

The Sudanese peace process and the media

by David Campbell and Kate Lloyd Morgan

Enabling the media to give Sudanese citizens a voice and help them access information required for sustainable livelihoods will require a regulatory paradigm shift and investment in infrastructure and human capacity.

Sudan has a state-owned broadcaster which owns all transmission networks and a censored press. Nearly all media originates from the North with only a small amount of local radio content available in the South. Fear of persecution under emergency laws has led to significant self-censorship. Private transmission networks are not permitted and new independent licensed radio services are obliged to use the state network. Sudan's only news agency, the Sudan Media Corporation, is controlled by the security authorities. Newspaper companies are barred from owning their own distribution networks.

Khartoum's 13 daily newspapers have a combined circulation of only 168,000. They are required to pay an initial and annual license fee and demonstrate that a requisite number of experienced journalists are employed. Individual journalists also have to be licensed, to be university graduates and to prove fluency in Arabic. In the South enormous physical difficulties impede distribution of newspapers. The only regularly distributed publication, the Sudan Mirror, is printed in Nairobi and circulated in main towns with support from NGOs.

The Media Cluster of the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) recommended the creation of independent media regulators for the North and South and public broadcast boards. Regulators will be responsible for frequency planning, awarding licences and guaranteeing press freedoms. The boards will be responsible for promoting the concepts and principles of public service broadcasting. The government can use and be part of the individual management boards, along with other stakeholders. The transmission network should be free

of direct state control and provide access to the transmission infrastructure (masts and aerials) on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms. Funds received for use of the infrastructure could be used to fund the public services. It should be possible for any commercial body to build their own transmitters.

It is essential that all Sudanese understand the peace process, its impact on their lives, and the pledges made by the authorities. They need reliable information about their rights and obligations from sources which they can trust. JAM recommends that national and local radio should:

- cover and support the peace process and return of IDPs and refugees
- ensure that IDPs in and around Khartoum are provided with accurate information to inform their decisions whether to stay or to return to the South
- help the public understand governance issues
- respond to demand for programmes in local languages
- provide information on development successes and challenges
- promote literacy and adult education
- encourage wider understanding of Sudan's history
- provide support to primary education
- work closely with civil society
- publicise Sudan's poverty reduction strategy and encourage transparency and public participation in its preparation and monitoring
- provide marketing and other livelihoods-related information
- promote preventative health and knowledge of malaria, AIDS,

bilharzia and mother and child health issues.

Strategies to foster a vibrant independent media will need to be tailored to the different situations in North and South. While northerners enjoy better access to radio, television and satellite broadcasts there is a need to invest in updated facilities and improve programming quality. University journalism courses need to start, including journalistic ethics and standards. The South requires massive investment in physical infrastructure and human resources. JAM recommends:

- establishing a regional media training facility: it is particularly important to train female journalists in order to ensure that issues of concern to women are included
- setting up a number of FM radio stations and providing training in production, radio journalism and financial management
- expanding capacity to print school books and other materials: the Government of South Sudan should not set up its own printing facility – there are hardly any examples in the world where this has worked – but work to encourage commercial printers to set up and deliver materials for government, commercial and civil society clients
- developing a satellite-based ICT system to support local government, enhance security and disseminate information to facilitate the return of IDPs.

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