

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training

Interview #17 -- Executive Summary

Interviewed by: Haven North
Initial Interview Date: August 26, 2006
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The Democracy and Governance (DG) Team under USAID in Southern Sudan is responsible for a \$60 million program. The program is an integrated strategy that looks at all the elements of trying to establish a democracy, helping the SPLM achieve a transition from being a rebel guerrilla movement to being a legitimate government and a political party. The program seeks to help Southern Sudan develop a government from scratch.

The DG team is tasked with supporting a transparent and accountable government of Southern Sudan; focusing on the ministries that are the most important for establishing the government: the Ministry of Finance (setting up a FMIS), the Ministry of Public Service, the Ministry of Legal and Constitutional Affairs, the office of the president, and the Ministry of Information; implementing the Two Hundred Day Action Plan; providing training leadership.

In the process, the DG program works with focus groups to make sure that the government of Southern Sudan hears the views of the people throughout the country. The point of the focus groups is to get the views of the people, feed them back into the policy makers and ensure that peoples' views are taken into consideration.

In addition the DG program is working on a national census, because of the links between doing the census and having the election. There will be one questionnaire for the whole country. The South Sudan Center (SSC) will oversee the census in the South; the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) will oversee it in the North, but with close coordination between the two. The program supports all the political parties in the South that are represented in the South Sudan Assembly, except the NCP.

The work involves mostly in three geographic areas of the country: southern Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains and Abyei. There are two protocols, one for Blue Nile and Nuba, which is now Southern Kordofan and a third one just for Abyei. The three areas have the potential to destabilize the CPA, because here is where the North and the South come together.

Civil society is affected through assistance to civil society marginalized groups, for example women and marginalized groups, where initial groups will be more dedicated and committed to their own cause, rather than being co-opted by the North. Pamphlets and brochures and explanations will explain what the CPA is about, what the constitution says, what the process is, when the elections come.

The DG program is a balance between support to government and non-governmental organizations. The SPLM requested assistance to transition on three fronts: from an army to a professional army; from a rebel movement to a political party, and from a rebel movement to a government. USAID supports the last two transitions.

Focus groups have indicated that if people voted “tomorrow,” the clear majority would vote for independence from the north.

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Q: Tell me about your role, so I have an understanding of the context for the interview.

A: I'm the Democracy and Governance USAID team leader in Sudan. When I arrived in June of 2004, we really had no democracy and governance program. So we had to design the whole program from scratch and then find implementing partners by the end of the fiscal year. That meant we had three months, from June until September, to get that done and then start implementing the program. When I started, the budget was nine million dollars for democracy and governance, and now it's sixty million. So we've really built it up over the last two years. I'm quite proud of how much work we have done. We have a very integrated strategy that looks at all the different elements of trying to establish democracy, trying to help the SPLM transition from being a rebel a movement to being a legitimate government and to being a political party.

Q: This is just focused on the SPLM?

A: No, it is democracy and governance writ large. The difference between this democracy and governance program and other ones is that we're helping them develop a government from scratch.

Q: Who is "them"?

A: The government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) is a combination of the SPLM, the National Congress Party and the different parties represented in the South Sudan Assembly, but the SPLM has a majority of the representation. You talked about the CPA and how the CPA is being implemented. A main portion of the CPA was the agreement for the SPLM to have the lead in the South in setting up the GOSS. We wanted to assist in ensuring that the GOSS was set up in a transparent and accountable manner. That meant everything from determining how many ministries they were going to have, how many people they would have in each ministry, helping them with the scopes of work, a lot of public administration issues, roles and responsibilities, and delegation of authority. So one part of our portfolio is to assist in establishing the government.

We have worked in countries all over the world where we have helped governments reform existing policies and procedures; that is one approach. But the difference in Southern Sudan is that you don't have to reform anything because there was nothing there to begin with. We have the opportunity to assist in getting them off on the right

foot from the beginning, so that proper systems are put into place and institution building works. It was really a unique opportunity from that perspective.

Q: Where are you based?

A: I live in Nairobi but I fly in and out of Juba on a regular basis. We have a compound in Juba and plan to move in full time this year. When I arrived in June 2004 the CPA hadn't been signed so we couldn't live in southern Sudan. We fly in and out of Juba and other parts of Southern Sudan and spend a couple weeks there and go back and forth.

