Helpdesk Research Report

Democracy strengthening in Sudan

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Question

Can you identify and summarise the key findings of evaluations and research conducted in the past 10 years on democracy strengthening in Sudan?

Contents

1. Overview

This report summarises key points of development work and research conducted on democracy strengthening in Sudan. It **excludes the nation-state of South Sudan**, but does include some research covering the southern areas of Sudan before the secession in 2011. Most of the literature focuses on democratic elections, from voter education to election conduct, but this report also tries to include broader democracy building processes.

The four subsections are areas of key interest identified by DFID. The literature presents a high level of interest in engaging women in democracy processes, in particular focusing on the **role of women as voters and political representatives**. Literature notes that civil society organisations in Sudan appear to have a strong interest in women's political participation, have successfully **increased women's representation in parliament** and influenced some policy change. **Youth participation is much rarer**, and the literature presents little comment on this beyond the need to improve civic education. The civil society literature, apart from instances of women's activism, mainly looks at **freedom of the media**. There are few examples of interventions which can positively support this, due to the policy environment set by the Sudanese government. Until the **repressive laws and policies** are lifted, few development interventions can improve media freedom. Political party development has mainly focused on **improving the SPLM's legitimacy and ability** to lead South Sudan, since it was South Sudan's de facto government

party pre-2011. **Smaller parties are given much less attention**. The SPLM is considered to have benefited from strengthening interventions and to be progressing well. The final section on civic and voter education shows that the literature **focus is mainly on voter education**, in preparation for Sudan's 2010 elections. Programmes have been received extremely positively, and voter commitment to democracy is perceived as high.

State of the evidence reviewed

In general, the literature relies on **project self-reporting**, and much of this is prospective planning documents rather than evaluations. Few concrete results or empirical evidence are presented by NGOs, with a few exceptions. Much literature talks about the **challenges and prospects** for peace and peaceful elections, focusing on **context analysis and obstacles** rather than interventions. South Sudan is a major focal point and there is much less literature which looks at Sudan as a whole or, now, northern Sudan. Similarly, the **2010 election is a focal point** and there is less literature on creating a broadly democratic culture. The table below provides a brief summary of the state of the evidence presented in this rapid review, relevant to the four identified themes.

Table 1: Summary findings from a rapid review of literature

Area	Summary of literature
Women's and youth participation	Women: strong body of literature. Mainly academic, theoretical and critical, but some project evaluations. Youth: very few projects or academic work.
Civil society oversight of electoral and political reform	Quite strong on reporting women's activism, in academic discussion. Media freedom literature is largely reporting on workshops, not critical or empirical. Most literature is self-reporting by NGOs.
Supporting political parties	Mostly project literature, but a weak evidence base. One or two rigorous evaluations, but many projects do not have evaluations publically available, thus commentary is drawn from project websites.
Civic and voter education	Quite strong evidence base, several critical academic and NGO papers. One baseline study from 2008.

2. Women's and youth political participation

Much of the literature on women's political participation concentrates on the formal **quota for their representation** in the legislative and executive bodies. There are two key national acts in this process, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the National Elections Act 2008. Formal political inclusion of women was **largely driven by pro-women activists** in both cases (considered in the civil society section below).

The **CPA is considered quite gender-blind**, as it does not contain a quota for women and did not include women in the drafting process (Abbas, 2010). The Northern interim constitution contains a bill ensuring men's and women's equal rights (Article 32), making previous laws discriminating against women unconstitutional, although these are yet to be amended (Tønnessen & Kjøstvedt, 2010). The single provision for affirmative action on women in the Northern constitution is considered weak in comparison

with the Southern interim constitution, which successfully incorporated a 25 per cent quota for women in both the legislative and executive structures (Abbas, 2010). These steps towards codification of women's rights into law are important, although small and not yet institutionalised.

The National Elections Act 2008 specifies that 25 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly are reserved for women (Tønnessen & Kjøstvedt, 2010). This is the only instance in the North where a quota is definitively given in law (Tønnessen & Kjøstvedt, 2010). In Sudan, women have been better represented in politics under authoritarian rules which directly appoint women, and under-represented in periods with semi-democratic elections (Abbas, 2010; Tønnessen & Kjøstvedt, 2010). This suggests a **quota may be an effective method** for improving women's representation. The quota is perceived as a positive step, but it does not respond to the complexities of women's positioning within party lists or the perceived merit of MPs elected by default, which women's activists had highlighted in the drafting process (Abbas, 2010). Abbas (2010) suggests that the most important impact of introducing the quota was actually in the **increased engagement** of women with the political process in terms of activism and lobbying, rather than concrete changes in women's formal representation.

