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CHANGING THE MINDSET TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH TO SOLVING PROBLEMS OF SUDAN



RESEARCH PAPER

Changing the Mindset Towards a New Approach to Solving the Problems of Sudan

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore the cultural and institutional changes needed to achieve sustainable development in Sudan.

Approach: The paper endeavours to draw lessons from the experiences of industrialised and high-tech societies, and suggests some measures for a sustainable development process.

Findings: The success of developed societies rest upon certain cultural traits; therefore, a collective and inclusive effort is needed to bring these traits into the Sudanese cultural landscape through a bottom-up approach, utilising education and social work.

Social implications: The paper hopes to trigger in-depth research on the topic in order to kick-start a cultural overhaul process in Sudan.

Value: The paper emphasises the importance of cultural attitudes as a foundation for industrialisation; it also stresses that the process of change is a collective effort based on a bottom-up approach.

Keywords: *Culture; Ethics; Social work; Bottom-up approach; Industrialisation; Education; Development; Peace; Security*

Introduction

On 1 January 1956, Sudan gained its independence from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. Sixty-five years later, the once largest country in Africa is characterised by an economy in crisis, shredded social fabric, high levels of lawlessness, and fragmented political scene. Considering the vast resources the country possesses, Sudan could have been an African example for sustainable development. What is the main cause for this regress? Is it a governance and political problem? Is it colonialism? Is it due to foreign conspiracies? Or is the problem much deeper than that?

Policies and legislations have to be built on strong ethical and cultural foundations in order to be effective and sustainable. Without these cultural and ethical foundations, laws and policies will be circumvented at every possible opportunity. The development of events in Sudan since its independence has exposed serious weaknesses in those foundations. In order for these weaknesses to be addressed, Sudan needs honest soul searching. It is not sufficient to blame the political elite or the colonial past for the problems of Sudan: the political elite are the product of the Sudanese society and its culture. The colonial past was due to the fact that the Sudanese society had been susceptible to colonisation in the first place.

The mindset that has characterised Sudan during its recent history has ultimately led to the present deadlock: disease, poverty and ignorance. Therefore, the Sudanese should force themselves to give a rational critique to their history and social norms. History provides a set of lessons to be learnt from, otherwise mistakes are and will be repeated. Social norms are human experiences to be developed and improved, otherwise social stagnation is inevitable. What is needed are a diagnosis for the problems of Sudan, proposition of solutions, a procedure for realising these solutions, and feedback loops to check on the procedure and solutions.

This short paper does not aim to offer a detailed analysis or a comprehensive solution, but rather it aims to act as a trigger for in-depth research on the topic. It starts by looking at the causes of development in Europe. It then discusses the role of social work and education in inducing change, and finally discusses the relationship between peace, security and sustainable development.



Lessons from European History

Why have some nations, such as West Europeans, achieved growth, while others have not? Historians and economists have identified individual, societal and institutional factors that contributed to the development and growth in Europe. The paper looks at factors highlighted by two economic historians: Felix Butschek and David Landes.

In his book *Industrialisierung* (English translation: *Industrialisation*), Butschek (2006) listed traits that characterised the European personality and helped drive the process of industrialisation in Europe:

- self-confidence;
- self-initiative;
- individualism;
- responsibility;
- self-reflection;
- rational approach to life;
- recognition of the commercial side of science and technology.

However, in order to achieve growth, the society must be one that tolerates and accepts the above personal traits. David Landes (1999) tried, in his book *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, to answer the question why some societies had achieved growth while others had not. According to Landes (1999), in order to achieve growth and development, the ideal society:

- encourages initiative and competition;
- likes or values change;
- is receptive to new ideas and can create or adopt new technologies;
- is willing to take risk;
- opens opportunities to individuals or collective businesses;
- rewards merit and performance;
- is rational and scientific;
- is honest and ethical;
- develops efficient instruments of production;
- possesses a large middle class;
- diffuses knowledge through the generations;
- appreciates equality;
- is characterised by social and geographical mobility; and
- is characterised by high standards of living and homogeneity, yet has no equal shares.



