

182. Secondary Education in South Sudan

Windle Trust International – WTI – is a UK registered charity that has been working with refugees or conflict affected communities in the Horn and East Africa for over 40 years. Since coming to South Sudan in 2008, our **Solidarity with South Sudan** personnel have several times collaborated with Windle Trust in delivering education programmes. So it is that on several occasions I have met David Masua who is the co-author of an informative report published by WTI during 2017 entitled: '*Secondary Education in South Sudan: A Neglected Priority*'.

Solidarity with South Sudan has four principal focus areas: training teachers, health professionals, pastoral workers and farmers. *Solidarity* does not run schools, hospitals or parishes; but some of its member congregations do. The Comboni Priests, Brothers and Sisters, for example, do conduct schools, parishes and hospitals but they also contribute personnel to *Solidarity*. At present, the Principal and Deputy of our Catholic Health Training Institute in Wau, are Combonis. The Loreto Sisters provided the first Executive Director of *Solidarity*, Sr Pat Murray, but also began a secondary school for girls in Rumbek that is not part of *Solidarity*. We collaborate and provide mutual support and I was pleased to accept the invitation to chair the Loreto School Board. Loreto has also developed a thriving primary school with the first girls and boys graduating at the end of 2017. The girls can go on to Loreto Secondary Schools for girls (250 boarders) but there was no obvious avenue for the boys to gain a secondary education. Our De La Salle Christian Brothers are now responding to the local request through Loreto to begin a secondary school for boys in Rumbek.

Why is this a priority new mission for our Brothers who have strongly supported *Solidarity* over the years? It is simply a response to a great need. I quote selectively, in italics, from the 2017, WTI Report:

- *South Sudan is stuck at the bottom of the global league table for education. Enrolment rates are the lowest in the world and reflect a profound gender bias. Literacy levels, especially for women, are shockingly low; most of the country's teachers are untrained, poorly paid and lack the most basic teaching materials. School infrastructure is limited and often poor quality.*
- *The secondary sector in South Sudan is relatively small with enrolment in 2017 totaling about 80,000 and an enrolment rate of approximately 5%. This compares with average, gross enrolment rates at secondary level in Sub-Saharan Africa of 29%. WIT further states: This figure hides gender-based and regional disparities, which mean that in some parts of South Sudan, secondary enrolment may be as low as 1% for young women.*
- *With a dropout rate of over 70%, it is crystal clear that the current secondary school system is not working effectively or efficiently.*
- *Very few girls make the transition to secondary school. Even fewer complete secondary education. In 2017 less than 3,500 girls will complete four years of secondary schooling. Because so few young women complete secondary school, the number of women who can go on to become teachers, health workers, accountants or enter other professions is very small.*
- *Such catastrophically low enrolment rates for entry into secondary education have a profoundly negative effect on future economic and social development. It helps to explain why there are so few skilled or qualified South Sudanese workers in sectors as diverse as the building trades, the hospitality industry or business and accounting.*

A productive future for South Sudan depends very much on improving the standards of education and training the leaders of the next generation. *Solidarity* is not only producing better trained nurses, midwives, teachers, pastoral workers and farmers, but is offering live-in education where persons from a diversity of ethnic traditions live and interact daily in a mutually respectful environment. It is the same at Loreto in Rumbek. Rumbek is a Dinka area but girls are drawn from many parts of South Sudan. The new De La Salle Secondary school in Rumbek will be initially a day school. It will be building on eight years of quality, primary education and will hopefully develop young men who can aspire to future leadership in South Sudan. It is a further example of religious working together to provide the best service delivery. Loreto will host De La Salle students and staff this year while construction begins on 48 hectares of land provided by the local chiefs. *Solidarity* will continue to train graduates as teachers, nurses and midwives. These are very positive steps in troubled times for the future development of South Sudan. – Br Bill