

# Reflections on the Joint Assessment Mission

by Michael Kevane

*The Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) Sudan was an open and consultative process – and has generated an impressive archive for students of post-war reconstruction – but has paid insufficient attention to justice and failed to offer a safety net for marginalised households.*

The so-called Government of National Unity, the Government of South Sudan and donors are committed, under the budget for development spending presented by the JAM in May 2005, to spending just under \$8bn in the next two and a half years.

The budget is an interesting reflection of contemporary development thinking but also of continuing misplaced priorities. Building schools, health clinics and roads takes up the biggest chunk of the budget. When public expenditures suddenly soar, builders are the first beneficiaries. Land policy in southern Sudan is accorded \$200,000 but, bizarrely, \$48m is allocated to the region's media. So 240 times more will be spent on the media than on developing policies to avert the risk that land disputes will endanger peace. The budget doctors have allocated \$119m to the functioning of Sudan's central bank but a mere \$1.9m for mainstreaming gender into government policy and practice.

## Why not give away the \$8bn?

When we consider that reconstruction spending is to target around 20 million marginalised Sudanese (of a total population of around 32

million) then you have spending of about \$160 per person. After subtracting modest bureaucratic, consultancy and other delivery costs, this amounts to an annual payment of \$150 for each poor person in Sudan for the next few years. Most poor people would undoubtedly prefer to receive such a sum as an income supplement rather than as a bundle of services. Why did the JAM authors assume that they could plan more wisely, and government counterparts in the GoS or SPLM could spend more effectively, than poor citizens in Bahr al-Ghazal or the Nuba Mountains or the Red Sea Hills? Why should we not trust Sudanese to make strategic and livelihoods-enhancing choices – a farmer to buy a younger and stronger donkey, parents to send their children to a better school, or a tea-seller to invest in another set of tea glasses?

It is disappointing that no consideration seems to have been given to an income support scheme, at the least for elderly women and families with school-age children. Numerous studies have shown that these programmes can be just as effective as government spending, and they have ripple effects throughout the private sector.

Education and roads are at the core of the JAM budget. One has to ask whether the private sector cannot manage education successfully, especially in the south where Christian missionaries and NGOs are more than willing to subsidise schooling. Everybody likes the

idea of building roads. But the poor, in Sudan and elsewhere, know that their benefits go disproportionately to the rich. No doubt they would rather have bicycles, yet bicycles merit no mention at all in the JAM documents. As Sudan rebuilds, there is a real danger that the smart and the rich will take advantage of public investment, while everyone else stays at the bottom of the well.

Another major, and related, shortcoming of the JAM budget is that it lacks any justice component. Those victimised by the perpetrators of the war are entitled to restitution. The summary report avoids blaming any current power-holders – either in Khartoum or the SPLA – for attacks on civilians, arming of proxy militia and human rights violations. Diplomatic whitewashing leaves a lingering impression that the only leader who bears any responsibility is Jaafar al-Numeiri, the military strongman ousted from power two decades ago. Sudan's civil war is instead presented as an almost inevitable bursting forth of local tensions arising from pressure on a diminishing resource base. The JAM's focus on local-level conflict implies that the poor – the pastoralists and the farmers who could not get along – were responsible for war and now need to be taught how to cooperate. And since they were the cause of the war, and nothing was taken from them, there needs to be no restitution.

Scholars involved with Sudan need to remind policy makers that income guarantee and restitution schemes, rather than state-led development, may be the preference of the poor. Such schemes may be more effective in alleviating poverty, generating growth and restoring justice.

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*Women draw water from a borehole in Malualkon, southern Sudan.*

