Promoting community participation in improving education in South Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines an initiative by the USAID-funded Room to Learn South Sudan project (2013 to 2016) to encourage and enable community participation in improving education access, quality and safety. Project staff engaged parents and teachers as well as women, youth, and other community members in developing and implementing school improvement plans. These plans were informed by their participation in a "good school" visioning exercise; their interpretation of data on measures of access, quality, and safety; and their appraising community assets that could contribute to implementing the school improvement plan. The project provided in-kind grants (mainly books and other instructional materials) and organized one capacity building workshop for PTA members and one for teachers, but was not able to provide other kinds of support (e.g., funds for construction, on-going technical assistance). Nevertheless, many of the school communities reported that they had made progress in implementing some aspects of their school development plans, drawing on Room to Learn grants but also resources from the community, the government, and other projects. The project's implementation – and the daily life of school community members – were both interrupted and challenged by periods of violent conflict between political groups associated with the two major ethnic groups (Dinka and Nuer). The conflict-affected context not only limited implementation of the school development plans but also calls into question the sustainability of this and other initiatives undertaken by educational development projects funded by international organizations.

Keywords: Community participation, conflict-affected setting, South Sudan.

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INTRODUCTION

This article examines an initiative by the USAID-funded Room to Learn South Sudan project (2013 to 2016) to encourage and enable community participation in improving education access, quality and safety. The paper locates the initiative in the global policy and research discourses and in the historical and contemporary context of South Sudan. This discussion of the context is followed by a presentation of findings documenting the ways in which the project sought to promote community participation and the extent to which communities became involved in improving education access, quality and safety. The paper concludes with a reflection on the efforts to promote community participation in a conflict-affected context. Questions are raised about the possibilities and limitations of such efforts in the short- and longer-term, in particular around implementation challenges and the sustainability of initiatives undertaken by educational development projects funded by international organizations.

GLOBAL DISCOURSES ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable*

Development, described as "a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity" (UN, 2015: 5). Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the Agenda focuses specifically on education: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015:17). Unfortunately, none of the targets identified under SDG 4 – including those targets labeled "means of implementation" – highlights the importance of community participation, Nonetheless, participants in the World Education Forum (May 2015), which informed the content of SDG 4, certainly considered community participation as a key element in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. For the World Education Forum in the *Incheon Declaration* had stated:

> Over the 15 years to 2030, democratization of decision-making processes is expected to increase, with the voices and priorities of citizens reflected in the development and implementation of education policies at all levels… Participation must begin with the involvement of families and communities to boost transparency and to guarantee good governance in the education administration. Increased responsibility at the school level could strengthen efficiency in the delivery of services (UNESCO et al., 2015:23).

Interest in local community participation in school governance as part of a decentralized education system is not a new phenomenon. It can be traced back to at least the early 1980s when parental and community participation became "major theme in school reform in several education systems" (Abu-Duhou, 1999: 17; Bray, 2003; Falconer-Stout et al., 2014; Ginsburg et al., 2014).[1] The emphasis on community engagement in the education sector reflects and contributes to what Henkel and Stirrat (2001) call the "participatory turn" in development (see also Kendall, 2007). This trend was elevated to a global directive in 2000 in the *Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All* that called for a "move from highly centralized, standardized, and command-driven forms of [education] management to more decentralized and participatory decision-making, implementation and monitoring at lower levels of accountability" (UNESCO, 2000:19).

School-based management (SBM) emerged as one of the more popular approaches under decentralization to stimulate, focus and guide the involvement of community members around the governance and management of their local school. Indeed, Caldwell and Spinks (1992:7) identified school self-management as one of the ten

"megatrends" in education, beginning in the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, SBM had become "the centerpiece for the restructuring of public education systems in many parts of the world," including a range of developed and developing countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Columbia, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Israel, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Spain, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States, Venezuela and Zimbabwe (Abu-Duhou, 1999:18-19; Harber and Davies, 1997). A core feature of SBM is the school development plan, which has been highlighted by one of the early pioneers of SBM in international development settings. Abu-Duhou (1999:31-34; Malen et al., 1990; Pryor, 2005; World Bank, 2007, 2008) notes that "each school … develop[s] a school development plan, which is based on the strategic plan of the [national] system".

Some authors have questioned whether endorsements for parental and broader community participation in education and other sectors are based on real desires to promote participation and they point out that participation instead seems to serves ideological purposes designed to reduce direct challenges to elites by redirecting the energies of potential or actual opposition groups toward ritualistic activities, while also legitimating the status quo in society overall (Beattie, 1978; Krause, 1969; Lutjens, 1996; Pridham, 1981; Taub et al., 1977; Weiler, 1989). Nevertheless, such endorsements have also been associated with the following arguments for valuing public participation in schools (Mann, 1975):

1. Proponents of decentralized systems of government and community (including parent) participation in school governance have grounded their proposed reforms in the discourse of democracy and the inherent value in participation and/or power-sharing (Bray, 2001; Fantini, 1968; Ginsburg, 1991; Kamat, 2002; Lopate et al., 1970; Weiler, 1989).[2]

2. Proponents also appropriate the language of *efficiency* and *effectiveness*. And Barrera-Osorio et al. (2009: 2) note that "by giving a voice and decision-making power to local stakeholders, who know more about the local education systems than do central policy makers, decentralization can improve educational outcomes" (Abu-Duhou, 1999:27).[3] This argument is especially

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[1] More generally, it is argued that decentralization has become the "subject of discussion in all countries regardless of whether they are old or young states or whether they have a long unitary or federal tradition" (Konig, 1989:3) and "nearly all countries world-wide are now experimenting with decentralization" (Manor, 1999:1).

[2] Of course, not all forms of involvement are equally likely to translate parents'/community members' needs/wants into educational policy and practice. Arnstein (1971), for instance, distinguishes eight different levels of participation in terms of the degree of influence that participants may have. And Cohen and Uphoff (1977) propose a typology of rural development participation, distinguishing between participation in [planning] decision making, in implementation, in benefits, and in evaluation, with "scale of empowerment" applied to each type of participation. Similarly, Bray (2001) presents a matrix of participation in education, framed by two dimensions: a) functions, ranging from mobilizing resources to designing policies and b) genuineness, ranging from pseudo-participation to genuine participation (Rose, 2003a).

[3] This argument is based on the assumption that effectiveness improves when "the route of accountability becomes shorter as representatives of the clients –

cogent in contexts where diversity at the local level is a defining feature of respective communities (Altschuler, 2013; Bray, 1999; Carnoy, 1999; Weiler, 1989).

3. Proponents, often implicitly though sometimes explicitly, have based their support for local community participation as a way of reducing the national government's contribution of financial and human resources to schools (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bray, 1999; Carnoy, 1999; Fantini, 1968; Geo-Jaja, 2004; Inter-Agency Commission, 1990; Lopate et al., 1970; Prew, 2010; Schubert and Israel, 2000; Winkler, 1989).[4] As Bray (2003: 31) explains, "advocacy for community participation in education… has partly been based on a desire to spread the burden of resourcing education systems," which Lynch (1997:78) argues is "little more than thinly disguised means to move the burden onto the backs of the poor."

There is some evidence that SBM-type initiatives (e.g., in El Salvador and Kenya) "changed the dynamics of the school, either because parents got more involved or because teachers' actions changed" (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009:100; Di Gropello, 2006; Flórez Guío et al., 2005). Reviews of research find that there are mixed results regarding the effectiveness of SBM. Some research studies show that SBM does have a positive impact on quality of teaching, grade repetition, dropout and academic performance, while other studies show that SBM does not have any effect on these aspects of education (Altschuler, 2013; Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bruns et al., 2011; Jimenez and Sawada, 1999; Leithwood and Menzies, 1998; Nielsen 2007; UNESCO, 2003; World Bank/IEG, 2006).[5]

Of particular relevance to this paper are the findings from Barnett's (2013) analysis of data collected in Malawi as part of the Southern and East African Consortium Measuring Education Quality (SACMEQ). The analysis indicates that the "financing" mode of community participation (e.g., building and maintaining facilities, paying salaries of extra teachers, purchasing textbooks and school supplies by community members) explains more of the variance in pupil reading and math scores than "learner support" (e.g., parents checking if pupils' homework is done) and "networking" (e.g., parents meeting with teachers, having school events to attend), which are two other modes of community involvement. However, overall, available studies of community participation more generally and SBM initiatives

specifically do not provide compelling evidence of an impact on learning outcomes and other aspects of educational quality.

In conflict- and crisis-affected contexts, it is well documented that "many children's education opportunities are shattered by conflict [as well as] epidemics and natural disaster. Around 21 million of the world's out-of-school children, or 36%, lived in conflict-affected areas in 2012, up from 30% in 2000 [UNESCO, 2014]" (UNESCO et al., 2015:16). Thus, one of the means of implementation for SDG 4 is: "4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all" (UN, 2015:17). Realizing the aspirations of SDG 4.a requires the involvement of school communities; however, in addition to the challenges of operating in such locations, the body of research focused on SBM and other forms of community participation in education is extremely limited. However, Sullivan-Owomoyela and Brannel (2009:19) suggest that when "during conflict the retreat of the state … creates a gap ..., communities, recognizing the intrinsic worth of education, are among those who step forward to provide education."

