

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Sudan Experience Project

Interview # 64: Executive Summary

Interviewed by: Barbara Nielsen
Initial interview date: February 19, 2007
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This interviewee represents an NGO which has been involved in Sudan for many years building relationships through low profile consultations between adversaries. During the CPA negotiations, his NGO played a behind-the-scenes role, providing technical expertise on questions of disarmament and banking, for example. The interviewee believes that his NGO's technical contribution to the CPA was important. However, he confirmed the general conclusion that NGOs overall had only a minimal role in the negotiation process. Various NGOs sought unsuccessfully to make the talks more inclusive, so that other parties and voices could be heard at that stage. The interviewee believes that had others been included – Darfurians, the Umma Party, for instance - the CPA would have greater buy-in and those voices would now be in a position to join the SPLM in pressuring Khartoum for swifter implementation. He also believes that the international community and the negotiators erred in making it appear that “in order to be taken seriously at the negotiations, you needed to be a military party, fighting.” This stance, in his view, contributed to the Darfur rebellion.

One fundamental criticism of the CPA is the fact that the negotiations made no attempt to address the root causes of conflict, questions of access to resources, access to land, lack of rainfall, environmental degradation, poverty and so on. In his view, there needed to have been a more fundamental approach to why Sudan is in the state it's in; daunting as it may have seemed, the CPA would have been much stronger if it had addressed these issues.

This interviewee offers valuable insights regarding the role of particular personalities involved from the NCP and the SPLM, and believes that much of the lack of political will to implement the CPA stems from the fact that the NCP reformers who negotiated the Accord are no longer in the ascendance in Khartoum. The diminishing impact of sanctions and increased prominence of Chinese economic activity have also contributed to Khartoum's decreased sense of urgency to implement the Accord. These factors, coupled with the failure of the international community to maintain its high level of engagement with CPA implementation, has resulted in the delays in implementation.

Finally, the interviewee highlights the failure to adequately publicize the CPA and the work of the various commissions, such that the population at large would have a better understanding of what the agreement means and be more inclined to embrace it.

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Q: I understand that your organization is involved with track two diplomacy, building relationships through low profile consultations between adversaries, and that you have been active in Sudan. Could you describe what your organization has tried to do in Sudan, primarily in the last several years? Since 2001, for example.

A: Since 2001 we've been working with senior Sudanese on both sides of the North-South conflict and feeding research into the IGAD process and working quite closely with IGAD mediators and sometimes more distantly from them, as required. And that's led into work with the Darfurian process, recently.

Q: With regard to the IGAD negotiators, let's explore that a little bit; the kind of information that you could helpfully provide them would be what sort?

A: Details where they're getting stuck. Some of the research that we've done has been fairly specific, like how you would run a state with a conventional banking system alongside a Grameen banking system, for example. Trying to help them to decide what's feasible and what's possible and what's likely, what's physically manageable and what's practically feasible, so that they can talk about real issues and not just get bogged down in what they think might be the way forward without really having listened to it too carefully. There's sometimes a temptation in these kinds of talks for the parties to talk in fairly grand gestures that are more designed to please a political constituency than to move a process forward.

Q: That's often a big problem and these negotiations were very detailed and did get down to a specific, technical level. Was the question of the banking system one that you spent considerable time on?

A: Yes, as an organization. Not personally, because I wasn't involved in that stage, but I think we were fairly involved with that and with questions of disarmament and how you manage the process of DDR, or RDD, as we would have it.

Q: And were you able to see the results of the research that you provided actually having an effect in the final product?

A: I think so. I think in some ways that element was more successful. The other thing

that we were doing all the time was trying to encourage the two parties in the negotiations to be more inclusive. If we think about comprehensive as meaning including all the issues and inclusive as meaning including all the people, we were always trying to encourage them to get the other parties on board and to discuss the negotiations with other parties and so on, so that people didn't feel left out of the process. And I'm not sure that we were as successful with that, because although we tried very hard to do that, there wasn't much incentive for them. The international community was very happy to engage just with the two parties.

