

# **BACKGROUND-INFORMATION<sup>1</sup> REGARDING THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG GIRLS IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN**

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<sup>1</sup>The information is based on information provided by people from the Southern Sudan (partially obtained from the cultural meetings organized by OLS) and on Kwacakworo's personal research-work.

With thanks to the many Sudanese who have expressed their own views and summoned up their people's traditional attitudes towards modern education, namely Dr. Pius Subek, Dr. Kuol Deng Kuol, Dr. Tongjik Tutlam, Dr. Monywiir Arop Kuol, Dr. Riek Gai Kong, Fr George Kenga, Fr David Sahatini, Mr Peter Kidi, Mr. Paul Mabor, Dr Aduok Nyaba Tor, Mr. Massimino Allam, Mr. Ulum Amis, Mr. Simon Yien, Mr. Akok Anei, Mr. Bandini Pascal, Mr. Cagai Matet Guen, Mr. Luka Pal Rambang, Mr. Philip Nariko, Mr. Anthony Ubuc, Mr. Locek Akyangmoi, Mr. Salva Oler Gelasio, men and women from Akon, Mr. Malia Peat, Mr. Malual Chol, Mr. Anade Othow, Mr. Eli Magok Manyol, Mr. Yuggu Loro Suwaic, people from Paluer, Mr. Elijah Magot Anyang, Mr. Ajeo Nageri Lino, Mr. Lokonyeen Agustino, Mr. Mathew Atoya, Mr. Arkanyelo Dalla Abeikori, Mr. Yol Mayardit, people from Nasir, Mr. Logala Zachariah, Mr. Darious Ukech Kayo, Mr. Lohurre Akileo Lado. I am grateful to Dr. Paivi Laurila, Mr. Tim Leyland and Mr. Maker Majok for their kind assistance.

*"My personal view/opinion is to improve my people who are in the darkness in order to open their eyes to the light..."*

*"The major problem is education which makes people too low in the country; but the rest of the problems will follow..."*

*"The word 'education' is the key to progress"  
(Milkioré Ulum Amis)*

### **Introduction.**

The problem of education in the Southern Sudan has been repeatedly discussed by the participants of several "workshops on education" organized by UNICEF/Operation Life-Line Sudan where foreign and Sudanese lecturers presented their personal views on the subject and explained in details why there exists a traditional reluctance to send girls (and indeed boys) to school.

Having been asked to summon up the various traditional arguments which many Sudanese still bring forward *against* a general and indiscriminated scholar education of young children (and in particular young girls) in the Southern Sudan, I cannot pretend to contribute to the ongoing discussion with new elements let alone to propose new solutions to the problem<sup>2</sup>. By underlining once more the various (and sometimes contradicting) views held by the Southern Sudanese, I nevertheless want not only to accentuate some of the more fundamental obstacles to female education but also to make some more concrete suggestions how to overcome them. I do hope that this paper will contribute to get a more comprehensive knowledge of the various causes to the traditionally skeptical and often negative attitudes taken by the older Sudanese in what regards the school-education of their children and lead to a more sympathetic understanding of the cultural implications of any sudden and total change in local habits and customs. Cultural change, if it is not to be self-destructive, must grow from within and therefore depends entirely on the participation of the culture's members. This is why foreign "experts" need to become familiar with traditional conceptions, needs and practical obstacles in order to know the factual problems when discussing with reluctant Sudanese the various aspects of education and when trying to convince them of the advantages and benefits of their boys' and indeed their girls' schooling for their own culture.

In the following summary, I shall first recall some historic facts which may explain why the Southern Sudan is still without any solid structures of education, then ask who is deciding about children's schooling, remind of traditional education and finally list the reasons which are most commonly forwarded by the Sudanese for not sending or fearing to send their children to school. At the end, I shall have to look for possible ways of improving the present situation with regards the education of children in the Southern Sudan and to ask how realistic it really is to discuss the

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<sup>2</sup> I am confident that the educational coordinator of Operation Life-Line Sudan (OLS) is well aware of the existing problems and already trying to find realistic ways how to implement at least some of the "solutions" I shall propose in my conclusion.

important and yet specific problem of the girls' education in the present context of the Southern Sudan where the lack of educational facilities is general and where the ongoing war with its lack of stability seems to doom any serious development to failure.

## **1. THE PRESENT SITUATION REGARDING EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN.**

### **1.1. Historical background**

Amongst the strongest roots of the conflict between the Northern and the Southern part of the Sudan is the one of (lack of) education: while the people living in the Northern Sudan have always got the support of the different governments in practically all fields of development, the Southern Sudan was considered to be a sphere of its own, treated as such and left - more or less - alone with its traditional problems. The responsibility for the tremendous differences in the field of education between the North and the South must indeed be assumed to a large extent by the British who, instead of opening the South to the modern world decided to strengthen its existing natural isolation, hoping to preserve thereby its cultural identity while at the same time introducing Christianity to the "Pagan tribes of Southern Sudan"<sup>3</sup>. While the North had already a centuries-old tradition of (basically religious) education, the South was left without proper schools except those opened at a few places by Christian missionaries. Though these missionary-schools succeeded in bringing a minimum of literacy to the Southern Sudan (to encourage general school-attendance, chiefs were told to send one of their sons to school), their main-interest was of course the spreading of Christian faith; this added a further element of discord to the already existing natural and ethnical differences and thus, instead of narrowing the gap between the Northern and the Southern parts of the Sudan, widened and deepened it. But Christian education in the South did not only awake the Southerners' consciousness of their backwardness in comparison to the North but also introduced a supplementary element of hatred - the one of religion (while traditionally, religion was considered by the Southerners to be of a non-dogmatic and completely private essence). The element of religion happened to become - actually against the desire of the in what concerns all matters of beliefs very tolerant Southerners - one of the most popular explanations for the present war<sup>4</sup>. A Nuer from Yuai outlines the history of education in the following terms: *"During the Colonial Condominium Rule in the Sudan, the education was arbitrary without any genuine education or any policy to meet the needs and the aspirations of the people of the Southern Sudan. They were engaged in training junior staff in the North so as to administer their exploitive policy, while education in the South was left in the hands of the missionaries. The missionaries, too, though they opened the eyes of some Southerners, did not step in to*

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<sup>3</sup>Such is the title of the first ethnographic anthology of the people living in the Southern Sudan, written by Mr. and Mrs. C.G.Seligman (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London 1932).

<sup>4</sup>While the introduction of the 'Sharia' may well have been one of the more direct causes of the war, the real reasons are not of a religious nature; it is the accumulation of oppression, exploitation, different forms of racism and deprivations of all kinds which periodically has led to civil unrest and civil war.

*our area here. The missionaries whose motives were rivalries over spheres of influence of Christianity doctrines; their educational outputs were catechists and junior staff. Both the British and the missionaries education were very limited, providing children with religious knowledge while depriving them from traditional and cultural activities..."* Considering the consequences of Christian education and its benefits for the present war, a former leading politician well-known from the first civil war, Philip Pidak, once told me full of passion: *"Once we shall have succeeded in gaining our independence from the North, we shall collect all the bibles and send them back to Britain!! Why did they make us Christians if they do not want to help their brothers? Without them, we might have become Muslims, and nobody would have cared"... !* Such outbreak of anger is understandable, but it does not mention the devastating impact another imported and generously distributed article had on the people in the Sudan: indeed, modern firearms are presently not only killing people without any discrimination of sex or age but also destructing whatever has been built up before and during the present war. Definitely, modern times have not been very useful to the people of the Southern Sudan.

Considering the history of the Southern Sudan, we find that only one generation - and amongst them only the very lucky ones - had the opportunity to go to school for a limited period of time (for doing so, most had to overcome tremendous difficulties and move away from home to centres like Malakal or Khartoum), while the younger and older generations did not get this chance and had to remain without school-education. This of course holds also true for the present young generation which was ten years old at the beginning of the war and which is now already over twenty... Statistics may be there to prove the contrary, but it is a fact that education has to start at most places almost from scratch, and that it is already too late for the schooling of one complete generation! The fact that this "lost" generation has been brought up and "educated" by the army and learned mainly the horrors of the war is certainly not a good omen for the future when this generation is supposed to lead the country to peace and prosperity.

Having stressed these discouraging and sad aspects of past, present and even future history, we can nevertheless also discover more optimistic signs: indeed. the general awareness of the importance of school-education has grown tremendously during the present civil war and continues to increase, partly because of the continuous efforts of OLS and partly because of the intellectual (religious) pressure exercised by the Northern government on the cultural identity of Southern Sudanese. Education has become part of the struggle for the future domination of the South<sup>5</sup>.

