



**Windle Trust**  
International

**Accelerated Secondary Education  
as an Alternative to Returning to School:  
A case study from South Sudan**



Published August 2021

**Contents**

- I. **Introduction** ..... 2
- II. **The context: Education Provision in South Sudan** ..... 3
- III. **Key Features of the ASE Programme** ..... 5
- IV. **Alignment with the Accelerated Education Principles** ..... 6
- V. **Conclusions** ..... 8

## I. Introduction

There is a growing recognition of the need for catch-up or accelerated programmes of learning to mitigate the negative impact of prolonged disruption of education provision. Disruption of participation in education is usually associated with school closures due to conflict, natural disasters, and damage to or destruction of schools, or to the forced displacement of communities either internally or across borders. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, however, governments across the world have closed schools for many weeks or months as one measure to control the spread of the virus. Millions of children were affected by these school closures and their prolonged duration has prompted widespread consideration of how best to make up for the teaching and learning that has been lost. In countries with extensive and functioning infrastructure the move to digital and online learning was a quick option, but for countries emerging or in conflict this option could only benefit the already advantaged elite thus further exacerbating the existing inequalities.

The experience of Windle Trust International (WTI) in South Sudan, however, suggests there is scope and potential to scale up catch-up programmes that will support those who have missed out due to prolonged school closures. But instead of relying on technology and infrastructure which is often non-existent or limited in capabilities, WTI has developed a programme based on accelerated learning and specifically designed to reach secondary school students or those who have dropped out of secondary schools, or who failed to make the transition to secondary education. Instead of being seen primarily as a short-term response to a humanitarian crisis such as war or disease, WTI believes that accelerated learning programmes should be designed and developed to address disruption to education provision rooted in and made worse by social and economic inequalities and marginalisation.

Education catch-up programmes have become increasingly common in response to Covid-19 related school closures. They tend to be based on an assumption or approach that the impact of Covid-19 closures will impact on children of an age that can return to school. These are children who have lost out on schooling but can return to school and, provided a range of suitable catch-up programmes are put in place, their education can be put back on track. But there will also be older children who no longer intend to return to school and for them a different approach will be needed. Throughout the world, but especially in poorer countries, the impact of school closures on learning has been far greater for more marginalised children. Learners from better off families have benefitted from learning online, TV or by radio and from the support of literate parents or older siblings who can mentor them, meaning that they will be able to catch up on their learning given appropriate support when they return to school. The poorest however, have been unable to access any online, TV or radio-based lessons. For example, only 5% of school children in pastoralist areas of Laikipia, in Kenya were able to access any of the support programmes provided. Even in deprived urban areas such as Mathare, Nairobi the figure rises to just 11%. This means that technology-based catch-up programmes are simply not reaching children from poor families or areas with no basic services. In this way existing inequalities have increased dramatically with the digital divide overlaying the poverty divide and reinforced by geographical marginalisation of remote rural areas.

This paper draws a distinction between a catch-up programme and an accelerated secondary programme. The former is short term and designed to help children get back into formal school; the programme will be adjusted according to the extent of learning loss that has occurred. As a rule, the poorer the child the greater the input needed in terms of time and money to compensate for learning loss. An accelerated programme, in contrast, is designed for those who were in school before their education was interrupted but cannot or are unlikely to re-enter conventional schooling. They will need

a different form of support, but that support must provide qualifications that are equivalent to those associated with conventional schooling.

This paper will set out some of the salient features that influence access to, and the quality of, education in South Sudan before going on to describe an accelerated secondary education programme (ASEP). That programme is designed to reflect the particular needs of education provision in one country, but the issues it seeks to address will be found to a greater or lesser extent in many other countries. The principles and practice of accelerated learning are well-established, but the South Sudan programme is distinctive in two ways; first, its focus is on secondary education; secondly, it has been designed to meet the needs of specific categories of learners. In the first instance, the focus was on two quite different target groups within the population.

The first target group was existing primary school teachers who are untrained, have completed primary school and have often attended, but dropped out of secondary school. They are poorly paid, have been teaching for several years but have rarely benefitted from any form of training. Because they do not have a secondary school leaving certificates, they are not eligible for further training. The Ministry of General Education & Instruction (MoGEI) had long recognised the need to improve the quality of teaching however this could not be done unless the academic skills of these cohort of existing teachers in primary schools are improved. In 2019 working in collaboration with WTI, MoGEI identified the Accelerated Secondary Programme (ASEP) as a practicable and cost-effective way of improving the quality of education in primary schools and of increasing the motivation of untrained teachers.