You sent out the message that in order to be taken seriously at the negotiations you need to be a military party, you need to be fighting. And that, I think, was a contributing factor in Darfur, that people there felt that they had to fight in order to have a seat at the table. So it sent out the wrong signal, I think.

Q: As an NGO - and I have no idea how big a presence you have - what leverage can you bring to bear to make these points, that it's better to be more inclusive and you think it's important to have all the voice be heard? How would you go about making that known to the negotiators?

A: I think the only, the best way that we've had is to be talking all the time to the negotiators themselves through the mediators, because the parties themselves don't always want to hear that but the mediators are perhaps more ready to see the benefit of it. And that's certainly the case with Lazaro Sumbeiywo and with the AU team in Abuja. By working more closely with them we were able to try to influence things.

But there is, of course, a limit to what an NGO can do. We have an advantage that we're non-governmental because it means that we can say things that governments can't and we can engage with people in ways that governments can't. But of course that means we don't have the guarantees for an agreement or the leverage to push something through.

Q: In fact, in the negotiating stage, I can recall asking people specifically about the role of NGO's and the reply was, "Well, largely minimal" but I think that may not be the total point of view. How would you describe the role of NGO's in general, in addition to your own, at the negotiating stage?

A: I think the role of NGO's was minimal. I think there were very few of us who were engaged and we just don't have, NGO's don't have, the loud voice that other players have. So our engagement tends to be quite behind the scenes and tends to be quite low profile. That means that other people don't know that we're doing it or they don't take it seriously. I think our relationships with the parties in Naivasha and with the mediators meant that we were taken seriously by them, even if not by the international community.

Q: And your principal interlocutor, then, was General Sumbeiywo himself, or members of his staff?

A: Yes, General Sumbeiywo himself and members of the parties. We had fairly good

relationships with some of the more reforming characters in the National Congress Party in the North and with the SPLM. The SPLM in some ways was perhaps harder to engage. They had pretty strong support in the States, from government and from I think the public in general, inasmuch as people knew about Sudan. I think the fact that they were perceived to be struggling against an oppressive Muslim regime made them quite popular and perhaps even the whole Black-Arab thing gains a certain amount of support in the States. So they felt probably they didn't need to engage with anyone else, because they were the good guys; they saw themselves as the good guys. And often in these kinds of conflicts the lines aren't quite so easily drawn as that.

Q: So there's enough blame to go around to all parties. You mentioned that you had developed relations with the NCP. Was that an historical aspect?

A: Yes. We'd originally been asked by somebody from the NCP who'd seen our work in Rwanda to get involved in Sudan, because as you know the NCP's a fairly, if I can use the word church, a broad church.

Q: Church, did you say?

A: It's a fairly broad organization. There are people in it with quite a range of views.

Q: How about "tent"? That's a term we often use. A big tent and that seems very fitting for a desert country.

A: Slightly more fitting than church.

Q: So, okay, they have a wide variety of adherents.

A: Yes. So clearly some within the National Congress Party wanted to engage us because they felt, well, we're suitably small and have a small voice and therefore we won't have too much leverage and therefore they don't have to take us too seriously. I'm sure the more cynical among them would have thought that and perhaps they wanted to be seen to be engaging but without necessarily having to do very much. But there were reformers in the NCP who were engaged with us and who continue to be.

Q: Okay, who are some of these reformers?

A: People like Tariq Hussein Majub, who was the head of the wealth sharing committee for a time. There are a lot of people in the National Congress Party who talk the talk of reform. Mohamed Mukhtar Hussein from the presidency, for example. Even Ghazi Salaheddin, the presidential peace advisor at the time. People who were talking the language of peace and were actively engaged in the talks. Even Faleh Attib, who has a fairly hard-line background but was fairly willing in the talks to push the process forward. I think they were the ones who were most engaged. And now the others are in the ascendance. The rumors in Khartoum are that the Taha crowd from that period have been demoted in some way and the more hardliners are in the ascendance.

Q: And what do you think is going on? Does that ring true to you?