Q: Does this government you're forming involve all of the different local groups in the southern area?

A: It involves all of the groups except for the National Congress Party (NCP), which we can't train because of the U.S. sanctions against them.

Q: So what are the activities that you're carrying out?

A: We have five areas that we're working on in Southern Sudan. One is to support a transparent and accountable government of Southern Sudan. This work is carried out through a contract with Bearing Point.

The second area is called "political processes," and is based on consensus building. This area has a number of subcategories. One of them is focus groups. We wanted to make sure that the GOSS heard the views of the people throughout the country. Southern Sudan is very vast, the distances are great, the infrastructure is terrible, and the cost of travel is immense. So how do we ensure that the people's voices get back to the government and get factored into decision making when they make their policies and their constitution? With consensus building and focus groups, the main implementing partner carries out these focus groups once every six months. The idea is that they ask average people questions, they take a sample of all different ages, of men and women, of young and old, of different religions, different ethnic groups, so that it's representative of Southern Sudan. They ask questions and then when they compile the results, they brief the GOSS first, so that the GOSS can hear the views of the people and factor those views into their decisions.

Happily, the very first focus group carried out was completed before the CPA was signed. We really pushed for that because there was no way to have a baseline unless it got done before the signing. We needed to have a baseline of questions about what people's opinions were on democracy issues, their level of knowledge of these issues, how they wanted the GOSS to govern, their views of the leaders that work in a government. We took into account things such as: What were their views of the peace process? Did they feel they were adequately represented by the SPLM? How would they vote if the referendum was held tomorrow? The very first focus group asked all those questions and we got it completed before the CPA was signed. Every year, we go back and ask the same questions again, to see how the attitudes are changing from one year to the next.

It was an important milestone, because there were a lot of different views around the CPA before it was signed and there were a lot of advocates on both sides who believe that they were right. When I first got to Sudan, everybody seemed to have a different view, and they were all sure that their own view was correct. Two people would go to exactly the same event, and they would come back and report two opposite points of view about what happened at that event. I could not design a democracy and governance program like this! I needed to know what the truth was. And so where are you going to find the truth? Well, you find it with the people on the ground and the focus groups gave us those answers.

Q: What was an example of some of these different perspectives?

A: One group said that the SPLM were not the legitimate leaders of Southern Sudan, that the people in Southern Sudan didn't support Dr. John. This view believed that there were other people and other organizations that should have been involved in the peace process. So that was a question that was asked during the focus groups. It was very clear that the majority of the people in the South saw Dr. John and the SPLM as their legitimate leaders. When we asked if other organizations should have been involved in negotiations, they said no. We had to prompt them and say, "Do you think some NGOs should have been involved?" And after prompting, only about a third said, "Well, maybe, because they know the people on the ground."

But if you sit in Nairobi and listen to the NGOs, the Sudanese NGOs that are in the Diaspora in Nairobi, you get a whole different view of what the people on the ground think. In fact, the people on the ground didn't even know the NGOs that sit in Nairobi. Those NGOs purported to represent them, but the people on the ground didn't know them. They certainly didn't see them as their legitimate leaders. But in Nairobi, those people had a strong voice. They had connections to the media. They had a lot to say about what was going on and the fact that they were not involved in the peace process. The irony was that they weren't any more representative of what the people thought. But the voice of the people was difficult to transmit, because it was so hard to get to them. For me, it was invaluable to hear the views of the people on the ground. That one piece of information made all the difference in designing our programs. I have to say that when I first went to Nairobi and I said to people, "We need to do these focus groups and we have to ask these questions," there was a concern that "What if we ask these questions and the answers come back that the people don't support the SPLM? It could throw the peace process off course." So I said, "We still have to find the answer. We can talk about how and when we disseminate this information, but we need to know the answer because we can't design a program that's going to work if we don't really know; that's what democracy is all about."