## **1.2 Regional differences.**

The Southern Sudan is such a vast country that it will always be difficult to distribute services equally to all people. Because large parts are only accessible during the dry months of the year, it is quite understandable that less isolated places get priority when a government plans to develop the country or when foreign aid-agencies look for suitable ("safe") places for their own projects. The differences in

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<sup>5</sup>This is why the fundamentalist government in the North was so interested in capturing (and re-educating!) the so-called "unaccompanied minors". According to Southern sources, the government of the Sudan is also "inviting" children from the areas under their control to Khartoum in order to bring them up in their spirit.

development in the various regions of the Southern Sudan are probably less due to different cultures and modes of subsistence than to ecological conditions; places along the rivers or settlements which are accessible during the whole year are naturally privileged when it comes to the planning of services and development-projects. Because of their geographical and ecological isolation, the agricultural people in the Upper Nile regions, for example, did not receive better community-services than their pastoral neighbours, in spite of the fact that they would otherwise fulfill all conditions for a successful development. Describing the situation prevailing in many parts of the Upper Nile region, a Nuer wanted me to become conscious of the following: *"To be precise and concise,"* he told me, *"I would like, without any hesitation, to make you aware of the fact that, right from the dawn of the country's post-colonial independence, this country did not witness any development activities and came never to know anything about something like "school" up to this moment! This area has been totally neglected in the field of education for decades and decades..."*. And stressing this point even further, he replied that he could simply not answer my questions regarding the state of education in his place: *"...because of the mentioned neglect of our area, it is difficult for me to answer your questions... "Seeing means believing"... I can't answer you out of a vacuum!"!!*

The region in the Southern Sudan which is most developed in the field of education is certainly Western Equatoria; with its sedentary population, its rich vegetation, its stable climatic conditions and its (relatively) good communications, it offers most of the conditions required for a proper planning and a successful implementation of development-projects, including of course those of education. Other places where children could hope to find schools were the agglomerations along the rivers (such as the towns of Bor, Malakal, Wau etc.) or administrative centres (such as Rumbeck, Yirol, Gogrial etc.).

It is not surprising that regions and places which had already schools and which are familiar with aspects of modern education do not share all the fears expressed by "uneducated" people: the problems there concern the absence of proper schools, the quality of teachers, lack of material and bad influence on the school-children rather than education itself. The fact that a majority of the people in Western Equatoria do not oppose the education of their daughters anymore may suggest that this big problem for pastoral societies will be solved by itself if only proper and continuous schooling is provided everywhere and if people can witness the practical utility of education for their society; it is true that tribal customs - mainly in the field of marriage - may continue to remain a major psychological obstacle to the girls' education in schools for quite some time.

Differences in the development of regions (in the field of education like in all other domains such as roads, market-facilities etc.) create political tensions between different people and different areas: those who never got any benefit from the "gifts" or

the technical achievements of modern times feel, naturally enough, neglected while those who had, for example, the opportunity to go to school and thus got a more direct access to modern times feel frustrated because they see no hope to reach any further, to make use of the acquired knowledge let alone to get employment; such discontented persons use to blame the non-educated people for the lack of any progress in their country. While education therefore appears to be not only a vital element for the development of the Sudan but also for the country's internal political

stability, *inequalities in the level of education are bound to lead to conflicts of all kind*<sup>6</sup>.

### **1.3 Present state of education in the Southern Sudan**

*"If it wasn't for this dirty war, education could have been improved amongst the Dinka community", a Southern Sudanese explains, strongly reminding us of the present political (or rather military) context in which education is supposed to take place. A civil war with all its displacement of people, its unrest and general lack of security is certainly not the best moment to promote education.*

Before the outbreak of the war, educational facilities in the Southern Sudan were extremely poor. Naturally, they were not improved during the difficult and unstable times of the ongoing war, in spite of all the recent efforts made by the "Operation Life-Line Sudan" (of which Unicef is the leading agency); continuous destruction and endless migrations simply do not provide the necessary stability which is a condition to successful education. The just mentioned educational inequality was in recent years (as a result of governmental advances into formerly SPLA-held areas) accentuated, though this time according to the lines of combat: educational facilities (of an Islamic essence) are presently provided in the towns occupied by governmental forces (Bor, Torit, Kapoeta etc.) while most places under the control of the SPLA did not have the peace which is required for a regular education of some quality: Western Eatoria and - to some extent - the refugee-camps inside and outside of the Southern Sudan were exceptions to the general rule. *"The question of not sending young girls to school is not relevant for this area", an informant from Yuai states, "and this simply because this area has never witnessed any school since further hitherto...". "Before discussing education, we should know about what we are actually talking", a Lotuko teacher said in a meeting, "present education in the Sudan is very different from what we generally understand by 'education' - it is so poor that one could almost say that it is non-existing!". Another informant from Western Upper Nile stresses the same point: "In what concerns the education of girls in the Southern Sudan", he says, "at this moment and especially outside of the urban areas, it is non-existent. there are hardly any functioning schools for girls... In this region, there are local primary schools which are mainly for male kids and those are severely short of basic educational needs leave alone cloth and food...". Though such remarks may be disappointing for those who are devoting all their time to improve the present situation, they are not really wrong: statistics about "existing schools", the number of pupils and even about the children's attendance may well be indicators for the growing consciousness of the importance of education, they do nevertheless not provide any information about the regularity, the intensity and the quality of the teaching. Even the teaching at the very accessible refugee-camp of Kakuma in Northern Kenya is - because of many teachers' lack of qualification - far from being satisfactory.*

## **3. DECISION-MAKING**

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<sup>6</sup>One of the underlying causes of the present civil war was the differences existing in the field of education in the Province of Eatoria and the regions of Upper Nile- and Bhar-el-Ghazal.

Who is deciding if a child, boy or girl, is to attend the school, and on what grounds are decisions taken? In the Southern Sudan, school-education is not (yet) compulsory as is the case in the developed countries, and religious education is not essential either as it would be the case in places (like the Northern Sudan) where the reading of religious texts is a condition to the participation in normal social and cultural life. There is not much pressure on the parents or on society from any side to speed up the process of providing children (let alone adults) with school-education.

The head of a household is the father, and in consequence it would be him to decide if a child is allowed to attend the school. If the father is educated, the decision would most probably be a positive one, but if the father has never gone to school, he may be reluctant to send his son and even more reluctant to allow his daughter to attend the school. If the school is inside the village or near to it, a positive decision may be more easy to take, but if children have to move away for a while, the father may not only consider the benefits of education but also the negative aspects of such a move, as for example the consequences of a child's absence from home, the dangers which are often involved in the traveling to a foreign place or bad influences on a child's behaviour when abroad. Such fears for the safety and the welfare of small children (and in particular of girls) are very real in places where the traveling to a school involves walking long distances through wilderness and where children are supposed to live amongst people of a different culture. Transport-facilities in most parts of Southern Sudan are, as everybody knows, practically non-existent, even bicycles being owned only by a few privileged people: *"the distance to schools is too big to be covered by children in these times of war and insecurity"*, as one Sudanese explained. Foreigners may remember that the decision to send a child for education at a foreign place is not an easy thing even in places where education is well-accepted (like in Europe), both for financial and sentimental reasons<sup>7</sup>. The decision of a father will in consequence be based on economic considerations, social and private arguments, past experiences with educated children, attitudes by the general public and practical considerations regarding the children's safety. The number of children in the household-community and the different responsibilities expected to be assumed by (some of) them play also a major role.

When saying that the father is the person to make the final decision, one should not imagine that the mother has no say. In a "normal", average Nilotic family, the position of a man's wife is not as weak and powerless as one tends to imagine, and a husband is not as solitary in his decision-making as it may appear to the outside; the women's arguments are always to be considered. A woman is not alone either, for a *mother's brother* is looking after the rights of her children and protects them whenever necessary. The competition which exists between a man's wives may favour the education of boys but not the one of girls, for the girls are considered to belong to the husband and are, moreover, of great practical importance for the mother in her work.

But decisions are not only made by the father or - more indirectly - by the mother, they are also conditioned by social habits; where modern education is accepted by a majority of the people, the parents will show less resistance to a change in their traditional views and possibly consent to the schooling of their children even if they personally do not see it in their own interest. Because *social pressure is likely to be the decisive factor when changes in attitudes have to occur*, it is crucial to

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<sup>7</sup> Kwacakworo's father, for example, could not afford to send more than one of his children to university; for mainly traditional reasons, he choose his son, though his daughter was perhaps better equipped for higher education...

address the whole social body and not just individual parents when discussing educational issues.

*Relatives or friends* are, like everywhere, equally important factors when it comes to decision-making and they can put considerable psychological pressure on the parents in favour of the children.

Boys are clearly favoured when asking for support of their wish to attend a school: they can expect sympathy from their father who may even expect some benefits out of his son's education, and they can also expect support from their mother's brothers (his maternal uncles) who are supporting his personal ambitions (for example in his struggle for an important position inside society) in case a father seems to favour the son or the sons of his other wife or wives. Girls do not enjoy such support as they are expected to be given away in marriage anyway, a situation which will only change when educated and yet socially respectable men are looking especially for educated girls as their future wives.