Before examining a specific initiative designed to promote community engagement to improve educational access, quality, and safety in South Sudan, a conflict- and crisis-affected context, we need to briefly describe the societal and educational context in that country.

THE SOCIETAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF SOUTH SUDAN

From 1898 to 1954, northern Sudan (with a predominantly Arab and Muslim population) and southern Sudan (with a predominantly black, Christian and animist population) were administered separately by Egypt at the behest of Britain (Breidlid, 2010; Scroggins, 2002). While Sudan gained independence in 1954, ongoing civil war between the northern and southern regions was waged from 1956 to 1972 and again from 1983 to 2005. In 2005, the civil war came to an end when the *Comprehensive Peace Accord* (CPA) was signed (Breidlid, 2010; Haugen and Tilson, 2010; Scroggins, 2002).[6] In 2011 as part of a condition in the CPA, a referendum was held, enabling the people of southern Sudan to vote to remain with or secede from Sudan. Southern Sudanese voted to secede and, in doing so, created the world's youngest country, the Republic of South Sudan (Johnson, 2016).

Because of historical neglect during the British period

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either parents or community members – get the authority to make certain decisions and have a voice in decisions that directly affect the students who attend the school" (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009:32; World Bank, 2003).

[4] Thus, we should understand that those who promote SBM are at times driven by a neoliberal ideology (Abrahamsen 2000; Burde, 2004; Edwards, 2012; Edwards and Klees, 2012; Phillips, 2013; Pryor, 2005; Rose, 2003a and 2003b).

[5] These mixed results should be considered in the light of various methodological limitations of the studies reviewed (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009; Bruns et al., 2011; Edwards, 2012) as well as the diversity of reform actions that come under the umbrella of SBM.

[6] As Breidlid (2010:556) explains, "[t]he roots of the North-South conflict have often been attributed to the fundamental religious and ethnic differences between the southern, non-Arab populations and the northern, Muslim, Arab-dominated government of the National Congress Party, but the causes are multiple, including a struggle over the abundant oil resources" (Mayai and Hammond, 2014; Scroggins, 2002).

and the post-colonial period and the roughly 40 years of civil war, South Sudan, at its independence, was:

> Near the bottom of most [educational] measures compared with other nations, including on literacy and numeracy, net enrollment, school survival, and girls' access... Schools … [only rarely had] adequate infrastructure, such as permanent structures, working latrines, food and water... There [were] an insufficient number of qualified teachers … [as well as] language barriers on the part of both students and teachers (Epstein and Opolot, 2012: 10).

And, according to UNICEF (2008:14-15):

> During their 90 years in Southern Sudan the British [and Egyptians] did little for the people in terms of educational development… When the northerners assumed leadership in the south [after Sudan's independence from Britain in 1954],… the language of instruction was changed from English to Arabic … and this went hand in hand with Islamization of the curriculum and teaching … These developments led to resentment from people in southern Sudan, resulting in rapid decline of the already poor access and coverage of formal education…

Moreover, Mayai and Hammond (2014:3) report in the *Impact of Violence on Education in South Sudan*:

> Since the CPA era [2005-2011], education has been of little importance to the government of South Sudan, with the current rebellion increasingly exacerbating this problem. Evidence of this is that South Sudan's budget allocation [for] the education sector has been exceptionally low, standing between 5 and 7 percent [of total government expenditure] per year, and represents the lowest in the world (Good Planet Foundation, 2013).[7]

Despite the anticipation and jubilation that came with the establishment of the Republic of South Sudan, only two years later, the country descended into its own civil war in in December 2013 (Johnson, 2016). According to the International Crisis Group (2014), "[a]lthough the dispute … that led to the conflict was primarily political, ethnic targeting [Dinka versus Nuer], communal mobilisation and spiraling violence quickly led to appalling levels of

brutality against civilians" (2014: i). It is in this context that a USAID-funded education project with a core component focusing on community participation began implementation.[8]

SOUTH SUDAN'S FOCUS ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

In line with the global trends described previously, there has been a conscious focus in South Sudan on enhancing local level community participation to expand opportunities and address challenges facing the education sector at the local level. National level strategic plans and the legislative and policy framework for the education underpin and support the focus on community engagement in order to expand community members' participation in school governing bodies such as the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs) at the primary school level, and Boards of Governors (BOGs) at the secondary school level.

The Republic of South Sudan's first *Education Strategic Plan 2012-2017* states that one of the objectives under the strategic goal of "improving the quality of general education" is "improving school management, leadership and governance (Republic of South Sudan, 2012: 57). And South Sudan's first *General Education Act*, signed in 2012, defines the Parent and Teacher Association as "a body of teachers and parents that mobilizes resources from the community on behalf of a primary or secondary school, and participates in passing the school's annual plans and budget" (Ministry of Justice, 2012: 5). Furthermore, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) *Handbook for School Governing Bodies* (developed for members of PTAs, SMCs, and BoGs) states that "involving the community helps the school and community to: a) build trust and a supportive relationship; b) support education for all children and youth; c) bring the community together to help the school; d) help find ways to keep learners and teachers safe; and e) support student learning" (MoGEI, 2016:40).

Moreover, as Sullivan-Owomoyela and Brannely (2009: 109-110) note:

> a form of community participation existed in Southern Sudan throughout the years of the conflict [1956 to 2005]; however, it was focused primarily on direct aid to the local learning environment through the donation of in-kind items, … food for teachers, local materials for school construction and labour for building of schools, instead of on qualitative improvements

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[7] However, it should be noted that during discussions in 2009 the budget working group concluded that many international intergovernmental organizations and national/international NGOs were contributing to education funding, which meant that educational expenditure would equate to 13% of South Sudan's total budget expenditure. In addition, in the 2009 budget framework states were mandated to allocate their state-collected revenue to basic education.

[8] The 2013-2014 fighting occurred just as the Room to Learn project was getting underway, causing activities to be suspended until May 2014. Armed conflict erupted again in July 2016, leading to a suspension of project activities just as Room to Learn was entering the final months of its shortened life.

… [Nevertheless, because] these activities were often driven by NGOs or other external organizations, communities became increasingly dependent on external aid…, and as a result, organizations found it necessary to focus on ways to encourage locally generated participation.

Thus, as South Sudan was moving toward independence in July of 2011, findings from an analysis of qualitative data and anecdotal evidence by Haugen and Tilson (2010) showed that state and county education authorities and local community members believed that parents and other community members lacked a sense of ownership of the schools, but elderly individuals could recall a time when this was not the case and could provide examples of how communities mobilized to provide local solutions for challenges in education.

ROOM TO LEARN SOUTH SUDAN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

The Room to Learn South Sudan (RtL) project (2013 to 2016) was funded by USAID and implemented by a consortium led by Winrock International and included FHI 360 and Plan International. The project was designed in line with the USAID's *South Sudan Transitional Strategy 2011-2013*, which was framed around the overall goal of achieving "an increasingly stable South Sudan" (USAID, 2011:24). The Room to Learn activity fits under USAID's Development Objective 3: Help establish a foundation for increasingly educated and healthy populations through supporting local authorities and civil society organizations in their nascent efforts to extend basic services in conflict-prone area. RtL's overall goal was "to expand education opportunities that are inclusive and promote social cohesion," which was to be accomplished through achievement of three objectives: 1) improve and expand safer education services for children and youth, 2) enhance relevance of education and promotion of learner well-being and social cohesion, and 3) improve quality of management of education systems through local structures (Winrock International, 2015:2).

The initial RtL target areas were the five of the then-identified 10 states[9]—Jonglei, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Upper Nile,[10] and Warrap—that had borne the brunt of the conflict during the war and were viewed as

potential flashpoints for continuing conflict (especially with Sudan over Abyei) subsequent to the signing of the CPA. However, after the 2013-2014 eruption of armed conflict between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and (former) Vice President Riek Machar, when RtL resumed its activities in May 2014, its scope potentially included all of the then-designated 10 states. However, Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states, which were controlled by the opposition group led by former Vice President Reik Machar, as well as Lakes state were at least temporarily removed as RtL's target states because of significant security challenges. This meant that RtL's focus on school community activities beginning in February 2015 took place within six states: Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Warrap, and Western Equatoria (Figure 1).

The RtL project design placed a heavy emphasis on sub-national levels: the county, payam (an administrative unit beneath the county) and, especially, local school community levels. Given the situation in South Sudan (as described in the section above), RtL sought to vitalize or re-vitalize community participation in efforts to increase educational access, quality, and safety. The various steps in RtL's approach are shown in Figure 2.