A: It does ring true. People deny it in Khartoum, but it would seem to be borne out by the situation on the ground. I think implementation of the CPA has been extremely slow and there's clearly been an absence of political will from the NCP and absence of capacity from the SPLM to do very much about implementation. So it would seem that the NCP reformers were used to negotiate an agreement that everyone would be happy with and then haven't really been given the space within their own party to do anything very much about implementation. And there were frustrations there within the NCP that they haven't been able to see the process through in a way they would have liked.

Q: I wanted to ask about the whole question of attitude of the parties that you dealt with, both the NCP and the SPLM,, because many people have said that at the end of the year 2001, the Sudanese government reached the idea that well, they really did want to negotiate in seriousness, in order to rejoin the civilized world, if I can put it that way. They were suffering from being the victims of sanctions and they wanted to demonstrate that they could behave responsibly.

A: Yes, I think there's an element of truth in that. certainly, international pressure.

Q: So now, of course, having negotiated this agreement, what would you think their current attitude towards the agreement is in Khartoum?

A: I think in the meantime the Chinese have become a much bigger player in Khartoum and so the sanctions since then haven't really made much of a difference. One doesn't have the impression in Khartoum of a country that's under sanction or excluded from the international community in some way. It doesn't feel like the pariah that it was at that time. And probably the last part of that is that the money's flowing in for the oil from the Chinese and so they don't need, there isn't the same pressure internally, to conform to what perhaps the Western world wants them to do. So that's perhaps why the hardliners inside Khartoum have been able to be more vocal in recent times. Because I'm sure that the American position in particular in 2001 was a big factor in allowing or encouraging the Sudanese government to engage. And there are personalities involved as well, of course. All of this comes down to people.

Q: Actually that point can't be stressed too much, I think. A lot of people mention it, of course and there have been changes in leadership at least on the SPLM side, but in terms of leaders from the NCP, have there been some significant shifts? You mentioned the Taha crowd apparently no longer in the ascendance, but what's going on there?

A: Yes, I think also perhaps as time goes on Bashir becomes more presidential. I think you see in other places once a president is established as president he becomes more presidential in some way and so gradually he becomes more like a statesman, or she, for that matter, but I can only think of men. General Musharraf in Pakistan, for example, seems more like a president. He's in a similar position to Bashir. He took power in a

similar way but he now seems more like a president. He's been able to style himself as a president and he's in a much better position of winning an election than he might have been some years ago. And probably Bashir is in a similar position. He feels confident that he's now taken seriously by his people as a president and that even if there were an election he would stand a fair chance. I'm not sure he's going to give himself a fair chance but if there were one he probably feels more confident now than he did at that time.

Q: That's interesting, that this whole process of negotiating and implementing the CPA, you're thinking that overall this has raised his stature, because it's perceived as not a failure. Meanwhile, his performance in the Darfur region hasn't sufficiently detracted from his luster?

A: It may have on the international level, but it's not something that people really notice in Sudan. It sounds surprising maybe, but Darfur is a long way from Khartoum and people in Khartoum don't notice what's going on in Darfur and a lot of the criticism of what's going on in Darfur comes from people like the governments of the U.S. and the UK, whom the Sudanese don't like anyway. Or it comes from humanitarian agencies and the Sudanese are often mistrustful of what their motives are. It comes from the UN, which the Sudanese public views as being tantamount to the U.S., ironically, despite my frequent claims to the contrary when I'm there. So the man on the street in Khartoum, where still the bulk of the population is, in that central part of Sudan, doesn't necessarily even believe that the kind of things that are coming out are true, because of the source. That probably has an impact on it. It doesn't seem to have had an impact on Bashir's presidency.

Q: When we were talking about the negotiations and you mentioned that Concordas was among those that tried to get greater inclusion, in terms of other parties that had to make their views heard, when you look at the CPA today, does it seem still that it was a mistake not to be more inclusive? The argument for excluding other parties was that it would make the negotiations very difficult, but as we try to evaluate what's happened, how do you view that decision?

A: I think that was a very shortsighted decision. It's true that it would have made the negotiations harder and it would have had to be managed in some way to be at all logistically viable. But is it worth negotiating an agreement which then does not have sufficient buy-in from sufficient people actually to be sustainable? My sense is that the two biggest reasons for lack of implementation of the CPA are that the international community's really not been engaged with CPA implementation, particularly because Darfur's taken over people's priorities outside Sudan and the other reason is that there isn't a political will inside the National Congress Party to see that agreement implemented.

