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UNICEF EDUCATION

Case Study

SOUTH SUDAN

How Radio Education helped children learn during the COVID-19 pandemic and aftermath

June 2023

Since South Sudan's independence in 2011, the country's population has endured numerous humanitarian crises including extreme weather events, an economic crisis, and sub-national political violence leading to 4.7 million children (2.3 million girls) in need of humanitarian assistance by the end of 2022. COVID-19 worsened South Sudan's learning crisis with country wide school closures lasting 14 months impacting the learning of 3 million children. While 89 per cent of the population does not have access to the internet and mobile phones, FM radio is largely accessible with more than 30 radio stations across the country. For this reason, UNICEF supported South Sudan's Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) in their launch of a country-wide radio-based education programme called Education on Air (EOA).

To support COVID-19 learning recovery, UNICEF worked closely with MoGEI and education partners in the development of a second iteration known as Education on Air II (EOA II). This was developed to support primary level children in Grades 1-8. As part of the programme, 11 primary teachers (4 females) were trained in scriptwriting and radio presenting and were recorded delivering all lessons live. Interactive radio lessons were linked directly to South Sudan's national curriculum featuring songs, games, and activities that encouraged learners to use objects from their home environment as learning aids. If students had questions about a lesson, they could call a toll-free line and speak directly with the lesson's teacher. UNICEF distributed radio sets with lessons pre-loaded onto the devices to reach children who lived in remote locations with no access to radio coverage.

To strengthen the management of the EOA II programme, UNICEF worked with the MoGEI to develop a monitoring and evaluation system and facilitated the training of school inspectors and supervisors on EOA II monitoring and evaluation. After 18 months, a total of 96 broadcasted lessons covering English, Mathematics, and Science

targeting grades 1 through 8 had been featured on two national radio stations, across 6 states. All 96 recorded lessons are saved as part of the MoGEI's contingency plan for any future humanitarian crises that would prevent children's in-person school attendance.

RESULTS (from programme evaluation)

- The lessons reached 493,594 primary school students (252,302 girls).
- 329,063 children (168,201 girls) reported listening to their grade's radio lessons every week, with no significant difference in the proportion of listeners between in-school and out-of-school children and between boys and girls.
- 79.1 per cent of children who listened rated the radio lessons as either 'Very good' or 'Good'.
- A majority of learners reported increased knowledge about WASH, wellbeing and mental health, COVID-19 prevention, and an increased motivation to continue their education.
- All lessons were recorded and archived in the MoGEI ICT unit and are available to all teachers. Lessons have also been widely used and rebroadcasted by community radio networks at subnational levels.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Radio education can reach many children and supports learning recovery. Quality, easy-to-use, distance radio-based education is highly accessible in areas with radio coverage and can successfully support children's learning recovery.
- Quality interactive lessons are the key. High-quality lessons, which are age-appropriate, level-appropriate, and aligned with the national curriculum, ensure effectiveness in supporting learning recovery.
- Developing technical capacities enables sustainability. Capacity development of inspectors, supervisors, and teachers in lesson delivery and monitoring ensures that a cadre of personnel is trained to support and improve the programme in the future.

- **Free access to recorded lessons widens reach.** Making recorded lessons freely available enables their use by community radio networks to reach children in areas without access to national radio stations.

NEXT STEPS

The UNICEF and MoGEI evaluation of EoA II proposed that in future iterations will be broadcast in the evenings, which will enable a wider reach of children and that making lessons even more participatory and interactive as well as developing longer lessons can further support children's learning. To enable the determination of learning improvements in future EoA programmes, a baseline learning assessment of Early Grade Reaching Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment has been recently completed and is in the process of being validated by the Government and partners. This baseline can be used in evaluations of future EoA programmes.

Cost effectiveness: UNICEF invested US\$479,022 in the Education on Air II programme, which benefitted 493,594 children, at a unit cost of US\$1.00 per child. The lessons will continue to be an educational resource that children can use via MoGEI's website and also can be implemented with minimum resource allocation for broadcasting.