

Education is not an area for mere politicking and amassing of white elephants

By

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“Education must be done and lived”

A done and lived education should be the priority of the Republic of South Sudan (RSS) to be able to enhance the development of the country from the current state of 3rd world to 1st world in the 21st century. Without this there cannot be inclusive progress in the four crucial areas required by RSS i.e. **socio-economic development, political development, Technology and industrialization and effective utilization of natural resources to ensure sustainable environment and development.**

The reflection on Education and in particular as to what is going on in the Republic of South Sudan in the 21st Century gives clear need for the RSS to refocus its priorities. Many of us the South Sudanese educationalists and politicians still view education in the form of 1905 United Kingdom Education System and Aspirations. The Khartoum Regimes period did not attempt to take education in the then Southern Sudan to meet the needs of Southern Sudanese for progress to modernity. Islamization and Arabicization was the regimes’ priority. However, the covert motive was subjugation of the Southern Sudanese to servitude or third class citizens¹ in their own country. Unfortunately, keeping human beings in bondage has its own limitation and has to come to an end. The South Sudanese rebelled against the system and on 9th July 2011 South Sudan finally attained her political independence. My simplistic questions to the ruling elites are whether we have learnt from the history of Khartoum regimes? And whether we not putting our feet into the same shoes that burnt the Khartoum regimes’ elites?

Despite the drive for sovereignty was unstoppable, this did not go with equal awareness and clear understanding of what independence means and what to do after the independence. As a result, right from the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 to Independence Day and thereafter, the elites and Politicians became and are still submerged in fighting for positions and dominations using archaic politics which at the end will be self-defeating. With inadequate good laws and inadequate enforcement of the existing laws, many of the group members became submerged into self-service and me-first efforts carried out consciously or unconsciously without deeply reflecting about the effects on the nation both in short and long term. Corruption and nepotism became the order of the day in all sectors of governance at all levels. Despite involvement of the different sectors in the annual budgeting, at most the amounts are assigned without clearly considering sector and programmes priorities. Approved budgets are diverted and financial systems are kept obsolete possibly to enhance corruptions and diversion of the fund. Situation in service institutions becomes not only outdated with lack of basic facilities but also desperate, especially for the majority of the people of South Sudan. Schools and hospitals degenerate in quality of services to stakeholders and some are forced to cease operation. National Teacher Training Institutes could be typical examples. There is inadequate modern innovative developmental thinking for the nation. What seems to emerge is individuals grabbing of

¹1st class citizens are Arabs, 2nd class citizens are African Muslims and 3rd Class citizen are African non-Muslims

national resources for immediate self-benefit and self-enjoyment without caring about the welfare of the majority of the South Sudanese. In this scenario education is the worse hit. The context, content and implementation remain archaic. Despite the reviewed curriculum for basic and secondary education by standard is modern and has gone a far way to meet the 21st century requirement, it remains on papers and the implementation becomes a big national challenge that remains untouched.

The situation misused the various cultures of our people such as the “elders should be respected despite of their weaknesses, mistakes and misdeeds.” The elites and Politicians use these cultural aspects to subdue and rally the communities around themselves, thus enhancing ethnicity and deeper divisions among the people who with high hope and determination unanimously voted for independent South Sudan as a one people.

The elites and the politicians are after their cakes and entrenching themselves into the power/governance that will serve them. Unfortunately in this strategy of a wedge of interest clashed and this was transferred to badly informed populace that unfortunately with unclear understanding of what is going on, sided with the different groups. This culminated in the 15th December 2013 incident in which many lives were lost in the Republic of South Sudan and is still continuing unabated.

The conflict that started on 15th December 2013 is viciously more brutal than any in this part of the world both in terms of loss of human lives, materials and sufferings of the people of South Sudan. The war lords have extended the situation to all parts of the country even where people clearly say **“we don’t see the rationale for the war. What we need now is development. We have no enemy in the Republic of South Sudan”**. By the time this article was written over one million South Sudanese have fled for refuge to the neighbouring countries especially Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya.

The elites and the politicians did not see how the fire they sparked would be devastating as it turned to be. I feel confident to claim that they did not know and still don’t know their people. The very resources the governing elites tried to control went to unexpected ebb if not to nothingness. In fact the conflict has brought the Republic of South Sudan to a level that can justly be pronounced as a failed state. This fact is not declared just because of mere arrogance and lack of integrity or/and inadequate accountability to the citizens of the Republic of South Sudan the majority of whom do not know the insight of the problem.

An opportunity has occurred which should have been and still can be seized through the signed Peace Agreement mediated by Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) plus group. There is nothing perfect. Perfectness of anything is relative depending on to whom and when. Therefore, none of the parties in the conflict will see the Peace Agreement code named “Compromised Peace Agreement (CPA)” perfect to each of them as the name implies. What the majority of South Sudanese need from them is commitment to implement and keep compromising spirit and action whenever there is need for innovation for success of the peace for the nation of Republic of South Sudan.

With this in the background, one is bound to question the declaration of the creation of 28 States (the number of which seems to be still increasing). A true patriot and truly educated South Sudanese should advocate for the implementation of the 28 states to be shelved for a period after concluding the implementation of all the steps of the CPA signed. This is not to say the creation of the 28 states is rejected but rather, saying we need not to be diverted from the CPA steps as a priority to peace. The

temporary shelving of the declaration will also give opportunity for the populace to observe and digest the outcomes from the peace process. The political, socio-economic and sustainability of the system needs to be examined and assessed not only country-wide but also in each state. It might be necessary to carry out an assessment and evaluation (research/survey) on the ten states system to identify issues for improvement that will determine the appropriate number of states. The research should look into aspects such as governance, economy, political and sustainability factors. This will enhance innovation and justification of the needs for the expansion from the ten states and avoid further conflict. It will be very unfortunate if our citizens are led into a future without genuine sensitization and understanding where they are going.