So it worked out well. Actually, we managed to get the SPLM to be debriefed on the focus group findings during a lunch break at the Naivasha negotiations. We brought the contracting organization and they did a briefing for Dr. John and the SPLM, to brief them on these findings. I think it was the first time they had ever heard that kind of feedback

from people. We did focus groups again for the Goss during the drafting of the Constitution. We interviewed people on constitutional issues -- terms of office, age of voting, freedom speech, etc. There were all kinds of questions in the focus groups that were asked, and then we came back and made a presentation to the constitutional drafting committee to ensure that the drafting committee heard these views of the people on the ground.

Q: How would you describe the coverage of these focus groups?

A: It's totally representative of the population in Southern Sudan. The main person that NDI has working on this research has done focus groups for Fortune 500 companies and has extensive overseas experience. She's very well trained in focus group work and she did a lot of background research on Sudan before they went to the field and conducted this research. So they've made sure that this diverse population is adequately represented, so that all the voices were heard.

Q: Let's get back to what you were saying before that.

A: The point of the focus groups is to get the views of the people, feed them back to the policy makers and ensure that people's views are taken into consideration. On the constitution issues, an interesting point came up. When you ask people, "What's your view of freedom of speech?" they would respond, "Oh, yes, we want freedom of speech." "What's your view of freedom of association?" "Yes, yes, we want freedom of association." They want all these things. Then when you ask follow-on questions, you get a different answer. This is the value of doing focus groups in a post-conflict situation, because if you do polling you're only going to get one answer and if you get one answer it's not the real answer, because once you go back and say, "What do you think about people saying bad things about your leaders?" "Oh, no, we can't have that!" So on one hand they want freedom of speech but on the other hand they actually don't when you ask them specific questions. So when we got that feedback, we thought, well now what do we tell the drafting committee for the constitution, because we don't want them to use this as an excuse not to give the freedoms that are needed in Southern Sudan. So when the presentation was made the way we framed it was, "These are the views on the people on the ground. In principle, the people want these freedoms but because they've just come out of a conflict they don't want anything that's going to cause conflict again. But you're drafting a constitution that needs to remain in place into perpetuity. So you need to be the visionaries of this constitution and look to the future for what it is you want for southern Sudan and not let these views hinder you from writing those things into the constitution." And that's exactly what they did. So that's one part of consensus building that's really one of the most exciting parts of the portfolio.

The next part on political processes is the census. We have supporting the U.S. Census Bureau to work in southern Sudan. They're working with the South Sudan Center for Census, Statistics and Evaluation. In the CPA they mandate UNFPA as the lead donor to deal with the census. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is in charge of the census in the North, and the South Sudan Center (SSC) is in charge in the South. We brought in

the U.S. Census Bureau to work with the SSC. The reason the census is under political processes is because of the link of the census to the election. Right now we really don't know what the population is in Sudan. It varies, depending on what report you read. So there will be a need for a national census. There will be one questionnaire for the whole country. The SSC will oversee the census in the South, the CBS will oversee it in the North, but with close coordination between the two. It's not going to be easy. There are a lot of misperceptions right now in the South. The governors are concerned that the IDPs haven't come back, and, if the IDPs aren't back they don't really think they should have a census because they won't be counted. What we've been trying to say to them is, "There's a difference between a census and voter registration. At this point it's a national census. We're counting everyone in the country, north and south. So whether the IDPs are back or not really doesn't make a difference at this point. What we really want is to have this national count so we know what the population is. After that, when we get to voter registration, then we have to worry about where people are sitting, on which side of the line, because that will determine where they vote." So we're trying to talk them through these issues. So that's the second item under political processes.

The third item is support for political parties. This supports all the parties in the South that are represented in the South Sudan Assembly, except the NCP. Before the CPA was signed we weren't sure, a lot of people were claiming to be parties. There were very thin lines between parties and militia groups. So we had to be careful about how we were going to select these parties to work with. So once the South Sudan Assembly was formed, we decided that was the way to identify the parties to work with. They were represented. So we worked with all those parties. This support includes everything from work on the difference between a party and a government, the distinction between the two, fund raising campaigns, etc. Parties need to raise their own money. They can't live off government subsidies. Parties need to understand their role in the legislature; how a legislature works, committee work, all of these kinds of political party efforts. So that's another branch of our work.

The last area under political processes is the electoral framework. We haven't started this one yet. It's there because we know we're going to have to work on it in the future. According to CPA, the elections are scheduled to take place by July 2009. So we will start late this coming fiscal year or next year to work on the actual election activities.

