision-makers in Juba are not always aware of. The problem is not only the disparities as such, but also the lack of awareness of them. This is why field visits to the states for central-level MoGEI officials were seen as capacity development in their own right.

'At the time [beginning of the GESp process] we did not know that the GPE would have been a venue – if they knew that there was \$36 million ... once that letter came, there was so much excitement. We did not have the luxury of that information at the time.'

International advisor

'Sometimes you have to introduce reality as part of the process.'

International advisor, commenting on the need for consultations taking place within states, not in Juba

'State-level people found ways to respond to emails, even if they did not have internet connections. It's amazing what you can get the state-level people to do. It takes time though, and rigor.'

International advisor

However, several international advisors pointed out that, although the states have the capacity, they need to be empowered, and that resources do not always get transferred as they should from the central level to the states. Apparently there is often higher motivation and drive, more accountability, and younger staff at state level. State-level staff might understand their local environment better and feel more accountable to the communities they serve than central-level staff do.

For example, once they were given the task, state EMIS focal points corrected the data they had taken part in collecting, including spelling and geographic discrepancies concerning the location of schools. Increased accuracy directly benefited their own work. FHI360 facilitated data collection using questionnaires, and data entry was then piloted in five states, out of which four states completed the task with no incentives, according to international advisors. The state databases were then compared with that of the Juba EMIS Unit. Two state EMIS focal points stayed in contact with FHI360 headquarters and the Juba EMIS Unit to follow the results transpiring from the comparative analysis; they also commented on discrepancies. After some time, there was less reliance on the TAP technical advisors that FHI360 had positioned in each state.

However, one international advisor also cautioned: ‘Sometimes there is a romantic view of state consultations – sometimes you find that there are only one or two people who are tagging along with you. In the states, if you can get a useful core group, that should be sufficient. ... But we did not manage in each state to have a core group.’

It is useful for capacity developers in South Sudan to consider at what level it makes most sense to initiate their work, and the state level seems like a meaningful place to start. It should be noted that outreach to county and *payam* (district) levels was still viewed by respondents as difficult, even if very necessary.

2.2.2 Regulation of incentives

When government salaries are low, and in a context of dire poverty, the possibility of obtaining additional benefits like daily subsistence allowances (DSA) on missions inside and outside the country can be a strong incentive that influences programmatic priorities. For example, some respondents remarked that the initial desire of some MoGEI officials to conduct state-level consultations may have been based on their opportunity to obtain DSA during the travels, which would triple their income. This is rational, profit-maximizing, economic behaviour from the individual’s standpoint under the existing incentive structure (Bethke, 2009: 19) – although this was not the purpose for which DSA was intended. Further, it was never intended that the major programmatic choice between a decentralized versus a centralized planning approach should be based on civil servants’ prospects for maximizing their incomes. Rather, that choice should be based on a rational discussion of what’s best for the project.

2.3 The organizational unit

The analysis of the level of the organizational unit is particularly interesting because IIEP and UNICEF and the MoGEI struggle to solve the problems directly at this level, and also stand a chance of having a direct impact on it.⁸ For this study, the organizational units in question were the MoGEI’s Department of Planning in Juba, the Thematic Working Groups for the GESP, and the State MoGEIs.

8. The organizational level is about the organizational unit’s mandate and its tasks – and how this relates to its internal management (communication and coordination, transparency and accountability, supervision and support), structure (reflection of mandate, complexity and clarity), and resources (material and financial, human, information).

‘There should be baseline consultations ... to get the states’ idea of the GESP. It would only take two weeks to create targets, objectives, and activities ... quite fast.’

MoGEI official

‘We did not get access to parents, civil society, and religious leaders ... at state level. But they had a great role to play. The time schedule to discuss was too tight.’

MoGEI official, disappointed with the relatively superficial level of consultation due to time constraints

‘How do we actually build capacity at payam level? – We don’t know. We really have difficulty there.’

International advisor

2.3.1 Job descriptions?

One international advisor stated that ‘The Ministry has no job descriptions’, a finding which is supported by IIEP’s analysis of capacity development needs and next steps (IIEP, 2012). From a management point of view, job descriptions are of course essential.

In the words of one international advisor, ‘The only thing worse than bureaucracy is no bureaucracy’. An existing cadre of bureaucrats means there is a place to start, a structure to reform. Many operations are harder when there is almost no structure.