But if other forces had been involved as well then they would be putting much more internal pressure on CPA implementation. And there are significant other political forces in Sudan. It's not somewhere that's a sort of one party state, really. Even in the period

after this regime came in, when they banned all other political parties, those other political parties, the people in them were still quite active. And it's still somewhere where there is a degree of dissent and where there are some lively debates in parliament between people with very different points of view. And probably the international community hasn't exploited that, including Sumbeiywo. Because now they can't guarantee an agreement because they feel that they were excluded from it and so they spend their time, people like the Umma Party, spend their time criticizing their exclusion from the agreement, rather than criticizing the parties for not implementing the agreement.

Q: The Darfurians, of course, had they been included in the CPA negotiations, do you think that might have made a difference in the way things evolved in Darfur?

A: Very much so, yes. I think the conflict wouldn't have got so out of hand and the same in the East. One of the problems in the CPA, of course, was that other parts of Sudan viewed it as a success for the South and wanted something similar for themselves, not realizing that the structure of the CPA actually makes it very difficult for other regions to get anything similar, because it's kind of the mother of all other agreements and sets in stone the interim national constitution, which makes it difficult for other players to have as much freedom. And in fact they'd have much more for their region if they'd been included in the talks and they would have been much less likely to fight, because their reasons for fighting would have been nipped in the bud, especially given the timing.

Q: Well, they were fighting before the agreement was actually finalized.

A: It was a good 15 to 18 months between when the Sudanese government decided to engage properly with the process in Naivasha or Keren and when the rebellion, for want of a better word, started in Darfur. So in that time, in those 15 months, if those parties had been included in the talks then perhaps that rebellion wouldn't have even happened in the first place.

Q: I've heard views on both sides, but at this point it seems that conditions have been exacerbated in Darfur, possibly as a result of the attention given to the North-South and then the Darfurians feeling the only way to get attention is to fight for it. Were there, other than the technical reasons that the negotiators felt they really couldn't handle any more actors around the table, were there some personal reasons, again personalities or individuals who just didn't want to entertain the possibility of other groups being included?

A: Yes, I think so. Doctor John already had a tough enough time keeping stragglers on board inside the SPLM, people like Salva Kiir and Riek Machar and all those people. Lam Akol, who signed the 1997 Khartoum peace agreement, who was sort of in and out of the SPLM. He had to try and keep those people inside the SPLM and that was already enough of a job and probably his style and that of the NCP leadership was fairly sort of dictatorial in a way, not especially consultative.

So he probably didn't, I don't think either his style or Taha's, even, really lent themselves to including other people. They weren't that keen to engage with other groups. They didn't particularly engage with NGO's, Sudanese NGO's, women's groups, those sorts of people, either. It wasn't just that they weren't engaging with other fighters inside Sudan. They felt that they were in a position to negotiate what was right for Sudan. And the massive majority the SPLM has in the South is probably not entirely representative and they may have had to give some of that share up. Both the SPLM and the NCP stood to lose portions of their share the more people that were at the table and they didn't want to do that.

Clearly the SPLM has a slightly stronger argument because it could say that it needs to have a united opposition and it needs to have as large a representation as possible as a kind of solid opposition party, but in reality that hasn't happened anyway, particularly. The SPLM's share of government in the North is not correspondent with a loud voice in the North.

Q: Is that because they're unable to make their weight felt? They're given a certain number of ministries but maybe the personalities that they're able to place in those positions aren't sufficiently forceful to counterbalance the representatives of the North?

A: Yes, the North has been running a government for much longer and has a much larger cadre of people to draw on. The South has struggles to find all the people it needs to fill positions and a lot of the CPA was counting on John Garang to pull through, I suppose. He was so popular in the North that he would have had a bit more of a groundswell of public opinion behind him that maybe would have helped, whereas Salva is busy trying to cling on to his jobs in the North and the South, not really having much support from the SPLM or the NCP.