Often, however, parents do not even need to make a decision as the children have already decided for themselves... Amongst all children in the Southern Sudan, education is extremely popular, a kind of dream in which everyone wants to participate at all costs. The reasons for such a desire is not always clear, but it may have to do with the sense of adventures and traveling (which is strongly developed amongst the Sudanese), with the fact that children often have a - physically and sometimes psychological - very hard time while at home (indeed, children use for this reason to run away from home and to "seek refuge" at the home of their grandparents!) and perhaps with some elementary knowledge of the advantages of education (though some boys seem to go to school for no better (or worse!) reason than "*because the girls nowadays refuse with uneducated boys*"....). For physical and psychological reasons, boys are of course in a better position than girls to go to school against the will of their parents (in fact girls hardly ever dare to run away from home because of school) as the distances to the schools are usually long and because the life at a foreign place without any financial support can be tough and dangerous.

To my knowledge, there were only few attempts made by governmental authorities to enforce education on the people, and whenever there was such pressure, it was very selective and poor in consequences.

The British colonial power had tried to promote education by obliging all chiefs to send at least one of their sons<sup>8</sup> to school: it was hoped that the chiefs' "good example" would encourage the common people to send their children to school as well. Much more recently, the SPLA-Liberation-movement used a similar method by encouraging chiefs of different locations to send some of their children to the refugee-camps in Western Ethiopia, where they could expect to find not only educational facilities but also the necessary peace for learning<sup>9</sup>. Amongst those children were the well-known "unaccompanied minors" who later on had to flee to different places (most of them are still in the UNHCR-camp in Kakuma) and who are now amongst the very few children from Southern Sudan having enjoyed<sup>10</sup> the privilege to receive

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<sup>8</sup> Nobody bothered about the education of girls.

<sup>9</sup> The rumor that the lessons included also military exercises would not contradict the fact that the primary aim of the schooling was modern education .

<sup>10</sup> This "privilege" included, however, a lot of terrible suffering (isolation, lack of contact with home, lack of affection, witnessing all the horrors of war, continuous, endless running for life and safety,



some rudimentary school-education since the beginning of the war in 1983... The most powerful example of governmental interference in matters of education, however, stems from Ethiopia where (under the dictatorship of Mengistu Mariam) each village of some importance got its proper school and where everybody was forced to attend; though some people (especially the teachers sent to the "wilderness") bitterly complained about the harsh methods used<sup>11</sup>, the results of such pressure were - from an educational viewpoint - amazingly effective.

### **3. TRADITIONAL EDUCATION.**

When talking about "lack of education", some people may have to be reminded of the fact that schools primarily do not give "education" but rather provide someone with the theoretical and practical means to increase one's knowledge (reading, writing, counting etc.), supply a person with more information and make him or her aware of his or her particular talents or interests. Education (that is: the traditional education children are receiving or are supposed to receive "at home") means to teach a child how to behave in a given social context, how to respect the rules which govern the relationship between people and how to cope with the particular social and ecological conditions of a place; the most educated foreigner will, when coming for the first time to the Southern Sudan, still need to learn how to behave with people and how to move in that particular social and ecological environment.<sup>12</sup> Though all this is self-evident, it is yet important to keep in mind that intelligence, knowledge and skill exist independently from any school, and that one is not necessarily "ignorant" or even "stupid" - just to give one example - because one does not speak English<sup>13</sup>. If school-education is very important for the development of any society, the traditional education is - at least - of a same significance, especially where children after their schooling are supposed (or forced) to return to their traditional environment and cultural context: *traditional and education in school should be going together and take place at a same time.*

In the Sudan like in all traditional societies (and indeed in those parts of Europe where traditional activities are predominant), education involves the children's participation in all activities of a household: the girls are expected to assist their mother while the boys are helping the father. The children's early activities are not merely a much needed help to their parents, they are more fundamentally a *learning-process* and an *initiation* to their future life as pastoralists, farmers, as mothers and wives. Children should not miss these lessons (which sometimes are very hard to

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great loneliness etc.) which will be of great consequence not only for their own life but also for the people they are likely to "govern" and to guide in the future.

<sup>11</sup> Students who had completed their secondary education were forced to teach in a remote village and not allowed to go for higher studies; those who refused were put in prison, but many of those refusing actually fled to the Sudan side of the border.

<sup>12</sup> In the early days of my field-research amongst the Anyuak, I was of course convinced that I was the only educated person in the village, but it did not take me a long time to discover that I was actually the only person who did *not* know how to behave and was completely ignorant about almost everything... The most important thing I came to learn was indeed the limits of my own knowledge, the usefulness of modesty when it comes to deal with people not only of a foreign culture but also of a different social background.

<sup>13</sup> Most "uneducated" Sudanese speak more foreign languages than any "educated" Englishman could possibly dream of..!!

learn) as they imply a lot of technical knowledge, skill and cultural awareness. *School-education can in no case replace these cultural traditions by anything of a comparable value or importance*, and this is one strong reason why schools should, wherever possible, be located in the villages and not in centres where traditional life has been replaced by administrative, military or mercantile activities. *Only a sincere respect of traditional values can lead to cultural change and development.*

Amongst the many lessons only traditional education can offer to children are amongst many others: understanding of the local ecology, relationship with natural environment (animals, trees, water), technics of survival in times of hunger, thirst or war, knowledge of plants, wild foods, trees, animals and fish (including hunting, fishing and planting), preparation of food and beer, care for cattle, goats and sheep, responsibility for infants and young children, dancing-skills and poetry, oral traditions and music, but also awareness of social relations and behaviour, training in physical resistance and psychological endurance, in courage, human dignity, pride and respect... When comparing such traditional know-how with the knowledge acquired in schools, one may understand the amazed questions of the "uneducated" Sudanese: *"What is that, a school?"*, they ask, *"Is it spending all the time out of the house? What does education bring to our girls? Our mothers and their mothers knew very well how to bring them up, and they brought us up well, all of us! Being a native who knows him- or herself is better than an educated one who does not...!"*

*"Girls do not need to be educated"*, someone from the Pärei people argues, *"because their behaviour is dependent on someone else, someone who watches them in any case all the time"...* Traditional education implies indeed a very strong *social control* on the children in general and the girls in particular, and one cause to the children's eagerness to join school is perhaps their desire to escape such control at least for a while. The parents, on the other side, do of course not like to lose control over their children, naturally always fearing the worst...

#### **4. TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST SCHOOL-EDUCATION.**

*"Girls are regarded by their mothers as animals of burden and by their fathers as means of acquiring wealth".*

*"Girls are a treasure, boys a liability".*

*"People see that the educated girls will not get married like the primitive ones..."*

Some Sudanese who are frustrated by the lack of development in the southern part of the country simplify the question of lack of education by saying that *"this is because of the concepts of uncivilized and uneducated parents"...* This may occasionally well hold true, and yet it is difficult to blame adults for ignoring something they themselves never experienced: *"for the parents"*, someone explained, *"the fruits of education are "bitter most of the time"*, a remark which holds true for the entire society.

The traditional arguments against school-attendance of children can be differentiated and divided into three different types of obstacles: there are those of a practi-

cal sort (work, safety), those of a moral nature (bad influence, utility) and those of a more purely socio-cultural essence (marriage/status of parents); in reality, they are of course interdependent and part of one sole argument which is the continuity and survival of cultural traditions. The various obstacles are of a different weight and height all according to the parents' needs, their understanding, interests and possibilities.

Before entering the discussion of arguments against education in schools, I think it is important to give emphasis to the fact that many of the worries expressed by the parents are genuine and not just selfish excuses due to ignorance and inspired by greed, and that there exist a good number of *real* obstacles to general education. If one wants to make school-education popular, one therefore has to *overcome* the obstacles, *remove* the hindrances, make the school *accessible* to all children by *integrating* education into traditional life. But before drawing such conclusions, let us consider the arguments usually forwarded by those opposing or criticizing the education of young Sudanese girls and boys in school.

#### 4.1 Cultural arguments

A culture's main interest is to preserve itself from disintegrating and to defend itself against all those foreign influences which it cannot absorb without getting damaged and without losing control over those fundamental values which hold a society together. Does modern education undermine these social values and eventually destroy a culture? Culture being a growing process in which changes are a normal and constant part, one would deny it, and yet it is also normal that people fear that any change in the present life could cause the collapse of their whole cultural set-up and imply a loss of their traditions, such fear actually being one of a culture's vital automatism of self-defense. If it is true that a culture is always ready for change and in fact prepared for it, there must be an inner necessity to change, to adapt and to modify, *a good reason* for changing, for modifying its structures and for adapting to new circumstances; in any case, cultural change is occurring slowly and needs a lot of time. Where time is pressing or running out and where the reasons for change are not obvious to the mind of the people concerned, changes of attitudes are of course even more difficult to achieve: if needs are not visible it is difficult to reply to these "needs". Because governments which are really interested in the promotion of education ("*which is the key to progress*", as a Sudanese rightly stated) do not have the time to wait until changes occur naturally, they use to disregard cultural consequences and decide to simply impose education on everybody<sup>14</sup>.

