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**The Sudanese Strategic Report, 1997: Some Questions to Real
Progress.**

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1. Introduction

The *Sudanese Strategic Report (SSR)* is the official government document, which aims to provide information on the development status of Sudan. This is an important document because it is the only (at the time), comprehensive, official information source on Sudan. The document is used for international dissemination, and seeks to measure the achievement of the development objectives set in the *National Comprehensive Strategy, 1992-2002*.

In addition, it indicates the position of the Sudanese government on issues of the status and the power of the government, the role of the citizen in the nation-state, the implementation of the political ideology of Islamism as a method for social development, and the direction of change in Sudan, which in present day is a complete socio-economic and political transformation as compared to the previous governments' philosophies. It also shows that although in some sectors, such as the social and political spheres, Islamism is the base upon which all change and strategies are planned, other spheres such as the economy and social services are planned under the free-market economies model, based on profit maximisation, privatisation, and transferring much of the costs of living over to the consumer and the public.

The document contains a comprehensive and detailed report on political developments, the economy, foreign relations, the social situation and basic infrastructure, defence and security, and peace processes. In comparison the SSR of 1996 lacked much of the important information on indicators of development and political status. It is in this regard that this paper will highlight some of the questions that the information in the SSR 1997 raises.

2. Political development

Since 1989, when all laws and constitutions were frozen, the legal system based its proceedings and decisions on laws passed in „circulares“¹. However, since then many of the laws have been amended and passed to become the new laws in Sudan. The report mentions that in 1997: 416 presidential decisions were declared, 13 laws issued by the national council and passed by the president, 11 laws passed by the president with temporary orders, and 5 orders passed by the president based on laws (pg. 17). These numbers show the day-to-day

handling of problems and legal issues in the country, and where the judiciary is not the source of new laws. Another question concerns the 'orders based on law, passed by the president'; if a law already exists for a certain issue then why should the president's office pass an order based on this law? This may reflect that although a legal system exists, laws may be overturned or nullified, which in itself marginalises the judiciary and the legal system and may discourage the process of seeking legal remedy in Sudan.

2.1. The Federal States and Regionalisation

The document reports that the Sudanese government implemented the federalisation process as the best government system for the country, in light of the unequal geographical distribution of resources (pg. 25). In the South all councils were dismantled and elections were held for various state level positions on government nominated candidates. The Chamber of Federal Government is responsible for co-ordinating the activities between the states and monitoring financial returns and expenses of the states. The Chamber admits that some states need more central financing than others, depending on their respective resources. In 1997 the total expenses by all states were approximately SD² 110 billion, their total revenues were approximately SD 84 billion and contribution of the Central Government towards financing the states was approximately SD 7 billion for 15 states out of 26 (pgs. 37 - 39).

The main problem of the federal system is financing. The humongous structure created and the state level operations are still supported by the Central Government. The Federal structure consists of: 26 states, 114 districts, and 621 councils (pg. 33). These need money for running costs and human-power, which is the second major problem of the new federal system, lack of qualified cadre. Although the document emphasises the lack of qualified cadre to run these structures, the government's policies to attract labour is negligible. Policies of compulsory high school and university graduates' military service neglects the labour market of qualified human-power which otherwise would support these structures and perhaps even contribute to state and national development.

¹ These circulars were disseminated by the judiciary as amendments to laws already existing, which were frozen.

² SD = Sudanese Dinar. 1 Sudanese Dinar = 10 Sudanese Pounds. 1 DM = 1,000 Sudanese Pounds approximately.

