

Building Juba: on bricks, markets and inclusive development

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2011/07/08/southern-sudan-must-prioritise-a-development-approach-that-empowers-rural-areas/

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On the eve of Southern Sudan's independence, I offer congratulations, but retain concerns. Primary among these is the need for a development approach that seriously engages and serves the needs and priorities of its citizens.



Fish at market, Obel camp, near Malakal. Photo taken by Samer Abdelnour, 2006

As [McKenzie Funk's insightful article in Rolling Stone Magazine](#) reveals, foreign investors are scrambling to gain access to huge tracts of land and resources, often through questionable means. Local communities, including returnees, face an unimaginable task if they are to realise their aspirations through local elite and warlords backed by global capital.

Is Africa's newest country set to become an extractive colony for feeding the West food and oil? Will Juba's markets continue to be stocked with foreign goods and produce?

In rural areas, will large-scale mechanised farming destroy opportunities for widespread low-technology agricultural employment? Will independence give the people of Southern Sudan the opportunity to influence their economic environment?

These are some of the questions our research team contemplated while planning a study to explore opportunities for [vocational rehabilitation and business development in Southern Sudan](#).

This study includes a historical overview of vocational training and education in Southern Sudan, as well as determining opportunities for employment and enterprise creation based on market needs and priorities.

In designing our research, we were careful to avoid a conventional market survey, one which would explore the existing supply-demand relationship. Why? That would surely lead us to over-emphasise training in growth sectors such as hotels, hospitality and automotive mechanics.

The demand for these is heavily driven by the needs of development industry staff, government officials and those within the private sector, and hence is also more urban focused.

If valuable technical training resources were directed to satisfy demand in these areas, the main beneficiary would be urban services at the expense of rural rebuilding. Over time, such a path would accelerate rural to urban migration, and increasingly leave local labour vulnerable to donor priorities and foreign markets.

Instead we chose to focus on recommending solutions that could contribute to socio-economic development and reconstruction for and through local actors, by adopting [an applied local enterprise networks analytical framework](#) .

More importantly, this framework helped us to envision alternative development realities. I will narrate an example from the May 2010 workshop in Juba where the above-mentioned report was launched.

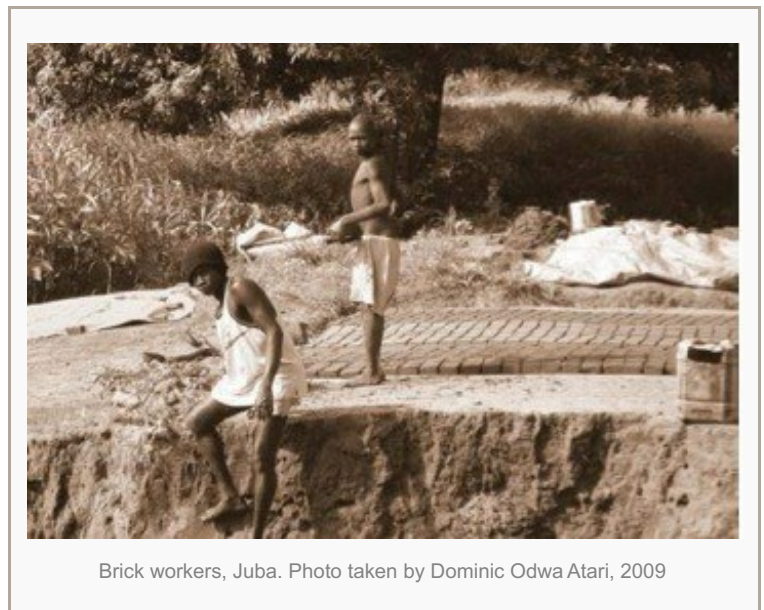
During a tour of the newly refurbished Juba Technical School (JTS), I noticed the construction students were using sub-par bricks that were brittle and of inconsistent shape and strength.

According to the instructor, the students were using bricks bought from the local market, the same they would use after graduation.

This situation got a few of us on the tour thinking about different scenarios through which the locals could influence local markets and development dynamics.

Rather than train students to use poor materials which would result in buildings and homes of poor quality, I proposed in the workshop that JTS teach students to make high quality bricks using simple brick press technology.

This technology is inexpensive and is [already used locally as part of donor-funded development projects](#) and in technical colleges in other regions in Sudan.



JTS, by expanding its training portfolio to include brick making, could now conduct its construction training using high quality bricks. Excess bricks would be sold in local markets to remunerate the training costs. In addition, top graduates could be helped to set up their own brick-making businesses, perhaps in partnership with local banks or an NGO partner.

In addition, JTS could also engage in quality assurance and standards with the support of government regulators. Each brick would be stamped and regular checks and training would be essential to ensure quality standards are maintained. JTS could also include artisan training to produce design variations in construction, complementing traditional means for decorating housing.

Students from villages and displaced communities could be trained with the idea that they can significantly contribute to reconstruction efforts using locally-produced quality products.

Once qualified brick producers are dominating the market, JTS would recognise the need to respond by reducing training in brick-making. They could then return to sourcing (now higher quality) bricks from the market, while remaining involved in quality standards and the development and testing of new types and sizes of bricks. In this way, JTS becomes genuinely responsive to market needs and priorities, which they helped to create.

Of course, JTS as well as other stake-holders could extend this approach to other fields including plumbing, sanitation plus agricultural hand and animal tools. One can only imagine a series of integrated enterprise networks engaging a diverse array of actors through local markets.

There was a mixed reaction within the workshop participants to this development suggestion. Some thought it was a great program to take forward especially those involved in technical training and trades. Others were more cautious, expressing the view that vocational training should be dictated by current growth sectors and supply-demand analysis.

But we all agreed that development is a far more complex process than the above case implies. I would add that it requires imagination, creativity and the ability to dream of a new and better reality.

Building training programs towards sectors experiencing market growth versus a local enterprise networks approach will certainly lead to very different development paths.

The former is focussed on urban areas and specific growth sectors supported by the aid industry and foreign capital, areas which primarily view people and communities as recipients of aid or economic inputs.

With a little ingenuity, the social construction of markets could support rural reconstruction by involving key players via the local production of goods and skills as the building blocks of a more inclusive and empowering development process.

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