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THE LIMITED SUCCESS OF IMF/WORLD BANK POLICIES IN SUDAN

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Introduction

The world debt crisis at the beginning of the 1980s has intensified the already controversial discussion about the role of the World Bank and the IMF in the development process of Third World countries. While the IMF, the IBRD and their advocates regard the crisis as a failure of Third World countries to adjust to the world market and claim to propose appropriate strategies for recovery, their critics from the Left blame the structure of the world market and condemn the IMF/IBRD programmes as imperialist methods to exploit the Third World.

Both of these extreme points of view seem to fall short of an appropriate analysis which is due to their underlying ideologies.

We present the case of the Sudan as a contribution to a more differentiated discussion. We argue that:

1. Crises in Third World economies are results of a combination of external and internal factors. While the export-oriented and capital-intensive development strategies of many countries were influenced by IMF/IBRD advice, they corresponded with the interests of the ruling classes in Third World countries.
2. The strategies of IMF and IBRD are not necessarily directed against the interests of the broad masses in these countries.
3. At the same time the strategies are inappropriate to solve most of the basic economic structural problems. This is due to some ideological misconceptions.

The Sudan is well suitable as a case study for the effects of IMF/IBRD policies on African economies. The six year long history of an economic stabilization policy pursued by the government on advice of the IMF/IBRD allows to evaluate its appropriateness to the problems of a low income Third World country in economic crisis.

To make this evaluation possible it is necessary to summarize Sudan's economic policy from the beginning of the 1970s up to 1978 in order to point out the main causes for the deep economic crisis which led to the involvement of IMF/IBRD; this will be done in part 1. Part 2 discusses the diagnosis of the IMF and the IBRD and their proposed strategies. Part 3 analyses the government policies and its outcomes. The final part 4 gives an outline of the necessary elements of an alternative strategy.

1. Emergence of the Economic Crisis in the 1970s

Like most former colonies, Sudan is characterized by a heterogeneous and non-integrated structure of the economy. The main economic linkages connect its modern sectors with the world market, via:

1) export of agricultural raw materials;
2) import of consumer goods and capital goods.

While this structure was a colonial heritage, none of the national governments aimed at or succeeded in changing the structure fundamentally after independence. There was no consistent policy towards the development of the "traditional" agricultural sector (which gives a living to 80% of the population) and towards the development of an industry based on the use of domestic resources.

In the beginning of the 1970s the Sudanese government initiated an ambitious development programme called the "Breadbasket Strategy". This strategy involved a massive restructuring of production and trade in order to take advantage of a regional Arabic division of labour. The strategy was based on large scale investments of the oil rich Arab states. The plan was to overcome the unilateral dependence on the world market based on the export of a few agricultural products (cotton, groundnuts, sesame, gum arabic) by exporting food stuffs (grains, meat, sugar, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables) to the Arab region.

The objectives of the relevant development plan - the Six Year Plan of 1977/78-1982/83 - seem to reflect the need to overcome the deformed economic structure. The objectives include: balanced growth (regionally and socially), development of the "traditional" sector and self-sufficiency in food. However, these objectives are not reflected in the actual allocation of resources. The emphasis on agricultural export production and on the modern sectors of the economy was maintained. While the government concentrated on investments in irrigated agriculture, the Arab investments were directed to the subsectors of mechanized cereals production, large scale cattle husbandry and various agro-industrial branches. The concentration on the East-Central Region was maintained as well.

The implementation of the Breadbasket Strategy depended on foreign capital to a high extent: This was planned to cover 52% of total investments. Even 38% of the domestic share of public sector investment - which made up 59% of total investment - was planned to be financed by borrowing (Ministry of National Planning 1977, Vol. 1, 55/6).

In the second half of the 1970s the over-ambitious and inappropriate character of the Breadbasket Strategy became obvious. The huge investments necessary had effected new distortions of the Sudanese economy and strengthened old ones:

- the imbalance of public revenues and expenditures;
- the imbalance of investments and savings;
- the imbalance of exports and imports.

