



UNIVERSITY of  
**BRADFORD**

University of Bradford  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Division of Peace Studies and International  
Development

**The Role of Development NGOs  
In the Context of Authoritarian Regimes:  
A Case Study of Sudan**

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Submitted to the Division of Peace Studies and International  
Development (PSID) at the University of Bradford

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
MA in International Development Management

September 2018

(Words count: 12,943)

## **Declaration**

I, Hamid Khalafallah, declare that this dissertation is substantially and entirely my own original work. No part of this work has been submitted in any form for an award at any other academic institution. Where material has been drawn from other sources, this has been properly cited and fully acknowledged.

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Signature: 

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2018

## **Dedication**

*To my beloved Sudan,*

*The land in which most my life's pain and hardships  
originated, yet the ultimate source of my pride, hope and  
happiness.*

## **Acknowledgments**

They say: “Life is our greatest teacher”. I am incredibly grateful for all the experiences and opportunities that life has generously offered me, which helped me in learning numerous important lessons and becoming the person I am today.

I owe special thanks to my supervisor, Dr Behrooz Morvaridi, whose valuable support and guidance, as well as useful feedback, were key factors in assisting me to finish the long and complex process of writing this dissertation. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr Prathivadi Anand for being the backbone of the Chevening scholars in Bradford and for his outstanding lectures that sparked my interest in public policy issues. Additionally, I am extremely grateful to the entire Peace Studies and International Development division, professors, staff and students who made my year at the University of Bradford an incredible learning experience.

I am truly indebted to the Chevening Scholarship scheme for enabling me to come to the United Kingdom to pursue a world-class learning experience and connect with hundreds of like-minded scholars from all over the world. My year as a Chevening scholar was the best year I have ever had and I will embrace being a Chevening alumnus for the rest of my life.

My sincere gratitude goes to my immediate family; my mother Umsalama, my father Murtada, my sisters Rahma and Gofran for their endless love and continuous support. I am also thankful for having a loving extended family, who believed in me and showered me with compassion and care. In addition, I am truly grateful to my close friends who always had my back, brought joy into my life and tremendously encouraged my journey. I am especially grateful to my friend Omnia for being the first reviewer of all my writings and to my friend Omer for keeping me grounded throughout this transformational year. Finally, my utmost gratitude goes to my late friend Mosab, who inspired me to get involved in the development field and made me believe that we can create a better world.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation focuses on investigating the role of NGOs in development in authoritarian states. It explores the nature of NGO-State relationships, as well as the effectiveness of NGOs' operations in authoritarian contexts. More precisely, the study examines the interactions between the government and NGOs in Sudan during the development process, specifically in the context of the authoritarian regime that has been governing the country for almost three decades. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of various secondary sources, coupled with primary data collected from the field. It is observed that, historically, authoritarian rulers have shown hostility against NGOs. Although the levels of hostility varied, it is safe to say that authoritarian contexts have always been harsh for NGOs. Generally, democracies provide healthier environments for NGOs operations and development programmes. In particular, the environment in Sudan has been exceptionally harsh for NGOs under the current regime and it is described to be one of the toughest environments for NGOs' operations. The Sudanese regime has been using multiple strategies to control and suppress NGOs, yet the NGOs law remains the greatest obstacle in their way. Nevertheless, aside of the regime's redundant firmness, NGOs and the civil society in Sudan have been suffering from complex internal deficiencies that prevent them from fully utilising the limited space allowed by the authorities and potentially expand it. These deficiencies are harder to address in such restraining conditions. Overall, the study finds that development NGOs have a considerable role in Sudan, albeit the strictness of the regime and other unfortunate circumstances.

**Key words:** NGOs, Development, Authoritarian States, Sudan, Democracy, NGO-State Relationship.

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## **Acronyms**

ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSCSO	Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSOSI	Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index
DOSTANGO	Donor-State-NGO Approach
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)
GONGOs	Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations
HAC	Humanitarian Aid Commission
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICNL	International Centre for Non-profit Law
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NCF	National Civic Front
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

SUDIA	Sudanese Development Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VHWA	Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

The role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in development is visible and vital. As of the 1970s, NGOs programmes and interventions have gained growing attention as a considerable alternative to state-led development. In fact, more development assistance to developing countries was being channelled through NGOs, making them the most popular service provision channel for donors (Lewis and Kanji 2009). Nevertheless, NGOs have been widely criticised in recent years and their role has remarkably deteriorated (Aldashev and Navarra 2018). NGOs' operations have faced several challenges throughout the years of their existence, particularly regarding autonomy, accountability and sustainability. It is argued that one of the main challenges encountered by them is working in authoritarian states (Heurlin 2010). Evidently, authoritarian rulers have deployed acts of aggressiveness and hostility in dealing with NGOs employing several strategies to control them. However, it is clear that NGOs were able to build resilience to resist states and continue their missions to some extent (Bratton 1989; Nair 2011). Additionally, despite the powerful criticism and the various challenges faced, NGOs significance in the world of development is still present.