The second target group was young women who have dropped out of school. Some may have dropped out of school many years ago due to forced marriage, early and unwanted pregnancy, family poverty and the need for labour at home or, in the last year or so, as a result of school closures. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contain specific reference to gender equity in education provision, but South Sudan is a long way from achieving the agreed targets. The nature and extent of this discrepancy is described in more detail below, but the key point is that if girls and young women drop out of schooling – at the end of the primary stage or during secondary education but before taking the final leaving exam – it is almost impossible for them to ‘drop back in’ into full time education in future years. There are few ‘second chances’ in a country with such limited education resources such as South Sudan. The Covid-19 induced school closures will have greatly increased the number of girls who now fit into this target group as while schools were closed they will have been pressured into becoming an economic asset, either due to their labour in the community setting or due to their marriageability.

Finally, the paper concludes by setting WTI’s experience of developing and managing an accelerated secondary education programme and demonstrates how the programme meets the key principles of UNHCR led accelerated education working group (AEWG) more broadly.

## **II. The context: Education Provision in South Sudan**

There is a widespread recognition that the large proportion of untrained teachers in South Sudan’s primary sector has a profound and negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Yet, however inadequate these teachers are, the fact remains that they provide the bedrock of teacher provision in villages and small towns across the country. If these teachers were to be dismissed, the number of teachers would drop dramatically – or would be replaced with other young teachers who were similarly untrained. An alternative approach is to invest in the provision of basic education for these existing teachers. WTI recognised that existing teachers could not realistically go back to being a pupil in a school

where they were also a teacher, and that what was needed was a programme that reflected the particular needs of adult learners. At the same time, it was agreed with the Ministry of Education that the programme must complement and not compete with or weaken existing secondary school provision.

Thus, these became our first target group. Apart from the high proportion of untrained teachers in South Sudan, the accelerated secondary education programme (ASEP) was a response to the fact that South Sudan has some of the world's worst indicators for access to school and educational outcomes. This is especially true at secondary level, which has been neglected for decades and especially true for girls which is why they are our second target group. In 2017 WTI published a report on Secondary Education in South Sudan<sup>1</sup> that revealed:

- The secondary sector is relatively small with enrolment in 2017 of about 80,000 and an enrolment rate of just 5%. This figure hides gender and regional disparities. In some parts of the country, secondary enrolment may be as low as 1% for young women. Such low enrolment, compounded by high dropout rates, is clear evidence that the current system is not working equitably or efficiently.
- Very few girls complete secondary education. In 2017 fewer than 3,500 girls completed secondary schooling. The principal causes of the high drop-out rate are poverty, early marriage, pregnancy, conflict and displacement. Poverty in particular means that many families decide to 'monetarise' rather than educate their daughters through marriage or casual work. These causes of high drop-out rates are reinforced by deeply entrenched social and cultural attitudes which are a major obstacle to older girls and young women completing secondary education.
- Although the figures of girls sitting the 2020 South Sudan secondary education examination went up to 11,716, which shows the gains made over the last few years, the Covid-19 related school closures will harm school girls according to [World Economic Forum](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/04/covid-19-has-harmed-girls-education-here-s-what-needs-to-be-done/)<sup>2</sup>. There is evidence according to the [World Bank](https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/covid-19-bringing-girls-back-school)<sup>3</sup> which suggests that the pandemic may slow or reverse these gains, through factors such as an increased risk of dropping out of school.
- South Sudan is a country with a history (both pre and post-independence) of civil war, poor quality social infrastructure and a chronically weak economy. In these circumstances a conventional approach that relies on building new schools and classrooms to increase enrolment is simply not realistic. New and alternative ways of increasing education provision needed to be explored and developed.

It was for these reasons that WTI worked with the Ministry of Education and other partners to develop an ASE policy and programme which is specifically designed to meet the needs of both of our target groups, that is teachers, but also girls and young women who have dropped out but who want to return to education and secure a secondary school leaving certificate.

The policy context is important. South Sudan already had a policy recognising the role and potential of accelerated learning programmes. But the alternative education policy was confined to the provision of primary education. It included no reference to secondary education. When the ASE programme began in South Sudan it did so with the full support of the Ministry of Education and a key element of their role was to secure an amendment to the existing 'Alternative Education Systems Policy'<sup>4</sup> so as to include secondary education.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://windle.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Secondary%20Schools%20in%20South%20Sudan..pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/04/covid-19-has-harmed-girls-education-here-s-what-needs-to-be-done/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/covid-19-bringing-girls-back-school>

<sup>4</sup> MoGEI, Directorate for Alternative Education, 'Policy for Alternative Education Systems for South Sudan' 2020 edition

### III. Key Features of the ASE Programme

#### a) Collaboration with the Ministry of Education

The development of the ASE programme was based on close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and associated bodies such as the Directorate of Curriculum and National Examinations Council. In particular, almost all of the features included in this section of the paper were the outcome of a workshop with relevant Ministry of Education staff, teachers and head teachers. That workshop led to the creation of separate, very small, working groups which reviewed the curriculum and created the schemes of work which will be the basis of day-to-day teaching under the accelerated learning programme.

