LOCALIZING THE LOCAL: REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN SUDAN

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In most deliberations on local authorities the discussion often centers on municipalities or local councils (*majalis mahaliya*, *baladiyat*, *mahaliyat*, etc.) and rarely extends to more localized, lower level authorities, either because they do not exist or because they are insignificant. I would argue that this is indeed a very important level because it is most directly attached to people on a daily basis, and also because it forms the base of the power structure and the foundation of the hierarchy of authority. This paper attempts to do so by referring to examples from Sudan – a country that is geographically situated at the margin of the Middle East, but has a rich experience as far as local authorities are concerned.

The paper discusses the decentralization experiences in Sudan, particularly those adopted in the past 30 years, giving more emphasis to the current federal system adopted since 1993. This system, it is argued, has made great strides in mobilizing peoples' resources and energies for the betterment of their own lives, and in devolving power to lower levels of authority. However, it has many shortcomings that need to be urgently and seriously addressed.

Decentralization in Sudan

If we review the modern history of Sudan, starting with its annexation to the Ottoman Empire in 1820 then the advent of colonialism and Sudan's annexation to the British Empire in 1898, and the post-independence era, which started in 1956 -- a period in which 3 military governments and 3 parliamentary democracies ruled -- we can observe a consistent drive towards

decentralizing the power structure in the country to administrative units lower than the central government. The difference between those various attempts has been in terms of the number and names of intermediate and lower levels of authority created and the degree of power delegated to them.

These continuous efforts to decentralize may partly be explained by the fact that Sudan is a vast country,encompassing about one million square miles, which is more than ten times the size of Great Britain; the weak communication linkages between its parts hence prohibitive costs of infrastructure networks; and also due to the fact that Sudan is composed of a multitude of tribally based, loosely connected communities which are not accustomed to submission to a centralized authority but rather to localized forms of native administrations such as tribal *sheikhs*, village or neighborhood *umdas*, etc.

Recognizing the potential difficulties in governing such a vast country, the colonial administration delegated limited administrative and judicial powers to tribal leaders throughout Sudan in 1922 in what was known then as the 'native administration' system. In 1937, a local government system was adopted by establishing municipalities and local councils, and in 1943 the country was divided into eight provinces, each governed by a commissioner, though the strong centralized authority remained virtually intact. In 1951, the Local Government's Act was enacted (based on the recommendations of a British expert, A.R. Marshall) whereby the country was divided into urban and rural councils with considerable powers delegated to them under the supervision of the provincial commissioners that were established in 1943. (Hamid, 2000:236; Musa 1998:47).

Although these attempts may suggest that Sudan had been a decentralized state, in reality the central authority has always been dominant and delegated only limited powers to the local administrations. This conclusion is consistent in most studies of local governance in Sudan. According to Bakheit, the guru and architect of local governments during the early 1970s, central authorities have clung to the major sources of power that affected directly people's lives

(such as financial powers) and relegated to local administrations inferior tasks, such as garbage collection, etc. (Al-Assam, 1983:176 cited in Al-Booni, 1998:81).[1]

In the past three decades there have been three pronounced decentralization schemes:

i. The 1971 Peoples' Government Act, which established provincial administrations with broad legislative and executive powers. Each province was in turn divided into several councils at the district, urban, rural, neighborhood, village, and market levels. Therefore, the system penetrated to the lowest strata of the urban and rural hierarchy by forming "basic units" *(wahadat asassiya)* at those levels. However, although the declared objective of the Act was to decentralize decision making away from the national capital, Khartoum, and to provide channels for popular participation at lower levels, in actual reality it resulted in the concentration of authority at the province headquarters and only limited powers were delegated to lower councils (Rondinelli, 1981:1).

