

These fact sheets have been developed by the AMEP Research Centre to provide AMEP teachers with information on areas of professional concern. They provide a summary as well as identifying some annotated references that can be used to broaden knowledge and extend understanding. These references can be obtained through the AMEP Resource Centre at rescetr@nceltr.mq.edu.au

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Context

Increasing numbers of AMEP clients from Sudan have presented to AMEP providers in parts of Australia. Most of these seem to be Christians from the south of Sudan.

In addition to clients originating from Sudan, some AMEP clients who have been refugees from neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa, particularly Eritrea and Ethiopia, have had extensive periods of residence as refugees in Sudan.

Sudan has always been characterised by significant differences between the north and the south of the country. The north is arid, and has a long history of Arabic tradition, including adherence to Islam, while the south is tropical, fertile, agricultural, and populated by black Africans. Christianity and animist religions have been the religious traditions of the south.

In contemporary Sudan this tension between north and south has continued, with many years of civil strife and civil war in the south following independence from Britain in 1956. This war has been very destructive and has led to the dislocation of large numbers of people. At the time of compiling this fact sheet (May 2003), there was considerable optimism that a cease-fire and peace talks might eventually bring some relief to this situation.

Historical background

Sudan has a long period of human occupation, with civilisations going back at least to the ancient Egyptians, and there is a long history of Egyptian influence in the country. Conversions to Christianity began in the early centuries of the Christian era, and by the 5th and 6th centuries AD there was a Christian civilisation with Coptic Christianity from Egypt becoming established. Islam arrived soon after, with significant Islamic influence beginning during the life of the Prophet Mohammed in the 6th century, and with widespread conversions in the period following his death.

In the several centuries that followed, a period of dominance by Nubian Christian rulers gave way to rule by Islamic princes who presided in small, warlike and warring principalities. By the nineteenth century, a complex situation existed with competing power groups based on the African slave trade, Islamic movements that attempted to revive what they saw as the purity of early Islam, the weak and declining influence of the Ottoman Empire, and an increasing Egyptian influence. The British became involved through an interest in both ending the slave trade and in maintaining their influence in Egypt (by which they held control of the Suez Canal). After an unsuccessful attempt to curb a primitive Islamic movement that resulted in the massacre of General Gordon in the capital, Khartoum, in 1884, a joint Anglo–Egyptian administration took control of Sudan in 1899.

Egyptian resistance to British domination of Sudan increased in the 1920s, and Egyptian involvement in the government of Sudan was minimised. After a long period of a developing nationalist movement, independence from Britain was achieved on 1 January 1956.

Since independence, there have been two prevailing trends in Sudanese politics and government. The first of these has been a series of military coups. There were coups in 1958, 1969, 1971, 1985 and 1989. These coups imposed military rule, which then generally moved towards elected governments. The elected governments have been unable to deal with the country's difficulties and have been unstable. The current Sudanese government is headed by President Umar el-Bashir, who came to power in the 1989 military coup. He has been subsequently confirmed as President with 75% of the vote in elections in 1996, but many opposition groups boycotted these elections. The el-Bashir Government has been closely allied with the fundamentalist National Islamic Front (NIF), and has moved to create a strongly Islamic state. Sharia law was adopted as the legal system in the north in 1991, and moves have been made to increase the influence of Islam in education and other aspects of life throughout the country.

The current regime has also been the object of considerable criticism and ostracism internationally for human rights abuses, and a willingness to harbour groups linked to Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda organisation.

The second trend in post-independence Sudan has been ongoing insurgency movements in the south. While this conflict dates back to 1955, it has been strongest since 1983, when the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), with its military wing, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, fought a series of battles. This conflict has been between southern groups that have resisted the prevailing government in Khartoum. But the southern groups are not united and at times have resorted to fighting each other. The situation is complex, as not all southerners are Christian or animist, and there are also different Christian groups in the south. In general, however, the sources of the conflict lie in a resentment of both northern control and exploitation of the more fertile south, and also the increasing imposition of a fundamentalist Islamic social order and legal system on areas that are not predominantly Muslim. While the response of the Khartoum Government has been to move to a more federal style of government, which gives greater autonomy to the southern regions, the influence of Islamicist policies – and resentment of such measures – has been strong.