There are a number of "very good" reasons why parents hesitate to send their children to school<sup>15</sup>, most of them concerning the girls.

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<sup>14</sup> Critics of such a reckless and radical approach to the problem of (lack of) education may be reminded of other, much more destructive forces working against the survival of culture, of the impacts of war or of the consequences of other projects of development (as for example the Jonglei-channel, game-reserves, exploitation of oil-resources etc.). While governments hesitate to enforce education, they have no scruple to impose other changes... Is it because education is costly and difficult to achieve, while business is profitable?

<sup>15</sup> When talking here about "school" we always presume that the school is not in the immediate vicinity or inside the village.

The argument most commonly forwarded when it comes to discuss the (negative) consequences of education for the culture centers on girls and their *marriage*: almost all fears concerning the girls' education focus on marriage as the most significant of all social institutions, if they are of a purely moral, of a more specifically economic or of a generally social nature. The reason why the argument of marriage affects only the education of girls lies in the tradition of giving away daughters to the family of their husbands *in exchange* of certain symbols of society (the symbols can also have an economic value such as cattle, tools, money, or be purely symbolic such as beads, spears etc.). Traditionally, girls thus have got an extremely high and sensitive value not barely as human persons but more specifically as *the means by which social relationship is created and through which social and economic structures are maintained*. Indeed, the traditional marriage-system is the foundation of the whole cultural set-up which would disintegrate and eventually collapse if radical changes in this domain should occur in an abrupt manner. If one considers this very basic socio-cultural significance of marriage-ties, one is bound to get a more sympathetic understanding for the people's great anxieties when they come to believe that their daughters are taken away by foreign institutions: after all, it is the survival of a culture which appears to be at stake. Only once people can see and experience that education is not necessarily (and in any case not directly) destroying their traditional social patterns, the almost instinctive reluctance to send their girls to schools may disappear.

"*Girls are a treasure, boys are a liability*", is the usual summary of the Nilotic understanding of the different social significance of boys and girls for the parents concerned. Not surprisingly, the boys' interpretation of such attitudes is less objective: "*a father cares much for his daughters*", they complain, "*but he does not bother about his sons*".... Both arguments originate in the fact that "*girls are a source of wealth*", while boys, well on the contrary, are costly (because their marriage means a temporary loss of livestock) and can cause much trouble, this especially to a family which is not wealthy. Girls would thus stand for income and gain, boys for expenditure and loss... Considering this crucial social and economic importance of the girls, it is only natural that parents watch their daughters like a set of valuable jewelry which one has to protect not only against loss or theft but also from getting spoiled by bad influences from outside: in order to keep their value and remain attractive, they must preserve their inner quality of beauty and elegance. Indeed, girls are precious stones which makes the wealth, the security, the pride and the happiness of a Sudanese family.

As long as school-education is not yet recognized as an additional social value, the risk of getting one's daughter spoiled or even lost because of education is too high to be taken by the concerned parents alone, for the consequences of such a loss are, as we shall elaborate, manifold, seriously threatening not only the future marriage of the girl but also the marriage of her brothers and thus of the family's kinship group as a whole, with possible implications on the social level. For such reasons it is crucial to let education play a significant role within society, thereby making it acceptable to the whole community; *vocational training* at school and *community-directed* development projects would help to integrate education into normal cultural life.

## **4.2 Social consequences of school-education**

Though marriage remains the main-argument when Sudanese explain their negative or reluctant attitude towards their daughters' education in school, the children's prolonged absence or departure from home may ensue a number of other, more socially natured consequences: *school brings social disadvantages for the parents in general and the child's father in particular, and the children's absence affects the social life of the village:*

### *4.2.1 Consequences for the homestead*

Most striking are the *practical* problems resulting out of the children's absence<sup>16</sup>. They are so important that one tends to overlook the *sentimental* and *cultural* aspects of a prolonged separation: "*a home without children is completely dead*", as one informant stressed, it is without life and thus has lost its soul: it is a very *sad sight* indeed! Though the tender care all Sudanese parents provide to their small children seems to disappear with growing age, their affection persists but simply takes different, more active forms, concentrates rather on the children's education and in-struction than on physical expressions of love. Because the whole life-philosophy of the Nilotes is based on children, the links between the parents and their offspring must remain strong and always be kept alive: children are the means by which people reach eternity!

Particularly strong are the sentimental links between a mother and her sons and between a father and his daughters, but a father often has also a very strong personal relationship with his sons - even though he would not show it and hardly ever admit it.

### *4.2.2 Consequences for a girl's marriage*

The *behaviour* of educated girls who are returning home is bound to be different from the one of the girls who never left the place: they are more looked at and "mistakes" are discovered everywhere: they seem (often are!) less obedient to their parents, less submissive, proud and self-conceited, and they are much less willing to accept a man selected by their father (on the basis of social or economical considerations) but who is not of *her* liking. They are arguing, headstrong and selfish and quite able to resist pressures from their parents... In a society where the (uneducated) men are used to make decisions, educated women are not immediately accepted, and one single "bad" example can spoil the whole reputation of education and make people overlook the beneficial effects the school had on all the other children. Like everywhere, people like to generalize and usually do this on the ground of bad rather than of good experiences.

If a girl is considered to have become "loose" and has an "immoral behaviour", it might be difficult for her to find somebody accepting her as wife. In consequence, she may be obliged to return to the town in order to find her husband there.

### *4.2.3 Consequences affecting the father's kin.*

If a girl who has been abroad for some time becomes pregnant there (as people almost seem to expect), the whole kinship-group will suffer a loss (in purely

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<sup>16</sup> About such consequences, see here on p.15

economic terms) as the husband may not be able to pay the dowries, only pay a part of it<sup>17</sup> or even use a different type of "currency" (beads instead of cattle, for example). Because in each marriage the whole kinship-group is - directly or indirectly - implied and thus affected (as donors or beneficiaries), the loss of any member of the group is of general concern: the girl's father will be blamed for the consequences of his "bad" decision and may find it more difficult to get his kin's cooperation in other matters and in particular in matters concerning his own sons' marriage.

#### 4.2.4 *Consequences affecting the father's social status.*

For someone normally participating in the political and social life of his village, such consequences can have a great impact on his pride and self-respect. Both the girls' and the boys' prolonged absence from home can lead to such an uneasy situation for a father and indeed his family:

- a *girl* who is returning home from abroad can completely *spoil a family's reputation*, as a "bad" girl *of course* must come from a "bad" family, i.e. a family which was not able to provide its children with a good (traditional) education. Such a situation is naturally *a shame* for the whole family but more particularly for its head, the father... This would of course only happen if the girl really got an "immoral behaviour" and thus "disturbs" the social harmony and peace of the place.

- a *son* who has not returned home from school (but may be working in a town, continue his studies elsewhere etc.) is equally putting his father in a bad social position. As the son is not an active member of any age-group (and thus of society), how could the father possibly have a say when people have to decide if they want to go to war, or indeed in any other matter directly affecting society as a whole? And why should he get any benefit of successful activities (fighting, work) if he was not one of the contributors? Such a father will prefer to keep silent during decisive discussions. The situation is even worse if a father has sent *all* his sons for education!

#### 4.2.5 *Consequences affecting a boy's social status*

There are certain signs by which society is able to recognize one of its members - and to respect him as such. All Nilotic people used (until recently) to remove some of their lower teeth, as to differentiate themselves from other people; many tribes cut particular markings (lines, arrows, beads) on their members' forehead, thus distinguishing themselves from other groups of a same origin<sup>18</sup>. Somebody who is not marked would be considered as a "child" who should not dare to discuss with adults, share their food or even flirt with girls. Tribal markings were also of significance for the integration of prisoners into the tribe, functioning as a kind of "identity-card" which allows entrance to society and prevents any possible discrimination.

A young man coming back from school may have "missed" his initiation into the group and therefore have no place in any age-group and thus in society. No girl respecting traditions could dare to marry him, and he would not even be allowed to

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<sup>17</sup> The differences in the number of cattle given as marriage-price are enormous not only between tribes but even within regions; moreover, the prices go "up or down" all according to the people's wealth in cattle. Dowries in which livestock is not involved use to be somehow more stable, though regional differences exist even here.

<sup>18</sup> The Anyiak differentiate themselves by *not* putting any marks on their forehead... (scarrifications excepted).

share the food of his age-mates; in consequence, he would be forced to look for a wife elsewhere...

#### 4.2.6 *Consequences on social life.*

In the same way a homestead is suffering of the absence of children, a village is missing a vital part of its social existence. Without children, a village is empty and seemingly lifeless: it is not worthwhile living there! Of fundamental importance for traditional education is the *dancing* where youngsters do not only display their skills and beauty but also *learn* the particular roles and patterns of behaviour which society expects them to know "by heart". The pleasure children have in playing and dancing is also the pleasure of the adults, for the noise made by children witnesses of the vitality and thus of the future of the people. In the arduous life of the people, the children represent one of the few social *entertainment* and bring much happiness to the people. Even if children are sometimes disturbing the seriousness of adults (for example when they are discussing important things), their participation as silent witnesses (kept at a respectful distance) reminds the adults of their own importance: children are the sense of society, and their presence is consequently of a great psychological significance.