From 1970/71-1978/79 the import value rose by 318.6% compared to a 65.9% increase of export value only. In the same time the government deficit increased by 1003.6% (Nashashibi 1980, 34). From 1973-78, Sudan's indebtedness increased by 386.7% (IBRD 1984. 98). At the same time, the debt structure worsened. It had become obvious that the main assumption on which the Breadbasket Strategy was based did not hold: the concept of Pan-Arabism, of Arab integration containing a concept of regional food sufficiency. In reality, the Arab states were willing to invest in projects but not to support Sudan sufficiently with the necessary balance of payments aid for the time up to the completion of the projects. Instead, they started to make disbursement conditional on IMF agreements. As a result of shortage of foreign exchange and declining international assistance Sudan had to rely on commercial credits with higher rates of interest to a rising extent. At the same time there was a shift from long-term to short-term loans and from project loans to balance of payment loans. This was a vicious cycle reducing the government's options more and more.

Resulting from rising import costs and rising deficit financing by increasing the money supply the inflation was speeding at 17.6% p.a. from 1974-78 officially (Fadlalla 1983) which is believed to be highly underestimated. The inflation effected an overall decline of standards of living, especially hitting low income groups and the rural population. While the terms of trade were calculated to move against Sudan at an annual rate of 12-15%, the main cause for Sudan's unsatisfactory export performance was falling quantities of exports. In real terms, exports registered a decline of 13% between 1970 and 1977 (Umbadda/Shaaeldin 1983, 8). The export of the main commodity, cotton, declined continuously. This was due both to falling yields and to an area reduction to make room for groundnuts, wheat, sorghum and rice. The decreasing productivity was due to shortages in imported inputs, agricultural machinery and equipment, ageing irrigation systems and, most important, the decreasing profitability of cotton for the tenants in the state schemes. This resulted from the system of sharing of costs and profits which charged all production costs on the cotton crop which was marketed by the state corporations, while the other crops were sold by the tenants themselves giving much higher returns for them.

The second very disappointing production performance - gum arabic - was due to the very low producer price level and to a beginning displacement of the traditional producers by an intensification of agriculture (especially mechanized farming).

An important factor for the weak production performance was the high import dependence of irrigated and mechanised rainfed agriculture as well as industry (cotton has import contents of 43%. UNDP/IBRD 1982,32). In fact, the quantity of most imported commodities was falling considerably during this period relatively to its values.

The import dependence of the modern projects resulted in a cost explosion. The costs for Kenana, planned to become the world's largest sugar factory, were calculated at $ 150 m. in 1973. By 1976 the figure had risen to $ 475m. and inofficial sources estimated the costs as high as $ 1bn. (African Contemporary Record 1977-78, B. 134; Wohlmuth 1983, 198).

A second important bottleneck is the shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour. Acute shortage of labour is recorded in most of the modern schemes both in agriculture and industry as a severe restriction to production. While this is stated to be a major reason for the high degree of mechanization practised in some agricultural schemes and industrial plants, it can be argued that the apparent present shortage of labour is neither an absolute one nor is it likely to rise in the future.

Instead, it is caused by the insufficient level of wages. In fact, the wages have been declining from the 1950s onwards. For skilled labour there is a strong labour drain to Arab oil producing countries, for unskilled labour many people revert to subsistence agriculture and to other sources of income, which is more advantageous for them (Hansohm 1984). However, the decomposition of subsistence agriculture and a high rate of population increase enforce the pressure to migrate and will do so to a rising extent in the future.

Lack of infrastructure is a constraint characteristic for most projects which had been extremely underestimated. It resulted in an even enforced dependence on foreign inputs for some of the new projects. Other bottlenecks were shortage of raw materials and of power supply. All of these causes together led to low capacity utilization and to production losses. Under the condition of shortage of foreign exchange, new projects had been implemented at the expense of existing ones. The result was a decapitalization of the traditional industries in different branches (Oesterdiekhoff 1982, 61).