Initially, RtL conducted *rapid assessments* in states and counties that potentially would be involved in the project, and then engaged in some *community pre-entry activities* before officially and formally "entering" communities. The first entry into a community and subsequent planned iterative annual community re-entry included collecting and reporting data through a baseline study that addressed various dimensions of education, facilitating a community assets appraisal (CAA), creating or revising a school development plan, and compiling information (that is, filling out an "Activity Ideas Template" – AIT) for a grant proposal. Between annual school development planning processes, involving wide representation from various community subgroups, RtL's approach was to support school communities in implementing their school development plans, including providing (in-kind) grants and organizing capacity building (for PTA executive committee members, but also for teachers and school administrators). However, because of various challenges, most notably early project closure (see subsequent discussion), RtL only undertook a first round of engagement activities and was not in a strong position to provide ongoing support as school communities sought to implement their school development plans.

The activities associated with the various phases of RtL's approach to promoting community participation in increasing educational access, quality and safety are discussed in more detail below.

Rapid assessment stage

The first stage of RtL's community engagement approach consisted of conducting a rapid assessment in five out of

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[9] In October 2015, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir issued a decree establishing 28 states in place of the 10 previously established states, largely along ethnic lines. In November 2015, Parliament approved a constitutional amendment to create the new states. RtL did not adjust its plans or strategy after the announcement of the 28 states, but this was being considered when USAID made the decision to end the project early (September 2016).

[10] Based upon the apparent disinterest of the Upper Nile State Ministry of Education in Room to Learn interventions and informed by the USAID guidance, RtL agreed to work in Lakes State instead of Upper Nile State.
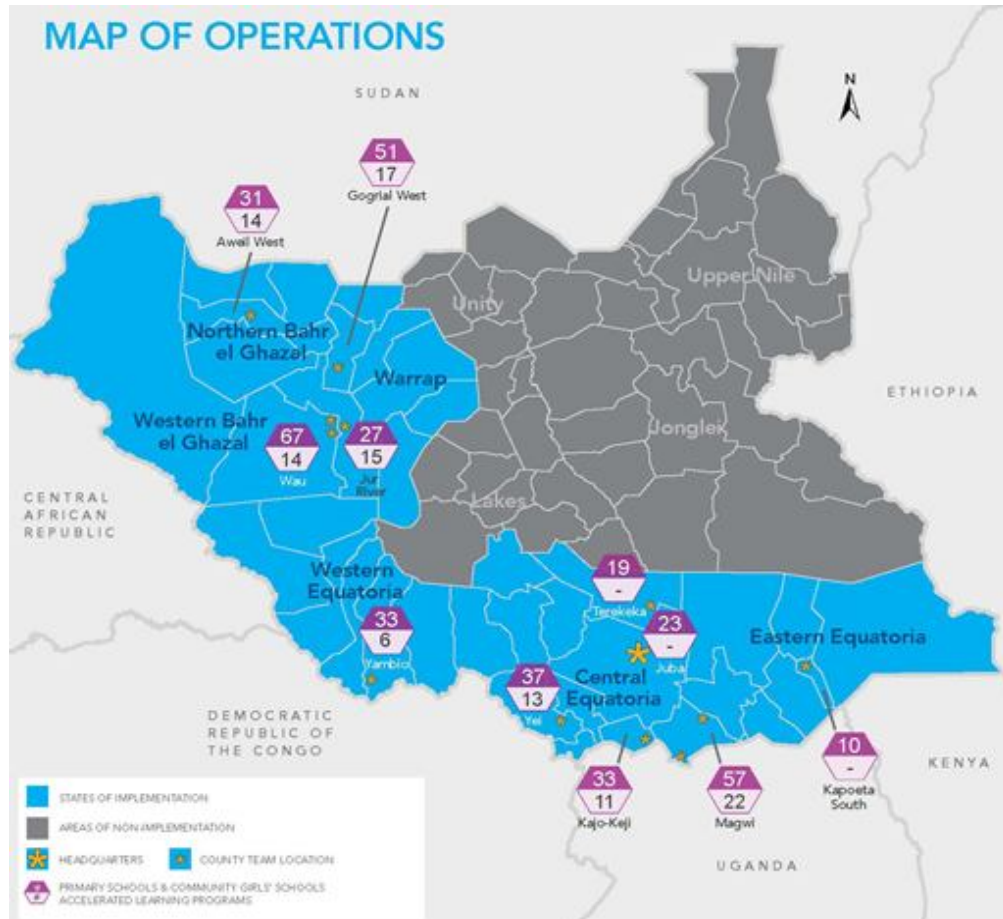
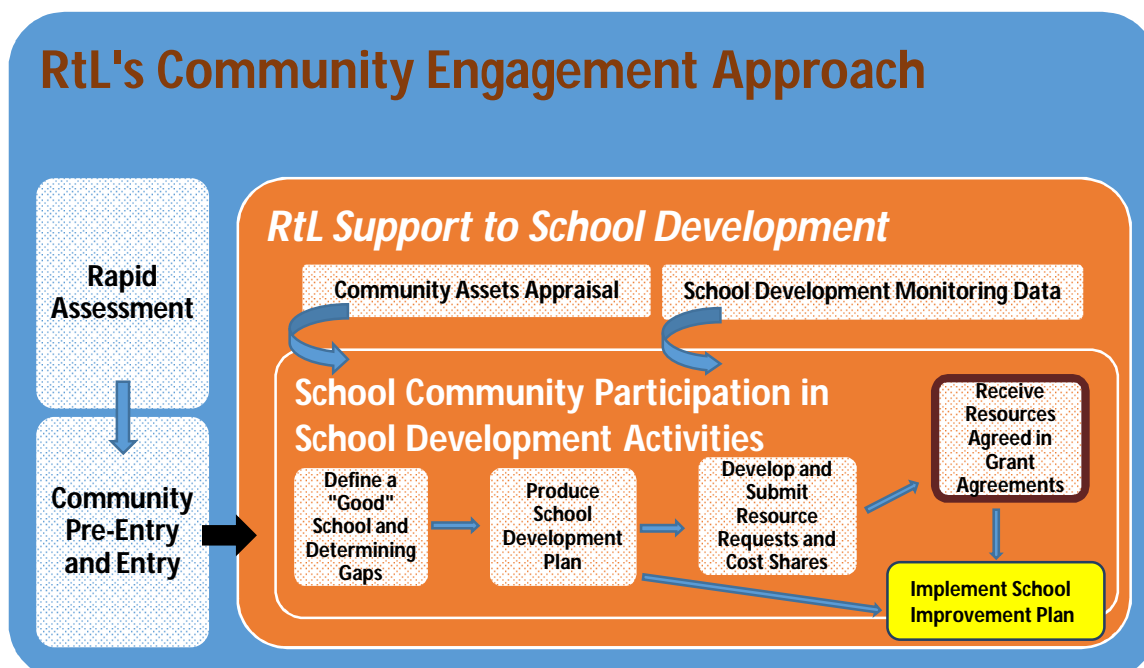**Figure 1.** Room to Learn's geographical coverage.

Figure 2. RtL's approach to engaging the school community in improving education.

Table 1. Room to learn South Sudan target states and rapid assessment timing.

State name	Targeted states – RtL inception	Targeted states – May 2014	Rapid assessment date
Lakes			*Not Applicable*
Northern Bahr el Ghazal	X	X	October, 2013
Warrap	X	X	October, 2013
Western Bahr el Ghazal		X	June, 2014
Central Equatoria		X	June, 2014
Eastern Equatoria		X	June, 2014
Western Equatoria		X	March, 2015
Jonglei	X		October, 2013
Unity	X		Oct-Nov, 2013
Upper Nile	X		*Not Applicable*

South Sudan's then-identified 10 states,[11] which were tentatively identified as RtL target states: Jonglei, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Warrap and Western Bahr el Ghazal. However, after RtL resumed its activities in May 2014, following cessation of field activities due to the outbreak of armed conflict between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and (former) Vice President Riek Machar, six target states were identified. Two of the originally identified states were kept, three states were dropped, and four states were added (see discussion above). Table 1 summarizes the shift in target states and the status of the rapid assessment phase.