2.2. The National Assembly

The National Assembly was established to involve the people of Sudan, from all areas and regions, in the process of designing proposals for change and forwarding them to the National Council for approval and implementation; a type of bottom-up approach. The Sudanese government saw this to be a „unique method in comparison to the past where the state had absolute control over society“ (pgs. 18 and 19). The popular participation would be done through involving student unions, women, youth, labour, entrepreneurs, and agricultural organisations in national conferences aimed at dealing with specific problems. However, the performance of this Assembly was criticised as not having achieved any of its popular participation objectives. Firstly, the members of the opposition political groups refused to participate in this Assembly, maintaining that it was just another ‘arm’ of the government. Secondly, the local organisations did not respond to the invitation to participate in the Assembly and very little grass-roots involvement was realised. The government feeling the near collapse of their ‘idea of bottom-up development’ intervened and the president became chief of the Assembly, and various ministers became part of the implementing office (pg. 54). The question which poses itself is, why would the people doubt the Assembly and refrain from participating in an opportunity to bring the important issues from the grass-roots to the official discussion table? This could be attributed to the general attitude among the public that any initiative stemming from the government can never be neutral, and it would be of little use to participate since in the end it is the government’s ideas which will be implemented. For example, in the last national elections, informal sources report that only about 5% of the people went to vote. Similar low participation rates are also reported by informal sources in the voting of the new Constitution passed in April 1998.

A concept designed under the National Assembly is the „Qawama“³ of the society (pg. 19). In the report, Qawama is defined as building a civil society, developing its capabilities and strengths as an alternative to the previous authoritarian control of the state over society. The report maintains that the relationship between state and society is complementary, and that to enhance this they have designed the theoretical and structural framework to implement this ideology in all sectors of society through laws and regulations in order to have a „union between the functions of the state and the society“ (pg. 20). In any political society, it is

³ Qawama in Arabic literally means ‘being in charge of’

known that there can only be a perceived union between the society and state when there is no opposition to either party (the state or society) implicitly the union aimed for by the government does not allow any opposition movement. Although the Sudanese government maintains that there is a pluralist government system, the opposition parties' real representation is hardly seen at any level, and neither did the opposition political parties participate in the last national elections. Thus, in the absence of political opposition and their party representation, the „union“ of the society and the state is only superficial since the only „union“ accepted is that defined by the government.

The document goes on to say that a proposal was forwarded to achieve the Qawama of the society through building a leadership society. The proposal can be criticised in some of the points that are outlined in the SSR (pg. 20):

Point 3 on self-sufficiency: To develop services⁴ at the grass-roots area level and to encourage voluntary and charity work. First of all the existing social services at the district or regional level are lacking enough qualified cadre, equipment, technology and infrastructure. For example, (pgs. 287, 288, 289) the tables show no increase (in some cases there is a decrease) in the number of medical professionals since 1994, compared to the medical needs of a growing population and a growing group under poverty (SSR, 1997, p. 322). The question would be where would these new social services be financed from, where will the human resources come from, if already the existing facilities are under equipped and do not meet the demand for medical attention⁵. Voluntary work is also questionable because, for example, there has been a recent trend among members of certain Government Organised NGOs (GONGOs) to knock on doors in residential areas and to ask for 'donations' of food, money or blood, which is not open to refusal.

Point 4 on control of moral behaviour: „Development of the commitment to (good) behavioural conduct through the directive of Amr bil Maarouf wa Nahiyi aan El Mumkar“ - (literally meaning) order of pursuance to goodwill and the elimination of bad influences. To encourage people to believe in God, through the control of their behaviour and to limit

⁴ It is assumed that services here means medical facilities, since these are the only ones which are yet centrally located in major hospitals.

⁵ Local hospitals lack even minor medical necessities, which the patient or his family have to buy from the local pharmacies before treatment can be initiated. For example, injections, IV drips, or medical gloves.

„abnormal behaviour“ (pg. 20). This programme has been undertaken to essentially limit women's mobility, interaction with the world outside the home, limiting them to only some kinds of jobs and bestowing upon them immediate punishments (e.g. by whipping) if any behaviour is deemed to be „abnormal“. The definition of „abnormal“ is vague and left to the discretion of the accuser on the street. In addition, the special police force of „El Nizaam El Aam“ - Popular Discipline Police - has the complete authority to stop any woman at any time and to bestow punishment at a court without trial or questioning.

If the aim of the state is to develop a „leadership community“, then both men and women should be treated equally. However, it would seem that according to this strategy, only men are considered to be leaders since they control women's movement and „behaviour“.