Besides the financial problems, the ambitious development plan had gone beyond the government's planning and implementation capacity. The overall plan objectives are not reflected in an integrated and consistent approach at project conception and implementation level. The lack of project coordination prevented a creation of intra- and inter-sectoral linkages which would help to overcome the economy's structural heterogeneity.

2. Analysis and Proposed Strategies of IMF and IBRD

At the beginning of an evaluation of the crisis diagnosis and the stabilization programmes of the IMF and the IBRD one has to bear in mind that the same institutions had encouraged the Sudan actively in pursuing the described capital-intensive and import-intensive development path. Also they were not much faster than the national government to recognize or to admit the extent of the adverse effects.

The diagnosis and the policy recommendations of the IMF and the IBRD do not differ basically but in the degree of precision, the policy emphasis and the time horizon. The IMF tries to give the impression of not interfering in internal affairs and therefore concentrates on a monetary analysis and fixes quantitative macroeconomic performance criteria, mostly on the demand side, as conditions for Stand-By credits. Its financial programmes are characterized by a short time horizon (1-3 years). Compared with this, the

IBRD concepts are real economy programmes, give more precise advices, include both supply and demand aspects and have a longer time horizon (5-7 years). In the case of Sudan, the policies of the two institutions have become more integrated and co-ordinated, among others in the frame of the Consultative Group of Sudan's creditors.

Starting point of their analysis is the reflection of the distorted structure of the Sudanese economy as evidenced in the fundamental disequilibrium of the balance of payments. The diagnosed imbalances include those between consumption and savings, investment and savings, exports and imports, public revenues and expenditures and physical and management capacity of the economy.

It is striking that the balance of payments crisis is described as a consequence of "inadequate economic management" in most IMF/IBRD documents. This "technical" point of view has important consequences for the policy recommendations.

Internal factors are regarded as the primary causes:
- distortions in the allocation of resources resulting from an overvalued currency (a disincentive for exports and a benefit for imports), restricted trade and payments regimes and inadequate government price policy;
- expansionary public sector financial operations;
- overinvolvement of the government and suppression of private sector activities;
- inefficiency of parastatals;
- inflated money supply;
- inability to mobilize domestic resources;
- lack of skilled and unskilled labour;
- lack of infrastructure.

Very recent studies also mention the excessive rates of profit in trade which have negative effects both because of draining investments from productive sectors and because of furthering luxury imports.

In the second instance, external factors are claimed to aggravate the situation:

- worldwide inflation;
- weak international demand for Sudan's export commodities;
- falling terms of trade.

From this analysis the recommended strategy is deduced. The IMF criteria being the conditions for Stand-By credits include:
- exchange rate adjustment (devaluation);
- an overall ceiling on domestic credit;
- reduction of the deficit in the government's budget by holding down both current expenditures and development expenditures and by increasing the rate of tax revenues to the GDP;
- restraint of consumption;
- removal of government subsidies.

Besides these exchange rate and demand-oriented targets the IBRD provides some supply-oriented policy suggestions:
- deferment of all new public sector projects and rehabilitation of the existing ones to raise the degree of utilization of their production potential;
- removal of price and cost distortions;
- price incentives for export production;
- removal of price controls to allow prices to rise with the result of a shift of income from those who save less (consumers, traders) to those who save more (producers);
- shifting emphasis from large public projects to support the small scale entrepreneur;
- liberalization of production relations in the government agricultural schemes: displacement of the Joint Account System by individual account systems and land and water charges;
- reallocation of land from food crops to cotton and groundnuts.

Furthermore, it is suggested to employ foreign advisors in order to improve the government's management.

Some elements of this programme - especially the idea to remove the bias against agricultural producers - make it impossible to condemn the programme altogether as an "imperialist method" to "exploit" a Third World country. This may be surprising for a leftist economist with an unequivocal political creed. In fact, with some of the strategies the IMF/IBRD policies seems to fight for the cause of the small peasant against a reactionary national government which defends the status quo.