During each rapid assessment three to five RtL staff members traveled to the state and, over a 2-to-5-day period, held meetings with the State Minister of Education and department directors of each State Ministry of Education, county education officials, and NGOs working in the state. The rapid assessments aimed to:

i. Explain RtL's design and approach to the key education stakeholders;
ii. Gain insight regarding:

a) Functionality of formal education primary schools, nonformal education (Alternative Education System) programs, county and payam education offices, and PTAs;
b) Students, out-of-school children/youth, and internally displaced and returnee families;
c) Conflict and natural disasters (e.g., flooding); and
d) Education development partners, including emergency/cluster group;

iii. Collect available quantitative data on the education sector in the respective state;
iv. Inquire about the situation in the state with regard to four components of RtL activities;[12]

v. Discuss possible counties on which to focus initially; and
vi. Establish a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between RtL and each state ministry (signed days or weeks after the rapid assessment).[13]

School community pre-entry stage

Once counties, payams, and school communities within a given state had been identified in consultation with state education officials and a MOU had been signed, the school community pre-entry stage began and took place on rolling basis from February 2015 to December 2015.[14] The purposes of the partial-day, school community pre-entry process were to formally connect with the relevant county, payam and school education authorities, collect specific data, and lay the groundwork for the activities of the school community entry stage. RtL county staff carried out the respective activities and processes associated with this stage through brief face-to-face meetings or, in a few instances, telephone conversations to:

i. Officially introduce the scope and focus of the RtL project;
ii. Determine whether a school community had an AES program in addition to a primary school;
iii. Collect information on the level of activity of each school community's PTA; and
iv. Coordinate arrangements for the school community

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[11] RtL uses South Sudan's original 10 states. In October 2015, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir issued a decree establishing 28 states in place of the 10 previously established states, largely along ethnic lines. In November, 2015, Parliament approved a constitutional amendment to create the new states.
[12] The four components or objectives of Room to Learn South Sudan were: a) to improve and expand education services for children and youth, b) to enhance

relevance of Education and promote learners well-being, c) to strengthen payam capacity to deliver and monitor education service, and d) to enable response to crisis affecting the primary education sector (Winrock International, 2015). During the period of RtL's implementation, USAID did not activate the fourth component.
[13] The MOU document, based on a template agreed to by the national Ministry of General Education and Instruction and USAID, specified the ways in which RtL and the State Ministry of Education would collaborate and cooperate toward achieving the goals of increased access, relevance, quality and safety in education.
[14] RtL was planning on conducting pre-entry and entry activities in additional school communities in 2016, but canceled this plan when USAID decided in January 2016 to revise the project's end date from September 2018 to September 2016.

entry stage.

School community entry stage

The school community entry stage consisted of RtL's efforts to collect data for the Baseline Study, help community members to conduct a community assets appraisal, facilitate a discussion (including good school visioning) to create or revise a school development plan, and identify the focus for a proposed RtL grant (specified on a "activity ideas template"). The number of days and the ordering of these activities changed after pilot testing the process (between 15 February and 30 April 2015) in the first 30 school communities, located in four counties: Kapoeta South, Magwi, Wau, and Yei.

During the pilot testing the community entry process was undertaken over four consecutive days in each school community: baseline study carried out (day 1), community assets appraisal conducted (day 2), good school visioning exercise and school development planning activity facilitated (day 3), and activity ideas template (AIT) drafted for grant proposal. After reviewing the results of the school community entry stage pilot, RtL adjusted the processes and activities. These changes were designed to reduce the amount of time required of RtL county teams as well as school community members. The new community entry process, employed by RtL between May and December 2015 was undertaken over a period of two rather than four days: baseline study carried out by a larger team of enumerators[15] a week or more in advance of the other community entry activities (day 1); good school visioning, school development planning, and community assets appraisal, and grant proposal (AIT) drafting activities (day 2). Below we describe each of the activities that RtL staff carried out as part of the school community entry phase.

Baseline study

For each school community, RtL staff (consultant enumerators and, initially, county team members) collected data through individual interviews with the head teacher (of the primary school and, sometimes, the Alternative Education System [AES] program[16]), all

(primary school and AES program) teachers, all non-educator PTA executive committee members, and a sample of students. In each of the 368 school communities the student sample consisted of four students (two females and two males) in each of the upper primary grades (P4-P8) and four students (two females and two males) in each AES program level (L1-L4), where such a program was operating. The baseline study indicators were grouped into the following five categories, and some of the findings from some of the indicators were shared with the school community members during the good school visioning and school development planning activities:

Physically safe and healthy learning environment and surroundings: The percent of permanent learning spaces, latrines with adequate structures and latrines clean and maintained, the female student-latrine ratio; distance to water source; school grounds safety index and student safety to/from school index.

Psychosocially positive and friend learning environment: The extent to which the education program promotes learner well-being, the extent to which the education program promotes social cohesion, and the frequency of teachers using various forms of corporal punishment.

Emergency preparedness: An index measuring whether an emergency preparedness plan and an early warning system existed and whether teachers, students and parents had participated in emergency/disaster preparedness training.

Quality of education: An index measuring the relevance of the education program, the textbook-student ratio and the student-teacher ratio.

Access to education: Recording the number of female and male students per grade or level, student gender parity, teacher gender parity, the number of out-of-school children/youth joining school, the number of 6-13 year olds not enrolled and the number of 14 to 25 year-olds who never attended school.

Community assets appraisal

RtL staff facilitated discussions among school community members (head teacher, teachers, PTA executive committee members, as well as groups of women, youth, and community leaders, with the total number of participants ranging from 35 to 70 persons) to conduct a "community assets appraisal," identifying the community's financial, material and human resources that could be used to improve educational access, quality and safety. In facilitating the community assets appraisal

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[15] The number of enumerators was expanded from 6 to 72, so that 18 teams of four enumerators could conduct the interviews in the remaining school communities for the Baseline Study (during May-September 2015). During the pilot phase one enumerator worked with each of the six county teams to collect and analyze baseline study data and also participate in the other community entry activities. Starting in May 2015, the enumerators only focused on collecting and analyzing baseline study data, providing a summary to county teams for them to use during the good school visioning and school development planning activities they organized with school community members.

[16] Alternative Education System (AES) programs in South Sudan include Accelerated Learning Programs, Pastoralist Education Programs, and Community Girls Schools. These programs were designed to provide the

equivalent of an 8-year primary school curriculum compressed into 4 years. Of the 368 school communities that participated in the full range of RtL activities, 110 had Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) and 2 had Community Girls Schools.

process, RtL staff asked community members assembled to identify resources in six categories that could be used to help improve education access, quality and safety in the school community: 1) human resources (e.g., teachers, carpenters, brick makers/layers, farmers, health care workers); 2) natural resources (e.g., water, sand, timber, stones); 3) agricultural and animal resources (e.g., fish, goats, cattle, crops); 4) institutions (e.g., church or mosque, police department, health units, local government offices); 5) organizations or associations (women's groups, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations); and 6) local market (e.g., cement, iron sheets, desks, building materials, dry goods).

Good school visioning

RtL staff facilitated discussions among a similar set of school community members concerning a vision of what constitutes a "good school" and how the primary school and/or AES program in the school community measured up to that standard. This discussion was informed by an RtL staff summary presentation of key indicators derived from the baseline study (see description above). Based on the discussion, the school community members identified priority areas for a school development plan.

School development planning

After the good school visioning exercise, the RtL staff convened a smaller group, composed of the head teacher and a small number of school community members (mainly teachers and PTA executive committee members) to finalize a school development plan (SDP). The goals and strategies of the school development plan were informed by the baseline data, good school visioning, community-identified priority areas, and – from May through December 2015 – by the community assets appraisal.

Grant proposal (activity ideas template)

The RtL staff members also guided discussions of a smaller group, composed of the head teacher and a small number of school community members, to sketch the key elements to be included in the "activity ideas template" (AIT). The AIT identified "in-kind" resources requested from RtL by the school community as well as resources the school community would contribute (informed by findings from the community assets appraisal). Both types of resources were meant to help enable the school communities to implement their SDPs. The AIT content was then incorporated into a grant proposal to RtL from the school community, which were submitted to USAID

for review and (perhaps) approval.

FINDINGS FROM ANALYSES OF DATA RELATED TO RTL'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

As a consequence of RtL's activities described above, school communities created school development plans and produced a grant proposal (AIT), which requested resources to be covered by RtL grants and made commitments to contribute labor and other resources toward achieving the objectives identified in their school development plans. Each of these will be discussed below.

School development plans

According to the data collected from 368 primary school head teachers who were interviewed for the baseline study conducted during 2015, as part of or prior to community entry activities: a) 86.1% of the school communities had formalized school development plans (SDPs) prior to RtL's involvement and b) 75.1% of these school communities had developed their plans during 2014. Moreover, SDP planning had largely occurred through the UKAID-funded South Sudan Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) project,[17] through a process in which GESS provided an SDP form and school community members checked off on the form the items they "planned" to do with the resources provided through capitation grants.[18] In 90% of the cases the previous school development planning had involved head teachers, teachers, and PTA executive committee

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[17] GESS's School Development Plan template provides space to "tick as a school priority area" a number of "school development targets" organized under the following categories of "areas of effectiveness": access, teaching, curriculum, care and guidance, parents and community, and leadership and management. In addition, GESS template provided space to describe activities planned to address the selected priorities as well as identify "what items and resources will be needed."