Under the concept of national unity, the document reports that a campaign was held to raise the awareness of the people towards the constitution. Under this, the campaign defined that there is no individual freedom, only „group freedom“ (pg. 22), and priority is always given to group freedom which is above all types of organisations in the society, including the state. The question is, what is the definition of freedom? How could individual freedom be lesser than group freedom, since a group consists of individuals who decide their freedoms? It would seem that even the group freedom is directed by the state through the laws, regulations and ideology which decides what is right and wrong. Thus, the concept of group freedom is structured by the state and therefore it is not above the state, as the report maintains. There is evidence that group freedom is structured by the state and the laws in the following (pg. 22):

Point 5 on religious freedom: This point mentions that there is complete freedom of religion, as long as it does not cause social unrest. The concept of „social unrest“ is unclear and vague and anything can be categorised under this concept and thus punishment is justified, curbing the said 'freedom'.

Point 6 on freedom of expression: This point mentions that there is freedom of expression as long as „it does not insult, degrade, or cause 'Fitna' (struggle between two parties) or reveal national secrets, as prohibited by law. Pg. 318 cites laws regulating mass media, in which it is stated that no media can operate without the „official permit under articles 6(a) to 19 (a), the National Commission (for media) has the right to prohibit and stop operations

of any media by an administrative order under article 30 (3 - b and h)⁶. Thus, where freedom of expression is first granted, it is later restricted by the laws which regulate freedom of expression.

Point 7 on freedom of association: This point says that there is freedom to associate and organise as long as it does not cause struggle for power (state power), disregard the constitution and the law, disregard religion and the nation state, or taking over power without free elections,..... as prohibited by law. The same is stated in the Constitution (1998), Part II, article 27. Again the freedom ends with the same statement, „as prohibited by law“. Although it is not clear what the law for associations and organisations is, it can be assumed that it restricts freedom of association and organisation, under the existing situation of complete absence of opposition political groups and their activities, inside the country.

What is „group freedom“? How is it above individual freedom, since freedom itself is defined, directed and restricted by the constitution and the laws. The freedoms mentioned above are cited in the new Constitution; however, the constitution itself has been drafted by an imbalanced representation in the drafting committee, pg. 42 cites that: 65 members were selected to participate in the drafting of the Constitution: 54 were male Northern Sudanese members, 3 women, and 7 Southern Sudanese members. It can be concluded that, freedom is restricted by the constitution and the law; law is above the constitution, since all constitutional freedoms are restricted by law, and any law not fitting the constructed principles of freedoms can be changed by a Presidential order (see beginning of this paper).

3. Poverty

The SSR reports that poverty and civil war are the main cause of social, economic, environmental, educational, and health deterioration. Poverty has increased since 1989 and the document reports that today an average of 95% of the population is below poverty (pg. 322). Regional statistics show that except Khartoum, all states have a population poverty rate of above 90%, which in 1990 was reported to be below 78%. In 1993 the poverty line for 91% of the population was calculated to be Ls. 270,000 (pg. 322). Today informal calculations show that the poverty line would be around Ls. 350,000, which affects seriously the part of the

⁶ The document, however, maintains that this law needs to be changed.

population with a limited income such as wages and salaries. The average salary of a civil servant is not more than Ls. 100,000 per month with all allowances.

The reasons for the increase in poverty (pg. 324) outlined in the report are: previous economic mismanagement, lack of transparency in economic and legal policies, lack of legal rights, civil war, and social imbalance. However, it can be seen clearly that the economic reasons mentioned are the result of the sudden liberalisation and free market economy policies. There is an on-going international debate on whether such policies would support both economic growth and poverty alleviation, simultaneously. Since it is evident that poverty has increased sharply, it would be questionable whether any long term vision and planning was actually undertaken before these policies were implemented.

The document reports two strategies as being used to alleviate poverty: Zakat (the Islamic Social Security system) and the Productive Families' Project (PFP) (pg. 324). The Zakat system reports impressive figures having been collected and distributed among the poor and needy. Nevertheless, in reality, there is a long period of application, verification, and bureaucratic procedures which in the end grant a one time sum of around Ls. 5,000 to 10,000 per person. This amount is sufficient for maybe one or two days for a family of five, considering the market prices. It is not the intention to criticise the Zakat system directly, but to highlight that these short term strategies do not contribute to any real poverty alleviation, since the number of poor is growing faster than the funds necessary to satisfactorily provide for all.