However, their concept is characterized by some misconceptions and inconsistencies. Some of these can be deduced from the ideological model of the Sudanese economy and society underlying the analysis. Basic assumptions are:
- the free play of market forces will produce an acceptable pattern of investment, production and trade;
- internal and external imbalances (inflation and balance of payments deficits) are caused by excessive internal demand;
- market forces will be able to produce a sustained growth in production and employment, if not disturbed by the government interventions or inflation (cf. Tetzlaff 1980, 249).

These conditions are perhaps fulfilled to a high degree in integrated Western industrial countries. However, this model does not account for the structural deformations of peripheral economies as the Sudan. Therefore, some of the measures proposed will have different or even contrary effects. Most importantly, the IMF/IBRD analysis confining itself to the economic sphere fails to appreciate the reasons for the apparent "mismanagement" of the Sudanese economy. It does not take account of the different meaning of the term "state" in Sudanese reality. First, the state policies do not represent the general interest of the Sudan but the interests of a few social groups: the military, the "national capitalists", the state employees and intellectuals and, in the second instance, workers and Gezira tenants. Secondly, the state's dwindling economic and social basis restricts its real options severely. The overall policy aim of "development" has been replaced by the fight for survival of the government.

The approach to raise industrial and agricultural output by giving incentives to primary producers is step in the right direction. However, it does not account for the marketing structure which prevents that producers receive a reasonable part of consumer/export prices for most commodities (Oesterdiekhoff 1979). Instead, the profits accruing to the big traders far exceed the returns to the farmers. The traders' position is enforced by the lack of alternatives to the traditional credit system which is based on crop sales in advance and secures excessive trade profits.

The proposed change in production relations in the state schemes from crop sharing systems to cost recovery systems will favour large farm units because it results in high fixed costs and a larger share of marginal production increase for the tenants. Furthermore, this approach does not account for another level of production relations between the de jure tenants and the de facto tenancy operators. In the main agricultural scheme - the Gezira - the tenant's family is assumed to contribute 20% of the total tenancy labour requirements only.

The term "private sector" is misleading because it covers two groups very different in regard to social background and economic interest: the "traditional" agricultural producers and international and domestic investors (mainly from the trade sector). In fact, the implemented as well as the proposed policy measures aim at the second subsector almost exclusively to the debit of the first subsector.

The great hope set in private investment both overestimates the capability and willingness of private capital owners to invest in productive enterprises and underestimates the adverse effects of private investments. The development of mechanised farming - supported by the IBRD- is an impressive example for "negative development". The government subsidizes a type of production which is hardly economically feasible, is directed to short-term profits accepting high ecological costs, leads to income inequality and displaces the original producers.

The proposition to hand over economic activities to the private sector is substantiated by the inefficiency of the parastatals. At the same time there is a series of private failures in the same branches. Other factors than inherent inefficiency of state enterprises - as lack of spare parts, maintenance, infrastructure etc. - seem to be more important for an explanation of the poor performance of industrial enterprises (Umbadda/Shaaeldin 1983, 17).

Due to the lack of domestic facilities the alternative to government action has often been the engagement of foreign capital. However, the history of this engagement has shown that its terms have been disadvantageous for the Sudanese economy in several respects: It enforced the processes of adjustment of the local production systems to the international demand conditions and of adaptation of the domestic demand structure to the production profile of the foreign firms (luxury goods production) which was accompanied by an income redistribution favouring the rich segments of the population (Oesterdiekhoff 1983). Furthermore, the foreign capital succeeded in getting special advantages like exemption from taxes, import duties and restrictions, shifting of capital and market risks to the government (Wohlmuth 1983).