The third program activity is decentralized local government structures and systems. The way we've defined it in the DG portfolio, is a focus on the Three Areas. We see the Three Areas as the place that has the potential to destabilize the CPA. If it isn't handled properly, if there's going to be some kind of disruption, it probably going to be in these Three Areas, because that's where the North and the South come together. There are a lot of potential points of conflict there.

Q: These three areas are what?

A: They are southern Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains and Abyei. There are two protocols, one for Blue Nile and Nuba, which is now Southern Kordofan and a third one just for

Abyei. We focused a lot of our assistance in these areas so that issues of conflict can be addressed. However, once the CPA was signed, southern Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains were absorbed into the North. These are the two areas that were disadvantaged in the CPA. They're the two areas that were basically relinquished to the North and once the CPA was signed they became part of the North and no longer part of the South. Abyei, on the other hand, has been given the option of voting in the referendum. They can vote in a special referendum for themselves on whether they want to become part of the North or part of the South. And so Abyei, in a way, got a special dispensation, but southern Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains didn't. We just did focus groups in those areas. When I get back to post, I think by the end of September I'm supposed to get the draft of those focus groups to find out what the peoples' views are in those three areas how the CPA is progressing. I don't have that information right now at my fingertips, but our focus on local government in our DG strategy is these three areas. The reason we did that is the World Bank and UNDP were both going to focus on local government issues in Southern Sudan so we focused on local government issues in the Three Areas.

The fourth area of the DG portfolio is institutional capacity building of civil society organizations. Our emphasis is on civil society organizations that support marginalized groups. This is important because basically we are helping to build these organizations from scratch. We're trying to build the institutional structures of a government and the institutional structures of civil society as well. What we saw in southern Sudan was that there was hardly any civil society. Proper organizations really didn't exist, so we wanted to support the development of civil society organizations that understood what their role was in being legitimate organizations — not being one charismatic leader with a briefcase and nobody standing behind him/her. We wanted them to understand that the organizations need to be legitimate, just as the government needs to be legitimate. That means that they need to be responsive, and they have to be accountable, and they have to be effective and represent a group of people. They have to have the proper financial management systems, policies and procedures in place.

So Mercy Corps runs this program for us and they have a number of areas that they focus on. They're going to have eight information centers throughout southern Sudan and the three areas. These information centers will serve as resource centers for the civil society organizations that they're supporting. Fifty per cent of the civil society organizations have to be run by women. Not focused on women's issues, but run by women. The other fifty per cent have to focus on marginalized groups. We did this because there was a tragic history in southern Sudan of groups being formed and then being co-opted by the North for the wrong reasons; we didn't want to create a situation where our good efforts would be used for the wrong purpose. The hope was that, if we focused on women and marginalized groups, these initial groups of people would be more dedicated and committed to their cause, and less likely to be co-opted by the North. That's why we focused on organizations led by women or focused on issues related to marginalized groups.

One of the most exciting things the NGO is doing is something called cross-site visits. And what they do is, every quarter they take a number of people from the CSOs that

they're supporting (they're going to support 56 Sudanese CSOs over the next three years), and take them to one site, so people can meet their counterparts from other parts of the country. They're all doing the same thing. They're civil society organizations, they're focused on marginalized issues and by bringing them together and facilitating them talking to each other and getting to know each other, they will learn about the culture and the experiences that people have in other parts of southern Sudan and the three areas. One of the big issues in southern Sudan is that people don't know their neighbors. They may know the ethnic group that lives next to them but beyond that they don't know what else is going on in southern Sudan and they haven't met each other because of the war. This is a way to make sure that we can help to build understanding across the people of Southern Sudan and the three areas.

The other thing we've done is, is work on civic education. A contract organization is doing this and they collaborate with an NGO at these cross-site visits so that they can ensure that the CSOs understand the what the CPA is all about, what the constitution says, when the elections are, etc. They use these forums to distribute civic education materials. This way the CSOs can go back and feed the information to their communities. The whole idea is to get the information out to the people.

