



**EVIDENCE GENERATION IN
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:
THE CASE OF SUDAN**

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this discussion paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or UN Member States.



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INTRODUCTION

Many developing countries are facing formidable problems and crises. Those range between economic, social, political and cultural sectors. Though the extent, and complexity of the government functions and roles to resolve those problems are progressively widening, yet in many developing countries endeavors to generate governance evidence and have it impact the governance reform discourse were, many at a time, hampered by serious obstacles. None the less it is evident that there is growing need for evidence, on the government side. The official complacent support mechanisms can not provide such evidence in a timely nor satisfactory manner, given the universal, regional and local fluidity and complication of the issues.

The governing Elite may choose to avoid what they consider shear competition, or uncalled for intervention or outright meddling in official business. They may not want to appear weak or dependent on others. They may want to respect their mandate and remain within the prescribed parameters. At any rate, intellectual support from researchers or think tanks continues to be needed, but not demanded. If government persists in its unwelcoming attitude, it will be incumbent on the part of the evidence generating institutions to be more innovative in the way they present, offer or avail evidence to governmental departments. This short paper describes the experience of The Peace Research Institute (PRI) of the University of Khartoum, the oldest, largest and most prestigious university in Sudan. The model adopted by PRI, a fairly new institution of the university, is a product of the turbulent modern history of Sudan. Research programmes academic scholarship and structural adjustment of PRI came in response to significant changes in the society. Provision of a brief description of the sociopolitical situation of Sudan is necessary to better understand the status and role of PRI as an evidence generating institution.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Sudan is caught within the historic phase that engulfs the quasi-totality of the African continent, namely the painful protracted transition towards nation building. The Sudanese current situation is characterized accordingly by transition, from civil war to relative peace, from totalitarianism to a democratic promise.

It is imperative that we take stock of the socio-economic factors impacting the transition. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement presents opportunities and challenges in the path towards democracy and sustainable peace.

A DIVERSE SETTING

Sudan is a diverse and vast country (area; one million square mile). Its climate varies and extends from Sahara desert of the north progressively to the equatorial flora and fauna of the South.

Socio-cultural variations characterize the Sudanese scene. The Sudanese society is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multilingual. All indigenous African ethnic groups, but one, are represented in Sudan.

Sudan borders nine African countries and has a long Red Sea coastline. Sudan shares no less than 50 ethnic groups and tribes with neighboring countries, including Egypt, the DRC, Ethiopia and Kenya.

THE CONFLICTUAL CONTEXT

Sudan belongs to the three, ever active, protracted African conflict systems,

- The Greater lakes conflict system,
- The Horn of Africa conflict system,
- The West of Sudan conflict system which emanates from Darfur and includes six other countries; Chad, Central African Republic, Southern Libya, Niger and Cameroon.

The interaction, spill-over and impacting sub-process fueled and maintained conflicts within Sudan and in other countries. Considering those conflict systems solely in their geopolitical settings give a distorted picture, as in the case of the relationship of Sudan with Chad where incursions, invasion and cross-boarder aggression, whereas, the only arbitrary colonial borders divided the same people between countries.

The global conflictual situation within Sudan is characterized by a degree of similarity, the specificity of conflict situations is determined to a great extent by degree or rank. Diversity is never a cause for conflict. On the contrary, it is a source of richness and beauty. Mismanagement of diversity leads to contention and conflict. Many studies are available on the root – causes of conflict in Sudan. Those causes include;

- Competition over natural resources
- Problems emanating from bad governance characterized by the absence of any creditable formula to share power and legitimize authority
- No future perspective for economic development, no real investment in the provision of basic services, human development and vital infrastructure.
- Mismanagement of diversity

THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The General Annual Budget for 2009 is under scrutiny through the governmental institutions. The official figures show marked amelioration in the general performance and in certain indicators, thanks to the revenues from the nascent oil industry. The new budget is burdened, however, by considerable expenditure to meet the obligations ushered by the three peace agreements, by the ongoing conflict and by overspending in non-productive sector. The weakness of the general services sector, poverty eradication, human development and the trickle of new wealth to the grass roots awaits future plans. The economic situation is endangered massively by the international economic crisis and the depression of oil prices.

CONFLICT AND LEVEL OF PEACE BUILDING

Each conflict situation in Sudan maintains a degree of specificity though Darfur takes precedence in world interest over the other conflictual situations. All, however, will require close monitoring.

Dealing with those conflicts ought to correspond to the level or stage they reached in the peace building process. The Darfur conflict is an active and hot conflict. It awaits a credible peace agreement to be negotiated and signed. In the eastern Sudan conflict the implementation of the peace agreement has just started. The parties have a long way ahead to go. In the North/South conflict despite the slowness and obstacles, the process of the implementation of the CPA gained significant ground.