2.3.2 Eight thematic working groups – a lasting legacy?

A key strength of IIEP’s approach to developing the GESP is that it was not done in the ‘parachute’ fashion by a senior foreign consultant working in isolation. Rather, it was the product of a quite participatory process where eight Thematic Working Groups⁹ actively discussed, drafted, and revised the plan’s chapters. IIEP initially assumed that these groups would work independently in between sessions, yet this did not always happen. More work got done when the groups convened for workshops. MoGEI respondents praised the fact that their points of view were actually being recorded, put on paper or projected on the wall, and taken seriously. After about a year of joint work, these Thematic Working Groups are now seen as having an increased analytic and planning capacity.

There is a relatively new Local Education Group in South Sudan coordinated by the Ministry and UNESCO and comprising various education stakeholders; it could be suggested that the process of the GESP development helped to promote this formation. A recommendation of this study is that the Thematic Working Groups could strengthen the capacity of the Local Education Group. More important than the GESP plan document itself are perhaps the working relations formed in these groups and their collective capability to analyse and plan. The Thematic Working Groups have developed a specialized knowledge which is probably unique in South Sudan.

2.3.3 Where were the MoGEI’s ‘heavy hitters’?

A key question for any unit operating within a Ministry structure is its mandate. In practice, the mandate and real political power of the GESP working groups was tied to the involvement of the top-level political leadership in the GESP process.

IIEP’s experience from other countries¹⁰ shows that top-level ministry engagement is a crucial factor, especially in the absence of a classic bureaucratic structure. Top-level support has been identified as a key enabling factor for what Baser and Morgan (2008) have called the collective capability to commit and engage.

Several international advisors noted that the MoGEI leadership failed to ensure involvement from the beginning to end of the GESP process of the ‘heavy hitters’, meaning MoGEI officials at undersecretary level and above. However, this began to change with the appointment of a new Undersecretary for Education in November 2011, but by then the planning workshops had already taken place.

‘For the GPE process to move forward, there must be an Education Sector Working Group. One of the strongest lessons learned is that for the process and product to have meaning, it needs to include all stakeholders. We did include many stakeholders in the process, but there needed to be a regular formation of the Education Sector Working Group to support the movement and review process at a later stage.’

International advisor

‘There was a problem with the Ministry leadership – the Minister, etc. The guidance ... it was weak. It was the Minister who wanted a plan before independence.’

International advisor

‘Sometimes our contributions are changed without our understanding [consent]. We then feel like our viewpoints are not represented.’

MoGEI official

9. The eight working groups were (1) Quality enhancement, (2) Increasing access and efficiency, (3) Literacy and alternative education system, (4) Enhancement of institutional capacity, (5) Situational analysis and policy framework, (6) Sector management and coordination, (7) Cross-cutting issues, and (8) Higher education.

10 For example, when Afghanistan’s MoGEI in 2005 embarked on drafting its second sector plan (NESP-II) in the local language Dari, it was driven by the Minister himself who would hold heads of working groups directly accountable. This command-style of planning was seen as key to a quick turnaround (Gay and Sigsgaard, 2011; Shah, 2010; Holland, 2010; personal communication with former advisor to Afghanistan’s Minister of Education at UKFIET 2011 conference, Oxford, UK, September 2011).

It was indicated that the current (as of March 2012) top-level MoGEI leadership is dedicated and pretty dynamic, and has spent time abroad. For the same reason, one MoGEI official underlined the importance of having held a council of ministers relatively late in the process, because ‘In this exercise it is not just we the middle level managers – also the ministers, secretaries, undersecretaries are involved.’ Most of the involved MoGEI officials ‘weren’t high up enough to get their policies through’, according to one international advisor.

Overall, South Sudanese GESP working group members were seen as having low capacity, leading to the groups sometimes being dominated by internationals. This is perhaps inevitable given the differences in education and experience, but can lead to lack of ownership and MoGEI staff feeling unrepresented. Hence, the participatory approach to planning requires a certain level of capacity to make sense. According to one international advisor, it helped to facilitate off-site working group meetings in between the planning workshops, where MoGEI officials could get used to the novelty of their ideas being written down on a laptop and projected on the wall. They stayed engaged because they were taken seriously – but the process required more facilitation than first anticipated.