The fifth and last area is availability and access to independent public information. I think this is absolutely key. As you find in many post-conflict countries, rumors are rife and can ignite conflict. Whether something is true or not, people react. So the idea is to make sure that balanced information gets out to the public. The only way to reach the public in a place like Southern Sudan is through the radio. OTI has established Sudan Radio Service in Nairobi, a short wave service that broadcasts into Sudan. The problem was that no one had radios, and without radios what difference could it make? So we are now going to purchase lifeline radios, which are solar powered, wind up -- AM/FM short wave radios -- and we're going to distribute them throughout the South and the three areas to ensure that people have access to information. We need to get them out there now, get people familiar with the radios, so they can learn how to tune in to get these messages.

Q: Who's preparing the broadcasting information?

A: EDC is the implementing partner for Sudan Radio Service. NDI is the implementing partner designing the civic education messages and then EDC will broadcast those messages. Right now EDC broadcasts news, health and education messages. They broadcast a distance learning program in order to reach those that can not go to school because there are so few.

Q: Is there a government relationship to this?

A: The GOSS knows Sudan Radio Service but they don't dictate the production to EDC. It's not their radio station. It's an independent radio station.

Q: It's a private radio station?

A: Yes.

Q: But the government allows it to operate?

A: Yes, the government allows it. They know that we're doing it and they're okay with it.

Let me go back to the government of Southern Sudan. I think some important points to make are that the DG program is a balance between support to government and support to non-governmental organizations. On the government side, we decided to focus on the ministries that were the most important for establishing the government. So we support the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Service, Ministry of Legal and Constitutional Development.

Q: You're talking about Southern Sudan only?

A: Yes, the GOSS only. We felt that these ministries were the nexus of the GOSS and the core to establishing the GOSS. We also provide support to the office of the president and starting at the end of this fiscal year we're going to support the Ministry of Information, because government wants to be better at getting information out to the people. Communication is a huge challenge in southern Sudan, not only reaching people, but getting out the message. So we're going to work with the Ministry of Information to help them develop messages, because one thing that has come back in the focus group research is that people are saying: "We don't hear anything from the government. We don't know what's going on and we want to hear." Of course Salva can't fly all over the place and talk to everybody on a regular basis because he's busy in Khartoum and in Juba and internationally. So we want to help the ministry develop weekly messages from the president of Southern Sudan, so the message can go out and people can hear what he has to say.

On the Ministry of Finance side, we've helped them establish a Financial Management Information System (FMIS) system, which is basically a computer system that tracks expenditures for the GOSS. The system is sitting in Nairobi. It's supposed to move to Juba either in August or September. The reason it hasn't moved sooner is because of the computer facilities in southern Sudan, we haven't been able to do it. It also has to be in an air conditioned building or else it will shut down. So the Ministry of Finance has had people in Nairobi, and we've trained them on how to use this computer system. Just to give you an idea of the sort of the challenges we've had to face, it took us about three months to get maybe 12 or 15 people identified to work on this computer system. The first day we ended up having to send all but like five of them to basic computer training.

Q: Southern Sudanese?

A: Right. They never had the opportunity to work on these systems. Some had never seen a computer before. So that left us with a handful of people to work on a financial

management information system, which is basically going to track billions of dollars. So you can see the challenges. The human capacity issues are immense. On top of that, while you are training people you are trying to build the structures they are going to work in. It's a long process.

We've also helped the Ministry of Finance to initiate something called the Two Hundred Day Action Plan, which is being printed right now in Nairobi. There has been a big outcry from the people in the south for peace dividends. People expected a lot from this new government because it was their government and after living through the war for all these years, they expected to see change. But at the same time the GOSS is preoccupied with establishing itself. Establishing itself is a huge endeavor; to actually implement programs at the same time is even more monumental. So the idea of an Action Plan was presented to the GOSS. The idea came from Liberia, where they did a 150-day action plan. The Council of Ministers, especially Salva, were really excited about this and said, "This is a great idea. We want all of the ministries to sit down and develop a plan of tangible deliverables in the next 200 days." They understood that if they developed this plan then they would be able to communicate what they were committed to, and the people could hold them accountable. So the plan is being printed now and all of the ministries participated. It took a lot of work and a lot of effort but they did it.

Q: Are you working with all the ministries?