It is worth mentioning that Landes believed that no single society had achieved all these factors (Landes, 1999). Another important factor that catalyses the process of development is the establishment of formal (governmental) and informal (non-governmental civil society) institutions: financial, educational, political, cultural, scientific, etc. These institutions bring like-minded people together and serve as platforms for the exchange of ideas and experiences. According to Landes (1999), ideal institutions:

- are secure and protect private property rights;
- protect personal liberties;
- maintain the rule of law;
- are characterised by an accountable government.

It is clear that the above characteristics are firmly anchored to culture. Therefore, the progress of Europe has rested on cultural foundations that promote innovation, improved productivity and growth. These cultural traits are transferable and not necessarily limited to a specific race or geographical region. Such transfer, however, is not easy and requires a comprehensive effort that is better achieved by engaging all sectors of society.

Changing the Mindset

The process of cultural overhaul requires a complete change in the mindset. It starts with having a bird's-eye view of the Sudanese cultural landscape in order to identify the problems therein and provide a diagnosis. Without diagnosis, solutions cannot be devised. Solutions, in turn, need continuous assessment and have to be corrected or adapted, when and if necessary. The following are some cultural issues that need to be tackled:

- impractical attitudes that value style over substance and kin over competence;
- lack of individualism;
- reliance on central personalities instead of values and institutions;
- low self-esteem;
- lack of social responsibility and team-work ethics;
- Utopian and emotional mindset;
- absence of rule of law;
- a lack of entrepreneurial spirit.

In order to tackle these issues, extensive social reforms are needed. These social reforms are better carried out through social work and education. Furthermore, given the current instability in the country and region, the social reforms have to be supported by a change of mindset regarding the relationship between development on the one hand, and peace and security on the other.



Social Work

Change cannot be enforced from the top of the social pyramid; it is an accumulative bottom-up process and has to be initiated at the bottom. Change will not be induced purely by allocating seats in parliament, or by offering cabinet positions, something that has already been tried. Rather, it is possible by extensive social work that has to be inclusive and include a wide section of Sudanese society. The following are suggestions for this social effort:

- initiation of serious and honest social debate and research, particularly by social scientists, historians, and economists, in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Sudanese culture;
- involvement of civil society and non-governmental organisations in order to raise people's awareness by organising cultural events, public lectures and debates that involve the population itself;
- mobilisation of youth in the process of change;
- the role of clerics should not be overlooked or underestimated: they meet people at the weekly congregational prayer on Friday, a valuable occasion to infuse Islamic ethics into the change process.

Education

The educational system, particularly at primary level, is where the real investment in human capital takes place. At the primary level, the education system should revolve around and promote the following:

- self-confidence;
- self-initiative;
- comprehension in addition to memorisation;
- curiosity: how to search for information;
- critique and analysis of available information;
- maximum utilisation of the available information through deduction and extrapolation;
- the ability to achieve goals with minimum information;
- resource management and improvisation;
- positive attitude to failures (failure as a step towards success);
- importance of innovation and invention;
- individuality and team work (one for all and all for one);
- social responsibility;
- exchange of ideas and diffusion of knowledge;
- adaptability and resilience;
- entrepreneurial spirit;
- acceptance of challenges and turning problems into projects;
- rational approach to life;
- verbal and written communication skills;
- the religious ethics that underline the above.

Given the diversity of the country and considering the latest technological trends, such as automation, the education system could be reformed to be flexible so that it offers multiple paths for students in order to realise their potential. Instead of deterministic paths, such as academic and vocational, students should be allowed to progress at their own pace and collect the required skills along the way. Therefore, vocational and academic classes could be offered at the same institution.

The education system should be supported by the family. That is, the personality traits to produce productive individuals should be promoted both at home and at school. Support of the education system should be a social responsibility, not just the responsibility of the government. In the current economic climate in Sudan, citizens should be engaged in supporting public schools in their residential areas, e.g., by contributing to teachers' salaries (parents pay huge sums for private schooling, while a fraction of this money could be used to supplement teachers' basic salaries in public schools).