#### 4.3 *Practical obstacles.*

Children play a very substantial role in the life of a family: from early childhood onwards, not only as vital members of the homestead but also a significant contributors to the economy of the household: indeed, children of both sex participate - directly or indirectly - in practically all the activities exercised by either the father or the mother. Without children, the economic structures of a family would have to undergo very drastic changes and could eventually collapse. The consequences of children's absence because of school are tremendous and need the sympathetic consideration of those who want to bring about changes in the educational system. Traditional attitudes can be discussed and finally changed, solitude or fears may be overcome and moral considerations put aside, but the more practical implications of the children's absence demand practical, not theoretical solutions.

It may be useful to get a rough idea of the children's traditional workload in order to reach an even better comprehension of parents' reluctance when it comes to allowing boys or girls to leave the village for attending school elsewhere - and to understand the children's eagerness to enjoy a more easy lifestyle at school...

The *young boys* help the father in many ways and often work independently at a very early age, first for example by rearing goats, then by rearing cattle, by helping in clearing the fields or by chasing the durra-birds from the crops<sup>19</sup>, by hunting or fishing etc. All the boys' activities are meant to introduce them to their future existence as fearless, careful and responsible adults, to provide them with the technical knowledge and practical skill which are necessary to survive in a difficult and often dangerous environment and to live there with pride and without fear. The cattle-camps are a kind of "education-center" where the boys are not only instructed

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<sup>19</sup> The absence of children at the time before harvest amounts to a catastrophe for the household as the fields have to remain unprotected and are thus likely to be eaten by the birds. (Note that the problem of *crop-protection* is generally overlooked when discussing food-security).

how to care for cattle but are also taught how to cope with the environment, learning simultaneously all the important lessons required for their cultural self-understanding.

Both *girls and boys* make a significant contribution to the household-security when - during the months of hunger - assisting their mothers in the *gathering of wild foods*; this activity makes children aware of the generous resources hidden in nature and helps them to survive in future times of hardship and starvation.

The *young girls* help the mother in pounding, preparing the food, in cooking, fetching water and firewood, in cleaning the homestead, in milking goats etc., but absolutely crucial is the girls' (and, in absence of girls, the young boys') role as "baby-sitter" as this allows the mother to do her difficult work more freely and without exposing her infant to the hot sun when walking to the river etc.

*The care-taking of small children by their sisters or brothers* is not only profitable to the health of infants but has also a significant *social* function as it brings children at a very young age in direct contact with the whole cultural, social and ecological environment of the place, thereby making the solid foundation of the children's future education. One educated Bari-informant<sup>20</sup> explained the practical constraints to the education of girls as follows: "*What normally tends to reduce the number of girls in school as they grow up is the social fabric within the family. If a family is large such that the workload of the mother within the house is great, the girl becomes the victim, especially if she is already able to assist the mother.*"

Considering all these factors, it is understandable that parents do not want to let (all) their children go to a school which is far away and from where children cannot come back to assume at least parts of their different duties: prolonged absence of children from home leaves the parents with a workload which is too heavy for them alone. This holds true especially for the mother, at least if she has to look after small children.

A *compromise* to this very real practical problem is necessary, for any promotion of girls' education should not imply the bringing of even more burden on the mother nor should it result in a loss of quality in child-care.<sup>21</sup>

As long as educational facilities can only be found in a remote place, the education of *all* children will prove to be impossible. Families which are sympathetic to the children's school-education use to make a compromise of their own by sending only some of their children to school. Naturally enough, the selection of children is done on the basis of their usefulness and intelligence, but not in the way one could expect: if only one or a few children are allowed to attend the school, parents would - at least in the past - send the "most *useless*" amongst them, that means those boys (or girls) who are not reliable, who are weak or "always sick", who are disobedient, lazy or even stupid...!! Modern Sudanese sometimes argue that this type of negative selection is not happening, saying that "*after all, there is something good in everybody*" (that is a way of confirming the negative method of selection!), or, as someone from Paluer put it, "*when children start to go to school, they are in any case still too young to be sure of their character, temper and behaviour*". It is true that in places in which school-education has become acceptable, parents are likely to decide to send the most brilliant of their sons to school, hoping that he may become "somebody important" in the future.

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<sup>20</sup> Dr.med. Pius Subek

<sup>21</sup> As the mandate of Unicef is to promote education *and* to help mothers and her young children, there is need for a carefully balanced intervention in traditional set-ups.



We shall see that school-education is expected to have a bad *moral* impact on children (and especially on girls). This "accusation" may be due to a few bad examples (which people use to magnify) but should not be generalized. What is less doubtful is the children's change in attitude towards their parents' work: "*once girls are educa-ted*", somebody from Waat explains, "*they appear to have become foreigners and are not part of their parents' lives anymore*". This fact of alienation may hold true for girls who have reached a higher degree of education only, but it is undeniable that even educated boys take different attitudes towards their fathers' work and their way of living and thinking, not hesitating to call them, for example, "uncivilized" or even "primitive" - while they themselves are caring more for the beauty of their trousers than for the problems of their naked father (whom they yet expect to pay for their marriage!). The integration of school into traditional life should help children to remain realistic about their future existence, allow them to return home and to enjoy there their native environment.

A practical hinder to education of a different kind are the long distances between a village and the school: "*the distance to schools is too big to be covered by children in these times of war and insecurity*", one of our informants rightly stated; but he could have added that war with its constant displacement of entire populations brings many other *very* practical problems to the people who first have to struggle for their children's survival before struggling for their education...

*Lack of the girls' protection* while in boarding-schools remains another practical problem to be solved in the future, as this seems to be the cause to the various moral consequences of education abroad. This problem will get special consideration.

#### **4.4 Economic obstacles.**

This subject can be divided into the chapters of "expenses", "losses" and "gains".

The school-related *expenses* concern *school-fees, clothes and living costs*. Even if the completely penniless societies in the Sudan are rapidly disappearing<sup>22</sup>, there are still many people who are leading a completely self-sufficient existence and who have real problems in getting the money which is required for their children's schooling (and who, if they get that money, may hesitate to use it for that purpose). The need of school-fees can force children to find their own means of subsistence by working for other people, the boys by washing clothes for soldiers, the girls by selling home-made beer at drinking-places where they are likely to meet with some otherwise "interested" men.... This is how a Bari describes the situation: "*Sometimes*", he says, "*the economic situation also contributes: for example, an adolescent girl in secondary school has more needs than a boy. Now if the family can't meet these needs, the girl will be forced to make and to sell beer what eventually draws her away from school, ending up in early marriage. The sale of this beer draws her into contact with drunk people whose intentions are more often than not destructive on the poor girls.....*".

Besides of the fact that such work does not give the pupils time to concentrate on their studies, it can have a negative influence on the children's behaviour and

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<sup>22</sup> This tendency got reversed during the past years of civil war where markets have almost completely disappeared and where *bartering* has become once again the usual mode of economic relationship between people. Presently, even OLS is having a "system" of trade by bartering ..!

indeed affect their future life: drunkards and soldiers are usually not the morally most qualified teachers for children who often are not aware of the possible dangers of a life *"in the twilights of the town"*. Schools where food (on a regular basis!) and clothes were given freely to the pupils would contribute not only to make schools more accessible to everyone and make them more secure and thus morally more acceptable to the parents, but also relieve the children from financial problems and help them to be more performant in their studies.

Lack of financial means to pay for the girls' education is one of the most popular explanations for the girls' early departure from school: *"Girls"*, a Dinka from Aweil explains, *leave the schools after a few years, when the parents at home run out of financial means and have no power to cope with their daughter's school-needs. For this reason, she has to leave the school and she goes out to look for her own luck in life"...*

The *losses* consist, in purely economic terms, in the deprivation of labour-force and, in more general terms, in a significant reduction in the quality of life of the parents and of their young children.

Because *"girls are a source of wealth"*, nobody would like the girls get out of the parents' direct control; while abroad, the risk of losing this value is considerable, - at least in the mind of the parents (what is decisive). It is generally believed that educated girls would later not come back but move to the towns, work and marry there or even end up in prostitution (and thus not get married at all); if girls do return but have adopted a behaviour which people at home qualify as "bad and immoral", their value on the marriage-market is likely to decrease or even to get nullified. In addition, there is the fear that educated girls are looking for educated men only, and this type of men are often too poor to pay a reasonable marriage-price; if they are members of a foreign tribe (as this may happen), their husbands may not even be able to pay in cattle but would bring a different type of dowries of perhaps merely a symbolic value. Such economic considerations may convince parents that it is wiser to keep their girls at home until they are married to a wealthy and hopefully good man.

Considering the expenses and losses, the *gains* of education are still of a purely theoretical nature. People may have understood that some educated men (but not women) have reached a more comfortable future and even acquired some wealth thanks to their studies, but the family's let alone the society's profit out of those men's education usually can't be measured in kinds: the benefits of education are not (yet) shared with society.