According to one international advisor, it is even possible that the participatory method of ‘people sitting around in small groups at tables in a big room was perceived to be for the little people’, meaning that ‘the big people felt above it’. It could perhaps have been helpful if IIEP and UNICEF had made it very clear from the outset that the process was not just consultative, but also a process where the sub-groups had quite some influence on policy-making.

One reason for the initial low levels of top leadership involvement may be that rotations in state leadership positions are frequent in conflict-affected states. In South Sudan, on 12 November 2011, the Undersecretary for Education changed as part of a shuffle of 27 ministry undersecretaries as well as 20 chairpersons and 16 deputy chairpersons of independent commissions and institutions.¹¹ This indicates that the issues are not limited to the education sector.

Conversely, it was pointed out that once the new MoGEI Undersecretary became involved (after 12 November 2011), the GESP process was re-galvanized. In the words of one international advisor:

Right now, people are so eager to see this thing [the GESP], because the Undersecretary took it under his own wing. Of course, we didn’t have him before [the Undersecretary was changed in November 2011], unfortunately he was not there much earlier, but then he came in at the right time actually. He is a modern, and fairly educated, guy. He is ripping the GESP document apart, which is really what should happen at this point – saying, ‘OK, this chapter should go to that ministry, we don’t quite need it right now ...’ Of course, it’s a little bit painful to observe that, because people put a lot of time and effort into it – but in reality, that really needed to happen in order to create ownership. It’s interesting that [earlier in 2011] we thought, oh no, we don’t have someone to do this but it was probably fortunate, because if he had been there before, he probably would have shown up for all the planning sessions, but I’m not sure if it [the GESP] would have had as many voices in it, which really needed to be there.

2.3.4 Basic office management skills

A key task for any ministry is handling information, and processing it for purposes of decision-making, as one international advisor pointed out. This involves operations such

‘We also had off-site working group meetings. We hooked up a projector to a laptop and wrote down every single thing the group said. They disagreed, but ... they saw their ideas on a screen or on a wall. This was strategy development in its early stages. Without those off-site meetings, it would have been hard to do it in the big room. The MoGEI officials came back because they were being listened to.’
International advisor

‘There was a transition in leadership, so nobody to say “Go to this!”’
International advisor
(referring to attending meetings)

11. Source: Presidential Decree No. 65/2011, cited in New Sudan Vision (2011); Ajith (2011).

'Filing, keeping files. People don't keep files. You know, filing is a very important component of office management.'

MoGEI official, first response when asked about learning from the capacity development activities

'One thing we rely heavily on is relationship building. That matters more than technical capacity. Building trust and strengthening relationships. For instance, we do one-on-one trainings, so people don't feel inadequate ... it is then easier for senior staff to say "I don't know how to turn on my computer" ...'

International advisor

as filing, memo writing, time management, and creating simple plans, briefings, etc. One international advisor in Juba spent much time on coaching MoGEI officials on teaching these basics, before it was possible to go one step further and teach strategic planning. The advisor said about his South Sudanese counterparts that they 'knew what had to be done, what needed to be done – but not how to get there'. His coaching or training worked best if it had 'immediate utility': 'If I work with them this week, next week they can use it – that is gratifying It worked if they got a format'. The flip side was that the advisor's planning skills were underutilized since the time was spent on teaching office management basics.

Likewise, as some international advisors reported, in a context of pervasive illiteracy and innumeracy, you need to understand what percentages mean before you can understand the concept of a ratio, you need to understand definitions before indicators, and population change before you can discuss projections. It seems that development partners need to offer more training on reading and arithmetic as well as basic office management training for South Sudanese counterparts.

2.3.5 Communication and trust

Communication problems were frequently mentioned as a capacity issue, and this was emphasized when they were overcome. For example, respondents mentioned how FHI360's TAP advisors would facilitate communication between the EMIS unit in Juba and the corresponding MoGEI EMIS focal points in the states, until the state MoGEI officials could follow up on their own. The TAP advisors could explain, collect data, remind, follow up, etc. They provided efficient communication where it was lacking.

One international advisor emphasized how quite some time was spent on 'shuttle diplomacy' back and forth between the Ministry and UNICEF. It could be hypothesized that this was necessary due to a lack of communication and/or trust.

There could be several reasons for the above communication problems, for instance related to very busy schedules, an absence of regular reporting routines, lack of trust or tension due to years of war or interagency competition – or simply email or phone connectivity problems, as was experienced frequently during this research.