Q: Official representatives of the Government of South Sudan have told us that the transition from John Garang to Salva Kiir was much more seamless than we might have thought and that Salva Kiir represents fully John Garang's ideals and has been able to, if not totally fill his shoes, at least do a very credible job. It would sound like you're a little more skeptical.

A: Yes, I was about to say that. I think he has done a credible job. John's shoes are difficult to fill and he's a pretty larger than life personality and anyone who comes after him under any circumstances is going to be compared less favorably maybe, just as Thabo Mbeki is compared totally with Nelson Mandela, each with their strengths and weaknesses. I think it would have been very difficult for anyone in that position to kind of match the charisma that he had. On the other hand, he could have been a more unifying force internally, because he could be less divisive as a personality because he's not such a strong personality, but I think people haven't trusted him perhaps entirely because people aren't convinced he was trusted by Doctor John.

He was always a kind of compromise candidate, the number two, to keep that part of the

country in line. He wasn't somebody who was Doctor John's deputy because Doctor John trusted him to take over from him. He was Doctor John's deputy because Doctor John needed somebody, it's like sort of marriages you would have in medieval Europe between the Austrians and the French or whatever to keep the peace, much more of that kind of an arrangement. And so, since he's taken over he's had to balance that much more.

And of course his deputy is Riek Machar, who's not trusted by very many people at all, apart from Riek Machar. So that doesn't help, either. It's not like he's leaving someone behind in Juba to do his work. He's leaving somebody behind in Juba who could easily undermine him. So that makes things perhaps more difficult, as well.

They have got some fantastic people in the SPLM: Nhial Deng, Luka Biong, Ann Itto. But Nhial is busy studying in St. Andrew's and Luka and Ann are pretty overstretched.

Q: In fact why is Nhial Deng studying in Scotland at this point? It seems bizarre to me.

A: He got tired of SPLM internal wrangling, he said at the time. I saw him just before he left Juba, when he was still minister of, he was basically kind of foreign affairs minister of the SPLM, regional cooperation, they called it and he just felt that the SPLM was not going to be able to deliver and didn't have the capacity to deliver, didn't have the capacity to absorb the money from Khartoum, didn't have enough people, didn't have enough strategy, was riven by internal wrangling and wasn't really going to do a very good job and he would rather get out now rather than wait to see it not do a very good job.

Q: That's a very pessimistic evaluation of the future on his part and he obviously is in a place to know.

A: He may make some kind of political comeback if things settle down.

Q: Maybe he figures if he has this low profile it will better enable his return, in triumph. Let's look for a minute at the commissions, speaking of problems in the implementation, where the work is definitely behind schedule. Regarding the Assessment and Evaluation Commission, which is key to implementation, what are your views as to why it hasn't managed to function as envisioned?

A: I don't know, because I'm not inside it and people like Tom Vraalsen would know much better the frustration. I guess it hasn't had that much to assess and evaluate, because the whole thing is going so slowly and that, perhaps because of Darfur, the international community has not engaged with it as much as they would have done in different circumstances, I guess. So there hasn't been the same kind of pressure and there hasn't probably been the same kind of technical support for implementation. It's not really a question of money, I don't think, because there's enough money sloshing around if they can work out a way of spending it. There's not really been the capacity on one side and not been the political will on the other and internationally there's not been

the political will to engage very strongly with it because governments are unwilling to engage with the National Congress Party while the Darfur war is going on.

Q: It comes back to those same problems I guess that plagued the process throughout, low capacity in the South, lack of political will in the North and the international community sidetracked by Darfur or distracted by Darfur.

A: It's just that unfortunately that distraction has given the National Congress Party something to complain about, because they turn around and say, "Well, we raised all these things but we just can't get the international community to engage with us because they're so worried about Darfur. We're not getting credit for the fact that we're not at war with the South anymore and don't you think we should have a bit of a pat on the back for what a good job we've done?" Everyone's going, "No, we don't think you should have that!" And that rather irritates them and regardless of whether it's true or not in a sense it doesn't matter, because it gives them an excuse to say that, which is all they need. It doesn't need to be true.

Q: Do NGO's like yours have a free rein at this point, now that, you might say, peace has arrived? Are you able to do the kind of seminars and consultations that you would hope to do?

