Planning for reconstruction

The Joint Assessment Mission

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As it became clear that both parties to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace negotiations in Naivasha, Kenya, were reaching consensus and that peace was imminent, attention turned towards assessing Sudan's reconstruction needs. The idea of a donors' conference had already been mooted, but conversations between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) wealth-sharing committee, the World Bank, the UN, IGAD and the IGAD Partners' Forum established that a donors' conference would be more effective if presented with a comprehensive framework for Sudan's development priorities. The notion of a Sudanese Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) was born.

Joint assessment missions had been conducted before in Liberia and Iraq, but Sudan's was to be the most extensive yet. Much more than a technical exercise to raise external aid, it would be an inclusive exercise in strategic planning and economic reconstruction for a war-torn country. Even now it seems remarkable that work on the JAM began while IGAD negotiations on power-sharing were still ongoing. We considered it essential to have enough time to develop a thorough piece of work to which the international community would respond properly. Initially planned as an 11-week process, it ended up running for 15 months. Slower-than-expected progress in the peace talks caused some delay, but the signing of the June 2004 protocols finally paved the way for a joint GoS-SPLM workshop in Nairobi to formulate the JAM's conceptual framework, to which representatives from the World Bank, UN, IGAD and donor countries were invited.

From the start all the parties to these discussions enjoyed good working relationships, and the joint sessions were very positive. Common issues were dealt with objectively, in a less emotionally-charged atmosphere than the peace negotiations. The SPLM members of the drafting committee included Kosti...
Manibe, Luka Biong, Anne Itto and Luai Deng, all of whom have since continued to show their commitment to making the January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement work. Further support was provided by the World Bank’s Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) fund, which had already decided – before the JAM was born – to finance initiatives in support of the peace agreement, making funding available to joint projects especially in the areas of civil service reform, media and youth. Unfortunately much of this funding remains unspent, but it was certainly helpful in promoting early cooperation on the JAM.

Working relationships built up during the talks smoothed the formation of a Core Coordinating Group (CCG) for the JAM, which was headed by Norway and comprised representatives from the GoS, the SPLM, the UN and the World Bank. It took the lead in organizing the JAM’s work into eight clusters (see figure 1) organized around key themes integral to consolidating peace and facilitating broad-based human and economic development. It also led on identifying and commissioning external consultants, who then undertook a number of field visits, working closely with their national counterparts to develop consensus on their findings. The results of these visits formed the basis of the JAM report published in March 2005 following a two-week-long meeting in Addis Ababa.

This report is much more than a request for external financing, but, as titled, A Framework for Sustained Peace, Development and Poverty Eradication. Covering the six-year interim period, it disaggregates programmes for the national government and northern states, the three areas and the southern government. Two thirds of the initial recovery costs are to be met from domestic resources, with US$7.9bn of spending planned for the initial recovery phase (through 2007).

It was presented first to the Sudanese Cabinet and Presidency, where it received strong approval as a plan for the six-year interim period from which no ministry should deviate, then to the donors’ conference in Oslo in April 2005, where donors pledged some US$4.3bn to Sudan. Those involved in the JAM also followed up the endorsement of the Presidency and Cabinet with separate meetings with the individual line ministries to ensure that the JAM would provide the core ideas for their own sectoral plans. The report was also backed up by a monitoring matrix, developed with the partners and conceived as a binding obligation between the newly formed Government of National Unity and the international community. It was also agreed that there should be an annual consortium to monitor the process of JAM implementation.

The JAM process, from its conception in Naivasha to its birth in Khartoum and Oslo, demonstrated the importance of inclusiveness at all stages, a shared commitment to reconstruction, a thorough preparatory phase and an understanding of the local context. Unfortunately, practical and time constraints meant there was insufficient consultation at local and state government levels, and the JAM could have been improved had there been more of an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of local needs, the different expectations of rural and urban communities and the root causes of conflict in Sudan. The JAM also avoided the issue of oil except to highlight its usefulness as a means for developing the industrial and agricultural sectors and fuelling economic growth. Nonetheless, the JAM was a statement on the importance of poverty eradication and sustainable development in reducing existing and potential conflict, and was a good learning experience for all involved.
Mixed progress