In the **2010 elections**, women only won seats where they were picked from the women's quota list, meaning no women won a seat through a (meritocratic) geographic constituency or a party list (Abbas, 2010). This – combined with a boycott of the election by opposition parties, which resulted in fewer female candidates overall – meant that **women were only elected where the quota mandated it** (Abbas, 2010). Women's under-representation is largely due to their lack of funds for campaigning, lower access to the media, continued marginalisation, little knowledge of how to run campaigns, and low voter knowledge (Abbas, 2010).

Tønnessen and Kjøstvedt (2010) identify that **communication is weak** between elite women in leadership positions and grassroots women activists. There is a disconnect between the aims of women's empowerment projects and the realities of poor women who need to work, meaning they do not often have the time to participate in activism or educational activities. The paper questions whether elite women truly represent grassroots concerns.

Projects

The UNDP project Good Governance and Equity in Political Participation in Post Conflict Sudan (GGEPP) is a prominent project on strengthening women's political participation. It ran from 2006-8, and has a rigorous evaluation conducted by an independent consultant (Koekebakker, 2008). The three objectives of the project were:

- Enhance the **capacities** of potential Sudanese women leaders and institutions impacting women's political participation,
- Raise the Sudanese public's **awareness** of good governance principles and the importance of the political participation of women,
- Improve the conditions for gender-sensitive **policy reform** for political participation.

The evaluation finds that the project has been **highly successful at capacity building** at both individual and institutional levels. **Awareness-raising had some positive effects,** for example an increase in independent media, but lacked outreach to rural areas. **Policy reform was the least successful** area, partly because it is difficult to attribute changes or potential changes in policy to any particular intervention. There is some suggestion that GGEPP's training enhanced the ability of leaders to advocate

for reform. In the North, the greatest successes were with women leaders in civil society and political parties, while in the South the greatest successes were in increasing the gender-sensitivity of government itself and women's awareness of policy issues. The evaluation highlights that there is a great **enthusiasm and interest in women's empowerment.**

UNDP have also helped improve gender equality by providing a gender and governance expert to work with the National Elections Commission and UNDP Sudan to ensure women's effective participation in the 2010 elections. This included workshops for women's participation and female candidates, and awareness-raising for journalists (UNDP Sudan, nd, p.28). UNDP suggest that this programme was partly responsible for the high turnout of female voters.

Youth

Literature on youth participation is limited. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (nd) provides a summary document detailing their programmes with youth. They have supported the establishment of Youth Parliaments in all states, provide leadership training for youth and youth organisations, and conduct research. UNFPA provides support for advocacy, including resource materials and grants for youth advocates to attend international conferences, and awareness-raising at a local level. There is no summary of impact or outcomes of their programmes.

3. Civil society oversight of electoral and political reform

There is little literature which reviews the capacity of civil society to advocate or monitor for reform. In part this is because **civil society is not well developed in Sudan**. The literature on this topic is mostly project planning or recommendations on how civil society could be strengthened.

Women's activism

Tønnessen and Kjøstvedt (2010), based on empirical fieldwork from 2006-9, suggest that there is a high level of feminist awareness and activism about women's issues in Sudan. Much debate happens outside parliament, within civil society. The authors note that **women activists are quite vocal and allowed a critical space in Sudan**. For example, the Lubna Ahmad al-Hussein case, where Lubna was prosecuted for wearing trousers in 2009, prompted a series of workshops and lectures and women's activists reached out to the international media for coverage and support (Tønnessen & Kjøstvedt, 2010). The Khartoum media has a critical view of some laws regarding women, and has prompted debate on some aspects (Tønnessen & Kjøstvedt, 2010).

The CPA process saw a lot of women's activism in both the North and South, particularly mobilising around the addition of a **25 per cent quota** for women's seats in parliament (Abbas, 2010, see above). Although this number was agreed by most parties, fissures developed between groups supporting the NCP and groups supporting the opposition, and over how the quota should be implemented. In the North, women activists had **little access** to the formal political processes of constitution drafting, so they utilised **media and protests** to promote their message (Abbas, 2010).