As the IMF/IBRD reports themselves recognize, two main objectives of stabilization programmes are contradicting: first, the drive to rapid export production to relieve the country from the immense debt burden and second, the reduction of imports and current and development expenditures. As the irrigation subsector which is expected to yield the highest output growth in the short term and the industrial sector are highly import dependent, their performance had to suffer from import restraints, effected by foreign exchange shortages and devaluations. Furthermore, credit became less available due to credit ceilings. Thus, a devaluation without a backing by availability of considerable foreign exchange for inputs resulted in shortages throughout the production structure and led to a contraction of the economy.

The main conflict between programme objectives occurs between the short term objective to restore financial equilibrium in the shortest possible time and the long term objective of a sustained economic development. Not mentioning the adverse social impact of lifting food subsidies with the result of aggravating income inequalities, the requirements of short term financial stabilization policies definitely threaten to destruct the long term perspectives of the Sudanese economy.

The programmes enforce the regional concentration on East-Central Sudan, the sectoral concentration on modern sectors and the commodity concentration (cotton, groundnuts). This implies a continued high dependence on the world market and an unpredictability of economic development even in the short term (one season). Infrastructural projects, which are considered to be of central relevance - the neglect of these was identified as a major cause for low economic performance - are neglected again because of low rates of return in the short term and long gestation periods.

In general, the advice to expand agricultural export production as suggested by the IBRD for Sub-Saharan Africa (1981) has to be questioned because - under conditions of highly competitive markets for the commodities concerned - widespread acceptance of that advice will inevitably result in a decline in prices.

3. Government Policies and its Outcomes

Since mid 1978 the Sudanese government pursued an economic stabilization policy consisting of an exchange and trade reform programme, a financial stabilization programme and a restructuring in the agricultural sector to promote export cultivation. In 1978 the government refused to accept IMF conditions because of the negative social impact (especially of cutting the food subsidies) and in the following years there was social unrest threatening the government when austerity measures were imposed.

However, from 1979 onwards the government fell in line with the IMF conditions closer and closer. Sudan witnessed a six year long history of austerity policy containing of:

- 5 devaluations;
- restraints of expenditures, especially development expenditures;
- a moratorium on most of the new schemes and rehabilitation of existing projects;
- cutting of subsidies on imported food, medicines, petrol and other commodities;
- credit ceilings.

Additionally, agricultural land was reallocated to the traditional export crops of cotton and groundnuts, the mentioned changes in production relations in the state schemes were implemented, privatization was promoted and the foreign exchange market was liberalized.

These six years have seen a chain of economic recovery, stabilization and rehabilitation programmes which could not achieve the desired aim of reversing the trend of economic crisis. On the contrary, the economic indicators show that the situation became worse. Nevertheless, none of the programmes constituted a substantial change in priorities and measures of stabilization policy as well as no change in the expectations on its outcomes.

From 1978-82 Sudan's indebtedness increased by 109% to $ 6.5bn. Foreign observers put the total debt figure at more than $ 10bn. in 1984. Foreign exchange shortages were chronic and insolvency could be avoided with the help of 5 rescheduling agreements only. The inflation increased to an average of 25.7% annually (official figures) from 1978-82 (Ahmed/Fadlalla 1983 App. X). The GDP growth rate was -3,9% p.a. (deflated) and the real interest rates are estimated to be -10% or more. At the same time, the shift to rather unproductive branches of the services sector was enforced. The efforts to restrain government expenditures implied a bias against development expenditures: Its share in total budgeted expenditures declined from 38.5% in 1977/78 to 24.8% in 1983/84.

The heavily import-dependent industrial sector had to suffer very much from devaluation. Prices for industrial commodities rose considerably, production declined for most commodities and the capacity utilization rate for most factories was between 20 and 40% (Umbadda/Shaaeldin 1983). Under conditions of liberalized foreign trade regulations the economic stabilization programmes implied a bias against industrialization and a commitment of Sudan to a role of a supplier of raw materials to the world market. In spite of these disastrous figures about Sudan's economic development the government, the IMF and the IBRD maintain to judge the economic performance as encouraging. This surprising evaluation is substantiated by the rise of export production, which is interpreted as a result of the incentives reform and the technical rehabilitation. While cotton yields could be increased, an overall view on agricultural production gives a less positive result: From the main crops only cotton and wheat realized significant increases of productivity, the rest stagnated or declined (especially rainfed crops). Furthermore, the rise in absolute agricultural production was not reflected in a parallel rise in export earnings: for the whole stabilization period export earnings decreased by 15%.

