

SUDAN: Cuts in educational budget

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During the last three years, the Government of Southern Sudan has slashed its education budget by more than 25 percent, from US\$134 million to US\$100 million. This is particularly disappointing given the remarkable improvements in enrolment rates since the 2005 peace agreement. Budget cuts of this magnitude are likely to adversely affect the quality of education services. With literacy rates at 20 percent overall, and 10 percent among women, much remains to be done. Recently, on the occasion of the International Literacy Day, Jesuit Refugee Service/Eastern Africa (JRS/EA) highlighted the importance of education in Southern Sudan and encouraged the local government to allocate sufficient resources to protect and improve upon the achievements to date. JRS/EA also urged donors and the international community to provide sufficient assistance. According to a UNICEF report last year, school attendance rates in Southern Sudan have tripled in the last four years. Since 2005, they have increased from 343,000 - then the lowest in the world - to more than 1.3 million. Despite this improvement, attendance rates for girls remain much lower than those for boys. Economic hardship, in addition to socio-cultural values and practices, such as early marriage, continues to prevent girls from attending school. More needs to be done to convince parents and communities of the value of education, especially for girls. Shortages of trained and paid teachers pose another major challenge to education.