

In Search of the Peace Dividend: the Southern Sudan One Year after the Signatures*

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During the peace negotiations between the Government of the Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army it was assumed that the people in the Southern Sudan should benefit from a more or less immediate "peace dividend". It is difficult to find a clear definition of this dividend but it seems to be a general understanding that it was something that was supposed to demonstrate the benefits of peace over war, and that the international donors and development agencies were expected to play an important role in both financing and providing this dividend. It was further assumed that should the dividend fail to materialise the whole CPA-framework would be in jeopardy. Now, more than one year after the signing ceremony a preliminary discussion of whether such a dividend has materialised and its importance for the continued peace in the Sudan should be desirable.

In this paper I am applying a broad definition of the peace dividend so that it encompasses all tangible positive changes in the lives of the Southern Sudanese made possible by the signing of the CPA. Still, I focus on some key areas namely security for the civilian population, political liberalisation and provision of social services and infrastructure. I want to argue that it is necessary to de-construct the notion of a uniform and universal peace dividend and instead see what it means for different groups of the Southern Sudanese society. My interviews with Southerners and representatives of foreign and local NGOs in various localities in the South and in Khartoum during the first three months of 2006 provide most of the background for this paper.

Services and infrastructure:

I am not going to talk very much about the provision of services and infrastructure. It is correct that the expectation of peace bringing economic development and services to the people seems to be shared by most segments of the Southern population. Still, little has been achieved so far. Quite symptomatic, it is de-mining and rehabilitation of roads which has really been able to go ahead, while other types of assistance is still in their early stages. I am saying symptomatic because both the de-mining and the road building activities are less

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reliant on the active participation of the Southern government and its administration. Also, many of the current road projects of the Southern Sudan is not build with the benefit of the local population in mind, but rather is intended to serve the economic and strategic interest of the central state. However, services and infrastructure may not necessarily be the most important or immediate peace dividend anticipated by the different segments of the Southern people.

Security

Provision of security in terms of safety for citizens and their property is a fundamental part of the transition from war to peace. Without adequate security, provision of any other aspect of a peace dividend will be difficult. It is my assumption that for the vast majority of the people of the Southern Sudan improvements in this regard has taken place, but several challenges to internal security remains.

International actors and also the SPLM/A leadership have been concerned with threats to security posed by government sponsored militias and the LRA. Absorbing or eliminating these groups is important in the process of creating security, but there are also other, less visible, threats to the internal peace.

Most important is the SPLM's inability to effectively police the territory under its control. There have been several incidents where local fighting starts over issues related to adultery, abduction of girls, grazing rights, cattle rustling and deaths related to any of these activities. These sometimes escalate to clashes between whole communities. In many cases, the SPLM has not been able to defuse such situations or stopping them efficiently once violence has broken out. The police force has been inadequate in number and training. Investigation and mediation have too often been left to the chiefs and the local courts. There is a need for comprehensive short-term and long-term measures to counteract these local outbreaks of insecurity.

It is also worthwhile to mention that the continued presence of Northern forces is regarded as a security threat by the GOSS as well as the local population in the South, where the government army is generally perceived as occupation force. The continued presence of government troops in the towns reminds the people of the periods with curfew and suppression, while the garrisons along roads still control the movement of people through

check points and travel permits. This presence also means that many are suspicious of the NCP's intentions. Many Southerners do not believe that the SAF are being withdrawn in accordance with the CPA, and the UNMIS has not been able to prove them wrong. The slowness in establishing the JIU also creates suspicions. But, perhaps most important, elements of the SAF are suspected of providing support to LRA and other subversive elements in the South. So clearly, the withdrawal of the SAF forces from the South will be perceived as a tangible peace dividend and it will increase the feeling of security for the population in general and may also help to defuse the current tension between NCP and the SPLM.

Local insecurity is also an obstacle for the UN-system which operates with security grading of localities in the South. When the level of insecurity reaches a certain point, movement is severely restricted and it is a time-consuming and cumbersome process to reduce the security level. Often the security rating reflects actual threats, but in other cases it is only lack of capacity that hinders down grading of security levels. Dealing with security threats is somewhat easier for the foreign and local NGOs which often have more flexible systems for security assessment. Still, insecurity is a hindrance to the provision of all types of international assistance and denies local communities peace dividends related to long-term development efforts.

UNMIS is an important symbol to the people and a peace dividend in itself. More than the assistance from the various UN-agencies and the foreign NGOs is the presence of the UNMIS seen as an international guarantee for the CPA and a symbol of the international concern for the future of the Southern Sudan. However the UNMIS' efficiency and the mission's ability to fulfil its mandate is questioned. This is both related to its yet to be defined role in dealing with local unrest, but also to what extent the mission is able to monitor the CPA in an efficient manner. It is still too early to draw any conclusions, but the day may come when some start to question the costeffectiveness of the operation and a funding windfall may ensue.