The PFP was designed more as a long-term strategy to poverty alleviation (pg. 326) through capacity building and self sufficiency among the poor. The project aims to support the needy families with financial, technical and training resources in order to enable them to generate income. Originally it was planned to mirror the Grameen Bank model, however, several studies show that the PFP has been unable to divorce itself from conventional banking systems and the common lending criteria have become the obstacle to poor people's access to this support, resulting in more middle-income families benefiting from this project. The Islamic financing system of Musharaka (partnership) is mostly used in this type of support to enable a long term business relationship between the bank and the client. Nevertheless, some surveys have shown a high death rate among the PFP initiated businesses after financing is over.

Other than these two strategies, the document reports no specific plans of the government to this major and critical problem of poverty except that, „resources need to be redistributed and poverty must be eradicated“ (pg. 327).

4. National Defence, Civil War, and the Displaced

The document reports that there is threat and unrest along all the borders of Sudan (pg. 339). In the North, Halayib is a problem area; in the East Eritrea and Ethiopia are areas of unrest, specially due to their historical co-operation with the Democratic Union Party and the Umma Party, respectively. The Red Sea is of geo-political importance due to the mineral wealth in the area, and strategic because of its closeness to the Arab Peninsula. The South is the civil war area with Kenya and Uganda interfering in the internal affairs of Sudan. The West poses no threat from the neighbours since the Central African Republic and Zaire (now Congo) are friendly nations. However, within the Western Sudanese borders there is growing tribal conflict and groups of armed robbery, which needs the presence of the military to maintain peace.

Civil war in the South, and on the borders of East and North Sudan have been mentioned throughout the report as hindering economic growth and the source of all other sectoral stagnation. It would, thus, be important to review the defence budget, or its percentage of GNP, or its percentage of national government expenditure. However, this information is nowhere to be found in the report. Indications to defence expenses are found in bits and pieces: point „B“ reports that there is a continuous economic deterioration and budget deficit at the expense of defence (pg. 355); an implicit conflict in this statement is the report on the performance of the economy which claims prosperity and growth! Another indication to reduce defence costs is reported on page 359 where it is mentioned that Sudan produces some of its own short-range ammunitions, instead of importing them, but no figures are given. In the period 1970-1978 Chinese arms and ammunitions were purchased to the value of US \$ 376,086,850 (pg. 358), which would allow a guess of double this figure today. Point „A“ (pg. 361) reports that the number of human-power in the military is limited because of the limited national defence budget, „although the military uses the biggest part of national revenues“ (pg. 361). Point „B“ argues that more resources need to be allocated to national

defence since the existing resources are used in the running costs and no funds are devoted to military development (pg. 361).

The document criticises the Compulsory Military Service programme for the high school and university graduates. Point „D“ (pg. 361) reports that qualified cadre is drawn into the military resulting in a negative effect on national development programmes. Point „H“ reports that the compulsory national military service has directly contributed to the deteriorating economic status of some families because the „individual volunteer“ may have been the main family income earner (Pg. 361). These two points reflect the direct contribution of government policies to increased poverty and would question the economic growth rates reported in the document.

An important social by-product of the wars is the increased numbers of displaced people which are seen in the displaced camps in Khartoum. The report makes no mention of their numbers, their locations, their socio-economic circumstances, or programs to support them. An informal source reports the number of displaced Dinka⁷ in Khartoum to be between 100,000 to 120,000 in 1996.

5. The Economy

The document reports that the government's economic philosophy is that of liberalisation and free market economy, to induce economic growth and development (pg. 81). The philosophy was transformed into the „Triple Program for Economic and Institutional Salvation“ which was established since 1989 (pg. 81). This ambitious programme aimed to encourage production, use resources efficiently and to build sustainable economic, financial, and institutional structure for economic development. It also aimed to increase the population participation base to create a social balance and protect the weaker groups from the negative effects of liberalisation the free market economy policies. The first phase of the programme ended in 1995, the second phase in 1996, and the third in 1997. The implementation of total economic change in three years can be considered aggressive for which the results have nothing to show except, increased poverty, increased informal sector, and relative increase in

⁷ The Dinka are one of the largest South Sudanese ethnic groups.

inflation rates. Table 1 on page 413 shows that imports decreased by only 5% between 1996 and 1997, whereas exports decreased by 32% for the same period.