ii. The 1981 Regional Government Act, which was a further development of the 1971 decentralization system, divided the country into five regions and a separate entity for the national capital. Each region was in turn divided into several urban and rural councils similar to those created in 1971. Although the regions had their own elected governors, governments and parliaments, they were financially dependent on the center. Hence, in spite of the considerable attention and publicity given to it, the regional governance system remained largely ineffective and some of the governors resented being crippled and marginalized by the central government.[2]

iii. The 4th Constitutional Decree of 1991, which adopted a federal system of governance whereby Sudan was divided into nine states (*wilayat*) each having its own government, legislative body and a

number of provinces and local councils administering the affairs at the local level. A number of constitutional decrees followed in the following years detailing and consolidating the federal system further. In 1993 an amendment subdividing the country into 26 states was enacted in order to devolve power over smaller geographical entities. In 1995 the federal system was consolidated further by devolving more financial powers to the states thereby reducing the powers of the central government. The 1998 Constitution reaffirmed the federal system and included within its stipulations a map detailing the names, boundaries and capitals of the 26 states, thus making it difficult to change.

Almost all of the decentralization attempts that preceded the 1991 Decree were similar in that they delegated power from the central government to local entities, which governed on behalf of the former. However, most of the important decisions, which affected people everywhere, as well as the financial powers and budgetary controls, were retained by the central government. According to Al-Booni (1998-79) "… in its modern history, Sudan has not witnessed an absolutely centralized state, yet at the same time we can't argue that its administrative system has been decentralized ... all the administrative experiences of modern Sudan are characterized by delegation of authority (*tafweedh*) and not devolution of power (*takhweel*)". Hence, those systems of local governance remained largely ineffective.

The current decentralization scheme (i.e. federalism) deserves a closer examination, because it is unique and highly ambitious in its attempt to localize power structures. The 1991 Decree was derived through a process of wide consultation whereby representatives of civil society organizations, politicians, academics, etc. were invited in August 1990 by the central government to participate in the National Dialogue Conference on the Political System, and to debate and recommend an appropriate system of governance for Sudan (ElSaouri, 1998:118). The participants reviewed the various strands of political systems, (socialism, communism, populism, federalism, parliamentary democracy, Islamic system, etc.), in addition to specific

governance examples, such as Switzerland, India, Tanzania, the United States, Libya, Nigeria and Turkey, as well as the previous decentralization schemes in Sudan (Musa, 1998:61). Most importantly, the participants took into consideration the recommendations of the National Dialogue Conference on Peace Issues (NDCPI) organized a few months after the National Salvation Government, led by Omer Al-Bashier, seized power in June 1989. The NDCPI has concluded that federalism was the most appropriate system for Sudan. This conclusion was partly influenced by and was consistent with the Salvation regime's declared objectives of transferring power to the people and mobilizing all national and local resources for socio-economic development.

The hierarchical structure of the federal system adopted since 1993 is composed of 26 states, 120 provinces and about 634 localities (Adam, 2001:17). Following are the main features of each of those four levels:

1. The *wilaya* (state), which is the main power base at the sub-national level. It is governed by a *wali*, who is elected by the *wilaya's* legislative council from a list of four nominees proposed by the president of the republic in consultation with elites and community leaders in the *wilaya*.[3] This short listing of candidates, as the authorities argue, is preferred to an open nomination-election system, which is likely to nurture local struggles and divisions. The *wali* appoints a cabinet composed typically of five ministers for finance, public works and engineering affairs, social and cultural affairs, education and health. Each *wilaya* also has an elected legislative assembly, which approves its legislations and budgets and oversees the performance of the various ministries and departments. The *wali* has the prerogative to appoint some of the assembly members in order to include under-represented groups, such as women, educated elites, etc.

2. The *muhafaza* (province), which is an intermediate level headed by a *muhafiz*, who, unlike the leaders at the other levels, is appointed directly by the president, but reports to the *wali*. The functions of the

muhafiz are limited to political, supervisory, coordinating, and security-oriented roles. He/she has no executive or legislative functions or intrinsic powers other than coordination between localities or those delegated from the *wali*.. In spite of his/her prescribed function the *muhafiz* has no official budget other than seed money allocated by the *wilaya* government. In most cases very little money is transferred from the *wilaya* to the *muhafiz*. Yet there are always substantial funds at the disposal of the *muhafiz* collected as charges from residents and businesses in the *muhafaza* based on local decrees suggested by the *muhafiz* and approved by locality councils. Some *muhafiz* receive grants/donations directly from the president, his deputies or from the central government for particular projects or on special occasions (Al-Booni, 1998). In some instances the *muhafiz* initiates a school building project or a street beautification scheme in spite of the existence of agencies charged with those responsibilities.