On the whole, education of girls presently remains, from the parents viewpoint, a very *risky investment without any guarantees of profit*. However, our informants have observed *a change in the people's attitude*, many girls nowadays looking more and more for educated men while the educated men clearly prefer educated women... In many places, the educated women are making higher "prices" than non-educated ones, and *this fact may indeed promote the girls' education more than anything else!* Like most people in the world, the Southern Sudanese consider life mainly under economic criterion.

#### **4.5 Moral arguments**

These arguments seem to be quite superficial and may sometimes sound slightly ridiculous, and yet they appear to be the result of very concrete experiences with "educated" children returning or even not returning from school and thus seem to express the sincere fears and anxieties of the people at home. The moral focus is naturally put on girls whose good and modest behaviour is a condition to their prosperous marriage.

It is significant that most of our Sudanese informants insisted on this particular point very much. This is perhaps simply because a person who is not well-behaved can't be considered to be a real human person<sup>23</sup> anymore, cannot have a proper place in society and, in consequence, is not suitable for marriage.

When discussing this particularly sensitive aspect of school-education at a foreign place, not all Sudanese agree on the dangers girls would encounter there, and the arguments differ as well. Some people say that "*girls stay together and do not mix with boys*", while others seem to be less confident in what concerns the character of their girls: "*the specific character of the girls*", an apparently well-informed Pãri explains, "*the problem of the girls is to love one another all the time..!*", modifying his argument in another statement where he seems to admit that (only) "*b a d girls may lose their g o o d behaviour*" when left without any protection under the careless supervision of young and often unqualified teachers while being constantly exposed to the many temptations of the towns where they are likely to fall into the traps of their "*wrong classmates*", as another informant from the same tribe put it in his argument: "*Here, it was not planned to send our girls to school because the present school was especially opened for boys. It is a shame that our girls should be combined with the boys. It would have been better if female teachers had been employed. Our girls learned bad behaviour from their wrong classmates who were never taught a good behaviour by their parents. Such girls will smoke any type of smoking, and do other things... Gradually, such girls are giving rough answers to their parents, and gradually their mind is contrasting with the mind of their parents and then it becomes difficult to control them... We felt great horror when our girl, after having been blamed for her bad behaviour, was simply intending to leave the home... Our mothers do such heavy work (harvesting, grinding, collecting grains, firewood, water etc.) which, without assistance from their daughters, can't be done. Educated girls pretend to be married by educated men only, and they pretend to be more civilized than anybody else, including their parents... Sometimes, such girls are marrying from a tribe where the dowries are paid in money, and this will be a great loss to the parents*"... A Nuer from Waat confirms this, saying that girls learn at school an "*improper moral behaviour*" while a Dinka from Yom-Cwiir explains that "*If a girl is taken away for education, they will end up in prostitution and the family at home will lose its dignity and respect in the society, and they will lose the cattle and other valuable things*"... The last part of the man's argument of course implies the already discussed loss of a girl's social and economic value, but the more specifically moral aspect of the question is also included: no family wants their children to forget about the "good" education they received while at home, and, like everywhere, parents actually do not only take social but also a lot of personal interest and pride in

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<sup>23</sup> This notion of "the human person" is extremely important as it precisely distinguishes between "really human" beings (with the self-consciousness of being "pure" and free from any badness) and people who are "non-persons" (for example dirty people, sorcerers etc.) who are full of malicious intentions. The names of all Nilotic tribes refers, directly or indirectly, to this quality of being "human", "pure", "(real ) people" etc.

their children. This is why some informants don't want allow their daughters to leave their home because of education, saying that *"parents should be in full control of their daughters all the time - until they are married!"*.

The fact that *prostitution* seems to be in the mind of most parents suggests that it may not just be a matter of pure imagination<sup>24</sup>. Even the very sober statement of our informant on the Bari<sup>25</sup> seems to confirm that the "danger of being misled" is not just a rumour: *"In the present situation of war where the number of schools are few and hence could be very far from home", he says, "most parents would not like to send their young girls there where the chances of being misled is great. Girls are always prepared to be good future house-wives, so no family would like their daughter to get spoiled."* Another highly educated personality from the Ngok-Dinka<sup>26</sup> echoes this statement and goes into details: *"Girls defect from school in many cases because of lack of any social protection by the male population which in many cases lures these poor girls into pregnancy and then leaves them out in the cold! This happens because school gives these girls a chance to have social contacts for which they are ill-equipped at their still young age, thus they get caught up in situations which are extremely frustrating for them and their parents".* And the doctor concludes that *"unless there is some assurance for the girls' protection both for the parents and the children themselves, schools will remain problematic places",* suggesting *"What I propose to change in the above mentioned situation is to impose strict punitive measures to protect these innocent children and to allay fears of the parents: ..Enactment and enforcement of punitive laws protecting girls from inhumane male assault<sup>27</sup>.."*

If one looks for one common point in the different arguments it is the following: school may be recognized by the people as a place where one can learn certain things (like writing and reading) but certainly not as a place where one can learn good behaviour<sup>28</sup>, well on the contrary, the fear that school-girls may get "spoiled" and "proud", acquire a "loose and immoral" behaviour or even get pregnant is in the mind of everybody.

#### **4.6 Political arguments**

Not only uneducated Sudanese seem to think that education produces only "trouble-makers" and thus eventually leads to political unrest. The history of the past and the more recent present could well come in support of such a view, many tribal wars (and other forms of quarrels) having been fomented by so-called "intellectuals". If education was for everybody and not just for a few, such bad influences could be better controlled as all people would understand the nature of some people's political ambitions.

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<sup>24</sup> The fact that prostitution is virtually unknown in traditional Nilotic societies makes it to appear even more horrible (the same would hold true for homosexuality which is also linked to modern and particularly Arab cultures).

<sup>25</sup> Dr. med. Pius Subek, medical coordinator of the SSRA.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Monywaar Arop Kuol

<sup>27</sup> This very strong term probably applies to soldiers... Somehow unfortunately, boarding-schools, intermediary schools and other higher institutes are situated in towns or larger villages where also the army keeps its garrisons. Children attending the school in Pochalla in the 1970s, *for example*, were all more or less the servants and "friends" of the soldiers stationed there.

<sup>28</sup> Even though school was previously considered - as mentioned before - as a "punitive institution" where "bad boys" could be disciplined.

It is worthwhile noticing that none of our Sudanese informants took up the argument that education does not only lead to literacy and economic progress but also to more political awareness and thus eventually to more political power, that education can function as a weapon used in self-defense when a culture is threatened from outside. Yet it is precisely for such reasons that the education of the so-called "unaccompanied minors" has become such a politically sensitive matter, everybody being well aware of the fact that these children will one day have to play a decisive role in the political life of the country.

*Religious education* must of course also be considered as an indirect means to achieve certain political goals, under normal circumstances but even more so in the context of the present civil war which some people - rightly or wrongly - presume to be of a religious essence. The fact that the Islamic government uses education for spreading religious beliefs in the South has made many Southerners aware of the potentially serious political consequences of the lack of education for their country; the aggressive policy of the present rulers in the Northern Sudan has not only helped Christian beliefs to become more popular and widespread than ever before<sup>29</sup>, it has also contributed to increase the people's more general interest in education as the modern means to achieve certain goals, making them a little bit less reluctant to accept necessary changes in their traditional habits.

## **5. EXPLANATIONS FOR THE GIRLS' EARLY DEPARTURE FROM SCHOOL.**

*"...for such reason, she has to leave the school and she goes out to look for her own luck in life..."*

It has been observed that at places where girls do attend the school, they nevertheless leave it before having reached higher classes. In the previous outline of traditional obstacles for and usual arguments against school-education, certain explanations for the girls' early departure from school were already suggested. The most common explanation focuses on *sexuality and marriage*:

*"The love of girls to boys spoils their education"*, one Sudanese explains, because *"when girls have intercourse with boys they become pregnant and will immediately discontinue their education. Love is their major problem... (So for this reason the girls need to control themselves from such dangerous aspects...)"*.

If *pregnancy* is of course a natural reason for leaving the school, the simple *fear of pregnancy* may also result in a girl's withdrawal from school by her parents. This usually happens at a time when a girl has reached *sexual maturity* and is expected to become attractive for men. Parents want to protect their daughter from "the dangers of love" and call them home, using various pretexts for convincing the girl.

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<sup>29</sup> This as the result of the confusion between religion and politics: while the North identifies itself by the Islam, the South - in opposition - considers itself to be Christian.

*When girls fall in love*, they tend to *lose interest in school* and *leave it by their own will*. She will follow her love wherever it leads her...Nobody will put pressure on her to continue...

Sometimes, *practical circumstances* force the parents to call their daughter back from school. This may occur after a death-case, because the mother falls sick, because the mother cannot cope with her workload anymore, etc.