#### b) Eligibility

Eligibility criteria limit access to those who have a primary education certificate and have dropped out of school either at transition or during their secondary schooling. To safeguard formal schools, only those who are adult and have been out of school for a specified period, usually 18-24 months, should be considered. In the light of the Covid-19 crisis, this might need to be reviewed so as to include girls who dropped out of school due to the closures but whose circumstances have changed to the point where return to school is no longer possible.

#### c) Selection Criteria

The criteria for selecting learners may include:

- ✓ All learners must have qualified for secondary school entry
- ✓ All learners must have been out of school for the specified period or for whom it would be inappropriate to return to a conventional secondary school
- ✓ Learners should be adult, i.e. at least 19 years old.
- ✓ There should be an assessment before entry. All learners should take two tests:
  - A diagnostic test to assess whether they have levels of literacy and numeracy that are necessary to participate successfully.
  - A placement test, to decide where on the course they should be placed, i.e. at the start of the course, or if they have already completed two or more years of secondary school and have retained the knowledge and skills, at a mid-point.

#### d) Curriculum and Course Structure

- ✓ The Curriculum is that of formal government schools, i.e. the National Competency Based Curriculum. The ASE will deliver the same curriculum with the same learning outcomes and content. It will be examined through the same assessment systems. In this way the ASE is intended to make use of and be consistent with existing government education systems.
- ✓ The only difference is at the level of the schemes of work as the curriculum will be delivered in a shorter time due to time efficiency, fewer holidays and by taking advantage of adult learners' ability to learn more efficiently.
- ✓ The programme is based on delivering the content of the secondary curriculum in a period of up to two and a half years based on 46 learning weeks in a year, of which 4 weeks would be for examinations. This duration may be shortened for learners who demonstrate good progress or have already studied at least two years in a secondary school. Teaching time for the schemes of work assumes 42 weeks of content each year with at least 20 contact hours a week. The programme includes an intensive English and study skills unit at the start of the course and time for revision, catch-up and exam practice at the end.

#### e) Other Features

The trainers on the accelerated secondary education programme will be selected from existing secondary schools but will be required to attend a professional development training programme to introduce them to methods and teaching practices appropriate to adults. In some parts of South Sudan, where Arabic remains the most commonly used language, it was also necessary to provide a short, intensive English course. The trainers were paid based on the extent of their teaching load.

Women who want to complete their secondary school education may have young children, so the ASE programme should include childcare provision so that young women can leave their children, knowing they are safe, well-looked after and nearby. The creation of an accelerated secondary education programme to complement existing provision was considered to be a socially acceptable way of giving young women a second chance since they can learn together with other women in a similar situation.

### IV. Alignment with the Accelerated Education Principles

It should be noted that the Accelerated Secondary Education Programme (ASEP) meets all the ten principles of effective practice established by the UNHCR led Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG)<sup>5</sup> (see figure below) apart from that of the target age. As the ASE programme is at secondary school level, South Sudan target age was agreed to be 18+ rather than 10–18. The programme is developed for age appropriate learners who in this case are young adults and fall under the AEWG definition of Accelerated Education Programme (AEP)<sup>6</sup>. We however also do recognise that the South Sudan accelerated secondary education initiative further extends the scope of catch-up programmes to reflect the country's history, context and specific needs. Perhaps the most significant new feature is the way in which the programme is designed to address fundamental and enduring inequalities of access to education and to complement existing provision in a cost-effective but mutually supportive way.

