



Political Economy Analysis in Sudan: Handy Tools for Everyone?

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About the Authors

Beverley Jones worked in Port Sudan for Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) as a teacher trainer from 1988 to 1990, as part of a British Council scheme to support the Ministry of Education. In the 1990s, she worked with Christian Aid as Sudan programme manager; and she was CAFOD's international director in the early 2000s. Bev was a strategic adviser to the British Council when the then Department for International Development (DFID) launched its flagship governance programme in Sudan in 2014, and she continues to provide advice to both the British Council and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) on Sudan.

Daniel Oosthuizen spent his early childhood in Ethiopia, which marked the beginning of a growing association with the Horn of Africa. A participant in the ODI-TTP Political Economy in Action course during COVID-19, he went to Sudan just before the outbreak of the current war to help update the Sudan case study for the course. After graduating in Politics and Anthropology from the University of Cambridge, Daniel spent a year in Leipzig studying Arabic, Japanese and Russian. He will be returning to Cambridge in the coming academic year to study for an MPhil in Economic and Social History.

Dr Abdelgalil Elmekki, who is a citizen of Sudan and Canada, collaborated in the Contextual Analysis course that is at the core of this story on political economy analysis in Sudan. Dr Elmekki worked at DFID in Sudan from 2011 to 2015, and was seconded to the African Union/United Nations mission in Darfur. Since 2015, he has served as senior governance adviser at the British Council in Khartoum. Over the past ten years, Dr Elmekki has taught at the universities of Khartoum, Toronto, Carleton (Ottawa) and Reading in the UK, and he holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Toronto.

Esraa Ahmed is a Sudanese development practitioner. Before serving as a governance adviser for the British Council and the then DFID in Sudan, she worked on business development and strategy in the private sector in Sudan for five years. Throughout her career, she has aimed to enhance local governance accountability and public financial management (PFM) in the social sector. She is also an advocate for transitional justice for Sudanese citizens, and for the urgent need for reform of Sudan's security sector.

Summary

Based on a case study of Sudan, this paper argues that the skills and mind-set of broad and localised Political Economy Analysis (PEA) capacity can make a tangible difference to people living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where navigating dangerous complexity is their daily reality. The paper also contends that there is under-utilised potential for PEA capacity to support not only ordinary people across a range of different occupations and educational levels, but also prominent actors who may eventually play key roles in intricate political processes, and whose choices can affect the longer-term prospects for stability and peace. The paper concludes that the fact that PEA training cannot always rely on stable contexts makes it even more important to consider ways to conduct it during periods of hiatus, fast-moving transitions – and even active conflict – as a form of essential capability and as a public good.

The paper highlights three critical lessons:

- At a *country level*, the twists and turns of Sudan's recent history reinforce the importance of citizens being able to better understand what is really going on, in order to make the best (or the least-worst) choices. The skills and mindset of both broad and localised PEA capacity can make a difference to people living in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where navigating dangerous complexity is their daily reality.
- At the level of *strategic programming*, there is considerable scope for capacity in PEA to support not only ordinary citizens across a range of different occupations and educational levels, but also prominent actors who may eventually play key roles in political processes, and whose choices can affect the longer-term prospects for stability and peace. This becomes even more imperative in the context of the war in Sudan, which now involves so many external actors.
- At the level of the *experiment in Contextual Analysis (CA)*, this story reinforces the paramount importance of adapting and grounding the PEA training in a common understanding among its intended participants, shaping it through their insights and experience. It also highlights how essential it is to continue the support in bad times as well as good given that, unlike conventional training, supporting this capability cannot rely on stable contexts, and nurturing such capacity in challenging settings requires courage and creativity on the part of the donors, course designers, implementers and participants.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 1 provides an introduction setting out the broad context of Sudan within which the Contextual Analysis (CA) training took place in Section 1. Section 2 describes the 30-year period of al Bashir's regime (1989–2019). Section 3 focuses on successive UK governance programmes in Sudan between 2015 and 2019. Section 4 describes the Contextual Analysis course (2017–2018) and its development. Section 5 looks at the revolutionary hiatus and brief transition to civilian rule in Sudan (2017–2018). This is followed by an account in

Section 6 of the 2019–2023 transitional phase and dashed hopes for a move to civilian rule with the outbreak of a civil war that has led to untold violence, displacement and hunger for the civilian population. Section 7 concludes with reflections on missed opportunities to capitalise on the CA experiment, and with recommendations on the need for continued support on PEA for Sudanese organisations.