One international advisor stated about the MoGEI officials that: 'things are maybe not always articulated clearly; but if you get it wrong, they care. They care enough to have their voice in the [GESP] document'. By building up relationships, the advisor became able to know what the MoGEI counterparts were trying to say, and act as a mediator. Forming relationships was therefore a clear priority.

2.4 Individual staff

There is global consensus that capacity development programmes undertaken exclusively at the individual level have little impact. In theory, the stronger the organization, the less dependent it is on individuals. Conversely, when an organization has a relatively weak or sporadic presence, individuals become all the more important.

2.4.1 Strength, courage, spirit

One resource for capacity developers to build on was portrayed by an international advisor as: 'The strength, courage and spirit of the South Sudanese. They are fabulous people They challenge you They care enough to have their voice in the document.' Before labeling South Sudan as a 'fragile' state, it's worth remembering that many South Sudanese individuals are tough, strong survivors. Their courage and resilience needs to be recognized.

'We used to fight with guns and now we fight with pens and paper.'

Excerpt from song, heard in an ex-combatant women's literacy and skills centre by UNESCO advisor

2.4.2 Individuals matter

Respondents agreed that in the reality of South Sudan, individuals do matter. (Even when they work for supposedly strong organizations; and although their behaviour may largely be constrained, or empowered, by the organizational and institutional context.) For example, a key factor such as trust is ultimately about an interpersonal relationship between (trust-worthy) individuals, although it helps if the organization has a good reputation. If one staff member is rotated or fired, some of the trust has to be constructed anew.

Successful GESP workshops facilitation did depend on competent individual leadership. The role of the individual senior decision-makers and advisors from the involved agencies was often emphasized. IIEP's project seemed to first really kick in once it placed an advisor permanently in Juba in Autumn 2011. This advisor's work was largely in one-on-one settings – at an individual level – and was appreciated by several respondents (see quotes in the margin).

In sum, individuals matter, but they are of course not stronger than the organization they represent.

2.4.3 The use of consultants and advisors

Importantly, development partners' use of consultant advisors will need adjustment particularly in conflict-affected situations where capacity often is weak. As one international advisor pointed out: 'You have to have an advisor inside the MoGEI for six months minimum, who can push the thing along.'

Another international advisor put it as straightforward, as this: 'You need people with a certain profile – it helps ... to do things in a simple manner, to adjust expectations and approach. I ran workshops in the field ... you need to get involved in technical work. Teach people what you can. Going to meetings in Juba does not change anything.'

2.5 Was the MoGEI's capacity for educational planning developed as envisioned?

This study is based on one of IIEP's fundamental assumptions, namely that a strategic planning process is an opportunity to develop national education planning capacity. An education ministry can learn strategic planning by doing it, given adequate technical support and time. Did it happen in South Sudan in this project?

2.5.1 Do planning processes necessarily result in increased capacity?

As is sometimes the case in sector planning exercises, the GESP project had to balance between delivering an output – the sector plan document – and developing ministry capacity in the process. The project did include a capacity assessment, but not a large-scale capacity building component; this was meant to follow later. Indeed, IIEP has later been implementing a Japanese-funded capacity development project at state level in 2012.

When asked whether the GESP process had led to increased planning capacity within the MoGEI, some respondents replied with positive enthusiasm (see margin). Or attention was drawn to the excitement about the existence of a plan, regardless of who exactly drafted it – and to the involvement of the MoGEI Undersecretary. (The ability to commit and engage has been considered [Baser and Morgan, 2008] as a crucial 'soft' skill in capacity development. Other such 'soft' skills include e.g. the ability to relate to others and to attract support.)

'To have someone, an expert in this kind of planning can be useful to provide some kind of guidance – [the advisor] was very exceptionally good.'

MoGEI official

'[The advisor] was very good – because he had experience, he was very quick to learn about South Sudan – he made a point of talking to just about everybody in town – he listened a lot.'

International advisor

'The theory and the practice can be two different things. You have to work with someone who has practical experience, who has experience under his belt.'

MoGEI official

'Some of us did not know the difference between target and indicators – through this we have learnt the difference. In this way we have learnt about monitoring – realistic targets or not.'

MoGEI official

'I learned a lot of things: How to figure out, how to identify needs, how to sequence, prioritize different needs – we are in a state of transition – so the needs are very many and require a lot of critical understanding. And working together as a group, in the process of developing a document – respecting different viewpoints.'