5.1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The document states that the GDP growth rate between 1985/ 1986 to 1990/ 1991 was 1.2%, between 1992 to 1996 it was 7.8%, and the 1996 Sudanese Strategic Report mentioned that the GDP growth rate for 1996 alone was 4.5% (SSR, 1996, p. 151). The GDP growth rate in 1997 was given as 6.6% (pg. 86). Therefore, this indicates an increase in GDP growth rate of about 2.1% in one year. The report claims that there has been a positive growth of the GDP because of increased contributions from various sectors (pgs. 86 and 87). However, comparing the sectoral figures, it can be seen that there has been a negative growth in the respective sectors (see table 1).

Table 1: GDP Growth and Contribution of sectors to GDP⁸

	GROWTH RATES			CONTRIBUTION OF SECTOR		
	1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
Agriculture	16%	9.7%	12.3%	42%	45.0%	47.4%
Industry	17%	7.2%	10.6%	50%	14.5%	15.0%
Services	--	- 1%	- 1.1%	40%	40.5%	37.6%

The growth of the agricultural sector has been, at best, unstable and its contribution to the GDP has increased by 3% between 1995-1996, and between 1996 - 1997 it increased by only 2.4%. The Agricultural Bank of Sudan, which is probably the biggest financier of the agricultural sector in Sudan, invested in 1997 Ls. 49 billion into 2.6 Million feddans, whereas in 1992 it had financed 7.6 million feddans with Ls. 5.9 billion, and in 1996 it had financed 3 million feddans with Ls. 24.8 billion (pg. 137, table 8). This indicates that on the average the amount of land being used for agriculture has decreased and questions the sector's increased contribution to the GDP!

Again the growth of the industrial sector declined by more than half in the period 1995 - 1996, and then increased by about 3% in 1997. However, the contribution of the industrial sector to GDP dropped by more than 35% between 1995 to 1996, and then increased only by a

⁸ The figures for 1995 have been taken from the Sudanese Strategic Report 1996, Pg. 140, and the figures for 1996 and 1997 have been cited from the Sudanese Strategic Report 1997, Pg. 87, Table 1.

0.5% in 1997, although there was a growth of 3% in that period. The 1996 report mentions that services decreased from 54% in 1990 to 40% in 1995, which may mean that the costs have been transferred to the public, and in so doing the ability of the major part of the population to survive on the edges of the economy is threatened. The question that needs to be answered is, if it is only the agricultural sector which has shown a slow but steady contribution to the GDP, and the other sectors are still unstable, then how has the GDP increased by about 2.1% in one year. The mystery about Sudan's economic growth is not explained in the SSR!

5.2. Inflation

The document reports that inflation has been brought under control and that in 1996 it was 112.6% and by December 1997 it was 31.9%. However, the SSR 1996 document reports that in the middle of 1996, the inflation rate was 160% (SSR, 1996, p. 151), and that it had increased since end of 1995, at which time it was 92%; the reasons given for this increase were the civil war and international economic sanctions (SSR, 1996, pgs. 150 and 151). Since these two factors are still ongoing, it is questionable: (1) how could the inflation rate have decreased from 160% in mid 1996 to 112.6% by the end of the same year - a decrease of more than 40% in six months? (2) How could the inflation rate have decreased by 80.7% in one year (1996 - 1997) under the circumstances of the civil war and economic sanctions, which have up to today not ended? Again, although the inflation rate in 1997 was so low (in comparison), the document mentions that, for example, the need for funds for the agricultural sector increased ('multiplied') because of inflation which also increased and as a result, the inputs became very expensive (SSR, 1997, p. 137).