A: No, and I don't think peace has arrived, really. I don't think we've seen much in the way of peace. Shots haven't been fired, perhaps, as much, but the underlying tensions are still there if not worse, and I think the atmosphere in Khartoum is more repressive than it was a year ago.

Q: Really? Why is that?

A: I don't know. Personalities in Khartoum. Frustration with the international community, international community frustration with Sudan.

Q: In the way that you were just describing: the international community is criticizing on account of Darfur and then the Sudanese are saying, "Now wait, we just tried our best with this accord."

A: The Sudanese government has also been very belligerent about things in the last few months as a whole. Debate about UN intervention and responsibility to protect and all that kind of thing, it's really got people's backs up on both sides, the international community's back and the Sudanese government's back. And the Sudanese government's response to that is to clamp down on dissenting voices. I think it has got a lot worse. You've had NGO's being shut down and opposition newspapers much more regularly it seems in the last year than happened before.

And even we, who've been very careful not to do any advocacy but always to be impartial, we may be a bit critical of people to their faces behind the scenes when no one's listening but as an organization we don't take a view. And even then we've had

workshops being threatened with shutdown and one workshop we tried to run about a year ago, last March I think it was, where people just didn't turn up because they were worried the government was going to throw them out if they got there. That was the kind of atmosphere at the time.

Q: So that was a year ago, basically, end of March last year?

A: That was the African Union summit, I guess just over a year ago, in Khartoum, where the AU decided not to give Sudan its presidency because of the Darfur conflict. And the Sudanese government reacted by shutting down any sort of advocacy NGO's that they thought had influenced the African Union to make that kind of stand. Now the African Union's decided the same thing again this year and the Sudanese government looks around for scapegoats and says, "Well clearly it's nothing to do with us because we're doing exactly what any government would do. We're crushing a rebellion and implementing a peace agreement and aren't we good guys?" And the rest of the world is saying, "No, you're not really good guys" but their response is not to listen to that but to find scapegoats, I guess.

Q: Now how often do you manage to go to Sudan?

A: Personally I go quite a lot. I've been in and out probably every two or three weeks in the last six months. I've been there three times this year. So I do get in quite a lot and they've never refused me a visa, so at least in London I'm still not considered dangerous.

Q: And you have a visa that is good for how long at a time?

A: I have a single entry visa each time.

Q: So each time you go you have to reapply, so they keep tabs on you and while you're there presumably they know what you're doing.

A: Yes. I will go and see them anyway. I let people in government know when I arrive and when I leave and whom I'm seeing, to some extent, so they feel they're in charge.

Q: Well, that's very polite and you gain something by engaging them, I'm sure. I'm not sure whether they're nice, warm and fuzzy people but at least...

A: No, I wouldn't really describe them as that.

Q: In fact I'm trying to think how you find common ground. You may have discovered some things that you enjoy in common?

A: No I think things are very rarely black and white. Things are generally murky and it's difficult to see, one can't see the government in Sudan in black or white terms, either. There are some very difficult people there who are going to try to retain power and I suppose there are lots of people on all sides who are in it to retain power. A lot of it's

about personalities, from all the parties. A lot of the Darfur stuff is about personalities of people like Abdelwahid. So a lot of that comes into it. The government of Sudan is not a sort of homogenous body of evil people. It's kind of a mixture of people who have different motives and ways of dealing with things, some of whom are more unpleasant than others and I guess that we need to continue to engage with those who have a slightly less unpleasant approach and see if they can somehow encourage the government as a whole to take a more open stance. Now the government has backed themselves into a corner. I think the international community and the Sudanese government have sort of taken such opposing views in recent times that they've kind of backed off from each other into opposite corners of the room and aren't quite clear how they get out of that.

Q: I notice that some of the subjects that your organization works on are very specific and technical and the kind of thing that both sides could agree on, like water, education, land rights, I guess, and maybe even religion. Are you able to work on any of those kinds of topics at this point and do they relate to any aspects of the CPA?