Media freedom

Article 19, an international freedom of expression NGO, held several roundtables on media freedom immediately following the CPA. In southern Sudan, these focused on producing a new media policy framework, drafting media laws and self-regulation codes of ethics[1]. In the North, the focus was on developing media freedom of expression through reforming the existing system[2]. The intent was to follow the roundtables with national conferences to sustain ongoing local media development (Article 19, nd), which appears to have happened to some extent.

Article 19 provides wide recommendations for reform, which include: that Sudan establishes a **right of public access** to government decision-making; that the media has **protected freedom of expression;** and that government oversight bodies are replaced by **independent** ones (Article 19, nd). The roundtables after 2005 show continuing concern over freedom of expression, and give no clear indication that the situation improved. In 2008, Article 19, its partner NGOs and 34 Sudanese media professionals released a statement calling on both Northern and Southern governments to end repression of the media, in particular the **censorship imposed by the security forces**[3].

The Center for International Media Assistance, an American initiative of the National Endowment for Democracy, convened a discussion on the status of media in Sudan in 2007 (CIMA, nd). Fifty representatives of international organisations, Sudanese and international journalists, the Government of the Republic of Sudan, and the Government of Southern Sudan attended. The issues discussed are mostly as described above, including the **restriction of topics** which journalists are allowed to report, that **journalists were not trained** to a sufficiently high standard, that **Sudanese people see TV and radio as tools of the government** and are more likely to look to newspapers for less biased reporting, and that **independent stations tend not to broadcast news** for fear of reprisals (CIMA, nd). Both governments thwart independence by refusing to grant licenses and have otherwise obstructive policies (CIMA, nd). Radio is considered more effective for reaching illiterate rural populations than TV or written media, and participants agreed that the majority of Sudanese were uneducated on the content and meaning of the CPA. This short report from CIMA highlights that most **problems for the media in Sudan are in the lack of an enabling environment**, rather than capacity issues per se. There is an identified need for more journalistic training at this point in time, but the legal and political restrictions are presented as the most problematic for the existing media.

Projects

Radio Miraya is a radio station run by the UN, based in Juba, broadcasting to all Sudan (http://www.radiomiraya.org). Its remit is part entertainment, but mainly **independent news broadcasting**, providing a **platform for dialogue**, and **civic education**. One funder, the EC, describes the station's impacts as establishing an unbiased and reliable information source, fostering dialogue including defusing tense situations, and supporting the peace process[4].

The 2010 elections saw a **national election monitoring effort** carried out by the Sudanese Group for Democracy and Elections (SuGDE; North) and the Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections (SuNDE;

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[1] http://www.ifex.org/sudan/2005/10/13/article_19_leads_sudan_roundtables/
[2] http://www.ifex.org/sudan/2005/10/13/article_19_leads_sudan_roundtables/
[3] http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/press/sudan-juba-declaration.pdf
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/sudan_human-rights-democracy_en.pdf

South), which are umbrella groups for eight organisations working on free and fair elections[5]. This was the only Sudan-wide non-partisan monitoring (SuGDE & SuNDE, 2010) and as such, represents a move towards greater democracy through elections. Their report on the 2010 elections (SuGDE & SuNDE, 2010) shows that citizens and officials were keen to participate, but that the **elections did not meet international standards**, mainly due to administrative problems and inappropriate conduct by political parties. Their key findings are:

- **Administrative** problems: election stations opening late, closing early, often due to lack of crucial materials; confusion and lack of coordination by NEC and other administrative bodies; absence of some voters from voter lists; incorrect ballot papers.

- **Intimidation and observer obstruction:** all states reported intimidation and violence, with the highest percentage in Western Bahr el Ghazal (33 per cent), usually carried out by party agents. Observers were deliberately obstructed in a small number of cases.

- **Polling station security personnel, party and candidate agents:** party agents were present in 97 per cent of polling stations. They often argued with officials, and campaigned in 12 per cent of stations. They were a major cause of disruption.

- **Counting**: 96 per cent of polling stations counted without incident of violence or intimidation. Some stations barred party and candidate agents from observing the count, but others allowed unauthorised personnel to observe, both of which are against NEC rules.