In spite of the lack of clearly prescribed functions or set budgets, the *muhafiz* plays a significant role in the Sudanese federal system. This may be attributed to two factors: (a) The *muhafiz* has been the premier local administrator throughout the previous decentralization schemes adopted in Sudan during most of the 20th century, except for the current system where the *muhafiz* has been stripped off most of his/her powers. For the majority of people who are not familiar with the details and technicalities of the current federal system, the *muhafiz* *is* still the person to resort to in order to address a problem or to satisfy a need. To maintain people's allegiances the *muhafiz* often goes out of his/her way, encroach upon the mandates of localities, states or ministries, in order to solve a problem or to respond to a request. Of course this has caused considerable friction with the concerned authorities, which necessitated in some cases interference from supreme authorities to resolve (Al-Booni, 1998: 73). (b) It seems that the planners of the federal system meant to create this amorphous level of authority (which has no set rules or supervisory councils) that can mobilize resources swiftly when need arises. Hence, it resembles a form of a task force

that can go to any extent, often stepping on others' turfs, in order to strengthen the political regime or to address a perceived security threat[4]. Therefore, a *muhafiz* is usually selected based on his/her strong allegiance to the regime regardless of any prior experience in local administration.

3. The *mahaliya* (locality), which is the other side of the coin to the *wilaya*, and the other pillar of the adopted federal system. Each *wilaya* is composed of a number of urban and rural localities. Each locality has an elected deliberative and legislative council, which elects an executive body. This council is assisted by technocrats and civil servants who may not necessarily be residents of the locality, but are seconded from their agencies at the *wilaya* or the national level to the locality in order to oversee the local health, education or public works systems.

   The locality is entrusted with a wide range of responsibilities which cover all aspects of life: political, security, economic, financial, educational, social, public works and public health. The localities coordinate their responsibilities with higher-level agencies at the provincial and wilaya levels. For example, the Ministry for Public Works and Engineering Affairs at the *wilaya* level is responsible for building major roads and drains that cut across locality boundaries, and for preparing and coordinating land use planning, while specialized state and national agencies are responsible for water and electricity.

   The funding sources of the locality include property taxes, sales taxes, 40 percent of locally-generated income taxes, taxes on locally manufactured products, income from investments, rents, licenses, and permits, donations collected occasionally for specific purposes, and from intermittent transfers from the state government to resource-poor localities.[5] Furthermore, the locality has the power to raise additional funds from its residents through specific charges, taxes, rents or by land sales. Throughout the first half of the 1990s, most of the localities'

funds were collected from charges imposed on rationed essential commodities (namely, sugar). Since sugar had been sold at subsidized prices through household ration cards, most popular committees, localities, and even states were able to impose an additional charge on its price, and to use the proceeds to finance their capital and operational expenditures. Since people perceive sugar as an indispensable household commodity, they willingly paid those extra fees. However, when the government removed sugar from the list of rationed goods in 1999, the popular committees, along with most localities and states, lost an important source of revenue.

More often than not, the locality funding sources do not cover all the expenditures, either because the locality has a thin resource base or because of inefficient collection and tax evasion. In the absence of adequate and timely transfers from the *wilaya,* or even the national government, localities with inadequate resources are not able to perform their functions or to pay for their employees. Some localities (e.g. in Northern Darfur state as reported by Salih (1998:195) resort to selling their stocks and rations of sugar and wheat flour in the black market in order to raise the funds required to pay salaries and other current expenditures.

4. The *lajna sha`biya* (popular committee) is an elected body of volunteers who administer the affairs of a neighborhood or village. At this nuclear unit, or lowest level of the administrative-political structure, each geographical unit forms a 'base conference' (*mo`tamar gha`idi*), as a public forum, in which all adult neighborhood residents could participate in deciding about the neighborhood affairs, in electing a popular committee composed of 20-30 members for a two-years term, and in dis/approving its programs and achievements. The conference has two regular meetings per annum. However, in special cases the neighborhood may call for a special meeting to address an emergency or to vote for changing an ineffective popular committee.