A: Yes, we can do those things and they're quite useful ways in because they're not obviously political. As you say, everyone needs water. Education is political as well because there are whole questions of where you build a school and then whose community that is and what language you instruct people in and what you teach them about religion and all those things come into education, so it becomes political. But on all sides people would fundamentally agree that there ought to be free and compulsory primary education, for example. So you do find some common ground that way. We've been doing some work on local government, to try to encourage people to arraign their own governments more at the local level, as a way of addressing marginalization at the political level. To say, "Okay, you've accused Khartoum of withholding all this power from you. Is there a way that we can encourage Khartoum to decentralize in some way, to devolve power and to allow people at the more local level to run their own affairs?"

That will cause us to go down to local levels to build things up and acquire greater constitutional awareness and greater willingness on the part of Khartoum to let local government to get on with it and all those different sorts of things that will need to be happening at the same time. If we can do some work on that at a quite technical level, now what does the constitution say about local government, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and how might we address those and what's feasible and how do we go about establishing a solid local government structure in Sudan, those are all ways of helping the peace process in terms instigated in the CPA to kind of take root in some way and to be taken more seriously.

I think the CPA needs to have produced something that people can see and at the moment it hasn't produced very much that anyone on the ground sees. And it needs to be supported by initiatives that help to encourage wider society to take the points of view that are in the CPA: that education is a good thing and reconciliation is a good thing and land should be owned not by the government. All those sorts of things that are in the CPA, mentioned in the CPA and referred to in the CPA need to become much more part of the national psyche.

Q: Unfortunately many of these concepts are novel. It's not that they need simply to be implemented and people's minds refreshed but rather the ideas may be new to folks who haven't really been living in a democracy before.

A: Yes and they haven't been disseminated. One thing that the SPLM, especially Doctor John in his time was much better at, once the CPA was signed, was going around and telling people what it was. So even though he didn't want to include people in the process of agreeing to it, he did see the benefit in showing people, once it's agreed and saying, "This is what we've got for you and this is what it means." and trying to take it beyond a simple discussion of, "Okay, now we can become independent." which is what most people in southern Sudan think the CPA means.

The assumption in the CPA is that it will be publicized, that people will know about it but nobody's really taken that very seriously and of course the National Congress Party still has sufficient rule in the North that it can stop efforts to do that if it so desires. It's quite hard for other people to get out there and do it. There has been some work recently to get the DPA (Darfur Peace Accord) more widely known and that might be a way of getting the CPA more widely known using the same kinds of mechanisms, because the government has always supported the idea of DPA dissemination.

Q: Now are you likely to be involved in that as an organization?

A: Indirectly, and we've been continuing to engage the non-signers but we're most likely to be engaged in the Darfur-Darfur dialogue in the next weeks and months and that's a question of packaging to some extent, because people on the ground have not been supportive of the DPA. So it needs to be re-branded as a good thing in and of itself so that people see that even if they don't like the DPA at least independently the process is a good thing. There haven't been similar initiatives I think with the CPA, to push ahead with what's inside the CPA, the various commissions and make them more public and make them more transparent and publicized. That would maybe help people see the CPA as a good thing, so they understand, know and want to embrace it.

There hasn't really been that process. The people in the North, it hasn't really made a difference to them and the people in the South haven't really seen massive differences on the ground. They're just aware that they'll be able to vote for independence. So that's all it really has meant to them. Which is a shame, when you think how long this process took, how much technical detail there is in there and how much they seriously thought about how the process has worked. I do think that both parties took it very seriously and though there were times when they started fighting again, there were different perhaps goals and they had different levels of engagement, still, by and large, especially given their history, the two parties took the negotiations quite seriously.

Q: I think that point about the need to disseminate the provisions and really make sure that the Sudanese population understands the contents really can't be overemphasized; elections are coming up and how can they be prepared for that if they really aren't aware

of what's supposed to be happening in their various governmental organizations?