As if the already done damage by the conflict is not enough, on 8th July 2016 South Sudanese were caught still into a more vicious and destructive conflict that left hundreds dead in Juba both on armed forces and civilians. This quickly spread all over the country. The most peaceful people were also aggressed causing influx of some entire communities to refuge as mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, some ethnic groups are seen as the cause of the conflict and bitterness is growing which is dangerous to this nation. This cannot be contained by force or guns as the ruling elites seem to believe.

The way the ruling elites of South Sudan mismanaged issues leading to the current situation in the country demonstrates they are not genuinely educated. The fact that they could not predict the repercussions of their deeds and their acts were without patriotism and justice is termed inhuman. Atrocities of killing innocent citizens, corruption and nepotism have reduced South Sudan to a failed state. These are clear evidences of being ill-educated. South Sudan needs truly educated people. An educated person is a good citizen. A good citizen is what Paulo Freire described as “conscientized” human being. A conscientized citizen is a person who has *“learned to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality”*². The ruling elites in South Sudan are therefore not truly educated in the sense of education. A true educated person also lives it.

To lift South Sudan from the current state of affairs that can be classed as 3rd or last world in the sense of socio-economic and political development level to 1st world in 21st century, we need education that will speed up sustainable socio-economic development of the people. This implies modernization, technology and industrialization. Fortunately, South Sudan is blessed with abundant natural resource including land and low population. Therefore, environmentally sustainable & responsible Agriculture and Agro-Industry as well other industrialization can be successfully pursued. This can succeed if the citizens are responsible patriots and peace loving. Such citizens cannot be got without appropriate 21st century education.

For the sake of peaceful and stable South Sudan the governing elites and the politicians have to rethink their ways and resort to sensitization of our people for sustainable nation building for all. The greatest tool to this is education. As said in the introduction of this article, not much is done in the area of education modernization for the 21st century. The context, content and implementation of education especially at education institutions (schools & Teacher Training Institutes and Universities) levels remain obsolete. At General Education Level a relatively modern Curriculum Framework and Syllabus have been

²Freire P 1970: Pedagogy of The Oppressed (p 17)

produced for Early Childhood Development (ECD), Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET). Support materials are still to be produced. However the implementation which forms the real education is far from being touched. This area demands for proper planning and putting the plan into practice. One of the greatest required resources is trained, politically and professionally committed & sensitized teachers. By the time of writing this article, put modestly, about 11% of our teachers for ECD, Primary, secondary & TVET combined could be proven to be qualified and supported with correct/genuine professional certificates. However, this very 11% group is also obsolete and still using non 21st century methodology. This group is in addition to the 89% untrained teaching cadre. Thus the two groups require retraining and training respectively.

The reviewed South Sudan General Education Curriculum require teachers, inspectors, supervisors, advisors and education managers to understand the 21st century oriented curriculum and be able to implement it in the correct way. The mentioned teachers and education management cadre must be made able to design curriculum from the national curriculum framework and syllabus for implementation in each of their institution of education in the Republic of South Sudan. The curriculum design at each institution of education level translates the national curriculum for implementation to achieve:

1. Successful learners
2. Confident individuals
3. Responsible citizens

These requirements are clearly spelt out in our General Education Policy Framework. The curriculum design should answer the following three questions:

1. What are we trying to achieve?
2. How should we organize learning most effectively to achieve them?
3. How will we know if we have been successful?

The curriculum design should ensure the learners to:

1. Be creative
2. Communicate well
3. Be literate and numerate
4. Solve problems
5. Work together in teams
6. Have a global perspective
7. Show initiative
8. Work independently
9. Be lifelong learners
10. And most important “be promoters of peace and harmony in the Republic of South Sudan and the world at large”

The curriculum design that fits the current 21st century national curriculum should take into consideration the following areas³:

³Brian Male (2012): *The Primary Design Handbook*: Continuum International Publishing Group

1. Subject areas (that are relevant)
2. Personal development
3. Key skills development
4. 3Cs (i.e. Communication, calculation, and Computer) Competencies

Learners must be innovative, creative, peace loving and valuing human life.

How do we get teachers and education managers that can design and implement such a 21st century curriculum in the Republic of South Sudan given even the said 11% of qualified teachers that at best require in-service training? Yet further, the National Teachers Training Institutes and Public Universities require modernization into 21st century education! This question demands thinking outside the box to solicit an appropriate approach and methodology inimitable to the situation of South Sudan.

The current scenario is that there is inadequate political will to enhance true education in South Sudan. At most the priority is guns and showing the mighty of gun power. At the sector level, workshops and conferences are held for education and the deliberation are kept at reports' levels without being taken to implementation. It is not an empty claim to say such workshops and conferences at most are re-inventing the same wheel. Elaborate media reports are made of such conferences including that of internal and foreign trips, to the populace while on the ground the education system is sinking to even below that of the colonial period. The political post holders and top civil servants use the media for popularization to entrench themselves into the posts they are holding. Thus education has become an arena for mere politicking and raising of white elephants.

All of us have to note that **“Education is not an area for mere politicking and amassing of white elephants.”** Education for South Sudan must be genuine in meeting the aspirations of our people in their four important needs which are: 1) **socio-economic development**, 2) **political development**, 3) **Technology and industrialization** and 4) **effective utilization of natural resources to ensure sustainable environment and development**.

My dear elites and politicians of South Sudan wake up and be true citizens who are patriots with love for your nation which is under formation and turn the direction to forgiveness and selfless work for your people. Ensure that true education is implemented to lift out this beloved country and her esteemed people from the current misery into a nation of prosperity.

End