The popular committees have numerous responsibilities which can broadly be grouped into: monitoring and supervision of the performance of agencies and service departments operating within their boundaries, provision of certain services, and mobilizing the local community to accomplish specific self-help projects, or to participate in political events such as rallies, collection of donations for the Popular Defense Forces, etc. They also assist the police, through surveillance and regular reporting, in maintaining law and order and in combating various forms of deviance within their jurisdiction. It is important to note that the popular committees are not executing agencies; therefore, they have no implementation mechanisms or equipment. Hence, they are mostly limited to supervision and surveillance, and to issuing residency certificates and mobilizing communities.

The popular committees work in tandem with the localities, and are used by the latter as an efficient and cost effective way to collect and/or disseminate information, to collect charges and fees, and to distribute rationed goods and *zakat* (obligatory Islamic alms) to needy persons. In conjunction with the *mahaliya* and *muhafaza* they strive to ensure a large participation of citizens in political and national events. To finance their activities, popular committees depend primarily on funds raised locally, either from fees on residency certificates, income from their own investments, or from compulsory donations collected from local businesses or from households.

The lower levels of governance (the *lijan* and *mahaliyat*) provide an excellent opportunity for on-the-job training of leaders. Local leaders who exhibit exceptional leadership talents and dedication may be elected or appointed to positions at the *muhafaza* or *wilaya* level or even at the national level.

Towards an Evaluation of the Federal System

To what extent has the adopted federal system been successful in achieving the dual goals of transferring more power to the people and mobilizing local

resources and energies for development? The answer is not so simple, and further contextual details are in order: When the current system of decentralized power was adopted in 1991, the country was besieged by chronic problems of economic stagflation, rampant unemployment, civil wars and famines in its peripheries, and an unfriendly international community disturbed by the regimes proclamations of exporting its revolutionary brand to neighboring countries, and its neutral stance vis-à-vis the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, which was largely interpreted as siding with the aggressors. These external pressures and international boycotts forced the burgeoning regime – which was in its first two years in power – to turn inwards and to appeal to its citizens to pull together for the betterment of their own lives. In the following sections I will discuss the strengths and shortcomings of the adopted federal system.

A. Strengths of the Federal System

Following is a list of what I believe to be the major strengths of the federal system of governance adopted in Sudan:

1. Being in direct contact with people on a day-to-day basis, and in close contact with the locality leaders and machinery, has enabled the popular committees to focus on *local* issues of priority to their neighborhoods as determined by their conferences. Issues such as an annoying presence of mosquitoes, a leaking water network, a falling roof in a primary school, a landowner encroaching upon the public street, etc. may have received less attention by the relevant authorities had it not been for the constant follow-up by the concerned popular committees, and their ability to mobilize local resources or *nafeer* campaigns to assist the relevant authorities in addressing urgent *local* problems. [6] This localization of local issues (municipal service delivery, socio-economic and urban developments, etc.) is a unique positive feature of the current federal system, which has not received adequate attention by researchers and practitioners alike. Its success depends to a large extent on the presence of dedicated local leaders, whom it should be noted are volunteers motivated by altruistic ideals, religious

beliefs, political allegiance, etc. On the other hand, it also depends on the existence of responsive and accountable locality leaders who respond promptly to the urgent issues facing their constituencies.

2. The federal system has created more opportunities for people to participate in governing their affairs. The neighborhood conferences, which are the basic building blocks of the system, constitute open fora that provide chances for every citizen to have a say in the decisions directly affecting his/her life. In that sense, the adopted federal system (in its ideal form) provides more avenues for open democracy than any other political system. Those who have the time, energy and motivation to assume leadership roles have chances to do so at the level that suites their ambitions and talents, whether at the locality, state or national levels.