[18] In South Sudan, "school capitation grants are funds made available to all not-for-profit schools (government, community and faith-based schools) to help supplement running costs and improve the learning environment. … The amount of the grant each school receives [is] based on the number of pupils/students (both boys and girls) enrolled. Each school will get a base amount (different for primary and secondary), plus a set amount per pupil/student. Eligible schools … need to meet the following six requirements to receive grants: 1) submit a Pupil Admission Register (PARs) to South Sudan Schools' Attendance and Monitoring System (SSSAMS)/ 'Ana Fii Inni' ('I am here'); 2) provide a daily update on the attendance of pupils using the South Sudan Schools' Attendance Monitoring System (SSSAMS) / 'Ana Fii Inni' … www.sssams.org; 3) have a School Governing Body in place – usually a Parent-Teacher Association for primary schools, ideally with a School Management Committee drawn from its members, or a Board of Governors for secondary schools …; 4) make and submit a simple School Development Plan to lay out how the school will spend [its] money …; 5) lay out a simple school budget …; and 6) open a school bank account" (Cambridge Education *et al.*, 2017). Under agreement reached as part of the UKAID-funded Girls' Education South Sudan project, funds for primary schools were to be provided by the Government of South Sudan and funds for secondary schools were to be provided by the GESS project.

members; however, students and other community members had participated in less than 40% of these processes. Interestingly and unfortunately, however, most head teachers did not have a physical copy of the SDP.

The implications of these findings were that, although RtL had anticipated working with many school communities to revise their SDPs and had coordinated with GESS to frame the SDP in similar terms, project staff ended up assisting community members to create a new SDP, since there was no SDP document on hand in the school community that could be used as a starting point. Moreover, RtL's approach went beyond GESS's school development planning approach by engaging a broader set of community members (e.g., also including children, youth, and women) in discussions about their vision of a good school and their priorities for school improvement.

Figure 3 presents the results of an analysis of the information contained in 200 of the 368 RtL-facilitated SDPs. As can be seen in Figure 3, the SDPs tended to focus on basic school infrastructure (e.g., furniture and classroom structures), health-related infrastructure (e.g., handwashing facilities and latrines), safety-related infrastructure (e.g., school fencing and tools for grounds maintenance), and arts and sports infrastructure (e.g., musical instruments and sports equipment) More specifically, a majority of school communities indicated in their school development plans that they wanted to acquire school furniture (64%) and to build or repair classrooms (51%), areas that could contribute to increasing education access, quality, and safety. The next most frequently specified areas in the school development plans were musical instruments (42%) and sports equipment (40%), things that could contribute to providing psychosocial support for students. Note also that two of the safety-related infrastructure items were included in approximately one-third of the SDPs, with school fencing (35%) serving to keep unwanted animals or people from the school grounds and tools (30%) being used to clear the school compound of plants or unsafe objects. Finally, approximately one-fifth of school communities identified elements categorized under health-related infrastructure, with hand-washing facilities (28%), latrines (23%), and water facilities (17%) being considered as contributing not only to health and safety but also encouraging school attendance, especially for girls.

Grant proposals (AITs)

Figure 4 presents the findings from an analysis of a systematic sample of 50 (13.6%) out of 368 completed AITs.[19] As can be seen in Figure 4, school communities'

requests for in-kind assistance from RtL focused on basic school infrastructure, health-related infrastructure, safety-related infrastructure, instructional materials and resources, art materials, and sports equipment. [20] More specifically, the most frequently requested items in the AITs was classroom furniture (requested by 96% of the school communities); followed by bicycles or other modes of transport for teachers (60%); sports equipment (44%); health, hygiene, and sanitary materials (42%); textbooks and instructional materials (34%); tools for grounds upkeep (34%); and health-related infrastructure (30%). The other three items that were requested on at least one-fifth of the AITs were school and sports uniforms (24%); teacher incentives (22%); and cooking utensils, flour, and other food (20%).

In addition to specifying the physical resources being requested from RtL, the AITs identified the financial, material and human resources that the school community pledged to be provided by the school community as a cost share. Based on the analysis of 50 (13.6%) of the 368 AITs, we found that school communities pledged to contribute various types of human resources/labor as well as some material resources and financial resources (Figure 5). As shown in Figure 5, a large majority (80%) of the school communities committed to work on increasing access by mobilizing and sensitizing children/youth to attend primary school or an AES program. Additionally, approximately two-thirds of the AITs indicated that school communities pledged to contribute human resources, either securing and insuring proper use of supplied equipment and materials (68%) or helping to offload furniture or other items when delivered (66%). The analyzed AITs indicated that some school communities pledged to contribute labor to cleaning and leveling land for playground, tents, or gardens (32%) as well as building or repairing classrooms or offices (22%). School communities also pledged to mobilize material and financial resources toward recruiting volunteer teachers (14%) and providing housing for teachers (14%).

### Grants approved, materials delivered, community cost-share contributed

After a series of discussions with USAID, RtL ended up providing "supply-driven," in-kind grants (Instructional Materials Packages) to all 388 RtL-supported school

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[19] The sample consisted of AITs from four primary schools in 12 of the 13 RtL-targeted counties and 2 from the 13th county. The 13th county was in Kapoeta South, where AITs were analyzed from 2 of the 5 school communities that were involved in RtL's activities. While 50 out of 368 (i.e., 13.6% of the) school communities may seem like an inadequate sample, we decided not to expand the number of AITs analyzed because there was very little variation in the 50 examined initially. The limited variation likely derived from project staff's communication of what kinds of things could be included in the grant proposals.