The Rift Valley Institute offers a critical examination of the contested South Kordofan 2011 election (Verjee, 2011, p.8). The paper suggests that the national and international **monitoring was insufficient to guarantee free and fair elections**. Further, the authors consider that attempts to strengthen democracy through elections and election monitoring may instead have **undermined trust in the democratic system**, through elections' failure. The main issues identified as problematic are: constituency boundaries and/or proportional representation; irregularities in voter registration (multiple registrations and duplicate entries); and counting and tabulation discrepancies. The NEC responded to complaints about registration by removing 16,000 names from the register in Muglad before the election. This paper suggests that the election observation process was weak and did not enforce internationally accepted standards, maintaining a blind eye in some cases. This has not helped strengthen democracy.

4. Supporting political parties

USAID has long been involved in democracy strengthening in Sudan. Part of its support has consisted of funding the International Republican Institute (IRI) to support political parties in:

- Political party organisational development;

- Political party participation in elections; and

- Strengthening party caucuses and specialised committees in the southern Sudan Legislative Assembly (SSLA) which promote good governance.

A mid-term review from 2008 conducted by independent consultants summarises the project's progress (USAID, 2008); a final evaluation was scheduled for 2011 but this report does not seem to be available.

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[5] SuGDE's website is currently unavailable as of July 2013 (http://www.sugde.org/)

The project focuses on **building the capacity** of the southern Sudan political parties, including the SPLM. The SPLM is assessed as making good progress in capacity and **increasing internal democratic good governance**. This is measured by having a democratic constitution, a strategic plan, departmental work plans, and departmental budgets, partly but not wholly due to IRI. The evaluation assesses the programme as successful in developing greater capacity of the SPLM and in its ability to continue along a path of democratic development. The training and mentoring sessions offered by IRI are considered useful and applicable by participants. Party strengthening of the SPLM has manifested through better strategic planning, new constitutions and manifestos, smooth operation of a party convention, and dialogue between political leaders. Some modest improvements have been made with the SSLA, in skills training and committee functioning, but it has not increased its capacity overall. The **smaller parties are less able to develop** and face greater obstacles.

Another party strengthening project ran in 2007, funded by DFID and coordinated by the Electoral Institute for Democracy in Africa in partnership with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), The Parliamentary Centre, a Canadian-based NGO and Partners in Development Services. As above, there is no formal evaluation publically available so it is difficult to draw out lessons learned.

The overall purpose of the project was to assist in developing and strengthening political parties in Sudan so that they:

- Perform as effective actors of democratisation and good governance, trusted by voters.
- Are representative and responsive to public needs and concerns.
- Contribute to public debate.
- Are equipped to support government and a constructive opposition.[6]

In May 2007, a **workshop was held for the six major political parties**, which discussed internal governance and functioning. No immediate impact was felt but the feedback from participants was that it was **a good forum for dialogue** (EISA, 2007). A further workshop was held in June 2007, responding to participants' requests, which focused on elements of internal party democracy[7], such as inclusion of women and minority groups, quotas, party finance, and leadership selection. IDEA has a strong focus on the inclusion of women and the broader meaning of democracy beyond elections. There have been calls for further training from the political parties attending these workshops.

In 2008, IDEA and UNDP started a new project which built on the above, aiming to extend the training beyond the six major parties to members of 24 parties over 18 months[8]. The project aimed to develop and strengthen the political parties in Sudan to perform as effective actors of democratisation and good governance trusted by voters, representative and responsive to public needs, engaged in public debate, and well equipped to support government and a constructive opposition[9]. UNDP lists the project's major achievements as[10]:

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[6] http://www.eisa.org.za/EISA/pp5.htm

[7] http://www.idea.int/parties/workshop_sudan07.cfm

[8] http://www.idea.int/africa/sudan/strengthening_pp_demo.cfm

[9] http://www.sd.undp.org/projects/dg17.htm

[10] http://www.sd.undp.org/projects/dg17.htm

- Two **Trainings of Trainers** on 'Political Party Organization and Management' for 72 participants representing 22 political parties. The training aimed to build capacity on political party models organisation.

- Two training workshops on 'The **Role of Political Parties in Elections**' for 89 participants representing 22 political parties. This aimed to enhance capacity on their expected role in democratic elections and to equip them with knowledge and tools for the coming elections.

- Two workshops on 'Political Parties and Elections'; the first one attended by 46 participants representing 11 political parties; the second attended by 51 participants representing the other 11 parties. The workshops focused on the **need to reduce the gender gap** in relation to elections and women's quota in Sudan.