It can also happen that *a girl falls sick* and that there is nobody to look after her or to pay for her treatment. In such a case the girl may return home by herself or be called back by her worried parents. She is not likely to return.

Finally (and frequently), *financial problems* may force a girl to give up the school and to return home: *"What contributes to the reduction of girls in higher classes in the schools are social and economic problems, the latter being the biggest culprit."*, Dr. Pius Subek stresses, suggesting the following measures to be taken: *"To reverse or to improve that, to me it might need some social education on mothers not to interfere with the education of their children - and in particular of the girls - whatever is the workload in the house, while for the financial economic aspects the best way to tackle it at this moment may be to have boarding-schools where at least some of the problems of girls are addressed. In school also they could be taught some handicrafts or needle-work which could help them purchase those things they may not get at home or at school"...*

Some informant gave some other interesting explanations, saying, for example, that *"some girls leave the school when the lessons become too difficult for them"...*, because of *"dullness in the school"* or because *"some girls are shy to be amongst the boys"*. Nobody would dare to pretend that girls are less intelligent than boys, but the interest of girls to go to school is, generally speaking, less pronounced than the one of boys - even this of course a consequence of traditional education and the present very limited prospects for a girls' future existence outside of marriage.

## **6. SUMMARY OF TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS AND OBSTACLES:**

*"For the parents, the fruits of education are bitter most of the time..."*

Parents are reluctant to send their boys and even more their girls to school because:

- **it is a loss of human substance** in the homestead and in the village, children keeping the spirits of a village alive. A home and a village without the presence of youngsters is dead...
- **it is a loss of cultural values, knowledge and skill: it is a loss of traditional education:** Children who do not participate in traditional life will not learn how to cope with the particular conditions of the place and rather learn things which are not practical in the social, economic and ecological context at home.

- **it is a loss of man-power**, both girls and boys being important economic factors in any household, boys helping the father, girls assisting the mother and taking care of young sisters and brothers.
- **it can affect the household-security** in case children are not assuring the important task of crop-protection during the month preceding harvest.
- **it is a loss of social substance**, the absence of young men reducing the military and economic power of the village.
- **it increases the burden of the parents, especially the of mother.**
- **it reduces the quality of child-care** because infants will be exposed to the hard (and for the child dangerous) working-conditions of the mother.
- **it is a loss in social prestige** by the father who may lose his right to vote when it comes to decision-making (because his son is not contributing to the fighting - force)
- **it is a loss of a family's reputation, its self-respect and pride** in case an educated girl has brought shame to the family by getting pregnant or by showing a bad, socially unacceptable manners. In extreme cases, such girls will not get married at all and thus prevent the family of creating new social ties with in-laws.
  
- **it is a loss in the relationship with one's kin** in case a man's daughter has not been married in the traditional way (what deprived the kinship-group of their share in cattle which they need for their own marriage);
- **it is a loss in wealth**, as the educated girls are expected to marry from outside or to get married by educated but poor men, or to move to towns where they find work.
- **it is a loss of a man's social identity** (in case he has missed initiation) what may force him to marry from outside.
- **it is possibly dangerous** for the children to attend a school at a foreign place, because of possible negative influences on their character and behaviour, because of their safety (when walking to far-distant places, especially in times of insecurity and war), because of the various temptations offered by the life in town and, possibly their health (when falling sick, nobody cares).
- **it is too expensive**, especially if several children want to go to school for a number of years (living-costs, clothes, traveling etc.). The need of money for education reduces the children's chances to finish school.
- **it is generally considered to be "a waste of time"** because the schools are closed "most of the time" as a result of lack of school-material, lack of teachers or for other reasons.  
Last but not least,
- **it is generally considered to be "useless"** because school does not lead anywhere (except perhaps to foreign places of a doubtful reputation, such as the "*twilights of towns*"<sup>30</sup> or the army<sup>31</sup>): employment of educated youngsters inside a village is, generally speaking, non-existent. Such a situation leads to

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<sup>30</sup> *"In some instances, girl fall out of school because of pregnancy and go into the twilights of towns... Such cases are highlighted in poor families..."* (Dr.Monywiir Arop Kuol)

<sup>31</sup> The army has always been the great beneficiary of school-boys who either started their "military carrier" as servants of soldiers while still at school or who after school could not find any better employment, the boys' thirst for a more adventurous life contributing to such a decision.

**frustration, anger and despair**, and it increases the wide-spread feeling that the people of the Southern Sudan are left alone in their struggle for more development and thus for a more human existence.

## **7. ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF SCHOOL-EDUCATION**

Arguments *in favour* of school-education are usually hidden in the people's demand for more "enlightenment", but they are hardly ever specified. Nobody openly disputes the necessity to give children access to modern education, but as people do not *see* any positive result coming out of the schools, the adults' interest in education remains very vague; their demand for more development is not directly linked to the existence or the lack of school-facilities. The considerable *frustration* about the lack of development (especially in the sector of health) leads first to disappointment, then to despair about the hopelessness of the situation and finally to a hostile attitude towards everything which comes from outside, including education which has already proved to be "*useless and bad*", and which has been, to put it mildly, "*a waste of time*".

The recent tendency of paying a higher marriage-"price" for educated girls than for non-educated ones is probably the most optimistic sign of a change in the people's attitude and a clear indication for their growing understanding of education's importance for their children's future.

## **8. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS.**

Out of the information collected from different Sudanese sources<sup>32</sup>, we can conclude that the needs for education are acknowledged by a majority of people. There is practically no opposition of sending boys to school and there is very little *principal* opposition to provide girls with education.

What still hampers school-education are practical, social, moral and economic factors; some of them are due to cultural traditions while others are simply due to lack of facilities or to the remoteness of educational institutions.

Two main obstacles to education could be distinguished, one concerning girls and boys, the other one rather concerning more particularly the girls<sup>33</sup>:

The first one was the *lack of schools*, the *lack of qualified teachers* and the *lack of the most elementary school-materials*.

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<sup>32</sup> Significantly enough, these sources were almost all male... A good number of informants are working as "coordinators for education" (within the SRRA or the RASS) and are as such in close contact with the various problems of education and in particular the one of (non- functioning) schools. The only women (3) from Akon apparently decided that the subject was so controversial that there was need to make a proper survey of existing opinions and arguments....

<sup>33</sup> It is quite interesting to note that people focus on the moral (or rather the "immoral") behaviour of girls and their uncontrolled desire to make love to boys while nobody seems to bother much about the character of the male children which does not seem to be subject to change...



The second one was the problem of *boarding-schools* or of *schools situated outside of the village* where children have to live without the protection and guidance of the parents, where they lose contact with traditional education and where especially the girls are in risk of being misled, of adopting bad manners and of not getting married in the traditional way; parents and their kin were found to be the principal victims of the children's education, on a social as well as on the economic level, the increased workload of the mother showing serious consequences for their own and for their small children's health and general welfare.

Though traditional objections to school-education are most of the time reflecting *genuine* obstacles, they appear to be less arguments *against* education in schools than *explanations why school-education is not easily acceptable under present economic, social and ecological circumstances*, and this even less so in the present times of war and general insecurity. This is why the negative and pessimistic conclusion drawn by one of our Sudanese informants may not be fully true when he says that "*unless social, economic and traditional values are abolished (amongst the Dinka), education of young girls will be forged to prove impossible*". Personally, I don't see the logic nor the practical necessity of such a statement, even though I would not underestimate the negative influence cultural habits and beliefs can exercise on school-education. To me it seems that it is not the culture which has to disappear before education can take off but that *education should move to the culture, adapt to its particular conditions and help it to make the necessary changes in traditional customs possible*. Presently, culture is clearly under pressure from the outside (modern) world and is therefore looking - almost desperately - for ways to adapt and to change, *while keeping its identity*. Propagation of education should acknowledge this desire to change and help the culture to survive without losing its own values. The fact that the education of girls has, at least in some parts of the Southern Sudan, already become a socio-economic value in itself supports the view that change *can* occur without abruptly destroying traditions and beliefs: culture is able to absorb, to integrate and to change, provided it is given the necessary time and receiving the much needed support.

The following measures should be taken to make education more generally accepted and indeed more suitable for the cultural environment:

### **I. Removal of practical obstacles.**

Education in the Sudan is hampered by natural conditions: a father but even more a mother's work is very strenuous not only because there is a lot to do but also because it is very time-consuming. As it has been explained before, the children's assistance is really needed to take some of the work-load off the parents and to give them the time to perform other duties. It is difficult and not always beneficial to the family to free children from all their "work" (note that this work is, most of the time, not "heavy" in a purely physical sense<sup>34</sup>) because *the early sharing of responsibilities being one of the most useful lessons in preparation of a future life*, lessons which cannot easily be learned in school...! The obvious conclusion is that *modern education is to complete, not to replace traditional education*.

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<sup>34</sup> However, the fact that children are more or less permanently "working" in one way or another can sometimes cause great fatigue, especially amongst physically weak children. School could be a welcome break in the daily routine and thus have beneficial effects on the children's health.