[20] At the time the "activity ideas templates" were written up, the estimated total budgets for these in-kind grants ranged from 13,400 to 186,105 South Sudanese Pounds, though most were in the range of 50,000 to 75,000 South Sudanese Pounds. During this time, the official exchange rate used was 3.16 South Sudanese Pounds per 1.0 US Dollar.
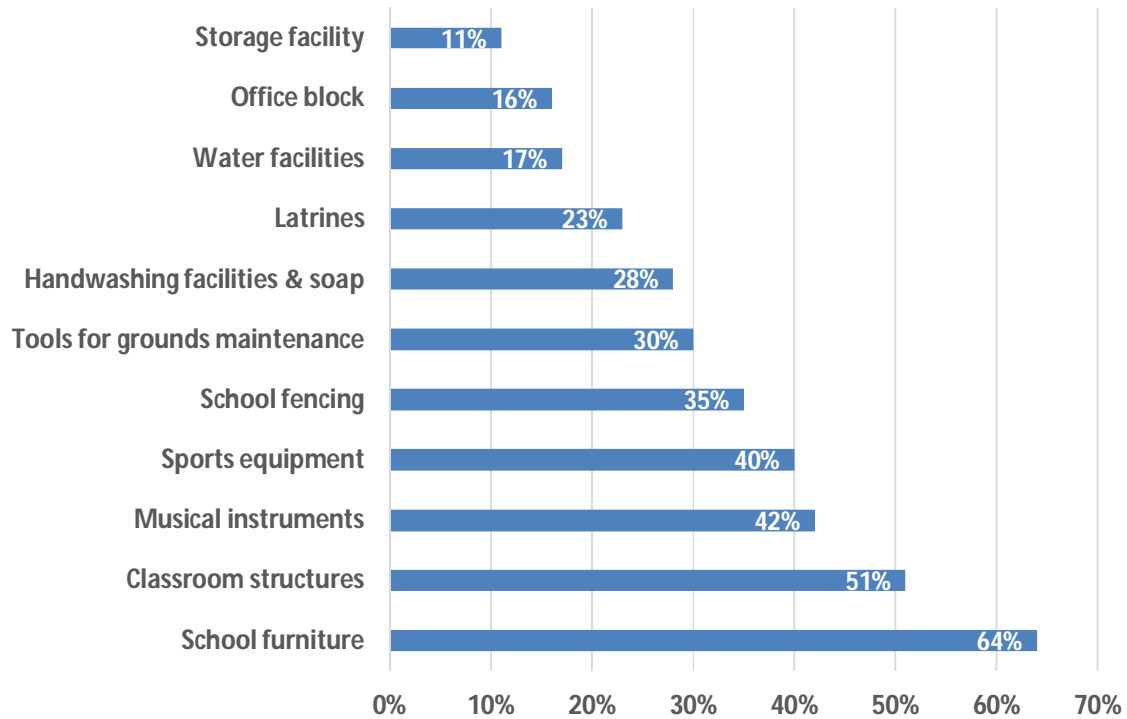
Figure 3. Percentage of school development plans including various items (n = 200).
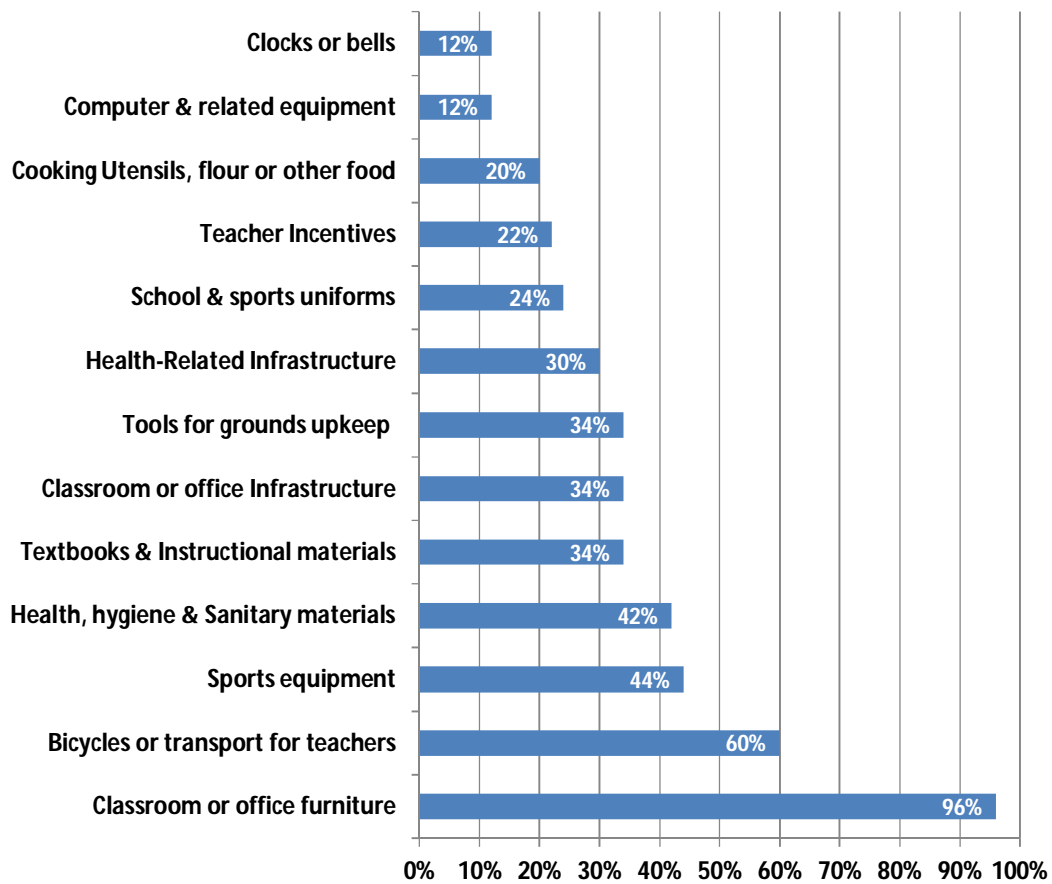
Figure 4. Percentage of schools requesting types of items in grant proposals (n = 50).
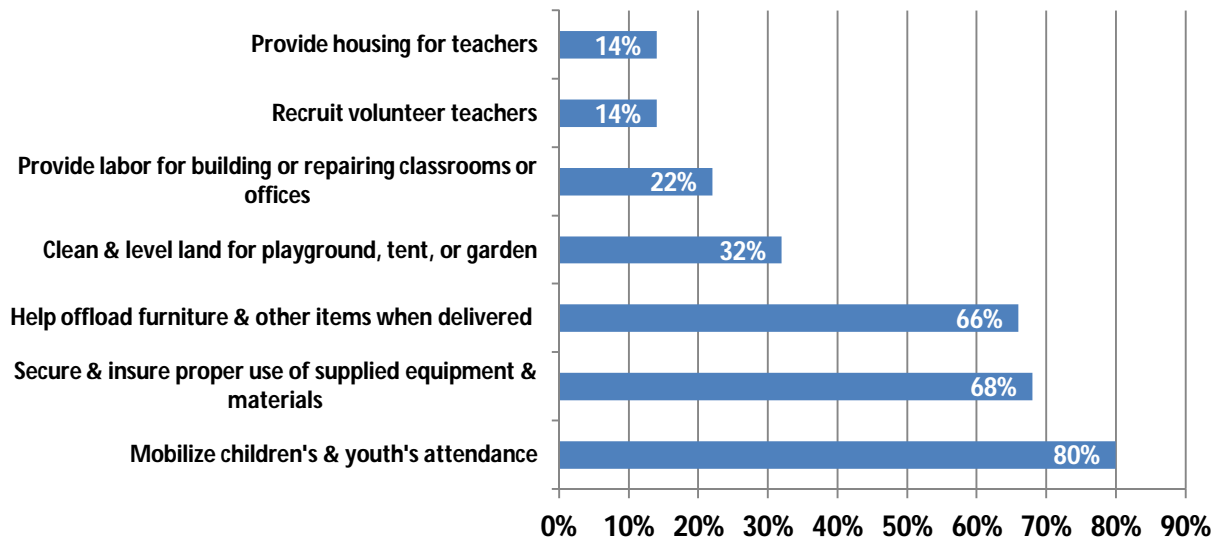
Figure 5. Percentage of schools pledging types of cost-share resources (n = 50).

communities,[21] representing a cost of approximately $4,000 per school community These grants responded to school community members' interests, expressed during the processes of school development planning and filling out the AIT. However, the same materials were delivered to all school communities, regardless of whether or not they had specified such materials in their AITs. The Instructional Materials Packages included basic classroom supplies (e.g., wall-mounted blackboard, portable blackboard, flashboard-sentence, flashboard-word, storage container), materials for making teaching-learning aids (e.g., colored paper, scissors), a pocket library (large hanging cloth with pockets to hold books), supplementary readers, digital audio players, and teaching games (e.g., Dominoes, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders, Scrabble).

In addition, the RtL project provided "demand-driven," in-kind grants (Education through Community Empowerment Grants) to 78 school communities, representing an average cost of approximately $7,500 per school community. The materials included in these grants represented a subset of items requested on AITs by school communities: textbooks and teaching aids for the AES program, tools for school gardening and leveling the playground, and school desks. The most noteworthy absence were items requiring construction (e.g., classrooms, offices, latrines), because USAID decided not to approve any construction-related grants. The number of school communities receiving these "demand-

driven" grants was lower than planned, because the violent conflict that erupted in July 2016 halted the process of delivering the materials, even before the earlier-than-expected closing of the project in September 2016.

When the Instructional Materials Packages were delivered to the school communities, community members contributed human resources to unload the materials and put them in the designated storage place. Additionally, when the Education and Community Engagement Grant materials were delivered to the designated school communities, some members of the community contributed their time and labor to unload these materials. Based on data gathered from head teachers, the estimated value of the cost-share from the school communities' contribution of human resources for offloading materials from each type of grant ranged from $209 to $435 per school community.

Progress in implementing school development plans

RtL sought to examine the progress school communities made in implementing their school development plans through a structured School Monitoring and Mentoring Study carried out in June to July 2016.[22] This study was conducted by RtL county staff and involved structured interviews with the head teachers from 40 randomly selected school communities located in counties which,