At higher education levels (secondary and tertiary), academics and students should be encouraged to form start-ups, particularly in important fields such as energy, medicine, mobility, communication and agriculture. In fact, higher education institutions could act as incubators for entrepreneurial academics and students through the formation of on-campus innovation parks.



Development and Peace

The history of Sudan has been marred by civil conflicts and wars: as a result, peace has become the ultimate Sudanese Dream. However, peace should not be viewed as a precondition for development; it is more likely that development would provide the incentive for peace than the other way around. Peace should therefore be viewed as a long-term process that rests on a development strategy that meets the interests of warring factions and communities.

For example, agriculture could be utilised as a means to achieve peace and development in regions characterised by conflicts between farmers and herders (e.g., Darfur). The following are some ideas in this regard:

- mixed farming of animal husbandry and conventional farming could be utilised in areas where there are conflicts between pastoral and farming communities in order to create mutual economic interests;
- the lack of development in conflict zones offers opportunities for businesses; therefore, the private sector, particularly the locals, should be encouraged to participate in the development process;
- central government could focus mainly on provision of infrastructure (energy and water supplies, as well as transportation and communication infrastructure) to support the above;
- any peace process should be built around large development projects that address the needs of local communities;
- social mobility between areas under control of different tribes or factions should be encouraged in order to build inter-communal trust.

Development and Security

Peace is not something that anyone could guarantee or choose at will. Even if Sudan achieved internal peace and pursued a neutral and non-interventionist foreign policy, external threats would still be possible. Africa in general, and the Sahel-Sahara region in particular, is extremely unstable and conflicts in neighbouring regions could spill over into Sudan. Because of this, investment in defence and security should be treated as an integral part of sustainable development. This involves investment in human resources (training and welfare), and equipment (supply and manufacture).

Provided that it remains a professional institution away from politicisation, the military could play a direct role in the country's development:

- the military industry is one of the most advanced in Sudan and could be utilised as a training ground for talented engineering and science graduates during mandatory or optional national service;
- the military could act as an incubator for entrepreneurial science and engineering students, who could develop civilian applications from military technology;
- there are many skills that the youth could benefit from the military such as:
 - improvisation;
 - leadership and responsibility;
 - management of people and resources;
 - logistics;
 - team work;
 - exposure to hi-tech;
 - negotiation skills;
 - networking;
 - mission-oriented attitudes;
- active and retired army officers with high qualifications could be integrated into academia and research. In fact, research and academic institutions should seek to recruit such talented officers in order to provide an environment for cooperation between military and civilian sectors;
- universities could offer tailored courses to active and retired army officers (e.g., in management, economics, politics, strategic planning, etc.) in order to incorporate them in civilian life and benefit from the skills they have gained in the military;
- industry could also recruit retired army officers to utilise their experience in:
 - resource management;
 - logistics;
 - leadership;
- engineer corps could offer valuable support to infrastructure projects, particularly in areas affected by conflicts.



Conclusions

- In order for Sudan, or any other underdeveloped country, to transform itself into an industrial and high-tech society, experiences of existing industrial and high-tech societies should be thoroughly studied, not copied.
- The social and cultural attitudes that characterise Sudanese society need to be examined, criticised, and reformed where necessary.
- Social reforms should follow a bottom-up approach and involve a wide section of Sudanese society.
- The education system needs to be heavily reformed with a focus on producing proactive and socially responsible individuals.
- Development needs to be viewed as a means to create an incentive for peace.
- It is necessary to engage the private sector in the development process.
- Due to the instability in the region, the defence and security sectors should be viewed as integral parts of the development process.

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Biography



Dr Osman Tangasawi has a BEng from the University of Hull, UK, 2003, and a PhD from Loughborough University, UK, 2007. He worked as a KTP researcher at Loughborough University between 2006 and 2008, and as senior researcher at Virtual Vehicle GmbH, Austria, 2009-2012. Since 2012, Dr Tangasawi has worked at AVL List GmbH, initially as simulation engineer, then as development engineer. His work experience includes modelling and simulation of automotive components and systems, and set-up and development of virtual test systems (Hardware-in-the-Loop, HiL). He is interested in the relationship between culture, industrialisation, and development.