Such problems have made it more difficult for the country to address endemic problems such as the aridity of the north, and low standards of education and living. There have been additional burdens such as the influx of several million refugees as a result of conflict and famine in the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Increasing international isolation and sanctions have compounded the effects of such problems.

Peoples and cultures

Sudan includes 90 different cultural groups. As indicated above, the ethnic origin of the people is mixed – mostly Arab in the northern areas and black Africans in the south. There are many additional tribal groups, including the Beja, Jamala and Nubian people in the north, and the Azande, Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk people in the south. The estimated population of Sudan as of July 1999 was approximately 34.5 million, of which about 22% live in urban areas.

Up to 70% of the total population are Muslim. Islamic culture is very strong in the northern two-thirds of the country, which is almost exclusively populated by Sunni Muslims, although thousands of Christians fleeing the civil war in the south have settled in the north. In the south, there are 2.4 million Roman Catholics, and 1 million Anglicans, Coptic Christians

and Greek Orthodox Christians. The remainder of the population are animist, or follow tribal religions.

Life expectancy is low by international standards, with an average life expectancy of 56.4 years (female – 57.4, male – 55.4). Estimates of literacy rates vary, with some sources giving an overall literacy rate of 46.1% with an imbalance between men (57.7%) and women (34.6%), while other sources estimate overall literacy rates to be about 30%.

Standard Arabic is the official language, with Sudanese Arabic widely spoken. Many other languages are spoken (mainly in the south), with regional varieties of Dinka, Fur, Nuer and Zanda the largest. Each of these languages has at least several hundred thousand speakers, and there are well over a million speakers of the five varieties of Dinka. When discussing languages spoken with AMEP clients, it is prudent to be aware that there are many different names for these languages, and that speakers of a particular language may not recognise the English name for that language. English is widely spoken and understood in Sudan, and is sometimes used as a lingua franca in the south, where there is considerable linguistic diversity.

There are significant social and human rights issues in Sudan. Female circumcision is a widespread practice, especially in the north, which often gives rise to health problems. The el-Bashir Government's program of Islamicisation coupled with the extension of Sharia law have led to restrictions of the rights of women and limitations on the rights of non-Muslims. The movement to restore Islam as a central part of Sudanese life draws on an approach to Islam that sees the early period of Islamic history as the purest form of the religion. Attempts to install such approaches to Islam have been a strong theme of Sudanese history.

Rates of infection of HIV/AIDS are significant and increasing. In the war zones a considerable number of children suffer from serious abuse, including enslavement, forced labour and forced conscription, and are used by both government and rebel sides in fighting. All sides in the war have been involved in the recruitment of soldiers aged under the age of 18. Casualties from the war have been high. There has been considerable displacement of people from war zones, with many refugees moving internally (for instance from the south to the north) or to neighbouring countries – especially refugees from the south moving to Kenya. Human rights abuses and acts of cruelty have been committed by all sides in the fighting.

Sudanese AMEP clients in Australia are frequently members of African groups from the south, especially the Nuer and the Dinka. These groups live along the Nile in a cattle-based economy. The cattle are utilised for milk and milk products rather than

meat, and cattle play an important part in ceremonial life, such as the dowry given by the bridegroom to a bride's family at the time of a marriage. The Nuer are also grouped into clan groups that share a common ancestor. Many of them are Christians. The Nuer and Dinka share many aspects of their cultures, but there are also differences. In the 19th century the Nuer dramatically expanded their territory, coming to occupy a large area previously occupied mainly by the Dinka.

Economy and education

There is widespread provision of free primary schooling by the government from the ages of 6 to 13 and provision of secondary schools and universities. Secondary education begins at the age of 14 and lasts up to 3 years. Universities are mainly concentrated in Khartoum. The curriculum is bound up with principles of Islamic education, which are applied to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Private schools, even those operated by Christian churches, are required to follow this curriculum.

The Sudanese economy has been in disarray for several decades. Most of the economy is based on agriculture, with almost all exports being agricultural products. The agricultural sector is based on small-scale farming, which is labour intensive. While there have been considerable foreign investment and aid programs in the past, political instability, and war and corruption, have resulted in few of the projects funded coming to fruition.