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[22] It may be that head teachers' reports exaggerated, to some extent, what school communities had accomplished in relation to their school development plans. And, while readers may want to be cautious about drawing precise conclusions about achievements based on head teachers' reports, it seems reasonable to conclude that such reports reflect that school communities had made at least some progress in implementing aspects of their school development plans.
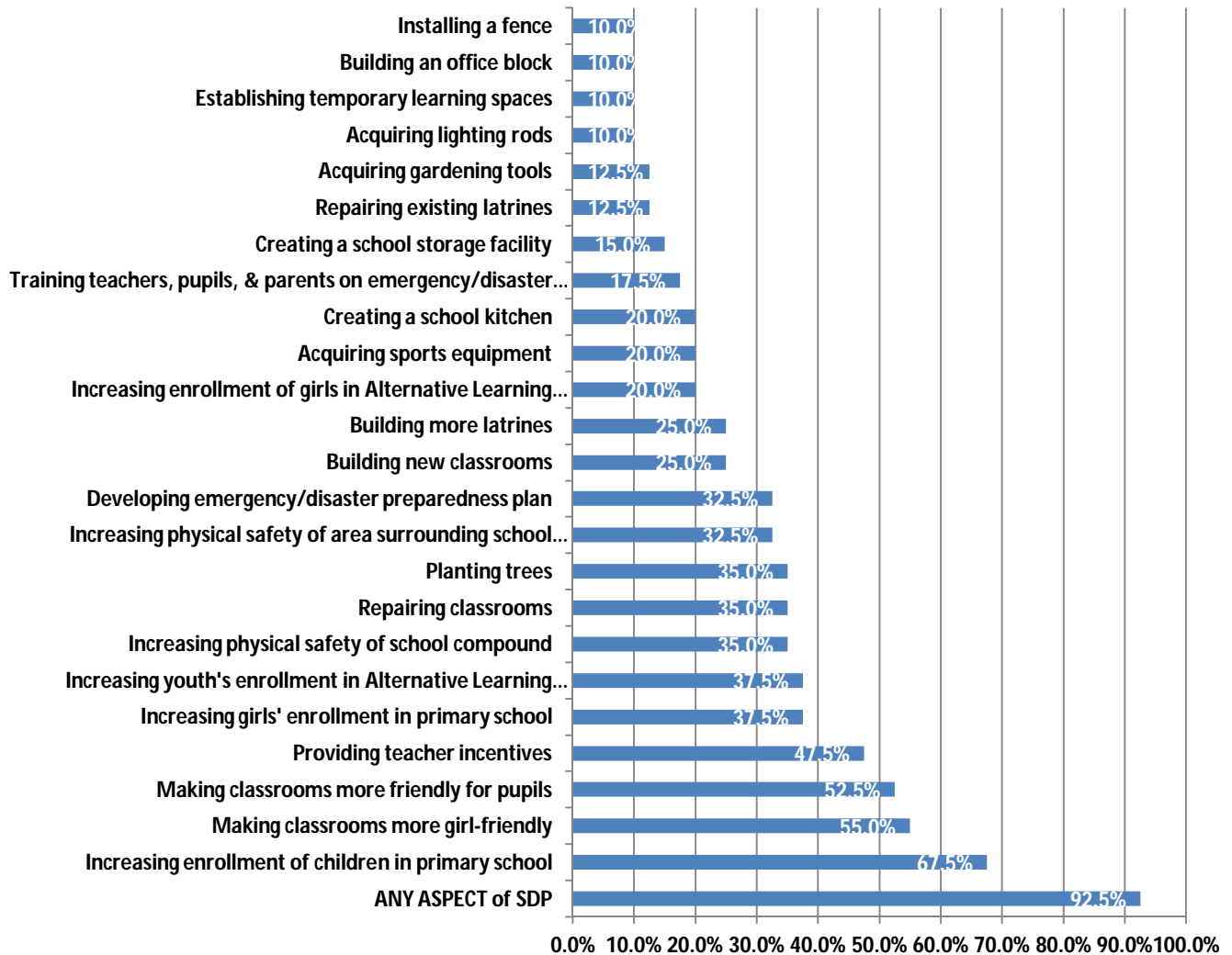
Figure 6. Percentage of head teachers' reporting progress in implementing aspects of SDP (n=40).

given security conditions, were accessible.[23] Figure 6 presents the findings from the analyses of data collected as part of this study.

As can be seen in this figure, 92.5% of the head teachers reported that their school communities had made at least some progress in implementing some aspect of their school development plans. Importantly, the aspect of their school development that head teachers most often (67.5%) reported some progress was related to access, that is, increasing enrollment of children in primary schools. Additionally, at least 30% of the head teachers reported their school communities' progress in implementing the following aspects of their school development plans: a) making classrooms more girl-friendly (55.0%), b) making classrooms more friendly for all pupils (52.5%), c) providing teacher incentives (47.5%), d) increasing girls' enrollment in primary school

(37.5%), e) increasing youth's enrollment in AES programs (37.5%), f) increasing physical safety of school compound (35.0%), g) repairing classrooms (35.0%), h) planting trees for shade (35.0%), i) increasing physical safety of area surrounding school compound (32.5%), and j) developing emergency/disaster preparedness plan (32.5%) (Figure 6).

Although RtL was not able to support building or repairing classrooms or to provide funds for teacher incentives, it is noteworthy that school communities made progress in implementing these aspects of their school development plans – progress that RtL encouraged through its PTA training workshop and other activities (e.g., school development planning, activating Gender and Social Inclusion subcommittees of the PTA, and teacher training). And all of these aspects were oriented to increasing education access, quality, and/or safety.

Some evidence that RtL contributed to enhancing community participation in improving access to and the

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[23] These school communities are located in Aweil West, Gogrial West, Kajo-Keji, Kapoeta South, Magwi, Nimule, Terekeka, Yambio and Yei counties.
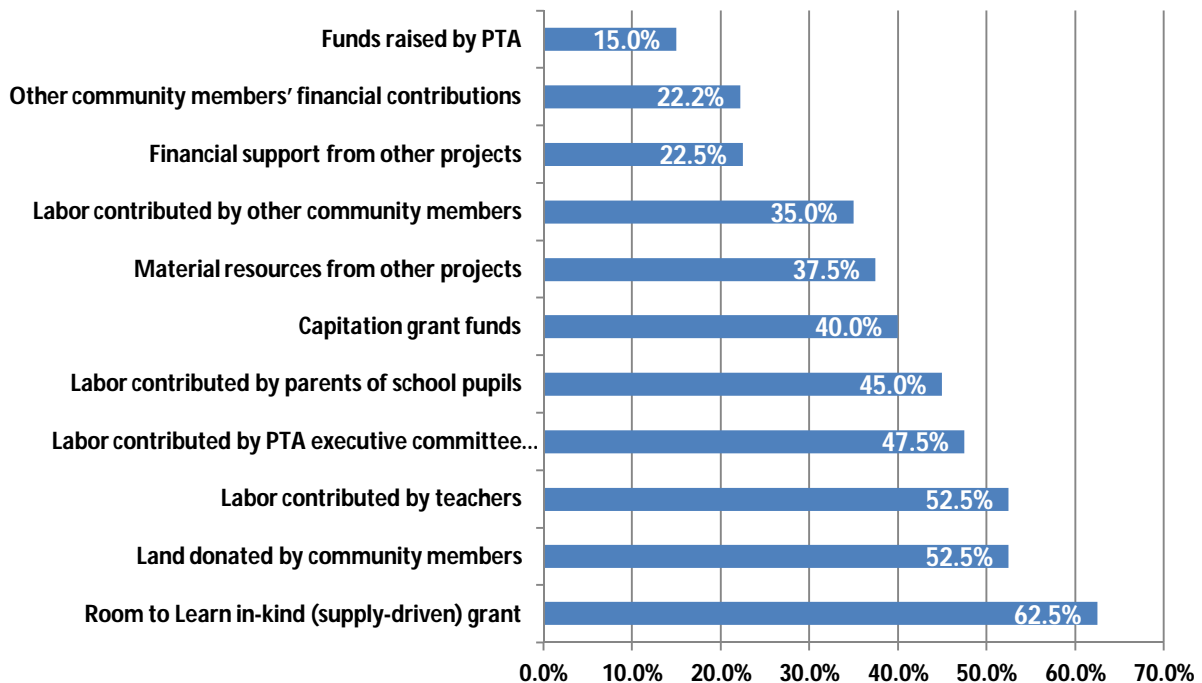
Figure 7. Percentage of head teachers reporting using various resources to implement SDPs (n = 38).

quality and safety of education in South Sudan is provided by the findings in Figure 7, which also are derived from the responses of 40 head teachers collected as part of RtL's School Monitoring and Mentoring Study conducted during June-July 2016. Out of the resources head teachers reported to have been used in implementing their school development plans, RtL's in-kind grants was the resource category most often mentioned (by 62.5% of the head teachers).[24] This resource likely was seen to contribute to efforts to increase enrollment as well as improving quality of education. It also important to note that more than 30% of the head teachers reported that their school communities had used resources from land donated by community members (52.5%), teachers' labor (52.5%), PTA executive committee members' labor (47.5%), parent' labor (45.0%), other community members' labor (35.0%) as well as school capitation grants (40.0%) and material resources from other projects (37.5%).

Implications of these findings are that although RtL was not able to routinely contact and support school communities, including providing materials requested in the demand-driven grant agreements, the RtL's activities and processes (assisting in the development of SDPs, providing teaching and learning materials through the supply-driven grants, organizing and conducting PTA and in-service teacher capacity development workshops), seem to have contributed to the school communities'

progress in implementing their SDPs.

DISCUSSION

Based RtL's experience in seeking to promote community participation in improving educational access, quality, and safety of education in South Sudan, the following conclusions can be drawn:

a) Efforts to coordinate with other projects (e.g., GESS) required time and resources and could have been more effective and productive if the projects had begun at the same time and if school communities had been given copies of their school development plans.
b) School community members from diverse backgrounds, including individuals with no or limited formal education, became involved in conceptualizing what a good school is and in defining goals for improving educational access, quality, and safety through the use of a school development planning process.
c) Reporting selected findings from a baseline study that was focused on aspects of education access, quality and safety to school community members appeared to help school community members during deliberations about priorities for school improvement.
d) Reducing the community entry process from four to two days did not appear to limit community members' input in the school development planning and grant proposal process to any significant extent and enabled the project to reach a larger number of school communities.

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[24] Note that compared to RtL's contribution, a much smaller percentage of head teachers mentioned financial resources from other projects (22.5%) and material resources from other projects (37.5%).

e) School communities were able to identify (through the community assets appraisal process) as well as find and/or mobilize resources in support of increasing education access, quality and safety, even in a resource-constrained and conflict- and crisis-affected context.

f) School communities seem to have made some progress in implementing at least some aspects of their school development plans, even when project support was limited (e.g., providing in-kind grants of instructional materials, only partially providing in-kind grants of items like classroom furniture, and not providing financial support for construction of classrooms, offices, latrines, and kitchens).

h) In making progress on implementing aspects of their school development plans, school communities relied on RtL and other project/government resources (notably school capitation grants) and also on their own financial, material, and human resources.