Moreover, the document reports that the tremendous decrease in inflation was the result of: restrictive economic policies for the control of money and diverting it into more productive resources (SSR, 1997, p. 87). However, in 1997 the government printed money more than once and floated the new SD 1,000 note (Ls. 10,000) in the market, which cannot be considered as a 'restrictive policy'. As a final note, Medani⁹ (1997, p. 175) reports that in 1994 the inflation rate in Sudan was 2,000%!

5.3. The Labour Force

The document reports no questionable change in the labour force situation since 1996. However, it mentions that 65% of the urban labour force is employed in the „marginal sector“ (SSR, 1997, p. 187). This is probably the first time in Sudan that an official document recognises the informal sector and can give an estimate of the numbers involved in it. The document goes on to report that this sector has the potential to contribute to economic growth and therefore must be given special attention to develop it. Although this may be true, the general opinion in the daily newspapers, and the workshop papers which represent the government’s policy towards this sector maintains a contradictory view. Hussein (1996, p. 3) says that the informal sector activities „must be taken off the streets“ of Khartoum because it ruins the beauty of the city, and there should be restrictions put on women tea and food sellers because they promote corruption and „it is the responsibility of good Muslims to change this ugly picture and to remove these women who trap¹⁰ men on the streets“¹¹. In addition the Petty Traders Law which was initially meant to „protect“ women informal sector workers has only made it more difficult for these workers to operate because of its restrictive nature. For example, the women may not work before 6:00 a.m. and after 5:00 p.m., this has directly affected their level of income as reported in a survey conducted by Al Gamhouria Newspaper (4.5.1998).

In 1990 the size of the labour force was 45% of the population which increased to 47.5% in 1996 of which 5% have university level education, albeit no indication can be found to the labour force’s overall literacy level. Unemployment in 1990 was 16.5% and rose to 16.6% in 1996 (SSR, 1997:191). Government reports maintain that the Sudanese economy is traditional and agriculture based. In 1996 the sectoral distribution of the labour force was as follows:

follows:	Agriculture	53%
	Services	18%
	Commerce	10%

⁹ Medani (1997) *Funding Fundamentalism: The Political Economy of an Islamist State*. In: Political Islam, Beinun, J. and Stork, J. (eds.). I. B. Tauris Publishers, London.

¹⁰ The word „trap“ here contains a sexual meaning and interpreted that the market women attract men to buy their products through seduction.

¹¹ Hussein, H. O. (1996:3) *The Marginal Economic Activities of Women: The Opinion of the Popular Discipline Police*. Paper presented at the workshop, „Women’s work in the unorganised sector“. Khartoum, April 1996.

Al Wifag Newspaper, pg. 3, 18.4.98.

Industry 6% (these figures, however, do not explain the entire labour force and it is not clear where the rest of the unexplained labour force is). Regarding the university educated labour force, the 1997 reports show that 83.4% was involved in the industry and service sectors, and 21% of this group was unemployed (SSR, 1997:189).

Looking at these figures we can assume (since no specific records are given) that a major part of the labour force is either illiterate or has some level of formal schooling; a breeding ground for the informal sector workers according to Mazumdar and Sethuram.

National records, although make an attempt to differentiate the labour force statistics by sex, have come up with only contradicting conditions. The document reports that unemployment among women (32%) is higher than that among men (17%) (pg. 189). The report, however, goes on to say that the official records of the Employment Selection Committee show that more women than men are recruited in the Civil Service, so the question would be how or where is unemployment among women greater than men. In addition, increased recruitment of women in the Civil Service can be questioned because a study on women's employment in Sudan shows that in the highest level positions in the Civil Service, measured by the salary scale 1 to 3, there are no women employees. At salary scale 4 the number of women are 26% and at the lowest level, at salary scale 14, the number of women are 44%¹². It would then be questioned, how can women be recruited more than men, when even at the entry level positions women are less than men, and that their promotion to higher level positions is also not equally distributed. Another question which poses itself is that if there is such a high employment rate then why is there such a big informal sector, since theory argues that the informal sector exists due to unemployment in formal income earning sectors?

Finally to summarise, a comprehensive evaluation of the overall performance of the economy, in the absence of a detailed national budget and expenditures report, is not possible. However, information pieced together from the whole report seriously questions any positive economic growth in Sudan. The only positive figures shown are for the agricultural sector, which is meaningless for economic growth considering low international grain prices, increased government expenditure on national defence, and increasing poverty.

