

Endline Evaluation of the Community Based Education for Out of School and Vulnerable Children (COBE) Project in South Sudan

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Abstract—This evaluation assesses the outcomes, outputs, and overall effectiveness of the Community-Based Education for Out-of-School and Vulnerable Children (CoBE) project implemented in South Sudan. Financed by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and executed by BRAC International between January 2020 and March 2023, the project established non-formal learning centers using the Community Girls' School (CGS) and Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) curricula. The program enrolled 6,755 learners (96.4% of target) across four states: Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG), and Western Equatoria. At project completion, 71% and 66% of Level 1 CGS learners achieved target proficiency (>60%) in numeracy and literacy, respectively. Among Level 4 ALP learners registered for the Primary Leaving Examination in Yambio, 93.3% of those who sat passed. While key outputs regarding center establishment, teacher training, and community management were met or exceeded, challenges such as safety, teacher gender disparities, lack of dignity kits, and transition obstacles to formal government schools persisted. Continued project funding, integration of livelihood/feeding models, and improved baseline assessment designs are recommended.

Index Terms—Community Based Education.

1. Introduction

South Sudan faces significant challenges in basic education access due to decades of conflict, socio-cultural barriers, and infrastructural deficits. Out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY), particularly young women and adolescent girls, remain among the most marginalized populations. To expand learning opportunities and address institutional, social, and gender-based barriers, BRAC International implemented the Community-Based Education for Out-of-School Girls and Vulnerable Children (CoBE) project.

Funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) from January 2020 through March 2023, the project aimed to directly and indirectly impact approximately 78,372 individuals. Specifically, it targeted 6,825 out-of-school children and youth aged 8–18 in four states: Eastern Equatoria (EES), Central Equatoria (CES), Western Equatoria (WES), and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG).

The CoBE project focused on two primary result areas:

1. *Increased Availability*: Establishing sustainable,

safe, secure, quality, and inclusive learning centers for marginalized children and youth, primarily girls and children with disabilities.

2. *Equitable Provision*: Delivering innovative, safe, gender-responsive, and evidence-based non-formal primary education aligned with the South Sudan Alternative Education System (AES).

2. Literature Review

Non-formal accelerated learning models play a critical role in fragile and post-conflict environments by offering flexible, age-appropriate pathways back into formal schooling. In patriarchal contexts like South Sudan, education interventions must address safety, female role modeling, community engagement, and distance to learning facilities to ensure retention, particularly for adolescent girls. Previous interventions demonstrate that community-led management models such as School Management Committees (SMCs) and local teacher capacity building improve project ownership and institutional resilience. Furthermore, integrating health protocols (e.g., COVID-19 prevention) and psychosocial support (PSS) into classroom pedagogy enhances holistic learner development during humanitarian crises.

3. Methodology

This evaluation utilized an endline assessment design based on the CoBE Performance Management Framework to evaluate project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

- *Target Population & Sampling*: The evaluation surveyed learners across 101 learning centers in four states. Quantitative data were collected from a sample of 389 surveyed learners, as well as household respondents, teachers, Master Teachers, and SMC members.
- *Data Collection Instruments*: Cross-sectional primary data were captured using mobile data collection tools (KoboCollect) covering learning assessment scores, safety perceptions, WASH facilities, teacher

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qualifications, and SMC functionality.

- *Curricular Context:* Learners were tracked across two standardized national non-formal pathways:
 1. *Community Girls' School (CGS)* for children aged 8–12 years.
 2. *Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)* for adolescents/youth aged 13–18 years.
- *Limitations:* Due to the cross-sectional nature of KoboCollect data entry and the absence of formal experimental comparison/control groups at baseline, causal impact attribution was constrained. Furthermore, dropout rates could not be fully tracked across a complete 4-year cycle due to the project ending prematurely relative to learner cohort progression.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Enrollment and Center Operationalization

The project successfully established 101 learning centers against an initial target of 83 (121.7% achievement). Total enrollment reached 6,755 learners (96.4% of the 6,825 target).