MoGEI official

But when asked about visible evidence of increased planning capacity, several respondents responded negatively. There were few visible advances in what Baser and Morgan (2008) describe as the capability to carry out technical tasks, i.e. in this case the ability to conduct educational planning and produce a strategic planning document. In the words of one international advisor:

'There are roots [of educational planning] that can grow up again with a bit of water and fertilizer. There are people who will have heard this language, this terminology, who will have an easier time engaging next time.'

International advisor

To be honest I have not noticed any massive changes. There have been too many big meetings over the last four years ... each one had an outcome, a document, which gets shelved. The key to moving on from GESP is to disseminate it and make sure that people at all levels understand it Regarding dissemination of the plan, radio is good, and each state has an FM station ... it can help civil society to hold government accountable. But don't print the plan in many copies – that won't work. Rather, produce 10 PowerPoint slides with four bullets per slide – for the key ideas.

Other respondents diplomatically stated that 'it's still at an early stage', meaning that it may still be too early to measure the change in capacity, since these learning processes take time.

One international advisor was more optimistic, suggesting that collectively 'they do have all the knowledge that we imparted. They just don't know it yet because they haven't been brought together in one room and tried it on their own. They can figure it out together, it will just happen at their pace and may not be up to international standards.' Here the importance of working together as a team was emphasized; it is more about developing collective capabilities than just individual competencies, as Baser and Morgan (2008: 24–25) have pointed out.

2.5.2 A satisfactory process

There were several positive responses about the process side of the GESP development.

It was very democratic and an open process. It meant work could be done in a more logical way. The only thing missing was state consultations. It was good to be presented with projection models and scenario planning (MoGEI official).

A lot worked well when [the advisor] was facilitating. When she was absent, the individual groups did not work as well. There was plenary and small group work. [The advisor] is very strong at doing both, but nobody was in position from the MoGEI to take charge – some working groups had no MoGEI involvement (International advisor).

The way [IIEP] handled this area [facilitation] – it was nice. Because they were from time to time involving the participants, to bring their experiences, discussing in smaller groups (MoGEI official).

'The process is much more interesting than the product. Most people had never sat together... Maybe that network has inherent value in its own right.'

International advisor

'The staff in the MoGEI was directly involved in developing the document; this was very significant – it has never happened in the past – in the past it has been consultants, with no participation.'

MoGEI official

2.5.3 Was the project a success?

To sum up, we can answer the following questions.

A. Did IIEP succeed in teaching the MoGEI how to draft a sector plan on its own?

Probably not. That task seems to require more time and existing capacity than was available. However, it was hypothesized that MoGEI officials might possess a better collective capability to plan than they are aware of as individuals, simply because they have not yet gone through a planning process on their own.

- B. Was an education sector plan produced with a common vision for South Sudan?**
Yes. Although the GESP has not been published yet. At the time of writing (March 2012), there was good MoGEI ownership of the draft plan, and donors were already committing to the priorities identified in the plan.
- C. Did the MoGEI officials appreciate the process and the skills they did learn?**
Yes. And this is an important outcome – a good starting point for further joint work.
- D. Were working relations established between people who had never before sat down together?**
Yes. This is also an important outcome. It will require a strong joint effort to enhance South Sudan’s education sector, and for that to happen, trusting working relations are a necessity.
- E. Is the plan sensitive to gender, youth, conflict, and disasters?**
Not as much as hoped. This was not discussed much in the interviews. Perhaps that is a point in itself. Maybe the MoGEI officials have not reached that stage yet, as they seem to be occupied with learning the basic ‘nuts and bolts of planning’.
- F. Did the plan present a common vision for the development of South Sudan’s education subsector?**
Yes – and this provision of a reference point for ongoing discussion about the future of South Sudan’s education subsector is itself a good result in a context with a plethora of education actors and projects.

3. Recommendations

The following are recommendations for IIEP's work in conflict-affected contexts where capacity for educational planning is low, based on the lessons learned from the GESP project in South Sudan 2010–2011.

