

Joint Assessment Mission provides road-map for peace

by Jon Bennett

The Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) for Sudan has broken new ground in post-conflict planning by working with key local and international actors to develop a strategic vision for reconstruction and recovery.

“Sudan is at a critical juncture.” This is the opening sentence of the Framework for Sustained Peace, Development and Poverty Eradication, the document presented to donors earlier this year as an outcome of the Joint Assessment Mission. The January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)¹ formally ended war between the Khartoum government and the insurgent Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM).

The CPA was the culmination of a process primarily fostered by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a seven-country regional development organisation.² IGAD brokered the talks which in July 2002 led to the signing by the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the SPLM of the Machakos Protocol.³

In July 2005, six months after the signing of the CPA, a new Government of National Unity was sworn in, though it took another two months for ministers to be named. The shock of the death some three weeks later of John Garang, Sudan’s first Vice-President and founder and leader of the SPLM, might have created a major setback but this was not the case. The government includes 30% representation from the SPLM. For the first time southern Sudan has its own government the (Government of Southern Sudan – GoSS) and there is agreement on how to share the country’s growing oil wealth. Sudan now not only has to overcome the huge social and economic challenges of a ‘failed state’ but also the political challenge of proving the viability of a unified nation. The alternative, after a six-year Interim Period culminating in a referendum to decide the future of southern Sudan, could be Sudan’s dissolution into two separate states. With stakes this high, the JAM was always going to be more than simply a technical exercise. It was certainly not a traditional needs assessment

but rather an inclusive exercise in strategic ‘vision’ planning for a country with huge potential, yet torn apart by political, social and economic inequality. Consolidating a still-tenuous peace requires a rapid and visible redress of the underlying structural causes of conflict and underdevelopment. Redistribution of wealth must be accompanied by an overhaul of the governance apparatus. Without these issues very firmly on the table, neither the donor community nor the domestic audience was going to take seriously the blueprint presented in the JAM.

The peculiarity of Sudan is that it is now poised – thanks to its newly acquired oil wealth – to become one of Africa’s richest countries while simultaneously having some of the continent’s worst human development indicators.⁴ Thus, the whole thrust of the JAM was not to raise external aid (though this is important in the early post-war years) but rather to redress the imbalances of wealth through a fundamental restructuring of the economy and political landscape of the country. The measure of success would be in placing Sudan firmly on the road to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As global uncertainties continue to push up oil prices the GoS’s revenues will continue to increase. However, unless the absorptive capacity of the GoSS to handle revenues is quickly increased, and unless accountable and transparent governance is developed, oil revenues could – as has happened in Angola and other post-conflict states – result in corruption and the entrenchment of unaccountable elites.

Immediate needs

The JAM covers the six-year Interim Period, with a focus on the critical ‘first phase’ (2005-07), and on the

poorest, most disadvantaged parts of the country – in particular southern Sudan and the contested states of Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei (known as the Transitional or Three Areas). Two thirds of the initial recovery costs presented in the JAM are to be met from domestic (mostly oil) resources, with only one third from international donors.

Key immediate necessities include security, reconciliation and peace building, meeting food security requirements and enabling the sustainable return of displaced persons. This requires the establishment of basic structures and institutions of participatory governance and respect for human rights. Access to land is an immediate issue and, in the medium term, marketing reforms are needed, alongside a reorientation of resources from the military towards investment in productive sectors (traditional agriculture, livestock and the private sector), social services and infrastructure in long-disadvantaged parts of the country. Key to this will be shifting national wealth towards state and local governments while building their capacity to deliver basic services.

Southern Sudan is starting from a much lower level in terms of institutional capacity and socio-economic development. Key education and health indicators, such as child and maternal mortality and primary enrolment, are among the worst in the world. Infrastructure is virtually non-existent, with no paved roads outside the main urban centres. A civil service and structures for service delivery must be created essentially from scratch. The strategy in the South is to promote rural development through emphasis on basic infrastructure to support intraregional, North-South and international trade linkages, agricultural productivity and expanded access to basic social services, especially education. Through the CPA the GoSS will have access to substantial domestically generated revenue but additional resources will be needed, particularly for technical assistance and humanitarian needs.