3. The federal system of governance has brought power and decision-making closer to people, particularly in the mundane issues directly affecting them. By subdividing the country into 26 states and numerous localities it became easier for people everywhere to reach the responsible officials faster and vice versa. There is also more face-to-face interaction between leaders and citizens, hence more bonding and responsiveness (Mohammed and Abu Sin 1998:172). It is not uncommon, for instance, to see locality leaders, state ministers or even *walis* attending funerals or weddings of ordinary residents within their jurisdictions.

4. Some physical development has occurred as a result of upgrading small towns into state and provincial capitals. Thus, additional office space and housing were added, new schools and clinics established, markets upgraded, etc. As noted by Salih in his study of Darfur states (1998:191-2), the federal system has given the states the possibility and the ability to undertake major projects such as establishing aviation companies (e.g. the West Airlines), television-broadcasting stations, or to address vital issues such as chronic water shortages. Among others,

he cites the example of Um Kaddada Province, one of the poorest in Darfur, which has managed to mobilize about 20 million Sudanese Pounds (US$ 80,000) from its residents towards the cost of potable water provision. Of course, most of this development has been financed by people through donations or charges. Many were glad to see their hometowns flourish more rapidly than neighboring towns, but for many others the charges levied from them were higher than what they could bear, and the benefits were not so immediate.

5. There is strong evidence to suggest that a potent process of community mobilization has been instigated and that local communities have been taking the matter seriously. Base conferences have been formed, and popular committees have been elected, in almost every urban neighborhood and village. Similarly, local councils have been elected (and their staff appointed) at every urban and rural district level. The performance of those local entities, however, has been mixed. Some of them have managed to mobilize local resources and energies and have made a real difference in terms of service provision against all odds of meager resources, inadequate equipment and inexperienced staff. Some popular committees, for instance, have been successful in combining resources mobilized from within their neighborhoods with resources allocated by localities or state agencies to implement local programs such as street cleaning, maintenance of public buildings, orchestrating garbage collection campaigns, etc. Others – particularly those hampered by local divisions and struggles or inefficient leadership – have been impotent and less successful and failed to organize even a neighborhood conference (ElSauori, 1998:123-4).

   The adopted model of local mobilization builds on the strong and deeply entrenched tradition of reciprocal mutual help (*nafeer*), whereby neighbors and friends rise to the assistance of a family or community member in need of assistance either in cash, in kind or through unpaid labor with an anticipation that this assistance will be reciprocated.

Nafeer campaigns have been active throughout urban and rural Sudan for centuries. A considerable number of schools, health centers and potable water networks have been established and substantial miles of roads have been paved, drainage trenches dug, irrigation canals maintained through *nafeer* (Hamid, 2000: 238). Thus, the adopted administrative decentralization scheme has been successful in orchestrating those ad-hoc activities and integrating them into a national campaign of social mobilization.

B. Shortcomings of the Federal System

In spite of its achievements and strong qualities, the federal system of governance has not been without failings. Below are what I consider to be its major shortcomings:

a. The federal scheme has been criticized for creating multiple levels of administration (federal, state, province, locality, and popular committees) superimposed over numerous administrative entities often without sufficient inhabitants to populate them[7]. Some do not have sufficient natural or material resources to support them. The rationale for creation of those entities apparently was not based on objective criteria, but rather to facilitate tighter control and to maintain security over desolate regions, and those posing potential security threats. Others were created in response to pressures from local communities or tribal groups who preferred to have their own administrative units, hoping that this will bring more benefits to them. This indicates that maintaining social stability was often more important for the architects of the 1991-1998 federal system than mere objective criteria such as size, population density, resource base, etc.