For the soldiers of the SPLA and the recently absorbed militias the expectations towards a peace dividend may be radically different from those of the civilians living in rural areas of the Sudan. For instance, in March this year, for the first time since they went to the bush, SPLA soldiers were paid salaries. Now as DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and

Reintegration) has started it is important to beware the danger of dissatisfaction among dismissed veteran soldiers. Soon after the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, a large part of the Anyanya rebel army was laid off and given only a small pension. This caused dissatisfaction and already in 1974 some ex-rebels move into the bush and started fighting again. There was a steady increase in local armed groups during the 1970s and they became known as the Anyanya2. It is generally assumed that the threshold for deciding to launch or join an insurgency is very high, it is however my theory that in a post-war Southern Sudan, this threshold will be rather low. Dissatisfaction among veteran soldiers may be caused by inadequate pension, lack of job opportunities, a feeling that ethnicity has been a factor in deciding who has been pensioned. Such dissatisfied elements may on their own initiative decide to start using violence either motivated by economic or political reasons. They may also easily serve as instruments of groups that desire to destabilise the South. The states of Upper Nile, Unity, Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria are areas where this is most likely to happen. To avoid it requires both good advice and pressure from the international society, but it is ultimately the responsibility of GOSS and the SPLA-leadership.

To summarise: Insecurity is endangering the CPA in the sense that it hinders development and erodes the confidence in the GOSS. Not only is the development services not forthcoming, but people in areas suffering under insecurity may lose faith in the new government and be more prone to support other armed groups who promise protection. Heavy handed measures in dealing with local insecurity may also cause resentment. The GOSS and the international society are on the right track in dealing with these issues when they negotiate with local armed groups, organize peace meetings between local societies in conflict and train police forces. The question is whether the efforts are adequate.

Democratisation and Governance

The establishment of the Government of the Southern Sudan and functioning state structures at all government levels is key to the development of a democratic Southern Sudan. However as a historian I would like to remind you of some of the historical heritage in terms of politics and administration in the South.

Many use terms like “reconstruction” and “rebuilding” when talking about the post-conflict development in the South. This is partly misleading when used in relation to physical infrastructure and provision of services, and perhaps even more so when we discuss politics

and state in the South. True, there were elections and a regional assembly during the period of the Addis Abeba Agreement, but one needs to remember that this was still a one-party system within the context of military dictatorship at the national level. Also, that “elections” were flawed and that the opportunities for genuine political participation at the grassroots level were few. Moreover, in most cases it has been difficult to distinguish the political sphere from the administrative.

In addition, the level of state penetration outside towns in the Southern Sudan has been limited indeed, and the system of indirect rule through chiefs established during the colonial period remains intact in most places as was illustrated by Cherry Leonardi’s paper yesterday. Most localities have become used to close to complete autonomy. The extent to which services have been provided, these have in many cases come through foreign institutions be it the UN, NGOs or missionaries. As a consequence it is fair to say that many people in rural areas have at best an ambivalent attitude towards the state and it often represented a negative factor in many people’s lives. This means that there may only be limited expectations of any return to “the good old days” in terms of democracy and the establishment of a modern bureaucracy.

Therefore one may say that among ordinary people the expectation of any dividend related to democracy and governance may be limited, but this is not the case when we talk about the group who has received secondary or higher education. The history of the Southern Sudan tells us that the employment opportunities and working conditions for Southern politicians and bureaucrats have been crucial for the political development of the South and it is important that this group feels that they are treated justly and receives the opportunities they deserve. It appears that the current politicians and administrators are mainly drawn from two pools:

The first group consists of those who entered politics or the civil service during the period of Addis Ababa peace agreement and continued serving under the various regimes in Khartoum during the civil war. In my experience, though being well-intended, most of these appears to have been cowed by working for a hostile state in a wartime situation and under a military dictatorship for more than 15 years. The other group were the students, teachers, high school leavers and government officials who at different stages deserted to the SPLM and, after the compulsory military training, were assigned to administrative and political positions within

the SPLM/A structure. Though often wanting in formal skills they still have a tendency to have more initiative and visions for post-war Sudan than the first group.

One problem within this context is that political and administrative positions are still regarded as economical and political assets and they are not necessarily distributed based on qualifications and work experience. This has consequences for the peace dividend of a third group within the educated elite, the younger generation. They have often spent most of the civil war period outside the Southern Sudan being educated in Northern Sudan, neighbouring countries or further abroad. This group is now coming back to the South seeking employment opportunities. But many also refer to ideological or political reasons for returning. They want to come back to a place where they are not treated as foreigners and they want to contribute to rebuilding the South. Although they are often seen as useful by the foreign agencies and the Southern Sudan in general experiences a dearth of skilled manpower, this group continues to struggle finding employment. Age stratification in the parliaments at the GOSS and state level in the South may provide some compensation for this unfortunate tendency. It is possible that as state capacity increases and business prospect new opportunities will present themselves for this group. Nevertheless, the young and educated is also a group that may end up considering themselves cheated out of the benefits of peace and become the vanguard of another rebellion.