- *Enrollment by Pathway:* 4,838 learners (71.6%) enrolled in CGS, and 1,917 learners (28.4%) enrolled in ALP.
- *State Distribution:* Central Equatoria recorded the highest enrollment (2,161), followed by Eastern Equatoria (1,655), Northern Bahr el Ghazal (1,578), and Western Equatoria (1,381).
- *Age Demographics:* Age-grade mismatches were observed: 39 CGS learners were under 8 years old, 4 were overage, and 315 ALP learners exceeded 18 years.

B. Learning Outcomes and Academic Performance

- *Literacy & Numeracy:* 71% of Level 1 CGS learners achieved numeracy competency (>60% assessment score), and 66% achieved literacy competency. Across all levels combined, 67% scored $\geq 60\%$ in numeracy and 68% in literacy.
- *Subject Performance:* Social Studies (SST) registered the highest average mark (77%), followed by Christian Religious Education (66.9%). Mathematics performance was poor, averaging 48% (below the passing threshold).
- *Primary Leaving Examinations:* In Yambio, 39 Level 4 students registered for the South Sudan Certificate of Primary Leaving Examination. Of the 30 who sat for the exam (9 were absent for unknown reasons), 28 passed (93.3% pass rate) and only 2 failed (6.7%) significantly better than the national failure average. Notably, 7 students (23.3%) scored above 70%.

C. Safety, WASH, and Inclusion

- *Safety Perceptions:* Over 91% of learners reported feeling safe traveling to school, 94.6% felt safe at school, and 93.8% felt safe returning home. Boys

reported slightly higher security levels than girls. One school security incident (abduction and subsequent rescue of a student) was documented during the project.

- *WASH Facilities:* 88.2% of centers had operational toilet facilities, with >90% of surveyed learners confirming separate facilities for boys and girls. Additionally, 73.5% of centers-maintained handwashing stations stocked with water and soap.
- *Disability Infrastructure:* Inclusion remains an area for improvement: only 24% of centers had mobility-accessible facilities, and 17.7% had accommodations for hearing impairments.

D. Community Ownership and Governance

- *SMC Formation:* 101 School Management Committees were established (target: 79).
- *Gender Leadership:* All 80 Batch 2 centers achieved $\geq 50\%$ female representation on SMCs. Women held 51.2% (86 of 168) of leadership positions in Batch 2 SMCs.
- *Parental Satisfaction:* 72% of parents expressed satisfaction with SMC governance, and 81.6% of household respondents took personal initiative to enroll their children.

E. Teacher Training and Capacity Building

- *Gender Ratio:* Female teachers represented 53.6% of the overall workforce (below the 70% target due to local socio-cultural dynamics), with NBeG recording the lowest proportion (1 in 3).
- *Training Execution:* 255 classroom teachers were trained in child-centered, gender-responsive, and inclusive pedagogy, PSS, life skills, and COVID-19 protocols. 225 teachers (95%) routinely attended monthly refresher modules.
- *Master Teachers:* 16 Master Teachers were trained for supervisory and coaching roles, though only 1 was female.

F. Challenges and Lessons Learned

- *Funding Gap & Cycle Disruption:* Project closure in March 2023 left cohort 1/level 1 students without multi-year transition coverage, causing some centers to close prematurely.
- *Menstrual Health Management:* The absence of dignity kits/sanitary pads in phase two contributed to dropouts among girls over 15 years.
- *One-Teacher Rule:* The policy requiring one teacher per class created disruptions during teacher illness or absence.
- *Transition Barriers:* Government primary schools frequently refused entry to transitioning CGS/ALP graduates due to registration fees, uniform costs, and tuition requirements.

5. Conclusion

The CoBE project successfully expanded access to non-formal primary education for vulnerable children particularly girls in four challenging states of South Sudan. Key target outputs for center creation, learner enrollment, and community governance were met or exceeded. Strong academic results in literacy, social studies, and primary leaving exams demonstrate the effectiveness of the accelerated curriculum model. However, long-term sustainability is hindered by project closure prior to full cycle completion, low mathematics performance, inadequate disability infrastructure, and government transition hurdles.

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