A: The Ministry of Finance took the lead on implementing the Two Hundred Day Action Plan. They called in all the ministers represented in the Council of Ministers. They explained what the Plan was about. They laid out a framework for how to fill it in and what they needed to focus on and then our advisors went and worked with each one of the ministries to help them draft the plans. It took a good four months to get this, and now the plan is complete. This goes to the heart of "meeting expectations." We found in the very first focus group that expectations were very high and in some ways, very unrealistic. So if there wasn't a way to meet those expectations that could be a flash point. So this work goes directly to addressing potential flash points.

We've also worked with the Ministry of Public Service: a big part of our program is focused on training and leadership training is key here. When I first got involved in Southern Sudan in 2004, one of the most interesting things for me was the fact that the SPLM recognized that the transition wasn't only a physical transition, it was a mental transition as well. How do you achieve a transition from a military mentality to a civil service mentality? It's very difficult. Leadership training is all about how you delegate authority, build teams, and work in a civilian environment. In the military there is hierarchy. The man at the top tells you what to do and everyone does it. Now these same people have to create a team, encourage people, delegate and trust. We have been supported a series of leadership trainings, from the deputy secretary level, to help them in these new roles. It's very important to carry out these training activities, because it's a whole new way of thinking and these kind of things take a while to sink in. Philosophically or intellectually you can understand that you need to change, but changing behavior is a huge challenge. That makes up a lot of the work that we're doing

with the Ministry of Public Service. They're in charge of training, as well as overseeing the establishment of the civil service.

We've worked with the Ministry of Legal and Constitutional Affairs on two levels. NDI worked with the ministry by assisting them when they were developing the constitution for southern Sudan. They provided drafts of constitutions from around the world and during the drafting process, they also provided a legal expert to provide assistance. After the constitution for Southern Sudan was drafted and ratified, they started working with them on drafting the state constitutions in the South, so they've provided support to the whole process. Following up on this process, Bearing Point provides assistance to the Ministry on the drafting laws. Now that a constitution is in place, they have to draft laws to be consistent with the GOSS constitution, the constitution in the North, and with the CPA. It's a comprehensive program. There are always ten other things that have to be done.

Q: Is it building these ministries from scratch, pretty much?

A: Yes, the three ministries that we are focused on, Finance, Legal Affairs and Public Service; we have advisors in each of those ministries, who are basically advisors to the ministers to help them get the ministries up and running.

Q: Are there groups that are resisting the change or opposing what you're trying to do?

A: I wouldn't say that's the case. You mean Sudanese groups?

Q: Yes.

A: In Juba I think people are really receptive to assistance. I've lived in Africa for 16 years and there are a lot of countries where people don't want our assistance. In Southern Sudan, all the groups that we've come in contact with, if you're there to provide assistance, they're more than happy to have it. They don't want to be dictated to. You have to be inclusive and you have to be sure that their voice is being heard and that they you're not showing up with a pre-designed plan.

Q: What about people in the different states or provinces?

A: We aren't working in the states and provinces except on a few distinct activities, like the constitution activity and they've been very receptive to help on that front. We haven't worked at the local government level, again because World Bank and UNDP were taking that up. So we haven't had a lot of experience there. In the Three Areas we're at more of a local government level and because the situation is so unique there, they've been very receptive.

Q: Are any militia groups still causing troubles?

A: Yes, there are still militia groups in the South; but they are not part of our portfolio.

Q: In the Southern Area?

A: Yes. You certainly see news reports about places, especially in Upper Nile, where there are militia groups and there are disruptions, but it isn't something that has hindered us from getting our job done.

Q: Is there any reaction from the Northern Government about all the things that are working on?

A: You would think so, wouldn't you? We have heard that the North wanted the U.S. government to play more of a role in the North. Our role in the North has basically been consumed by trying to help resolve the Darfur conflict. The World Bank, through the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (that resulted from the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM)) developed two trust funds for Sudan; one for the North and one for the South. And that meant that the North could be the recipient of donor funding through the trust fund. Even though the United States does not provide donor assistance to government activities in the North, there is a mechanism for assistance to be provided, which was something the North was looking forward to after they signed the CPA. My view is that the North believed that signing the CPA would bring them into the international realm, into the international community, and they wouldn't be pariahs any longer. The CPA would open the door for them to receive assistance from donor countries and they would be back on the international stage. The MDTF allows that sort of support to the North.