   The multiplicity of administrative units is reflected in an exceptionally high cost of office accommodation, buildings, salaries, vehicles, equipment, etc. as well as operational and running costs. Hard estimates of these costs are very scanty and contradictory. But if we recall that there are 26 *wali*, 120 *muhafiz*, about 140 state ministers,

and some 634 locality leaders – in addition to about 30 federal ministers and two vice-presidents – it becomes clear that the federal system has created a mammoth government apparatus for the sake of transferring power to people. Given the low-income level of Sudan (estimated at about $240 per capita per annum, according to World Bank estimates), it is evident that the adopted federal system has a heavy toll on the overall national accounts and on the general welfare of the population. Whether this high cost is out-weighed by the goals of maintaining security and social stability is doubtful as evidenced by increasing insurgencies and insecurity in some parts of the country.

b. As far as the declared objective of mobilizing local resources and investments in each state and every locality in order to achieve a state of self-sufficiency and self-financing, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the revenues mobilized from within the 26 states have been constantly on the rise during the period 1994-2000 (Table 1). While the aggregate revenue collected in all the states in 1994/95 was 89.1 billion Sudanese pounds (US$ 44.5 million), it increased more ten folds in 2000 (measured in pounds) reaching 911.5 billion pounds (US$ 364.6 million) [8] (Elsheikh, 2001:Table 6). On the other hand, actual expenditures in the 26 states were also constantly increasing during the same period. They rose from 131.6 billion pounds (US$ 65.8 million), in 1994/95 to 1242.8 billion pounds (US$ 497.1 million) in 2000 (*ibid*: Table 7), indicating an increase of more than nine folds, also measured in pounds.[9]

Table 1: Estimates of revenues, expenditures and subsidies recorded in the 26 states

	1994/1995	2000	% Increase
Revenue	89.1	911.5	923
Expenditures	131.6	1242.8	844
Subsidies	?	223.7	?

In billions of Sudanese Pounds

US$ 1 = £S 2000 in 1994 ; US$ 1 = £S 2500 in 2000

Source: El-Sheikh, 2001: Tables 3,4,6,7 and author's calculations thereof

These expenditures, however, were spent mostly on strengthening and financing the burgeoning local administrations, and no so much on local socio-economic development. It is also noticeable that expenditures were consistently in excess of the revenues collected, which necessitated transfers from the central government to subsidize the bankrupt states. The total developmental, current and additional subsidies rose from 137.9 billion pounds (US$ 55.16 million) in 1998 to 223.7 billion pounds (US$ 89.5 million) in 2000 (Elsheikh, 2001:Table 3)[10]. This meant that none of the 26 states achieved self-sufficiency throughout that period[11], and that one of the major objectives of federalism in Sudan has not been achieved because the states remained financially dependent on the center in spite of the substantial revenues they have managed to mobilize from within.

c. The current experience of decentralizing powers to state and local level authorities shows a big gap between stated objectives, legislations and structures on one hand, and actual implementation on the other. Whereas the legislations and structures provide sufficient powers to local authorities (particularly to localities) in reality their performance leaves a great deal to be desired. This can be attributed at the minimum to three factors: (a) encroachment of higher-level authorities on the powers and jurisdictions of local authorities (Al-Booni 1998:81; Sheikh Idris 2001:127). This has resulted from unclear legislations in some instances and from lack of coordination between various levels of authority in others (Dani 2001:36); (b) lack of trained personnel and equipment, particularly in the peripheral states to which employees are reluctant to relocate when they are transferred; (c) bureaucrats and technical staff seconded from state ministries or national agencies to work at the *muhafaza* or locality level do not have full allegiance to local leaders. In several instances they have refused to obey the orders

of the *muhafiz* or the locality leader, or have obliged reluctantly but slowed down the work (Al-Booni 1998:73).

d. It seems that the adopted system of governance has been less effective in creating a broad-based democratic process as it purported to achieve. Various studies suggest that the leadership of local level authorities has been hijacked by local elites (El-Karsani 1998:137) and ardent members of the political regime, who strive to achieve personal and/or narrowly defined political gains. This dialectic relationship between the political system and the federal system of administration is a characteristic feature of the Sudanese experience since 1991 (Musa, 1998:53). There is a great deal of overlap between the political system, spearheaded by the National Congress Party, which was the only political party in the country throughout most of the 1990's until political parties were allowed to operate after 1998, and the federal system. Virtually every locality leader, *muhafiz*, *wali*, state minister, etc. is recruited from party cadres. Furthermore, the secretary of the National Congress Party at the locality or the state levels have considerable authority within those levels of administration, sometimes even greater than that of the elected local leaders. This has antagonized a vast number of people who prefer to be indifferent and isolated from the unfolding political process.

e. The peculiar and ambiguous position of the *muhafiz*, as discussed before, and as many would agree (cf. Al-Booni, 1998, Sir Al-Khatim, 1998) is one of the weaker elements of the federal system.