We can speculate that school communities would have made greater progress in implementing their school development plans if RtL, other projects/NGOs, or the government had provided additional resources, including those that had been requested by school communities in their grant proposals (that is, activity ideas templates). Moreover, it seems likely that school communities would have made greater progress in implementing their school development plans if RtL, other projects, or the government had provided more frequent supervisory guidance and support to school community members.

Of course, both of these changes would have required additional financial and human resources as well as a context that was more conducive to regular, ongoing engagement with school communities. However, as Figure 8 illustrates, the eruptions of violent conflict rendered the context anything but conducive in this regard. Recall that RtL's activities were interrupted from December 2013 to May 2014 by the outbreak of civil war, just as the project was moving to implement key aspects of its work plan. In 2014-2015, RtL undertook additional state-level rapid assessments and its school community-level pre-entry and entry activities during a period of somewhat improved, but still unpredictable security in some states and counties, while other parts of the country were off limits to the project because of extreme insecurity.

Then, in January 2016, as RtL was gearing up for follow-up interactions (e.g., capacity building and revisiting school development plans), USAID decided to close the project two years earlier (in September 2016), which meant that the work plan had to be revised toward a close-out mode. Importantly, USAID indicated that this decision was based on its determination that the Agency should focus its resources on humanitarian (rather than development) activities. And even as RtL was engaged in activities as part of this close-out plan (e.g., delivering Education through Community Empowerment Grants,

conducting the School Monitoring and Mentoring task), violent conflict erupted in Juba and spread to other areas in July 2016. This led to the second evacuation of international staff and largely ended project interactions with school communities, except for finalization of paperwork regarding the grant agreements and some materials distribution.

What can we speculate regarding the sustainability of the initiative in South Sudan to promote community participation to improve education? It is first worth noting that we agree with Gillies (2010:152) that "sustainability is more complex that simply continuing project activities or initiatives. ... Sustaining changes [in relevant attitudes and behaviors] … requires an alignment between the leadership and deep ownership by the people involved, supported by policies and procedures that reinforce behavior and provide incentives …" That is, sustainability – at least in normal development contexts – requires ongoing effective leadership, participation in developing and ownership of the reform ideas and practices by a wide range of stakeholders, institutionalization of reform support policies and procedures (including monitoring and reporting progress), and a certain level of financial and human resources (MSI, 2012; Perlman Robinson and Winthrop, 2016; Williams and Cummings, 2008). To this list, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, one should add a modicum of political stability, a limited occurrence of armed combat, and rare or only minor natural disasters.

With regard to leadership, one may note that the Room to Learn project sought to involve county, payam, and school administrators in various "pre-entry" and "entry" activities as well as in some one workshop focused on PTAs and one on teacher training, but these experiences likely did not significantly contribute to strengthening the capacity and commitment (particularly of county and payam administrators) to lead community engagement and school improvement activities. Moreover, at the school community level the Room to Learn project sought to involve a wide range of stakeholders in various processes (community assets appraisal, good school visioning, school development planning and implementation). Less effort was directed to involving school communities in deciding on and planning these activities, and generally the involvement of stakeholders at the payam, county, and national level was less in both respects. There is some evidence that school communities embraced (that is, came to "own") the school improvement process, but it is not clear that stakeholders at the higher levels of the system established ownership of this reform.

Likewise, while some (informal) policies and procedures were developed – or at least played out – at the school community level, there was likely a lower degree of institutionalization of reform support policies and procedures at the payam, county, and national level. The Room to Learn project in collaboration with the

Situation in South Sudan		Month/Year	Key RtL Activities
PROJECT YEAR ONE		September 2013	Project startup begins
	Civil War Breaks Out ↓	December 2013	1st evacuation of staff; office temporarily closed (5 months)
		April 2014	Conflict-sensitivity workshop in DC
	Situation stabilizes in Juba but many "no go" areas across the country ↓	May 2014	Office reopens in Juba
		June 2014	Expand geographic footprint
		September 2014	Do No Harm Workshop; Wau Office Opens
PROJECT YEAR TWO	Steady decline in security across country ↓	November 2014	New work plan; MOUs for SMoEs approved by USAID
		February 2015	Community entry begins as schools reopen
		April 2015	Last MOU signed with SMoE
	Compromise Peace Deal ↓	July 2015	First grants awarded
		August 2015	County team expansion
		September 2015	Payam teacher trainings begin
PROJECT YEAR THREE	Highly fluid security	December 2015	Yambio office temporarily closed (due to violence)
	Skyrocketing prices, increasing displacement, and attacks in Juba	January 2016	Project end date revised
		February 2016	PTA trainings begin
	Continued breakdown of law and order in Juba ↓	March 2016	Closeout plan and revised PMP approved by USAID
		July 2016	2nd Evacuation; key staff relocated to Kampala
		September 2016	Project closes in South Sudan

Figure 8. Overview of South Sudan situation and key RtL activities (adapted from Cochran et al., 2017).

GESS project did assist the Ministry of Education in drafting *The Handbook on School Governing Bodies* (MoEGI, 2016), but it is unclear the extent to which this Handbook has served to shape the behaviors of actors at various levels of the education system. Furthermore, no real progress was made in institutionalizing the incentives to promote such behaviors or the mechanisms to monitor their implementation.

This, of course, leads to the question of financial and human resources. Similar to the cases in many development projects or other donor-funded initiatives in conflict-affected contexts, the sustainability of the initiatives in South Sudan was constrained by limitations of resources. Indeed, even the initial plan – for the government to fund the capacitation grants for primary schools, while the UKAID-supported GESS project would fund the capacitation grants for secondary schools – had to be abandoned in 2016, because the government had

insufficient resources.[25]

Finally, just as armed conflict detracted from progress in implementing the project, it seems likely that what appears to be a never-ending civil war in South Sudan will undermine efforts to sustain some of the initiatives introduced by Room to Learn. Certainly, the fighting that re-erupted in July 2016 meant that planned activities to reinforce what had been introduced could not be carried out. With the continuation of internal displacement, the rather fragile notion of "community" in some counties may also be further weakened.

CONCLUSION

This article contributes to the literature on promoting

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[25] The resource constraint was attributable to a number of factors, including the precipitous decline in global oil prices and the resurgent armed conflict.

community participation in improving education, particularly in a conflict- and crisis-affected context. The RtL experience certainly indicates that promoting community participation can help to mobilize local financial and human resources. But whether or not this mobilization of local resources provides a rationale for reducing national or international resources (Barnett, 2013; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Bray, 1999, 2003; Carnoy, 1999; Fantini et al., 1968; Geo-Jaja, 2004; Inter-Agency Commission, 1990; Lopate et al., 1970; Prew, 2010; Schubert and Israel, 2000; Winkler, 1989), especially in a context that has been chronically marginalized and under-developed, is questionable. At the same time, we need to be concerned that, by suggesting that non-local resources can be reduced, in doing so, we may be engaged in a process that is "…little more than thinly disguised means to move the burden onto the backs of the poor" (Lynch, 1997:78).

While we are not in a position to assess the extent to which community participation in South Sudan increased the efficiency and effectiveness of education (Abu-Duhou, 1999; Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009), there is some evidence of democratization (Bray, 2001; Fantini, 1968; Ginsburg, 1991; Kamat, 2002; Lopate et al., 1970; Weiler, 1989), at least in terms of the range of individuals who participated in the school visioning and school development planning: community/religious leaders, education officials, educators, women, and youth.

Furthermore, although we are not in a position to judge whether our efforts to promote community participation served ideological purposes designed to redirect energies of potential critics or actual opposition groups and thus sustain, if not legitimate the status quo (Beattie, 1978; Krause, 1969; Lutjens, 1996; Pridham, 1981; Taub et al., 1977; Weiler, 1989), certainly the ongoing crisis in South Sudan makes this an important issue. Future research could focus on examining the hypothesis suggested by Monaghan (2016:14) that "conflict-affected states might solicit or accept education interventions from bilateral and multilateral agencies … [in order] to signify their own legitimacy and post-conflict stability to their domestic populations."

Moreover, we need to raise the concern that encouraging communities to participate actively in improving educational access, quality, and safety – without being able to reciprocate with the promised material and financial resources and by placing undue paperwork and literacy demands on unschooled and oftentimes non-literate community members – may weaken possibilities for promoting such participation in the future. As noted in other contexts in which participants did not perceive (or receive) the promised benefits, participants may become more cynical "with each increasing use of the ideology [of participation] which does not produce positive results" (Krause, 1969: 142) or they may become "disillusion[ed] with the whole concept of participation" (Pridham, 1981: 242).

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