Q: Will you be working with CPA Commissions in the North? That's a pretty hot potato, isn't it?

A: We don't have the money for this type of work yet, and we haven't decided which Commissions we're going to work with. Our mission director for USAID/Sudan is also the U.S. government representative to the AEC commission.

Q: Which commission is this?

A: The AEC, the Assessment and Evaluation Commission, mandated to oversee the implementation of the CPA. She sits on that commission and we provide logistical support.

Q: This is countrywide, both North and South?

A: That's right.

Q: And it's based in Nairobi or...

A: No, in Khartoum.

Q: She's one of the members of this commission?

A: Yes, we're represented on the commission.

Q: And who chairs this commission?

A: He's Norwegian,

Q: And how do you think that commission is proceeding?

A: It was late in getting established. Everything is late. But now it is established. They've developed a scope of work and they're working on trying to lay out what the most important milestones are that the AEC needs to focus on, to ensure that the CPA stays on track. That's their mandate.

Q: So they're just getting started?

A: I would say in the last five months.

Q: And how do they affect what you all are doing?

A: We're fortunate because our Mission Director sits on the AEC, and she's also the mission director, so she can brief us on what's happening and if there are things that need to be done or information that needs to be funneled into our programming. We can also help feed information into their meetings. There is a nice circle of activities there, around the policy and implementation levels.

Q: Who are the other major donors that are involved? You mentioned the World Bank and UNDP. Who else?

A: You mean overall? I believe the U.S. is the largest donor. Then the World Bank manages the Multi-donor Trust Fund and the Trust Fund is a major donor because the majority of the bilateral donors contribute to it. The EC is very large as well. Norway and the Netherlands are critical donors who've been involved in the whole CPA process. As part of the JAM, there was a group of donors that worked together. The U.S., the UK, Norway, Italy and the Netherlands have always been closely linked in this process. So those are the main donors in Sudan.

Q: How do you see this process going forward? Are there major problems that you foresee that may cause a problem about whether it will actually stay on track or not?

A: I've seen immense change in the South. They didn't have anything, quite frankly. When we went into Southern Sudan we lived in tents. It wasn't until Dr. John's funeral that most of us first visited Juba. Before that, when we went into Southern Sudan we'd go to Rumbek. Originally, the plan was that the GOSS would establish itself GOSS in Rumbek until they could move to Juba. Since Juba was a garrison town controlled by the North, even though it was located in the South, it had a large number of Northern troops.

According to the CPA, the northern troops don't have to leave Juba until two years after the CPA is signed and so the SPLM wasn't going to relocate to Juba and be surrounded by Northern (SAF) troops. It wasn't until Dr. John's death that the GOSS move to Juba was cemented. When they buried Dr. John there, the SPLM said they had to be near their leader. Looking back on that now, it is fortunate that the GOSS was able to establish itself in one capital in the South, and not two. It's difficult enough to have good lines of communication in one location, but if they would have been divided between two locations, that would have been much harder.

Q: Have the northern troops left Juba, or not yet?

A: Northern troops are on a timeline for leaving. Some have left and I understand that they are on schedule. We're not at that two-year mark where they all have to be gone. Some people say, "No, they're not on track." Other people say they are. I'd like to believe that they are closer to being on track than being off track.

Q: But they present a major problem for what you're trying to do?

A: They haven't. There's been a lot of security issues in Rumbek with law enforcement officials. The same level of insecurity hasn't occurred in Juba. One of the reasons is the mix of forces there. The SPLA, the SAF, the garrison town police, who are still reporting to the North, all know that if any one of them moves in the wrong direction, the situation could ignite very easily. So they keep a check on each other by having multiple forces in one town. Originally the thought was that all these forces would make it insecure. How could we possibly go there and work? But in the end it's made it more secure and places where there isn't a balance between different groups are less secure. So it's worked out in a way we really didn't expect.

Q: Are you optimistic about the CPA working out over time?