A: Yes, I think on that front there'll be a lot of work that somebody somewhere will need to do on encouraging political processes and political participation and not just the people voting but how parties themselves are organized, how the political process as a whole is taken forward, because much of it still depends on personalities. We saw how much the SPLM was tied up by John Garang's death and how much the SLM is tied up in personalities of their different bits of leadership that keep splitting off and how much the eastern front agreement has not been implemented because of lack of will on the Eritrean and Sudanese government side but also because of personality clashes between the leadership. And it seems even Sadiq al-Mahdi, who always argued for being bold in the Naivasha process, was criticized for his fairly dictatorial and unhelpful rule when he was prime minister from 1986 to 1989, even though he was elected. So I think generally the political parties need to be encouraged to be proper political parties in some ways, with clear leadership structure and clear manifestos and some accountability to their electorate, which hasn't really happened yet.

Q: Well, it's a tall order. So much of Sudan needs to be developed, from the political structure to the economic structure to the educational institutions. Everything is in need of rudimentary development, apparently, so that it's not just a matter of reestablishing what used to exist, but creating it for the first time.

I want to give you a chance to make a concluding statement or two, in terms of your understanding of the CPA. What do you think could have been done better or done differently in order for it to be a more effective instrument at this point and maybe even serve as a better model for other peace accords?

A: There's one thing we haven't talked about, which is the whole root causes thing and that one of the advantages perhaps of engagement and one of the things that didn't happen particularly in the CPA was a discussion of why the conflict started and why it continued and what the basic issues are behind it, and how you might address questions of access to resources and access to land, and so on.

It is much more about disarming the parties and agreeing on which side of the divide the "three areas" will be and how much money the South will get from the North and all those sorts of things. If there'd been perhaps a more fundamental approach to why Sudan is in the state it's in, then that would have maybe been more helpful for the processes elsewhere.

Q: Now was that approach suggested and then rejected for various reasons?

A: I don't know how seriously it was suggested. It was suggested by us, but we're a very small voice and it was suggested by other NGO's. But generally the emphasis in any kind of peace agreement setting certainly is to stop the parties from killing each other, understandably. But it means that because by the time they got to killing each other they already had almost forgotten to some extent why they were originally fighting. Somehow,

that opportunity to address those root causes is then overlooked, in the interest of disarmament. But had it really been fundamentally addressed it would have been perhaps much more helpful for the rest of the country. It's much less about which preventative power people have and much more about fundamental problems in Sudan: lack of rainfall and environmental depredation and poverty and lack of opportunity and all those sorts of things that are rarely addressed.

Q: Do you think it would have simply made the problem seem too intractable, if they saw the overwhelming number of issues that they would need to resolve if they went deeper into the root causes?

A: Maybe it would have been seen like that in the beginning. I think perhaps as the system developed and people saw what was going on and relationships were created and so on they might have been more open to address those things than perhaps the mediators thought at the start.

Q: Fundamentally, they would have had to figure out how to take an underdeveloped country and develop it and I'm not sure the formula for that has been totally figured out.

A: No, it depends on each case as to the measurement and where they put things but it would have been more helpful in hindsight if more of that had been included and if they engaged more with civil society, I suppose, so that now people would be much more aware of what it said and what it was trying to do for them and how they could get on board. Because now people don't feel sufficient ownership of it to pressure the government to get things done. Maybe at the time the international community thought that they would be the ones doing the pressuring so it wouldn't matter.

Q: The international community thought they would be the ones?

A: Well, I wonder when the parties refused to have that level of engagement with civil society and in the interests of getting an agreement people were happy to let them do that. Which I guess was fair enough at the time but in hindsight, I mean hindsight is always clear, isn't it? I have the impression that the mediators and the international community - and when I say international community I mean particularly the U.S., the UK, Norway and Italy in this context- they made the best decisions they could at the time, but in hindsight things could have been better and it's worth taking time as you're doing, to try to learn what could have been done better, how things could have been approached maybe differently to get a more lasting process.

Q: Indeed, that is the object, to try and ferret out what mistakes were made. Obviously everyone did their best at the time but surely there will be situations in the future where these lessons learned can be brought to bear. That's the hope, certainly. The CPA was a very complex negotiation and you've brought out a number of other interesting aspects that were forgotten. But clearly your organization is committed to being there and to continuing your work and it sounds like you're able to do some worthwhile things, so that's encouraging.

A: Yes, I think so. We'll see how it goes.