The failure to reach export earnings targets even with rising production was due to weak international demand. This shows drastically the risks of unpredictable future developments of an economy based on the export of a few products whose price is a fixed external date.

4. Conclusion: Lessons and Alternatives

The analysis of the stabilization policy since 1978 gives evidence to the fact that this policy failed to attain its own targets and, more important, to achieve any significant improvements in the direction of structural development of the Sudanese economy. Basically, the structural malformation of the economy was reenforced rather than overcome both during the Breadbasket period and during the stabilization period. Both planning concepts did not only represent particular vested interests but they are also characterized by lack of realism and consistency.

During the second period Sudan has lost its capability to pursue alternative options to a rising extent because of the pressure to earn foreign exchange in order to continue the interest payments on foreign debt. At the same time, the Sudanese government lost essential elements of national sovereignty. Its economic policy is conditioned by external advisors: the Consultative Group of Sudan's creditors, the Joint Monitoring Committee and the External Finance Coordinator. While national sovereignty is a condition for any real development which is to the benefit of the broad population, this condition is not sufficient. Instead, as the history of the Breadbasket Strategy showed, the basic reason for inappropriate development was the power concentration on small social groups within the country. This allowed for a capital-intensive, import-intensive and export orientated development policy concentrating on modern sectors, neglecting the "traditional" sector.

Thus, the question "What tactics and strategies are open to those countries which wish to resist World Bank and IMF advice?"[1] gives a false alternative for countries with extreme forms of class domination as Sudan and most of the African states. Instead the decisive question is: Which strategies aiming at strengthening the position of the producers themselves are realistic under the conditions of international dependence?

The role of the IMF/IBRD is ambivalent. They represent the interests of Western capital. However, this does not necessarily imply a contradiction to the population's

1) This was one of the themes of the ROAPE Conference 1984.

interests in every case. Their policies should be evaluated with the criterion "To what extent can they further political emancipation of the population or do they strengthen traditional class domination?", as Tetzlaff (1980) suggested.

For the Sudan, the conventional stabilization policy of the IMF/IBRD has re-enforced the country's unilateral dependence on the world market, aims at denationalization/internationalization of the economy and did not - not yet? - succeed in improving the material situation of the producers significantly.

Anyway, for Sudan there seems to be no alternative way without the IMF and the IBRD, neither for the present government nor for a new government formed by the present opposition groups because the economy is too weak and the international dependence relations are too unilateral. However, on the background of the series of failures of stabilization policy the international organisations and foreign creditors might be willing to accept an alternative strategy. This would include:

1) Political participation of the broad population: integration of the producers in the development process.
2) Political decentralization;
3) More reliance on the own resources and production for the domestic market, with the most pressing aim to attain food self-sufficiency;
4) Reduction of the dependence on foreign cooperation (trade and capital), with the Western countries as well as with the rich Arab countries (the present Arab cooperation is an example of unequal South-South cooperation);
5) Development of a South-South cooperation on a more equal basis, e.g. with neighbouring African countries and Arab LLDCs;
6) Promotion of small-scale agriculture and crafts;
7) Restructuring of the industrial sector to "basic needs" commodities production, to integration with agricultural development, to decentralization and to more appropriate technologies;

8) Reduction of the tertiary sector;

As was noted above, presently Sudan's political system is characterized by a minimal degree of broad participation. While the process of capitalization - which is promoted by the IMF and the IBRD - might tend to change this situation, any impetus from outside cannot substitute for the domestic articulation of the popular interests.

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