A: I'm optimistic that the South will have a period of time without war, and will use that period of time to establish itself, basically to establish institutions of governance, both in civil society and from a government perspective. The big question is whether we will ever have an election. The election is going to be nation-wide, it's going to be for the president of both the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan. It's going to be for all the assembly members, in the North and the South, for all the state representatives, everyone from top to bottom. It will be difficult for nationwide elections to go forward on schedule. The question is, if the election gets delayed, what happens to the referendum? Will the referendum be delayed as well, or not? There are a lot of different scenarios that you can play out but it is difficult to tell how it's going to work out.

The Darfur situation complicates matters even further. That's still unresolved and yes, they've signed a peace agreement, but the violence has increased since the agreement was signed. So the security situation in Darfur has got to be dealt with. One certainly couldn't have an election tomorrow in Darfur because it wouldn't be safe enough. So

there are a lot of issues that have to be worked out before we get to that point. I don't see that as being a smooth path. We're going to have some hurdles along the way.

Q: Do you think all the parties are behind this and want to make it happen, i.e., the success of the CPA process?

A: Everyone wanted the CPA to be signed. By the time it was signed, those who negotiated it were comfortable with what was in it, because it was two plus years of negotiating every word. Each side, of course, wanted the words to work to their advantage and each side believes there are pros and cons. Those pros and cons differ, depending on what side of the table you sit on. And so, yes, the government understands that this is what they needed to get themselves to the next step and beyond the conflict. But the next question is, if the result of the CPA is the introduction of a democratic process in Sudan where free and fair elections take place, and if the main governance issue in Sudan is a center versus the periphery issue, of the periphery having concerns about the center that represents them, then will that process go forward? That is the outstanding issue. How will the elections go forward in a peaceful way? What will happen at that point?

The international community will have to be as engaged in 2009 as they have been engaged since 2000, when the whole CPA negotiations started in earnest. High level policy engagement is based on political will and Sudan's been at the top of the USG policy agenda for a long time. The question is, how much longer will they stay there and receive all the attention and support? Sometimes there's only a small window to get things done and the question is, who's going to get worn out sooner? Will the international community continue to give Sudan its number one priority attention. It's like an endurance test.

Q: And as the Southern Government gets more developed and more involvement of the people and so on, they're going to get some momentum on their own idea of independence. Is that fair?

A: That's very fair. One thing that came out in the focus group research was that if people voted tomorrow, the majority in the South would vote for independence. Dr. John was the one person that could have pushed for unity and not separation. He's the one person who might have been able to convince the population in the South to change their view and support unity. But he's not here anymore. So what's the chance of that happening now? It was very difficult to see who could possibly convince the population that's so determined for secession to change their mind. Dr. John's vision was for the SPLM to run in the 2009 election and win. He talked about unity with the vision that a Southerner would run the entire country. It wasn't a vision that was broadly understood. Most couldn't even conceptualize it. But I believe that was his view. And then, if they lost the national election, then the fallback position was to vote for secession in the referendum two years later. But, without Dr. John to drive this vision, it's going to be very difficult for this to happen. At this point, I can't see it happening.

Q: You don't see the leadership emerging that might bring that about?

A: Right. I don't see the links being formed at this point between the SPLM and the other northern parties; what you'd need is a coalition of those parties in order to vote for change. You can't just do it on your own. We still have time before 2009 and a lot can change, but at this point I don't see it happening.

Q: Is there anything you particularly would like to add about your work?

A: I would just say that it's very fascinating to be in Sudan at this point in their history. It's phenomenal, really. We're probably seeing southern Sudan, at its most peaceful state ever and so it's a moment in time, a snapshot in time, and hopefully they'll be able to sustain it. The cost of being at war is just too high on every front, and I think the U.S. government has done commendable work in the negotiation process. The long running conflict in Sudan needed attention for a long time and we've come to the table, put resources behind our effort, and we've been there night and day. These are people whose hearts and souls are involved in what goes on in Sudan. It's not just a job for them. It's something they've been working on for twenty or thirty years. It's something we can all be proud of. Every day we hope it works and every day we go in there and work as hard as we can to help make change happen. I really do hope that international attention stays focused on Sudan through the whole course of the CPA, because as soon as the international community starts to step back in the smallest way, it will provide a loophole for people who don't want to go forward, to jump in and create trouble.