Participatory planning pays off

IIEP and its partners should be clear from the outset about whether to employ a fast, externally driven approach to planning, or a slower and more participatory approach (or combine both on certain occasions). IIEP's insistence on a participatory approach was warmly received by the MoGEI staff and resulted in IIEP emerging from the process with credibility. Likewise, IIEP and its partners should decide whether they want to try to create a visionary plan that might generate enthusiasm and hope, or rather a more realistic and implementable plan based on the available data – or whether the ambition is to create both in one. In this project, internal confusion on this issue among the development partners led to delays and complications.

Initiate the planning process at the state level

The question of whether to initiate a national planning process in the centre, or at decentralized levels, is almost by definition politically sensitive, especially for a new state that aims to create unity among its different regions and peoples. However, in conflict-affected states, the capital city is often 'an island' and educational planners based there may lack awareness of realities at decentralized levels of the system and vice versa. Hence awareness-raising through the plan preparation process is also an important capacity development measure. State-level MoGEI officials were reportedly often more responsive and perhaps felt greater sense of need to address the core issues affecting their state. Hence, from that perspective, the planning process could benefit from being initiated at the state level. But equally, arguments can be made for starting at central level where priorities had already been nationally decided through the national development plan process. Outreach to county and payam level however may still be very difficult, but that challenge could perhaps be addressed at a later stage.

Consider hiring a full-time, in-country technical advisor

In many countries that partner with IIEP, a typical approach to plan preparation is to set up technical working groups within the ministry and support them periodically with distance support and expert missions. This approach did not work well in South Sudan in 2011. The assumption is that these groups will work alone in between the planning workshops. The experience from this project is that they rarely met in between the planning workshops or progressed the writing of the plan document. It seemed that the working groups functioned better with at least one stationary, full-time technical advisor sitting within the Ministry to support them, conduct tailor-made capacity building activities, and to push the process along. Crucially, in this environment, it also helped to build trust. It is possible that such an approach leads to some degree of staff substitution, but as long as national planning capacity is relatively low, it is critical.

Include basic administrative skills in the training menu

MoGEI officials, some of whom were war veterans with limited literacy skills, needed to learn basic office management (such as filing) before it made sense to discuss strategic planning; percentages before ratios; handwriting before minute-taking; and tables that added up correctly before graphs. In a context like South Sudan, it cannot be assumed that MoGEI officials possess basic administrative skills, and therefore such training should be part and parcel of IIEP's capacity development package.

Keep products simple

In a context of a country with 90 per cent illiteracy, the GESP, a 200+ page document containing the entire national education strategic plan, might benefit from being distilled down to, for example, ten PowerPoint slides with four bullets per slide on laminated, A0-size posters, and by transmitting key messages by radio. This major reduction of complexity is necessary if the plan is to be understood and put to use at different levels and with community based organizations, parents, and students. The same rule goes for materials meant to introduce such concepts as conflict and disaster risk reduction. Experience from the EMIS project shows that piloting, field testing, and continuous adaptation of the materials are required.

Seek out outspoken advocates for conflict-sensitive planning, gender, and youth

Cross-cutting issues such as conflict-sensitive planning, natural disasters, gender, and youth are difficult to integrate into the educational planning process when planning capacity is relatively low. The experience from the project shows that it takes a very outspoken advocate to get these issues on the agenda of the planners. This was the case with the issue of disability, where a blind representative of an international NGO was successful in getting MoGEI officials to consider disability in their planning.

Help strengthen the Local Education Group by building on the work of the Thematic Working Groups

The Thematic Working Groups formed during the GESP development process could contribute towards a functioning Local Education Group in Juba. IIEP used a participatory approach to planning, which supported significant decision-making power within these groups. These groups therefore have developed trust and unique working relationships between different stakeholders, which could be harnessed and utilized for the implementation of the GESP.

Annex 1. Interview request and protocol

INTERVIEW REQUEST

Lessons learned on capacity development during the GESP process

Dear _____,

My name is _____. I work for UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in Paris, France.

IIEP has been involved in the development of South Sudan's General Education Strategic Plan 2012–2016. We are now doing a study of lessons learned on capacity development during the GESP process.

I am writing to ask for a bit of your time, about half an hour, for a phone interview. The interview will focus on your experiences during the process of developing the General Education Strategic Plan in 2010–2011. Your answers will be anonymous. The interviews will take place during (date).

Our approach is to try and look for constructive examples of what works in building capacity in South Sudan. We hope that can be more productive than simply listing a lot of 'gaps' or things that do not work, which many other studies already have done. The interview protocol (the questions I will ask) is below.

