

Low pay forces teachers to take NGO jobs in Unity State

Tuesday 11 September 2012

By Bonifacio Taban Kuich

September 10, 2012 (BENTIU) - Teachers in South Sudan's Unity State say that their low salaries are forcing them to look for work at the United Nations or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), leaving schools without enough teaching staff.

Despite falling inflation in recent months South Sudan is suffering from an economic crisis triggered by Juba's decision to stop oil production earlier this year over a fee dispute with Khartoum. The stoppage meant that the government lost 98% of its revenue and has had to make cuts in many areas.

Before the oil shutdown and the rapid inflation that followed teachers were paid less than the equivalent of \$200, which some teachers in Unity State say is not not enough to live on in South Sudan.

Unity State and others on the border with Sudan have been the worst affected by the economic crisis as they used import most of their goods from Sudan until Khartoum closed the border last year, accusing the newly independent nation of backing Sudanese rebels.

Teachers at Bentiu A secondary school (BASS), which has 500 student, say that their monthly wage of 750 South Sudanese Pounds is not enough to support their families and have warned that more of them may be forced to look for more lucrative work at the many international organisations that operate in the severely under developed nation.

The temptation to leave teaching for less skilled work at institutions such as the UN was exacerbated recently when the United Nation Mission in South Sudan advertised for 20 positions as security guards earning 1,200-1,500 SSP, double a teachers' salary.

Student told *Sudan Tribune* on Monday at Bentiu A Secondary School that many teachers have abandoned their normal duties due to insufficient money received from government.

Bol Thow Nyuon Giel is a chemistry teacher at Bentiu Secondary says there are number of challenges facing teachers in the state, especially lack of funds, meaning that a number of teacher have left to look for better paid NGO jobs.

Giel said that this means many teachers now have to cover various secondary schools in Bentiu town. He called on the government to reverse the trend by increasing salaries for education workers.

"I think if they are paying me good money there is no reason for me to leave, because the issue is that some of the problems which are facing you are now fulfill by the place where you are working, no need for you to go for NGO's or to go and look for special work where you can get more income, if they are paying me the same people are pay in NGO's I believe that there will be no reason for the teachers to leave schools and work with NGO's", Giel added.

Nyapini Wal Khan, a third year student at Bentiu A Secondary School, said that students found it hard to learn because of the number of teachers who have abandoned their positions. He urged the government to fulfill the teachers' needs in term of improving salary payment.

Peter Kuoy Bona, the school's head teacher also agreed that low teacher salaries contributed to the lack of teachers. Bona appealed to the Unity State government to focus more on education so that for better future of nation.

The school has around 24 teachers both volunteers and full-time employees, he said, but as the majority received "low pay" he is not confident that they will all continue to fulfill their duties.

Bona added that the Ministry of Education needs to develop vocational training centres for the national teachers around the country to improve make them more professional. He confirmed that none of the teachers at his school including himself, had ever received any teaching methodology training.

Less than 30% of people in South Sudanese can read and write a legacy of decades of civil war and underinvestment in education, while the region was part of Sudan.

Having seceded from Sudan in July last year, South Sudan is in the process of adopting a new syllabus, taught in English, to replace the old Sudanese education, which was in Arabic.