¹² *Women's Employment in Sudan* (1997) Paper presented to ASHRAQ NGO, Khartoum, Sudan.

6. Social services

6.1. Health

Health is directly related to national development and poverty status. The document reports some very positive progress in this sector such as: 80% of the children immunised, 900 new units of trained birth assistants, and 80% increase in mother and child health centres (pg. 273). However, it is difficult to evaluate this progress fairly due to lack of comparative independent information sources. Nevertheless WHO¹³ (1998, p. 2) reports that for the period 1989-1990 the total national health expenditure as a percentage of GNP was 0.3%; whereas the Central Government Financing to state health budgets was 5% - 7% in 1997 (SSR, 1997, p. 40). Again this does not tell us much in the absence of a national expenditures report, including all sectors, and comparative data. For example the 1996 SSR does not contain any information on the health situation in Sudan.

6.2. Education

This section discusses only the university level education. No mention is made of pre-university schooling, although in a country like Sudan, kindergarten to secondary level education is more important to have at least a population that can read and write. The following are some statistics on the illiteracy situation in Sudan.

The 1993 population census indicated that 47.5% of the total population in the age 10 and above in the Northern States could not read and write. Illiteracy among women in the age range of 25 and above was 57.37% in the urban areas and 82.23% in the rural areas. Illiteracy among men in the age range of 25 and above was 29.09% in the urban areas and 51.69% in the rural areas. The following table 2 shows the education situation in 1996.

¹³ World Health Organisation (1998) *World Health Indicators*, Washington, USA:

Table 2: Education levels by sex and areas in percentage (1996).

	RURAL		URBAN	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	36.9	57.2	9.5	20.3
Read and write	35.5	25.0	24.2	23.0
Primary	14.0	9.1	16.9	15.5
Intermediate	6.5	4.8	14.4	12.5
Secondary	5.5	3.7	24.2	20.6
University	1.0	0.2	10.3	7.9
TOTAL	99.4	100	99.5	99.8

Source: El Nagar and Badri 1997.

Although progress has been made in achieving higher literacy since 1993, it has been slow in reducing the gap between boys and girls. The quality of education in schools has deteriorated. There is a shortage of teachers and books. Since students have had to pay for school level education, it has become more difficult for the poor families to send all children to school, and thus those that are pulled out of school are mainly girls¹⁴. The percentage of students from the rural areas going onto university has remained static, and in the urban areas has increased more among men than women, since 1990.

These figures would question the importance of opening 21 new universities (pg. 84), specially in the various regions where there is a high concentration of illiterate population. The document goes on to report that there has been a huge increase in student intake at the different universities (pg. 291). However, one would question the quality of education that these increasing numbers receive. The older universities, specially the University of Khartoum for example, is facing a continuous brain drain since the beginning of 1990s. The document admits that there is a brain drain (pg. 205) and that the Sudanese (graduates of U. of K.) have been successful as lecturers in universities all over the Gulf countries (pg. 291), who otherwise would have been employed in Sudan itself. Although, the report does not give any specific numbers, the trend among university lecturers to find employment in the Arab countries is on the increase due to dissatisfaction with infrastructure, pay scales, lack of books, and the inconsistency in the teaching programmes. An indication, however, to the increase in migration can be seen in the table on pg. 198 which shows that out-migration (in general) has increased

between 1990 and 1994 by about 450%. It is questionable whether increasing the number of universities and students in them is going to contribute to any real development since in the last three years all universities have faced a disruption in their calendars due to their closures for at least 9 months at a time (pg. 292) and intake has kept on increasing without graduating existing students who have been delayed by at least 14 months per discipline, respectively.

