Since the outbreak of the most recent war in 2011, the people of the Nuba Mountains have received little to no support for social services such as education. Yet, as the government of Sudan gained new leadership in April 2019, there has been progress toward peace and, with that, the possibility of increased humanitarian access. Because little data on the state of education in the Nuba Mountains are available, To Move Mountains (TMM) carried out mixed methods research in 2019 to help inform education service provision in the region.

**BACKGROUND**

To Move Mountains (TMM) is a faith-based organization with a mission to provide transformative education services to communities affected by conflict. We are presently focused in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, where co-founders Ryan and Jazira Boyette have seen the Nuba people’s belief in education as a way to overcome their oppression.

With the aim to address Nuba’s educational needs at their root, we are using a community-embedded design to develop a local curriculum and train teachers in improved pedagogies. We have formed a partnership with the regional Ministry of Education to disseminate the curriculum and pedagogies throughout the Nuba Mountains.

For a full report or more information about our work, please contact

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**Photo (to right):** Participants in a student focus group in Kujur Shabiah.
KEY QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

ENROLLMENT

Most 8- and 9-year-olds surveyed had at least completed Pre-Unit and some Grade 1, while 29% had received no education at all:

- Grade 1: 36%
- Grade 2: 16%
- Grade 3: 3%
- Pre-Unit: 12%
- None: 29%
- Unknown: 4%

GENDER PARITY

Although girls and boys completed school at equal rates, girls demonstrated consistently lower learning outcomes across all indicators.

LITERACY

Children demonstrated very low levels of literacy in English, the language of instruction.

Participants were able to correctly identify a median of 4 of 10 letters. Only 16% of children were able to identify all 10 letters presented.

73% of participants were unable to read any words. 96% were unable to read a basic sentence.

None of the children in our sample who had completed Grade 2 met minimum proficiency for reading, as determined by UNESCO global standards.

NUMERACY

Among all 8- and 9-year-old children surveyed, only 60% can count to 20. 32% of children who have completed Pre-Unit, and 20% of children who have completed Grade 1 cannot count to 20.

45% of the students in our sample who had completed Grade 2 could not solve the simple operations 2+5 and 8-4. Far fewer could complete addition and subtraction with larger numbers.

GAPS IN PEDAGOGY

No children in our sample were able to identify the sounds of 10 given letters. Even among children who were able to name all 10 of the letters, the median number of sounds produced was 0.

These low levels of phonemic awareness (compounded by the fact that children were far more likely to identify uppercase letters and letters at the beginning of the alphabet) indicate that children are learning letters rote-ly, rather than holistically.

53% of children who could count to 20 could not identify 3 given numbers between 1 and 20, indicating that, as with letters, many children in Nuba have merely a rote understanding of numbers.

Literacy among children who completed Grade 2:

![Graph showing literacy among children who completed Grade 2]
KEY QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

MATERIAL NEEDS

Schools in the Nuba Mountains are confronted by significant material needs, including those for:

- permanent school buildings;
- water and sanitation facilities on the school compound;
- desks or benches for student seating;
- textbooks for students and teachers;
- notebooks, pens, pencils, and teaching aids;
- school feeding.

Schools also face an array of operational challenges, including:

- a lack of teacher compensation;
- difficulties for parents to pay school fees.

CURRICULAR NEEDS

One important catalyst of war has been the government of Sudan’s imposed Islamic, ethnocentric school curriculum. The people of the Nuba Mountains instead adopted the curricula of Kenya and South Sudan for use in their schools.

Interview respondents revealed that these curricula have been insufficient, and they emphasized an urgent need for their own, contextually-relevant curriculum.

Subjects they would like to see in a Nuba school curriculum include:

- mother tongue, English, & Arabic;
- Christian and Islamic religious education;
- Nuba history and geography;
- practical content for math and science.

Skills related to agriculture, health, construction, business, and transportation would help develop their communities, and should therefore be promoted in schools.

Values that should be incorporated into a school curriculum include cooperation, respect, honesty, generosity, equality, faithfulness, and loyalty.

PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS

Nuba has a great shortage of educated people available to teach; many teachers lack adequate education and training.

Teachers in the Nuba Mountains articulated several things they hope to learn through additional teacher training, including:

- lesson planning;
- strategies for differentiation;
- knowledge of child development;
- skills for classroom management;
- methods for hands-on learning;
- strategies for promoting higher-order thinking skills.

Schools suffer from high rates of teacher absenteeism due to inadequate teacher pay and competing responsibilities.

Teachers often struggle with lesson planning, not only because they lack training, but also because they lack curricular materials such as teacher textbooks and syllabi.

Lessons often utilize teacher-centered methods with high levels of repetition and expository teaching. Few opportunities for meaningful student engagement were observed. Teachers also failed to contextualize lessons for students and clarify lesson objectives.

Students and teachers reported the frequent use of corporal punishment and harsh disciplinary methods in schools.

Photo (to right): Children at a school plagued by high teacher absenteeism wait for their teacher to arrive.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite a need for increased primary school enrollment, children in the Nuba Mountains who are in schools demonstrate extremely low rates of literacy and numeracy. The region is therefore experiencing what UNESCO and the World Bank have called a "learning crisis," which calls for a focus on enhancing education quality in the region.

Education interventions should include teacher training and professional development. Modules should cover:
- student-centered pedagogies that encourage higher levels of student comprehension;
- objective-focused lesson planning;
- positive behavior management;
- differentiated instruction to attend to the wide range of student achievement at each grade level.

Special attention should also be paid to girls' academic outcomes.

Material assistance to schools in the Nuba Mountains should include:
- permanent school infrastructure;
- construction of boreholes and gender-specific latrines;
- financial assistance for teacher compensation;
- scholastic materials (notebooks, pencils, textbooks, etc.);
- school feeding programs.

The Nuba Mountains should be supported to develop an independent, contextualized curriculum, which should be recognized within national education policy.

Financial and programmatic support should be given to the regional Ministry of Education and to local NGOs such as the NRRDO (Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation, & Development Organization), KODI, To Move Mountains, and the Diocese of El-Obeid.