Any lasting peace depends on a durable solution for the millions of IDPs and refugees who have languished, in some cases for a whole generation, in camps and urban areas. Of the country's estimated six million IDPs, at least four million have been displaced by the war in the South. It is expected that, although most will return, as many as a third of those based in or around Khartoum will remain. So far, some 200,000 IDPs and refugees have returned to southern Sudan and the Three Areas, adding to the more than 500,000 who returned in 2004.

– played a central role in the war between North and South. Situated on the frontline of the civil war, they are at the heart of national and local contests over resources, particularly water, land and oil. The Three Areas have a population of around 3.9 million, of whom 30% live in areas controlled by the SPLM. Due to their geographical position 30% of the population of the region have been displaced – around 75% of the inhabitants of Abyei have fled the area or are displaced within the state. The Three Areas will see a large inflow of returnees and serve as major transit routes for returning populations

Protocols agreed between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM recognise the special status of the Three Areas but leave many questions unresolved. In Abyei there are provisions for a referendum on whether to remain part of the North or join the South. Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile have special autonomy and will make submissions to the Presidency of the Government of National Unity on how to implement the CPA in the region.

Food security in the Three Areas remains fragile and land ownership highly inequitable. Existing tensions between pastoralist and farmers over the use of natural resources have been exacerbated by the spread of large-scale mechanised farming and oil exploration. The return of IDPs and refugees is likely to result in increased conflict over access to ancestral land. The presence or fear of mines continues to be an obstacle to productive use of land in some areas, while other areas suffer from over-usage due to the returning population.

Levels of access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation and health services are low. Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is estimated at 582 deaths per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in Sudan. Although overall there is more poverty and fewer services in the SPLM areas, there are marginalised groups in all parts of the transitional belt whose needs must be understood. The physical isolation of the SPLM-controlled part of Abyei and of Southern Blue Nile leads to shortages, or extremely high prices, for many goods.

JAM as a process

Sudan's JAM exercise was unprecedented in duration, scope and complexity. Initially planned as an 11-week intensive process, it ended up running for 15 months and turned into a unique post-conflict needs assessment. At the outset national teams were inadequately prepared, particularly in the South where it took six months to develop a viable SPLM team. Time was needed to build consensus among a huge diversity of stakeholders – IGAD, the UN, the World Bank, proto-governmental, civil society, NGOs, bilateral donors and aid agencies. Building trust between and within the national parties involved months of dialogue.

The delay in augmenting the Machakos Protocol with a formal peace agreement was unexpected. However, once it became clear that talks in the Kenyan town of Naivasha had reached an impasse, and the CPA would not be signed in early 2004 as intended, the Core Coordination Group (CCG) of JAM recognised the need for a preparatory phase to build capacity and broaden understanding of the JAM's aims and objectives. The risk of fatigue was outweighed by the opportunity to reflect and possibly influence the peace process by concentrating on a strategic planning process that looked beyond the negotiation difficulties. The level of participation from the parties and from the wider international community was unprecedented in recent post-conflict needs assessments.

Personnel and capacity constraints in the SPLM became evident as individuals assigned to the JAM were also involved in Naivasha. In Khartoum the GoS team struggled to raise enthusiasm for the process. Although much of the technical work of the JAM could be done, protracted security and implementation discussions in Naivasha inevitably led to further delays. Fortunately the signing of protocols in June 2004 lifted the JAM beyond rhetorical promise and provided a political and institutional framework that paved the way for intensive and productive dialogue. It allowed the convening of a joint GoS/SPLM workshop in Nairobi at which for the first time both sides agreed on the conceptual framework of the JAM. The outline of the final report was agreed, along with an understanding that:

Any lasting peace depends on a durable solution for the millions of IDPs and refugees

The UN programme, supported by NGOs and a joint GoS/SPLM Sustainable Returns Team, is based on several key priorities:

- prevent and ameliorate the effects of demolitions and other actions which could lead to coerced movement
- address gaps in coverage according to general vulnerability criteria in order to ensure that IDPs at least have the same living standards as host populations
- ensure that IDPs have access to existing services
- ensure that the displaced can make informed decisions through the provision of information, legal advice and counselling.

The revised 2005 UN Work Plan⁵ includes provisions to: (a) ensure that returnees have minimum humanitarian assistance through dispersal centres for the first phase of return to avoid additional burden on receiving communities; and (b) strengthen basic services in the communities of return, ensuring that current levels of per capita services for residents are maintained. Aid workers are to be properly trained on general protection matters to adequately report and seek redress for protection concerns encountered while implementing assistance. To the extent practicable, host populations will also be included in needs assessment and programme design.