The document reports that 5% of the labour force hold university qualifications (pg. 187), the argument goes on to say that an effort is being made to increase university education opportunities. However, the figure of 5% itself can be considered as quite high considering the limited outreach, up to now, of universities and the socio-economic structures in the country. On pg. 188, the document reports that almost 53% of the labour force are engaged in the agricultural sector, which shows that the economy is still traditional. Therefore, one would question the relationship between increasing opportunities for university education and the fact that the economy is traditional, which in essence would mean that more technical and skilled labour are needed to carry out economic growth activity, and that the management positions are limited and will not grow proportionately to increased demand for skilled labour. Increasing numbers of university qualified labour force may lead to an increase in unemployment among graduates as the following newspaper article reports. Al Gamhouria newspaper (4.5.1998) reported that 30% of the graduates work in economic activities that do not match their qualifications, and that in the intake of 1996/ 1997 only 2% of the new students were enrolled in the technical institutions. Historically the intake into agriculture has always been high, on the assumption that these are the qualifications needed for the Sudanese economy. However, the article goes on to report that agriculture graduates have the biggest problem in finding jobs, more than graduates from any other discipline; most of these agriculture graduates work as school teachers because they cannot find jobs to fit their qualifications. The article concludes that, „the expansion in higher education has concentrated on increasing the number of student intake and expansion of buildings, but did not see any expansion or increase in equipment or libraries. Therefore, the problem has been exacerbated because this expansion has led to low standards (in quality of education) and the result has been graduates who are weak and lack capabilities“ (Al Gamhouria Newspaper, 4.5.1998).

¹⁴ El Nagar and Badri (1997) *The Situation of Women and Children in Sudan*. Paper presented to the Poverty Study for UNDP, Khartoum, Sudan.

As a final note, pg. 307 shows a list of all universities new and old in Sudan. It is ironic to see that although 21 new universities have been established, they have no students. The students are still concentrated in the 5 old universities and 6 new ones, established about four years ago. This is probably because although the establishment of new universities is very impressive on paper, they still do not have lecturers, administrative staff, equipment, books, or buildings.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion it is important to say that the SSR 1997 has made a good effort to report almost all factors relevant to development and growth in Sudan. It has also, at times, made an effort to be neutral which one can see, for example in the section on Foreign Relations, which admits that relations with Europe, USA, neighbouring and some Middle East countries have increasingly deteriorated. Also, the section on poverty gives legitimate figures and reasons for the increase in poverty, and this is also an important issue since poverty is one of the biggest problems of Sudan and admitting that the situation is deteriorating may be a first step towards an understanding of the problem and seeking solutions.

On the other hand, however, there are also some sections which seem an over-ambitious representation of issues of development, such as increasing the number of universities when there is an obvious lack of sufficient infrastructure and human-power. In addition, the philosophy of increased university students is not in agreement with the military policies. High school graduates do not continue immediately on to university because of the military service; existing university students face academic disruptions; university graduates do not turn up to pick up their certificates because they can only get them in the military training camps from which they are taken to the war areas. Thus, it would seem that the government's complaints that there is not enough human-power for economic growth is unjustified, because this shortage in supply of labour has been created by their own policies. In addition, brain drain is also the result of the existing unfavourable economic, political, and social environment. This emphasises the need for the Sudanese government to rethink their policies, look at all sectors as a system, instead of applying sectoral development policies which denies other sectors of advantages. This sectoral thinking is obvious in the report where, for example, the section on

the economy claims growth, while the section on poverty claims increased poverty to be the result of economic deterioration.

As a final note, it can only be said that the central issues restricting development in Sudan, as can be understood from the report, are poverty and the civil war. However, these two factors are not indigenous to Sudan but occur in many parts of the world. Therefore, it is necessary that the Sudanese government analyse the problems causing these in depth and design realistic and practical steps to counter-act these.

It is recommended that future reports should give more complete information and focus on the following issues:

- The national budget and expenditures report;
- A national surplus/ deficit accounts;
- A comprehensive defence expenditures survey;
- The plans and strategies to increase demand for labour;
- More concrete plans and strategies for poverty alleviation;
- A comprehensive situation analysis on the displaced persons; and
- A comparative and historical statistical information on health indicators.

The SSR can, on the basis of objective information and analysis, contribute to a better guidance of the Sudanese government on social and economic policies.

List of abbreviations

PFP	-	Productive Families Project
SSR	-	Sudanese Strategic Report
U of K	-	University of Khartoum
WHO	-	World Health Organisation

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