Currently, there are hardly any arenas for genuine democratic legislative and decision-making processes in the Southern Sudan, and at least during the interim period it is not realistic to expect that it will be possible for the GOSS to effectively govern the lower administrative levels. But, in many respects it appears that the state level is potentially the most interesting arena for political development in the South, and then in particular the state assemblies. The state assembly is placed between “high politics” and the grassroots. Because of distances it is very difficult for the MPs in Juba and Khartoum to keep contact with their constituencies, but it is somewhat easier for the state MP who is seated in the state capital. At the same time does the state level have a potential of becoming an important decision-making entity. Different from the old regions which were too big, the size of the states is more manageable and it is to a further degree possible for the administration to monitor and instruct the lower units.

It is even possible to argue that a decentralised structure with considerable devolution of actual power to the lower levels is desirable and even be viewed as a peace dividend. Local

politicians will appreciate the opportunity to govern their own affairs and the local population may benefit from closeness to the decision-makers. This may contribute to development of a positive attitude towards the state in general. Moreover, the assemblies may work as political schools and help to develop a culture of parliamentary politics which in the second instance may help to improve the assemblies at the higher government levels. However, I know that this sounds much like wishful thinking and obviously requires a considerable amount of capacity building and assistance. There is also the danger that the political freedom of state assemblies is curtailed by the SPLM/A leadership, in particular outside the SPLM core areas.

However, also the relationship between the governors and the assembly needs to be sorted out. Recently representatives from all the states participated in a process of drafting state constitutions in Rumbek. The obvious purpose of this exercise was to streamline the constitution-making process to secure uniformity. Ideally this should have been a broad process taking place within each of the states. Still, it appears that the constitutions provide the assemblies the power of legislation and control over the state budget. Whether they can dismiss the governor is not clear. It appears that formally the assemblies have the potential of possessing considerable power vis-à-vis the governor, however it depends on what precedence being established during the first years. The state assemblies may also end up as a symbolic institutions rubberstamping the decisions of the state governor.

One special aspect of governance in the South – and which may be seen as a very important part of the peace dividend – is the special provisions in the CPA related to the management of land and natural resources. Here the state level is promised 2% of the income from exploitation of natural resources; oil being the most important commodity in this regard. This provides a potential for a certain degree of economic autonomy. Though, as far as I know this re-distribution mechanism is not in place yet.

But, perhaps even more important, the principle of land belongs to the community is established. This is a type of land ownership which diverges from the state ownership of the north and the free holding in the Western world. It has only to a limited degree been implemented in other countries but it still seems that many expect that the current system in the rural area where the traditional authorities administer the land will be the model for the future regime.

My impression is that despite limited efforts in terms of diffusion of the contents of the CPA, the principle of land belongs to the community seem to be well-known to many people. And, I will maintain that to many a fair implementation of this principle will constitute an important part of any peace dividend and that withdrawal or hollowing out of this principle by GOSS will lead to wide-spread resentment, in particular among tribes only loose allied with the SPLM/A.

My theory is that local politicians with perhaps only a pragmatic attachment to the SPLM, in particular in the Equatoria region, see this principle as a possible leverage against the GOSS and that fighting for this principle will strengthen their power base. Clearly, local communities would like to continue the current practise, which until now has provided sufficient security of their land and it is pretty safe to assume that they will not trust the decisions of the central government to necessarily be in their favour. Therefore, any local politician would see it as important that the local communities continue to administer their own land and that he or she will be a champion to ensure that this principle will be followed.

There is a danger that this aspect was not included in the SPLM's calculations when the CPA was negotiated and that they in fact expected it to be an empty paragraph. We may look at a recent example: in early March a local conflict developed in Juba. On the one side stood GOSS and on the other local Bari community. A foreign firm wanted to build a factory just outside Juba on what has been seen as Bari land. The firm had promised to build a building for the GOSS as a bonus, but nothing was promised to the local community. The Bari protested with the traditional leaders at the front invoking their "land belongs to the community"-right. Politicians in Juba were dismayed and could not understand how the local Bari failed to see the great opportunity this offered. Local members of the Bari educated elite intervened and managed to convince the Bari of ceding the land, but such issues may be more difficult to solve in the future.

The CPA mentions a land commission for the Southern Sudan, which is supposed to come up with a suggestion for a system of land administration for the South. However, to my knowledge this commission has not been established yet. Let us hope this is an indication of the gravity by which this aspect of the post-war Southern Sudan is treated and not a sign of indifference from the GOSS and the international community.

Conclusion

The simplistic notion of a general peace dividend in the shape of post-war reconstruction and development efforts, which through its assumed positive reception from an undifferentiated group of beneficiaries is a possible hinder to peace. This notion may be useful convincing dilating donors to untie the purse string, but it may also be dangerous when used as a strategy to strengthen the CPA. This idea of a need for a general uniform peace dividend fails to analyse the reasons why the Southerners have rebelled in the first place and perhaps which groups among the Southerners who spearheaded the rebellion. In fact, the whole notion of *one* peace dividend rests on the assumption that the people of the Southern Sudan constitutes one undifferentiated mass where one size fits all. In this paper I have demonstrated that there are many potential peace dividends and that expected dividends differ from one social group to another. However, when introducing the element of relativism in interpreting 'peace dividend', one also introduces the question of whether the notion of a 'peace dividend' carries any distinct meaning. One may then ask if the term has any use beyond fund rising for the UN and other aid agencies?