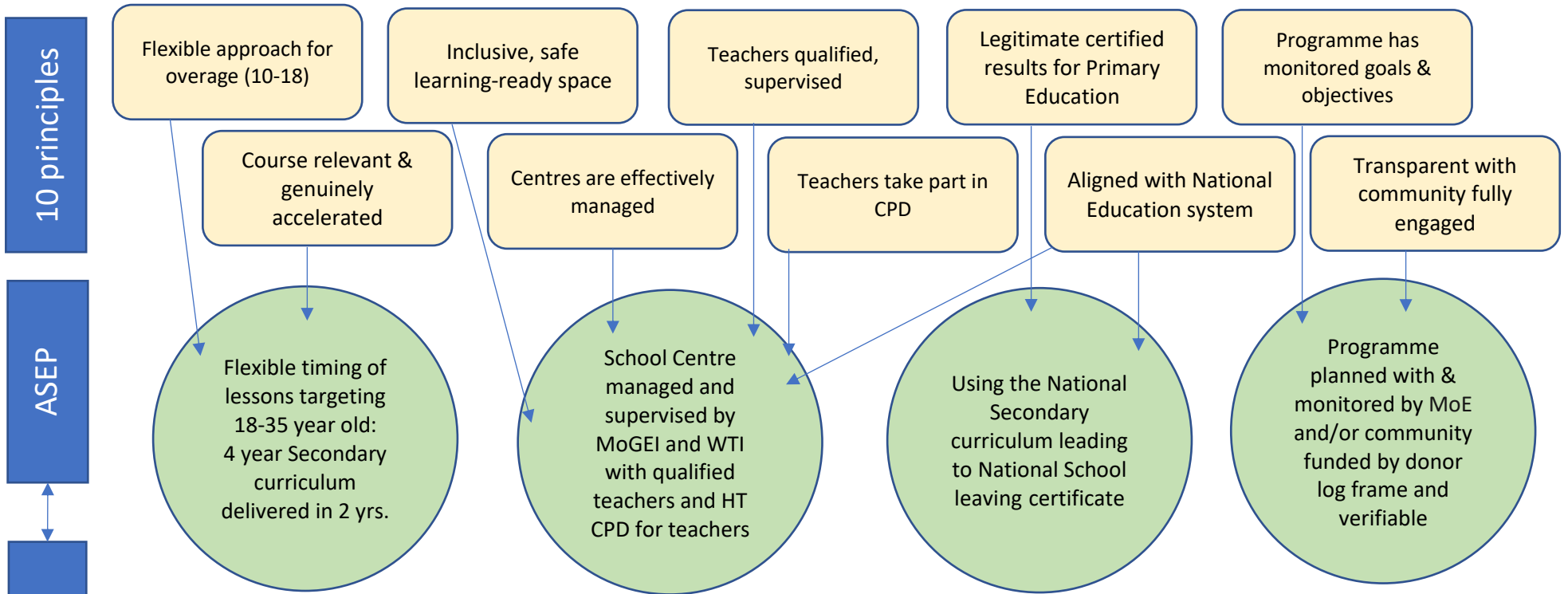
It is also of great significance as a tool in addressing the increased inequalities being created by Covid-19 and school closures. Some children will be able to take advantage of short-term ministry strategies and catch-up programmes to bridge the gap of what they have missed and, hopefully, to address the greater disparities created by the digital (and even audio) divide between those able to study during lockdown and those who could not. However, as stated earlier, many who were in school will not return to school for social and economic reasons, including family commitments, being married and having become a crucial economic pillar of their family. Over the next few months it will be essential to continue to monitor how many youth actually do return to school and then, target those who could not return with a flexible accelerated learning programme starting within the next 18 months and picking up the youth who will now have been out of school for 18 months+, the length of the lockdown. Only with a secondary certificate will they be eligible for any training demanding a school leaving certificate and providing them with greater agency over their future.

---

<sup>5</sup> [https://inee.org/system/files/resources/AEWG\\_Accelerated\\_Education\\_10\\_Principles\\_ENG\\_screen.pdf](https://inee.org/system/files/resources/AEWG_Accelerated_Education_10_Principles_ENG_screen.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://inee.org/system/files/resources/AEWG\\_Key\\_Programme\\_Definitions-screen.pdf](https://inee.org/system/files/resources/AEWG_Key_Programme_Definitions-screen.pdf)

## 10 Principles of Accelerated Education and Compliance of Accelerated Secondary Education Projects with these principles



10 principles

ASEP

ASEP

The on-going and planned ASEP in South Sudan are consistent with the AEWG principles with the Ministry of Education fully involved in their design, teacher training and supervision. They are also using recently developed government textbooks or, where not available, existing textbooks that are compatible.



## V. Conclusions

The provision of accelerated secondary education as an option to provide better future for those who have dropped out of school for one reason the other especially at this critical time cannot be overstated. An accelerated secondary education programme helps level the education playing field for those would have otherwise missed out completely. It offers an opportunity for individuals to participate with a particular targeted achievement in mind that requires secondary education certification. With the flexibility of an alternative system, accelerated secondary education programmes also offers the convenience that is much needed in servicing the ever-changing needs in pandemic, conflict impacted, weak and under resourced education contexts such as South Sudan.

## Acknowledgements

This article was written with contributions from:

**David Masua**

**Ian Leggett**

**Roderick Hicks**

## Published by

Windle Trust International  
37a, Oxford Road, Cowley  
OX4 2EN, Oxford, United Kingdom  
+44 1865 712 900  
Email: [Info@windle.org.uk](mailto:Info@windle.org.uk)  
Website: [www.windle.org.uk](http://www.windle.org.uk)  
Twitter: [@WindleTrust](https://twitter.com/WindleTrust)  
Registered charity number **1092834**



**Windle Trust**  
International