Classroom issues

The linguistic and ethnic diversity of Sudan means that teachers cannot assume there is a common sense of identity or solidarity between Sudanese students. Ethnic identity is based on a sense of affiliation as much as sharing of common languages and cultures. Names used for ethnic groups in Sudan (which reflect labels used by the British and the Arabs) do not always correspond with the names that these groups give themselves. Thus the Dinka and the Nuer (who constitute the two largest groups in southern Sudan) refer to themselves respectively as Jieng and Naath. Group affiliation can be a very subjective process, with little other than sense of identity to distinguish between different groups sharing the same language, culture and ethnicity. Teachers may find that clients do not recognise the English names for their cultural or linguistic groups, and they will need to be sensitive to the names that clients use to label themselves and others.

The low literacy rates in Sudan, especially among women, may mean that many students from Sudan will need additional assistance in developing English literacy skills.

Annotated bibliography

Amnesty International 1995. *The tears of orphans*. London

This volume is a report of the situation in Sudan at the time of publication, with extensive description of the conflicts up to that time, and their effect on economic and social life in Sudan. Considerable attention is given to human rights abuses. This volume provides useful background for teachers wanting to know the finer details of the situation from which their Sudanese students have come.

CIA – The World Factbook 2002 website:

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/su.html>

This website provides basic information under headings such as Geography, People, Government, Economy, Communications etc. The information can be factual and informative, but facts are presented in isolation.

The Ethnologue website:

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Sudan

This website has information about the languages of Sudan and a map showing the distribution of languages throughout the country, as well as links to information about those languages. It also includes alternatives to the English names for the many languages of Sudan.

Huffman, R 1970. *Nuer customs and folklore*. London: Frank Cass and Co

The Nuer and the Dinka were extensively studied by anthropologists in the early 20th century. Originally published in 1931, this volume is a brief and readable example of one such document, which presents the traditional culture of the Nuer as if it were untouched by more recent interaction and development, and which is framed in the discourse of colonialism. The final chapter, which contains Nuer folktales, may be of some value for AMEP teachers working with Nuer learners from Sudan.

Lonely Planet website:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/sudan/>

This website contains minimal information about Sudan, save for warnings of the dangers of travel there, but it does include links to a reasonable map and a small number of pictures that show some aspects of life and tourism in Sudan. Lonely Planet's travel guide, *Africa on a shoestring*, contains a section on Sudan that provides a western tourist's perspective on the country. This might provide interesting reading in conjunction with other sources.

Metz, H C (ed) 1991. *Sudan: A country study*. Washington DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, Country Studies, Area Handbook Series

Also available online at:

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/sdtoc.html>

This is part of a series of area studies of countries around the world. It is an extensive source of information, with chapters

on the history, geography, population, education system, and the military and political system, although some of its information is now rather dated.

UNHCR website:

<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees website has a wide variety of information for those with an interest in refugee issues – especially in countries of first refuge. By using the search function to find Kenya, a pdf file that gives details of UNHCR operations for the current year can be downloaded. (Click on the ‘Global Operations – Kenya’ link.) Similarly, by finding Sudan and following the ‘Global Operations’ link, information can be obtained about refugees seeking refuge in Sudan (generally from Ethiopia and Eritrea, who seek refuge in urban areas).

Journey to the ends of the Earth, vol 3 2001. Video. Virginia, Qld: Magna Pacific Distributors for Becker Entertainment Ltd

In this visually attractive travel documentary, a photojournalist travels down the Nile in northern Sudan to Khartoum. He visits the ancient pyramids of Meroe, and revisits incidents in the battles between the Sudanese and the British at the end of the 19th century, which led to the installation of a British administration in Sudan. Along the way there are scenes of everyday life, as well as social and religious ceremonies. While the documentary is restricted to the Islamic north, rather than the south, it does give the viewer a flavour of aspects of everyday life in Sudan. A short scene of a class in a school will give AMEP teachers an insight into the nature of schooling experiences of students from this part of the world. The documentary is oblivious to the many social, economic and political issues that relate to the displacement of people in Sudan.

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