Since April 2005, and despite the President’s strong endorsement of the JAM report, there has been less progress than hoped for or envisaged. Most critically, the Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs), designed to disburse funding according to the JAM’s recommendations, have not functioned as planned. The co-operation between the Government of Sudan and SPLM delegations to Naivasha has continued, but the planned representation of northerners in the southern MDTF and vice versa has not materialized. This was the beginning of an indication that the MDTFs would not be taken as seriously as many of us had hoped. Those of us involved in the JAM had intended the Minister of Finance to chair the northern Sudanese MDTF to ensure that the fund would be managed at a senior level and operated in conjunction with national development policy. But the Ministry of Finance has continued to operate the budget with only partial regard to the JAM’s findings, reports and matrices, which makes it either difficult or futile for the Joint National Transitional Team (JNTT, the successor to the Core Coordinating Group) to perform its stated task of ensuring that MDTF expenditure is in line with the JAM before funding is approved. Moreover, the Ministry of Finance was not heavily involved in designing and implementing the JAM, and so is not aware of the wealth of experience and brainstorming which contributed to the process, or of what was intended by the JNTT at each stage. The Ministry is therefore ill-equipped to manage the implementation of the JAM’s recommendations without the involvement of the JNTT and in some areas it even ignores them. Thus far, the World Bank too has ignored this discrepancy.

Whether the international community is to blame for reneging on its commitment or whether the MDTF has been poorly managed and directed, the Sudanese people have yet to see the dividends of peace. Despite high-profile commendation from President al-Bashir, and match funding of US$30 million from the European Union, the JAM process has largely remained a process of paperwork and procedure, bogged down in details of renting office space and vehicles rather than pressing ahead with community-driven recovery programmes. The slow start of the MDTF (at least in northern Sudan) has allowed not only the individual line ministries to implement their own projects without reference to the JAM. Other agencies working in Sudan, such as UNDP or international NGOs, are now following suit, leading inevitably to duplication and wastage. This duplication is in part caused by the lack of clarity about institutional responsibility. The JNTT does not play its intended role as guardian of the JAM in ministries’ budgets and plans, but it is seen as guardian of the JAM by the UN and other organizations when they want ‘government’...
approval for a project that has been blocked by a line ministry. Because these roles have been ill-defined the process has been slow to get off the ground, and this lethargy itself breeds a reluctance which further slows implementation.

Having all foreign aid managed by the Ministry of International Cooperation would help avoid duplication and encourage cooperation, so that there could be a clearer mechanism for government departments, international organizations and local civil society organizations to coordinate internal and external plans with each other and the JAM. It would also help if civil society organizations – which had been active at the donor conferences in Oslo and Paris but have not maintained their level of interest – could be encouraged to become more involved, as this would provide an impetus for activating the thematic groups, which is now behind schedule. During the JAM planning stages these thematic groups were seen as central to the MDTF – providing a focus for projects it funded – and it remains to be seen whether they will be belatedly activated by the Ministry of Finance or whether they can be rescued from apparent oblivion and reactivated as part of the government’s new National Strategic Plan (NSP).

A further indication of the reluctance to take the JAM as seriously as the Presidency’s original endorsement suggested has been that JNTT members have not been invited to share experiences with those involved in peace talks for other regions in Sudan. The May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement includes provision for its own joint assessment mission, but unfortunately no one involved in the conception of the JAM was given the opportunity by the parties or mediators to share the positive and negative lessons learned. This is likely to lead to further duplication of responsibilities and competences, less coordination of foreign assistance, and in the end a less effective mechanism for reconstruction.

Looking ahead

The advent of the NSP in August 2006 should go some way to addressing these gaps, reinvigorating the JAM by using the report as one of its main points of reference. Indeed, the circular from the Council of Ministers which supported the presidential decree establishing the NSP stated that in developing guidelines for a five-year plan the NSP should take into consideration the peace agreements signed in Naivasha, Cairo, Abuja and Asmara, the JAM report and the international community’s existing commitments to reconstruction. It is hoped that the NSP will be able to build its sectoral work around the JAM clusters, encourage compatibility with the JAM and build on the wealth of know-how which informed it, so that the JAM is not destined to be just another good idea.