All these sub-processes require multi-sectoral evidence to assist Government, Rebel groups and civil society groups to participate in building peace and democracy. Over and above the aforementioned varying socioeconomic and political factors which characterize the Sudanese political society, other major factors characteristic of many other African countries figure prominently as hurdles on the way forward:

- Socio-economic underdevelopment
- Political instability
- The diabolic cycle of military-civilian rule
- Mismanagement of diversity and multiplicity
- The dominance of traditional systems and cultures
- Dichotomies between civil and religious systems of governance

- The unattainable democratic promise

TRADITIONAL WISDOM

Traditional societies are not without their evidence producing “institutions” and “mechanisms”. The councils of elders, the wisdom groups throughout tribal history provided advice to traditional societies and leadership. Their role was better appreciated there, when compared to modern think tanks vis-à-vis modern governments. Their justification and recognition stems from traditional practices and culture.

MODERN EVIDENCE GENERATION

With the advent of Sudan’s Independence and Parliamentary rule in 1956 many attempts were made to provide evidence to rationalize and better formulate policies. The University of Khartoum (U of K) played a recognizable role here.

The U of K, as a non-state actor dominated the space of consultancy and evidence production, it did not monopolize it. Sudan, for sometime, knew the tradition of creating adhoc institutions to deliberate and or investigate and advise on specific issues. Famous among those, in recent years were the Southern Sudan Commission of 1958, The Addis Ababa Round Table of 1970, The Decentralization Committee of 1983, The Higher Education Reform Committee of 1997 etc. Governments welcomed at first those “think tanks” initiatives, but the fate of the product of their work varied with changes in the political climate. The vicious Circle of Civil/military rule impacted the evidence supply/demand situations. Totalitarian regimes resorted to their own closed institutions for targeted consultancy, whereas with the short spells of liberalism and democracy a much more open attitude was witnessed. Generally, line ministries and departments routinely conducted their businesses without expecting or demanding assistance from wherever. The deficient data and statistical institutions were blamed for many failures, weak analysis and poor planning characterized government’s work, till this day.

A new work culture and hope were ushered in with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005. In spite of the progress made, the process of implementing the CPA proved to be difficult, complex, elusive and endless. While struggling with that process, the Government signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), and the East Peace Agreement. As per the stipulation of the CPA, a government of national unity and a representative non-elect parliament were formed. Legal reform was needed to bring laws to parity with the new Interim Constitution of 2006. Added to all this, the government had to continue to exert serious efforts in all the areas of comprehensive socio-economic development. Government had to continue, also, with the day to day business of running a country burdened with all sorts of problems like Sudan. No doubt the government needed help and support, especially as capacities, both human and material, have been lacking or scarce.

These pressures drove government to seek evidence and even, to build its own evidence generating institutions, though docile, and non-critical. The road is paved for others to establish think tanks and research institutions.

Of the government-encouraged and supported centers we can enumerate:

- The Strategic Studies Center
- Future Studies Center
- Middle East and Africa Studies Center

Among the independent Think Tanks and research centers we can count:

- Future Trends Foundation
- Khartoum Human Rights Center
- Khartoum Development and Democracy Center.

The Ministry of Higher Education influenced by the example of the University of Khartoum encouraged other universities to establish Peace Centers. Already Juba University had its pioneering peace and development center, which concentrated its work on issues pertaining to the war in the south. Other centers mushroomed in:

- El Fashir University (Darfur)
- Nyala University (Darfur)
- El Geneina University (Darfur)
- Dilling University (Nuba Mountain)
- Sudan University (Khartoum)

These and other peace and general consultancy institutions are still trying to find their way and evidently they are far from being able to impact the situation.

The experience of the University of Khartoum remains unique and through its evidence generation efforts it dominated the scene for a long time.

ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KHARTOUM (U OF K)

The mother of Sudanese universities and of Higher Education in Sudan, the U of K played a central role in providing consultancy, expertise and qualified cadres to support governance in the country. The University of Khartoum was always a main instigator of change. It is no secret that the 1964 revolution and the 1985 *Intifadda* originated in Khartoum University..

In 1959, the university developed outreach and community service (Extra-Mural) programmes. Through such programmes, the university started the famous *Erkwit Conference*, which researched and debated development projects and issues by region. Line ministries, academics and various organizations representing the people were present through debates and policy formulation. Evidence was produced in a participatory manner and was owned by all the stakeholders, including the regional and central governments. The deliberations were published and widely distributed. Other institutions within the university were encouraged to relate and cooperate with society and government.

At a critical moment of the history of the country, when the international and geopolitical chemistry of the region made of General Numerie an idol of the West, development Aid began to flow to Sudan. An active dialogue on development, good governance, peace and peaceful coexistence was conducted. That was the time when the University of Khartoum established:

- The Institute of Developmental Studies
- Afro-Asian Studies Institute
- Environmental Studies Institute
- Urban Research Institute
- Roads and Building Research Institute

Other evidence generation, research and consultancy institutions sprang in the Medical and Agricultural campuses.