The information on practical obstacles leads to some negative conclusions on the effects of school-education on the people and society in general and on mothers and small children in particular; the absence of children from home does not only deprive them of traditional education and its benefits for their future existence, it puts also much *additional burden* on the parents' already heavy workload. Consequences for the mother's health, child-care and the both practical and spiritual welfare of the home result from such a situation. *Infants are the most vulnerable victims* of the girls' schooling, the quality of their early life being greatly affected on a physical and on a social level.

There seems to be only one way to avoid these negative consequences, which is to *bring educational facilities to the village*. This would make the absence of children from home more acceptable (because it would only be temporary) and wouldn't affect the parents as seriously as it does when school-children have to get education somewhere far from the village. The most effective way of promoting education, the one of boys as well as the one of girls, is probably *to reduce the workload of the parents* and to make the presence of children less significant<sup>35</sup>; the most urgent and most beneficial task would be the opening of (possibly clean!) water-sources near to the village.

Modern education has to *respect the rhythm of traditional life*: schools should therefore be opened only during the season in which people have less to do (and to walk!), i.e. during the rainy season, and the school-lessons should match with the household's particular time-tables.

If one intends to ease the circumstances which still produce arguments against education, one *must* make sure that the own argument (for education in school) is realistic and really leads to an improvement of the village's and its people's situation. Nobody can propagate a project which is bound to fail because of lack of facilities and which eventually proves useless for the people concerned.

These are in my opinion the points in our conclusion which would merit immediate consideration:

1. Educational facilities should be provided *everywhere* and for *everybody*.
2. Schools should be *inside* or *in the direct vicinity* of the village.
3. Schools should be *regular* but they should comply with the seasonal movements of the people.
4. The teachers should be *qualified* (!) and thus *trained* for teaching, not only with regards to their knowledge and skill but also with regards to their psychological understanding. Teachers should be, if possible, from the own tribe or at least speak the local language.
5. Teachers must be *re-trained* regularly.
6. *Female teachers* would contribute to make the school more acceptable for girls and more human for boys. Examples for the utility of women for the society in

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<sup>35</sup> When talking about the importance of the children's work at home one is actually talking about the workload of the parents! One way of encouraging education is indeed to give help the parents the practical means to do for a while without their children .

- another than the traditional housewife-function will help young girls to obtain their parents' permission to go to school.
7. There should be *no school-fees* and *no "uniforms"* required (unless the latter is the wish of the community<sup>36</sup>).
  8. Teachers should receive a regular *salary*<sup>37</sup>. Teachers should not be absent from school because they have to look for their own feeding.
  9. *Boarding-schools* should be opened for higher classes only (not before the age of 15).
  10. *Boarding-schools* must be accessible and do not need to be situated in big agglomerations: the criterion must be the *accessibility* by all children from a district or a region. Logistical problems of transport need particular consideration.
  11. While abroad, neither girls nor boys should have to "*work for education*"; there should be *no school-fees* and *food should be given freely* (and in sufficient quantity).
  12. Boarding-schools should be under the supervision of a small group of representatives of the different villages from where the children come.
  13. Children going to school at a foreign place are in need of special attention (including free *medical care*) and particular *protection*. Parents must have the assurance that their children are well looked after even when they are not at home.
  14. *Separation of boys from girls* in the boarding-schools can help to remove the fears of the parents at home.

Because of past experiences, two self-evident points have to be added:

15. *Schools should never be closed because of lack of teachers or lack of means.*
16. *School-material* must be available in *sufficient quantity*, with education-material for all levels, sport-items etc.

## **II. Integration of schools into the community.**

Education may well be recognized as "*the key to progress*", as one of our Sudanese informants stated, but the key to education is its integration into society. Modern education and traditional culture must complete each other and become one single movement leading to more development and eventually to a more prosperous and healthy future.

Presently, much opposition to school-education roots in the people's experiences with the practical outcome of education. If schooling can be considered as "*a waste of time*" it is because nobody can discover its practical usefulness, neither for individual persons (lucky exceptions are never seen again!) nor for society. What does the community care if one of their sons has become a medical doctor, a lawyer or

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<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it appears that the British have at least succeeded in connecting education with clothes, as if intelligence needed some cover-up...

<sup>37</sup> Unpaid work affects naturally the teachers' eagerness and eventually the quality of their work. It has also very negative consequence for the public understanding of the school's importance and the status of the teachers: something which is not valued in economic terms clearly is not much worth (and perhaps not worthwhile attending...).

even a minister<sup>38</sup> if such personal success does not bring any benefit to the village? What is the use of schooling children if they return home only for holidays but spend their normal time elsewhere, in towns or in the army, slowly forgetting about their origins?

There are a number of obvious conclusions to be drawn from such critics:

First of all, there is the necessity to *eliminate the negative side-effects of modern education* (haughtiness of "educated" children, their lack of interest in the life of the community etc.) by integrating the school into the normal life of the community .

Secondly, *adults in general and parents in particular should be made interested in education* by learning about the benefits of education for their children and their village. There could be information-sessions in which practical problems could be discussed and the expected benefits of education would get explained.

Arguments for the benefits expected from schooling for the people living in the village could be, amongst others, the following:

- education leads to *a longer as well as to a qualitatively better life*
- education *reduces infant-mortality*
- education allows people to stay in *better health*, through *better hygiene, increased medical awareness* etc.
- education gives people *better and more enjoyable food* of a *greater variety*.
- education leads to an *increase in crop-production* etc.
- education produces *more practical knowledge* in many fields (conservation of food, production of new materials, food etc.)
- education leads to *better health of the cattle-herds* etc.
- education reduces loss in livestock, crops etc. and thus is of a considerable *economic significance*.
- education does not destroy a culture and its language, on the contrary, *it increases the people's consciousness of their own cultural values*.
- education increases the people's understanding of the political realities of their country and helps them to defend their own identity by being active in different governmental or non-governmental bodies.
- education can lead to more political stability, to co-existence with neighbouring tribes and thus to peace and prosperity.

The possible benefits of school-education remain hypothetical as long as they are not perceived by the people concerned. The understanding of this second point and the belief in the usefulness of education will depend on practical experiences: "*Seeing is believing*", as someone rightly stated. In consequences, there will be a *strong need for concrete actions in the field of education-related development* .

Children cannot immediately bring the expected benefits of their schooling to the village, but the school itself has to move to the village and prove its practical usefulness there. Such integrations can only be achieved with the help and the participation of the adults concerned, i.e. the parents of the children.

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<sup>38</sup> Such expectancies make it also difficult for a well-intentioned minister to remain objective when he should govern the country: to be re-elected, he is forced to favour his own people.

Two measures could be taken to melt traditional knowledge with modern education:

One is the *integration of traditional knowledge* into the school-programs, in particular in the fields of history, oral traditions and literature, mythology and "religion", language and music, traditional healing, ecology, wild foods etc. The lessons should be given by local persons known for their particular competence or skill. Such integration of traditional values is extremely important for the cultural identity of the children and makes adults understand that the sending of children to school does not mean to make them lose their origins and to become "foreigners" to the own culture.

The other one concerns *vocational training-facilities* which should become an integral part of any education-programme, with *practical* instruction in the fields of agriculture, medical and veterinary care, child-care, cooking, food-conservation, hygiene and purification of water, building, brick-making, sewing, pottery, making of handicrafts etc. Such vocational training would narrow the gap between the school and "normal" life and could thus contribute to a more constructive attitude of parents towards modern education; as the adults would gain some personal profit from the training and start to get interested and more directly involved in different aspects of education.

Vocational training would in its turn only be useful if it was to become the starting-point of development-programs which would bring more facilities to the village (wells, clinics, veterinary and medical services etc.) and improve the general welfare of its population. It would eventually lead to the formation of small local teams which would provide special services in different fields and assume responsibility for equipment, material, medicines, tools, buildings, marketing etc. School-children would participate and assist the adults, in writing, record-keeping, planning etc.

The training could be conducted by experienced persons from the village or the district in cooperation with a team of more specialized persons (medical doctors, nurses, veterinary officers, technicians, constructors etc.), the latter traveling from place to place, informing, instructing, supervising the work, discussing particular problems, suggesting solutions and providing practical help (and material)... These teams should return to these places on a regular basis, the continuity of any project being indeed the condition to its impact and its success.

#### Finally, a last remark:

If there is one conclusion to be drawn out of the information on matters of education, it must be the following one: education in the Sudan, the one of boys and even more so the one of girls, can only become successful if the people and the organizations supporting it show a lot (more) of understanding for the cultural, ecological and political circumstances in which education is to take place, if they put more energy into their efforts to achieve their goals, if they prove to be reliable and competent and, especially, if they are *realistic and pragmatic* both in what concerns their planning and the execution of their projects. The people's "success" will not be judged on paper but in what is called "the field" - inside the Southern Sudan, not by

foreign experts but by the presently still young Sudanese who one day will relate to their own children the tedious history of their desperate struggle to get education.