I am going to call you on (one of) the following phone number(s) _____ on _____ at _____, Juba time (time zone UTC+3).

Unless I hear from you, I am assuming that you are available for the interview – let me know if not, if you wish to reschedule, or if this phone number is incorrect.

Thank you very much in advance.

Very best regards,

UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

7–9 Rue Eugene Delacroix, F-75116 Paris, France

Mobile: _____

Email: _____

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Lessons learned study on capacity development during the GESP process

In this study we define capacity development as more than just attending generic training courses. It includes organizational and institutional development, for example:

- developing clear terms of reference, job descriptions, mission statements, organograms;
- changing pay scales, per diems and other financial incentives;
- coaching and mentoring on the job;
- tailor-made training;
- advocacy and policy dialogue with key decision-makers such as MoE leadership and donors.

So: Think about the capacity development (CD) initiatives you and people around you have participated in, particularly the work you have done in the General Education Strategic Plan (GESP) Working Groups in 2011 ...

1. How would you define capacity development?
2. Can you give some examples of capacity development activities and initiatives you have participated in?
3. How were you involved in these activities?
4. What did you like about these activities/initiatives?
5. What didn't you like about them?
6. What did you learn from the capacity development activities?
7. What are the most important changes that have resulted from the GESP development project for you?
8. In your opinion, what are the most important changes that have resulted from this project for your colleagues and for the MoGEI as a whole?
9. What do you think about the process and methodologies of developing capacity?
10. If the capacity development activities were to be done again is there something you would like to spend more time, manpower or money on?
11. If you look back to the beginning of the GESP development process, can you give examples of capacity development principles and strategies that you chose?
12. How did you translate these principles and strategies into action?
13. Do you have any other comments?

Thank you very much.

Annex 2. List of respondents

Name	Title
Esther Akumu Achire	Director, Development Partner Coordination, MoGEI
George Mogga Benjamin	Director of Planning, MoGEI
Lyndsay Bird	Programme Specialist, Fragile States, IIEP
Peter Buckland	Independent consultant (worked with IIEP)
Bosun Jang	FHI360, EMIS
Rory Kilburn	Independent consultant (worked with IIEP)
Lene Leonhardsen	Education officer, UNICEF (worked specifically on EMIS)
John Lujang	Director, MoGEI
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Utem Watba	Director, MoGEI
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Annex 3. References

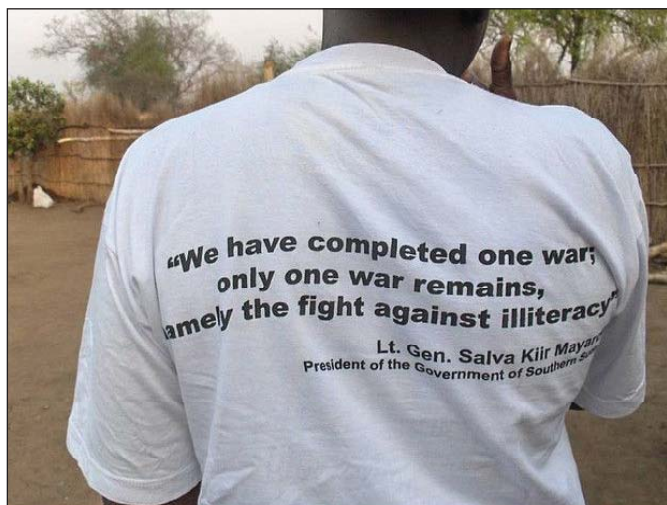
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The paper

South Sudan – the world’s newest country – is a difficult place to develop government capacity. This paper looks at lessons learned from a capacity development process where IIEP and UNICEF South Sudan supported South Sudan’s education ministry in developing its first education sector plan in 2010–2011.

The main lesson learned is that a participatory planning process pays off. International consultants could easily have been hired to draft a plan in isolation, but in this case where local ministry officials received the necessary time and support, the result was greater ownership, improved leadership, organizational learning, and a more sustainable plan.

Such support should be modified to a low-capacity context. Training topics should include not only planning but also basic administrative skills; all materials and products should be kept relatively simple; and training should preferably be accompanied by on-the-job coaching. Meanwhile, incorporating crosscutting issues like gender, youth, and conflict-sensitive planning proved tricky. These are a few of the lessons learned in this study.



The author

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