The Three Areas

Abyei, Blue Nile State and Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains – known as the Transitional or Three Areas

- needs would be disaggregated into four categories covering the Government of National Unity, South, northern states and the Three Areas.
- JAM interventions would start concurrently with the six-year Interim Period, while other instruments would meet existing and emergency needs.
- missions would be undertaken in the Three Areas with efforts made to instruct local authorities of cross-line movements by JAM teams.

The work of the JAM was organised into nine cluster groups⁶ which provided reference and consultation for visiting missions and were directly consulted over the final reports. They were open to any donor/NGO/UN agency with relevant skills. The arrangement was more effective in the South, perhaps due to a greater cohesion among operational agencies, the personal commitment of the deputy RC/HC and the presence of a greater number of development (as opposed to purely humanitarian) agencies.

The JAM has helped to:

- build capacity in southern Sudan and aid the birth of the new state apparatus
- prepare key stakeholders in the North for relinquishing some responsibilities under the agreed 'one country, two systems'
- re-shape governance structures by emphasising the need for decentralised government and fiscal reallocations within a federal state – thus translating the

- political, and sometimes ambiguous, elements of the Naivasha Protocols into concrete proposals
- develop a set of common objectives as a basis for a Poverty Eradication Strategy
- develop 'urgent needs' programmes, particularly relating to the return of IDPs and refugees
- lay the groundwork for two multi-donor trust funds (one for the North, one for the South) for the receipt of external development funding.

The JAM's CCG has now been replaced by the Joint National Transition Team (JNTT), a Sudanese-led body with international observers (donors, UN, World Bank) invited to attend. At the Oslo Donors Conference on Sudan in April 2005 the JNTT's presentation of the country's development priorities marked the first time that the parties to the CPA presented a unified proposal to the international community. The JNTT is now using the cluster reports as a basis for reshaping the programmatic outline provided by the JAM into firm project proposals for submission to national authorities and the Multi-Donor Trust Funds [see p23].

The realpolitik of needs assessment

In the closing stages of the JAM, some concern was expressed by international observers that human rights were not given sufficient prominence. Concern at atrocities in Darfur and the legacy of the many human rights violations perpetrated by all protagonists during the North/South war led some advocates

to argue for strong conditionality within the JAM appeal. It was necessary to make some compromises over language, removing the more accusatory phrases from cluster reports drafted by internationals. This was particularly so for Cluster 2 (Governance). The GoS argued that it would be difficult to sell the JAM to its own constituency if such language remained. The major sticking point was over the historical analysis of 'marginalisation' of certain ethnic, religious or geographical populations. The SPLM felt that this lay at the very heart of the peace agreement; the GoS wished to confine such an analysis to historical interpretation.

No process is ever perfect, and there are still rumblings of discontent from those allegedly 'excluded' from the JAM dialogue. Certainly, the omission of Darfur and the political expediency of having only the SPLM and GoS as main interlocutors limited the scope of the document. But the JAM was, first and foremost, a declaration of intent and commitment by those forming the new government(s). It contains measurable benchmarks – a check list of indicators for each six months until the end of 2007. This, more than anything, has convinced the international community of its ultimate worth. A great deal of work is needed to put more flesh on the skeleton of Sudan's recovery but the JAM has started the process.

Jon Bennett, UN Team Leader, JAM, is an independent consultant and director of Oxford Development Consultants. Email: jon.bennett@dsl.pipex.com. JAM final report and cluster team reports are online at: www.unsudanig.org/JAM

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan listens to tribal leaders in Sudan.



1. www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EVTU-6AZBDB?OpenDocument
2. www.igad.org
3. www.usip.org/library/pa/sudan/sudan_machakos07202002_toc.html
4. Sudan is ranked 139th in UNDP's 2004 Human Development Report. At \$1,820 pa, Sudan's per capita GDP is more than double that of most other conflict-affected states in Africa. http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_SDN.html
5. <http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/webpage.asp?MenuID=6282&Page=1217>
6. Institutional Development and Capacity Building; Governance/Rule of Law; Economic Policy and Management; Productive Sectors; Basic Social Services; Infrastructure; Livelihoods and Social Protection; and Information.