- Two training workshops on 'Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns' for 121 participants representing 22 political parties as well as representatives from media and communication sections. The training workshops aimed to **build capacities on developing electoral party programmes** as well as enhancing understanding of how to run electoral campaigns.

- Sixty participants from 22 political parties were trained in skills and methodologies related to the **facilitation roles** making use of Bridge methodology in 2009

UNDP also measures impact and success through the **enthusiasm and serious discussion** participants showed in workshops[11]. Participants were particularly interested in **understanding similar party systems** in other countries and the **history of Sudan's political party development**, with a strong focus on **electoral issues** due to the timing of the workshops[12]. The facilitation of cross-party dialogue has also resulted in increased cooperation between parties.

There are other examples of this kind of programme, particularly from UNDP, which usually have similar objectives and structures to those described above. However, there is a severe lack of evaluation reports from these projects.

5. Civic and voter education

A key reference work is **IFES' baseline study** on civic and voter education in Sudan, conducted in 2008 in preparation for the general election, which was initially planned for 2009 (IFES, 2008). The report presents potential options for civic education (CE) programmes, both short- and long-term, and reviews opportunities and challenges. At this point, it is assumed that CE will be conducted by NGOs, not the state. Since the report is forward-looking rather than evaluative, its main message is that **Civic Education programmes are largely absent in Sudan**, and it makes suggestions for new appropriate initiatives. A central pillar is the coordination or at least communication between the various agencies undertaking CE.

The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) ran CE programmes in Iraq and Sudan from 2006-2010. Their comparative review of these two countries highlights some lessons learned from Sudan (Levine and Bishai, 2010. Sudan case study pp. 10-14). The first workshop, held in Khartoum in 2007, asked participants (a mix of college-level teachers, students, journalists, civil society activists, and political party members) to design activities for their communities that would convey the meaning of democratic elections. One participant, a theatre teacher, presented a **series of vignettes** which illustrated important lessons. The participants' response to this was so positive that the teacher was commissioned to develop

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[11] http://web.undp.org/comtoolkit/success-stories/ARAB-Sudan-demgov4.shtml
[12] http://web.undp.org/comtoolkit/success-stories/ARAB-Sudan-demgov4.shtml

this into a play, which was then performed live for several of USIP's voter education workshops. It is considered highly successful by USIP, which is attributed to its **use of local customs, dialects** and particularly its **jokes and humour** which tapped into Sudanese culture. It has opened many dialogues on the elections and on civic rights and responsibilities more broadly. USIP also held a **conference on CE** in the national curriculum, which concluded that it was insufficient and ineffective, but little has come from this finding.

USIP also ran an Electoral Violence Prevention programme in 2009, which wove together case studies of four other elections on the African continent, as well as conflict management skills, and citizenship components that provided a long-view perspective on democracy and political participation. These workshops were extremely popular and participants regarded them highly. This project also contained a train-the-trainers phase, which brought together groups of **trainers from the north and south** to learn the course, which in itself **fostered democratic dialogue and cross-national learning**. Bringing together different groups was highly valued by USIP as a means to enhance relationships by using common interests as a bridge.

UNDP Sudan provided considerable support to voter education for the 2010 elections by distributing grants and providing training on procedures to grantees, as well as directly producing civic education materials and media outputs (UNDP, nd, p.28)

The SuGDE member organisations conducted voter education reaching 90,000 Northern voters directly from mid-March 2010 (SuGDE & SuNDE, 2010). They used **public forums** targeting community leaders and civil society activists, **workshops** for community educators, **popular theatre** shows, **exhibition** of voter education materials such as posters, leaflets, stickers and booklets, and a **lecture series** on the election process, targeting groups which included women, youth, university students and police forces. The people reached directly then disseminated this information. SuGDE assesses voters' commitment to the process as high, but there was still some **confusion about how to vote** and the **role of officials and party candidates**. The location of polling stations was not publicised until quite late in the process, so **some people did not know where to go to vote**. On occasion, when voters asked for help from officials to cast their vote – which is their right – party candidates protested as they misunderstood this as an attempt to interfere with the vote. This suggests that training be directed at officials as well as voters.

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Key websites

- National Democratic Institute – Sudan section: http://www.ndi.org/sudan
- Rift Valley Institute – Sudan Open Archive: http://www.riftvalley.net/?view=iresources
- Sudan Institute for Research and Policy (SIRP): http://www.sudaninstitute.org/about.htm

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