

Sudan: Education is the key

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By Adeeb Yousif

June 14, 2012 - Education is vital if one is to maintain livelihoods; it is also the main gateway to development, security, prosperity, understanding, acceptance, respect and peaceful- coexistence among others. Lack of education therefore has the reverse effect: it is a major barrier to building a better life and ensuring stability. In war zone areas, the situation is even worse, because populations are often drawn into conflict unwittingly. Lack of education can exacerbate hostile relationships between groups and there is no mechanism by which they can work through disagreements peacefully. As a consequence, education is very much needed as a means through which people can reflect on their differences, understand the ways in which differences can also be strengths, and work together to create a shared future. Education is therefore a way through which awareness can be created and can prevent different kinds of opportunists from using and fueling conflicts by using lack of education or their illiteracy.

Sudan arrived at this point through deliberate government policy of the current regime in power, some of whom are leaders who rose to power through big institutions in Sudan or/and bigger institutions out of the county. When the current regime came to power, it changed the education system in all universities into Arabic. Unfortunately they did not stop there. The same regime ended the boarding school system leaving villagers nowhere to go to continue their education if they could not afford to live in a city. In the early 1990s the regime eliminated all out of the country scholarships and forced all students back home in what was called the *revelation of high education*. This situation forced young men to join the military and those being used and abused in civil war or to remain at home.

In reaction, the masses organized themselves to demand their basic human rights from the government. Eventually the behaviors of both sides spiraled: action and reaction alike generated the context of conflict. The government quickly adopted a genocide policy of kill the *"slave by the slave"* and declared war against the other group. The inability of large portions of the population to attend school led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, widespread sexual assaults, and the displacement of millions from their homes to camps with limited humanitarian services and poor security.

On the other side the leaders of the resistance have never made education a priority, even in their area of control. The leaders have never felt comfortable with educated people and often view them as spies for the government or a threat the leaders. Some resistance movement leaders depend on those with nothing to say because they are more likely to follow commands of the movements' leaders. The result limited access to education and the loss of generations.

Even those who believe that ending the armed resistance movement is the priority agree that rebellion is only a phase that should precede development of the region. They believe the fighting will lead to the just settlement of the conflict, which will be followed by sustainable development. What would be the type of development that would help to overcome the current crisis without education? Who is planning and implementing such development project? Right now there is no clearly defined plan, but the leaders must not forget that education is key for all they want to achieve. Moreover there is no country in this planet that has prospered, evolved and grown without education and indeed in this century of globalization, technology and modernity it is difficult if not impossible to rule a country with people who have limited education or have never seen the inside of a classroom. Therefore, sending people to school, training them and giving them the opportunity to advance their level of education is an urgent need This will ensure the future of the current and coming generations, is rooted in peace deep inside individuals, groups, villages and indeed will prevent injustice from happening.

For those who are invited to the negotiation table without having negotiating skills and knowledge it is important to remember that formal handshakes and signed agreements can only provide a safe environment to address difficult social, political, economic, and military issues; but in most cases; they do not guarantee peace in Sudan. As Baruch Spinoza once said *"Peace is not the mere absence of war, but is a virtue that springs from a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, and justice."*

I interviewed over 200 children in different parts of Darfur they have nothing to say but their need for education. This is one of the stories:

My name is Abdusalam Zakaria Mohamed. I am 15 years old from Surra village in west Darfur. It is very difficult for me to forget some of the terrible things that have happened to me. It was milking time on Thursday morning January 1st 2004 and my mother was doing what she normally did everyday: milking the cows and providing milk for us. The day however became anything but ordinary. It became the worst day of my life, when the Janjaweed militia attacked our village and killed every body regardless of their age or who they were. Unfortunately my parents were among those victims. Together with my three young siblings we ran following the rest of the people towards the nearest town, Zalingei. Next day we arrived and stayed in school building before we went to an internally displaced persons camp. My uncle Ahmed took us to his tent in this camp

called Hamdidia camp. Since then, for the last 8 years, I have been living with him and his children in addition to my siblings. Today I am school age, and I'm growing up in this camp, without any education. My life is meaningless, hopeless, and jobless. My dream is to be a doctor to treat everyone. I really need help with my education, so that I can help the other people in the camp and the people in my village if I am able to return when there is peace.

There are hundreds of thousands children like Abdusalam across Darfur, in south Kordofan and Blue Nile.

The way forward:

I cannot think about a better sustainable solution for the conflict in Sudan, or in any other African country, than education and human rights education. The majority of people need to learn and be fully aware of their rights, and how to put their rights and duties into practice. Neither humanitarian intervention nor political solutions can exist if there is no respect for human rights, respect for each other, in a multi-racial, multi-culture, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society with everyone equally enjoying peaceful co-existence and development.

To the government: there is need for the government to overcome illiteracy in Sudan, as this is a major obstacle to achieving meaningful peace and development in the area. The "nomadic people" should be given specific consideration. There must be a deliberate effort to promote education in the rural area restoring the boarding school system.

To the resistance movement: taking the estimation of 3 million made homeless and 1 million orphaned or separated from parents I do not think you need to focus on AK-47s. Send combatants to schools, open schools in areas you control and create an education budget. Appeal and seriously seek for scholarship to the combatants as well as civilians.

To the Donors: There is no amount of donor money that can bring peace without education. Thereby donors have to give education especial attention as well as focus on connecting all projects to the relevance of education and to conflict sensitive approach in projects with reference to peace and peace building and development. Donors also need to give scholarships and advance training to the war affected population

To nations that love peace: there is no better help assistance or gift to the people of Sudan better than education as it is the only way left them out of poverty and helps them to have peace. Education is the key for respect, acceptance, harmonious co-existence, sustainable peace and reconciliation between stability and development. Therefore, both conflicting parties must focus on education. There's an old Japanese saying that "if you give a man a fish he will eat for a day, but if you teach him to fish he will eat for a lifetime".

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