THE PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The University felt a need to extend its efforts in the area of conflict resolution and peace building. The Peace Research Institute PRI was established in 1985 as a center, and was upgraded in 1990 to a full fledged institute¹. The university wanted the institute to act as its flagship to

¹ The Institute is headed by a senior member of staff as Director assisted by a core staff of assistant, director, registrar, secretariat, four coordinators to head the four units of the institute. The Institute is fully independent with its capacities for transportation, communications and material production.

initiate, lead and cooperate on activities for peace in the country. Those include research, capacity building, consultation and availing fora for dialogue.

PRI AND EVIDENCE PROVISION

PRI is a small institute within a university with limited material resources. Nevertheless, PRI is a hyperactive institution. The scope of evidence produced by PRI extends from the micro to the sectoral and macro levels.

PRI continued to pursue the classic approach to participatory knowledge production which the university had adopted. PRI chose participatory techniques of producing evidence to policy options and encouraged all relevant stakeholders to own that evidence.

PRI's mandate stands on two main pillars:

- i. Democratic transition
- ii. Conflict resolution and peace building.

These two streams defined the parameters of the work of PRI. A wider range of objectives and guidelines characterized the activities of PRI to allow for widening the space and diversity of its work. Those objectives included:

- Bridge divides, be it political economic or cultural. Through structured and informed dialogue.
- Develop consensus on public policy issues.
- Use informed research to support informed dialogue and enable informed decision making.
- As the foundation for sound socio-economic and constitutional development and the promotion of human security, build cooperative relationships and networks based on mutual trust and confidence.

The enthusiasm with which PRI's activities were received drove the institute, to widen its mandate even further. PRI is now engaged in:

- Availing data, information, consultancy and evidence.
- Encouraging and adopting participatory methods for generating evidence and consultancy.
- Progressively widening the circle of stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- Networking at different levels.
- Providing information, open-door policy to local and International Media.
- Reducing debates to print and back format, funds permitting.

PRI TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

The institute holds international and local conferences, seminars, workshops and roundtables. Most of the work is planned and executed by university staff members and experts from different institution. Donors are fairly generous to PRI. Now government wants to engage in joint projects.

PRI's plans to work in the regions are stalled by lack of funds and unfavorable circumstance. Some progress is achieved in the case of Darfur, where activities are being conducted there.

A fifteen member council headed by the Vice-Chancellor of the University is the supreme administrative and academic authority of the Institute and its academic activities are overseen by a ten member academic board. The Institute as an organ of University of Khartoum is accountable to the Senate and Council.

PRI's Programmes

1. The Election Programme: PRI held many conferences, workshops and seminars on matters pertaining to elections in Sudan. Through a national independent commission, PRI helped produce the first draft of the elections law which stirred debate and prompted interest in elections and referendum issues. Books produced from those activities are widely used all over the country.
2. Early warning research programme in collaboration with (IGAD), Sudan Government and the German GTZ.
3. Macro-Micro conflicts research programme in collaboration with the Norwegian Mikkelsen Institute.
4. Popular Consultation on the future of the three regions (Abyei, Nouba Mountains and Blue Nile) with UNAMIS
5. Darfur Peace Project, many partners and donors (UNDP, UNAMIS, and others)
6. Rule of Law Impact Project (RIPS) UNDP
7. On going, Central Project of Support to the CPA. Group of Donors to give but examples.

Lessons Learned

PRI is faced now with overwhelming responsibilities and draconian tasks. The Sudanese situation is changing by the day and the volume of information/data is enormous. A proper evaluation of the work awaits latter times. Nevertheless, some sobering lessons are learned:

1. *Demand Driven vs Supply Driven Evidence:* Effort to identify needed research is always exerted. From experience, it seems that research on micro and macro conflict levels, root causes and possible solutions is a needed area of evidence building. Another need to be serviced is in the area of models and frameworks for institutional building, e.g. political party program drafts and law drafts. A third need is for regular bulletins with information on specialized topics of public concern in relation to state-building for peace.
2. *Participatory Evidence:* PRI's experience with participatory dialogue to produce evidence has been positive. It helped enhance ownership of evidence in contentious areas of research such as conflict and peace building. With enhanced ownership, a wider circle of stakeholders are engaged and impacted.
3. *Transparency of Results:* PRI's experience shows that transparency of research results is key to success and impact. PRI's research is always published and shared widely in multi stakeholder roundtables. However, it is also clear from PRI's experience that such modalities of transparency require extraordinary trust and confidence building measures. The identification of champions of peace and reconciliation with government and outside it become key skills.
4. *Environment of democracy and evidence-based policy:* PRI's experience shows that demand for open and transparency evidence is still weak. However, the hope is that peace agreements will eventually help weaken traditions of authoritarianism in Sudan.