



Welcome 193rd country

On a recent trip to what is now called the Republic of South Sudan **Mareike Schomerus** found a desperate need to believe in a better future. But will the fledgling state deliver?

A banner welcoming visitors to the world's newest country greets passengers climbing out of the plane at the airport of Juba, the capital of South Sudan. When I last walked past the banner to line up in the immigration queue in late December 2010, there were still a few days to go until the referendum. The Southern Sudanese were set to decide whether to become independent or remain one country with the national government seated in the north of the country, in Khartoum. In those last few days leading up to the polling, however, Southern Sudan seemed to have made up its mind to become a sovereign state. On top of the local minibus taxis, oversized hands made from cardboard were waving goodbye to Khartoum. Unsurprisingly, when the results were announced a few weeks later, an overwhelming 98.83 per cent of the southerners who went to the polls had voted for independence. Although there were reports of rigging and forced voting, it was clear that the Southern Sudanese wanted to leave Khartoum behind.

The decision on independence had been a long time coming. Southerners often refer to this moment as “a correction”: they think that Sudan should have been split in two at independence in 1956 to reflect what they see as the distinct characters of the two parts of the country. Instead, a bloody civil war ensued between north and south and lasted, with a brief respite in the 1970s, until the signing

of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The referendum on independence was anchored in the peace agreement, an ambitious undertaking in a country with minimal to no infrastructure and a largely illiterate population that had suffered tremendously from decades of war violence. The international community, while supportive of the referendum, was cautious and concerned about the potential for reignited violence between north and south after a vote on secession. While many issues need to still be solved, the vote for the 193rd country has been greeted with enthusiasm – abroad and, naturally, in the designated Republic of South Sudan.

When I asked southerners during the polling what the future might look like, I often received the same answer: “There will be a lot of dancing and a great feast.” More important than a day or a week of celebration, however, is the promise of development, of being able to send their children to school, of having access to hospitals and roads to walk on without fear of being attacked by an army or a militia group. Some people express deeply personal dreams of how independence will make their lives better: one woman explained that she lost all her children in the war and has not been able to get pregnant again. In an independent South Sudan she expects a new hospital to allow her to have another child. The hope that a new state will provide a better future

has many facets. People here have been waiting for their situation to get better for a long time.

The first years after the peace agreement in 2005 were marked by challenges and very slow improvement, but also by great enthusiasm for peace. Things took a turn for the worse, however, in 2008 and 2009. Suddenly, more people were dying again in local attacks and it was unclear what caused the renewed violence. Peace was suddenly conspicuously absent in everyday lives. The surge in local violence was why Pact Sudan, a peace building NGO, and the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) commissioned a team from LSE to research the reasons for local violence. The findings, published in the report *Southern Sudan at Odds with Itself: dynamics of conflict and predicaments of peace*, suggest that the tension between building a new state and controlling violence without existing state structures had created a vacuum. This remains one of many difficulties that the new sovereign nation will have to tackle.

Significantly, many citizens of the nation felt only a tenuous connection to a government that has delivered limited improvement since the peace deal was signed. People resorted to what they had known during the war: to rely on violence for survival. The fledgling state structures provide limited rule of law or justice procedures to stop violence. In the new independent country, providing reliable state structures and connecting to the citizens who have voted the new country into existence will be the government's main challenge.

Yet it is not only the government that is important. People living close to the new north-south border, with minimal connection to the far-away government structures of Juba, tend to organise their lives not with the help of their government, but despite the government. Few people in the marginal areas of South Sudan – and the margin here is very large – expect change and governance to come from Juba. For many, the state

of the world

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has been so conspicuously absent as an accountable organising force that other governing mechanisms are more important. These might be local institutions to deal with crime, to mitigate disputes over land usage, to administer water sources.

It will take a long time to effectively devolve South Sudan from the central government, so it is necessary to better understand how in reality people tackle the challenges of their everyday lives. To make use of such local structures for development policies requires a deep understanding of how they work and whether they are fair and of equal benefit to all. The Justice and Security Research Programme, a new international research consortium at LSE, funded by DfID over the next six years, aims to pursue this understanding.

The Republic of South Sudan will experience growing pains; at best these will be addressed, bit by bit, by the government. Whether the state functions effectively or not, however, might not be the decisive influence on the quality of everyday lives. The future,

it seems, could well be determined by local solutions. These will be diverse, challenging and maybe quite different from what visitors see when they arrive at Juba Airport and are welcomed to and by the 193rd country of the world. ■



Mareike Schomerus is a fellow in LSE's Department of International Development and chief executive officer of the Justice and Security Research Programme at LSE.

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