It is evident that the federal scheme has created numerous state and local authorities without creating the necessary financial resources to finance their programs and staff. The result has been a tighter squeeze on people's limited resources in the form of taxes and fees, and a marked deficiency in the structures' ability to deliver basic services. The popular committees and localities need sustainable sources of income and a larger array of equipment, and their human resources require significant development. As it stands now,

this elaborate federal government system is under stress and its complete disintegration is possible unless a solution to these shortcomings is developed quickly.[12]

It seems that, what seems to be a sound model of devolution of power and massive social mobilization has many shortcomings when it comes to day-to-day interactions and actual implementation. It is hoped that these shortcomings will be seriously and sensitively addressed so that the Sudanese populace could achieve the level of social and material progress it deserves.

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NOTES

[1] Apparently Bakheit was referring to the decentralization attempts that preceded the 1971 Peoples' Government Act, which he masterminded.

[2] The notable example was that of Mohammed I. Diraig, then governor of Darfur, who deserted his region and left the country when his repeated objections fell on deaf ears.

[3] In effect, this was a reversal of the governors' election procedure practiced during 1981-1985, whereby the regional assemblies recommended to the president three candidates to choose from.

[4] By decree, the *muhafiz* is in charge of the security apparatus in his /her *muhafaza*. The state and the localities do not challenge this role.

[5] Some localities (e.g. Al-Ameer and Khartoum West studied by Kafeel (2001:186-191) have a rich resource/tax base due to the presence of a fledging market or valuable real estate within them. Conversely, others are less fortunate and have a thin resource/tax base.

[6] In his study of popular committees in three neighborhoods in El-Obeid, the capital of Northern Kordofan State, El Karsani (1998:140) has listed the range of local issues that were successfully addressed by the committees each within its own jurisdiction, according to its priorities. These included, for instance, supervising the distribution of basic commodities, assisting in obtaining residency certificates to naturalized citizens, encouraging residents to provide street lighting on their front doors, collecting perquisites and incentives to land surveyors involved in regularizing informal housing, assisting in expanding a water and electricity networks, organizing literacy campaigns run by volunteer teachers, etc.

[7] While some localities in Khartoum State, for instance, have a population of about 350,000 people, many localities have a population size below the average of 30,000 people set as a benchmark for establishing localities. Some states in southern Sudan, for instance, have a population density of as low as 1.24 people per square kilometers (Dani, 2001=41).

[8] If we exclude the ten southern states in which collection was dismal because of the raging civil wars, the collection in the northern 16 states rose from 88.5 billions pounds (US$ 44.2 million) in 1994/95 to 892.9 pounds (US$ 357.2 million), in 2000 indicating also an increase in excess of ten folds (Elsheikh, 2001:Table 6).

[9] During the same period actual expenditure in the 10 southern states rose from 7.1 billion pounds (US$ 3.6 million), in 1994/95 to 210.5 billion pounds in 2000 (US$ 84.2 million), indicating an increase of about thirty folds (*ibid*: Table 7).

[10] This increase in subsidies occurred in spite of the fact that only one out of ten southern states received developmental and additional subsidies during 2000. No data is available for subsidies paid in 1994/95.

[11] Except for Khartoum, Red Sea, Gedaref, Sennar, White Nile and Blue Nile States, which did not require subsidies from 1994/95 to 1997, then joined the rest of the states in receiving subsidies from the Central government afterwards (*ibid*: Table 3).

[12] During the past few months, the federal government, through its Federal Government Bureau, has instigated a process for evaluating the performance of the federal system, whereby each state is required to organize workshops to debate the pros and cons of the system as experienced in each state. Recommendations of these 'local' workshops are to be discussed in a subsequent national forum. Khartoum State, for instance, organized its assessment workshop in 12 February 2002.