NGOs play a significant role in Sudan as well. Historically, Sudan gained independence from the Anglo-Egyptian colonial consortium in 1956 but soon fell into a war-poverty trap that grips the country until today. Moreover, Sudan has experienced a cycle of military coups that brought dictator rulers to power over three periods for more than 50 years (De Waal 2013). The current government toppled the previously democratic one and came to power through a military coup in 1989. Since then, all conflicts and national dilemmas were laced with extreme ideological policies (Ajawin et al. 2002; Ali 2010). A striking fact is that large parts of Sudan remain underdeveloped and the poverty rate is dreadfully high (Ajawin et al. 2002; Copnall 2014). In such circumstances, the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), particularly development NGOs, becomes crucial. However, in the context of the current authoritarian regime, NGOs and other CSOs are struggling to survive in light of the state's hostility against them (Ali 2010).

## **1.2 Rational and Scope of the Research**

Various studies have examined the relations between NGOs and states in authoritarian contexts, however, they were focused on particular cases and did not develop a general theory (Heurlin 2010). The situation of Sudan is unique and complex. Firstly, the authoritarian regime exhibits a blend of military composition and religious ideology. Additionally, the regime seems to have demonstrated a mix of all of the different strategies followed by authoritarian states to govern NGOs. Finally, despite the mentioned restrictions, development NGOs in Sudan are present, functional and provide valuable services to Sudanese citizens. Subsequently, I aim to contribute to the literature by shedding light on this exceptional context, as well as adding to the relatively limited literature and studies about Sudan.

The research focused mainly on Development NGOs, meaning NGOs that work primarily in development and service provision. However, this could not be fully realised, as most of these NGOs engage in advocacy campaigns, human rights protection and other activities. Nonetheless, the study considered various types of development NGOs, in terms of size, structure and political perception. Moreover, this dissertation studied the interactions between NGOs and the current Sudanese authoritarian regime only and did not examine other periods. In other words, the historical period investigated in this research starts from 1989 to present. It's worth mentioning that this period includes times when Sudan and South Sudan were in unity.

### **1.2.1 Research Question**

This study aims to answer the following question:

To what extent are NGOs able to contribute to the development of a country under an authoritarian regime?

### **1.2.2 Main Objective**

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of Development NGOs in Sudan, considering the context of the authoritarian regime governing the country for the past three decades.

### **1.2.3 Specific Objectives**

Further to that, the study investigates the following specific objectives:

- Explore the effectiveness of NGOs' development programmes in the context of an authoritarian system.
- Discuss the nature of NGOs-State relationship in an authoritarian state.
- Understand the interactions between NGOs and the state during the process of development in Sudan.

## **1.3 Methodology and Data Collection**

The study has followed a qualitative method in describing and critically analysing the role of Development NGOs in the context of an authoritarian state, particularly in Sudan. Qualitative research is generally appropriate for social sciences as it allows for the provision of both localised and contextual narratives (Flick 2015), hence, its suitability for this study. Additionally, a case study model was used to understand the specific situation of Sudan. The usefulness of a case study model in this perspective was that it helped in exploring important characteristics of real-life issues and in gathering detailed information about a particular case (Yin 1989). It is claimed that case studies are most relevant in “in-depth and extensive description of a social phenomenon” (Yin 2014: 4). The data was collected and analysed carefully to generate a generalisation that explains the specific situation in Sudan and to make appropriate recommendations.

The study used a combination of secondary and primary data. According to Best (2012), secondary data is generally found to be more reliable in providing new perspectives and developing an analysis of data sub-sets. However, due to the limitation in secondary data on the particular case of Sudan, further primary data was collected and used to fill the gaps. The secondary data used were mainly reports and studies conducted by distinguished institutions about NGOs and CSOs in Sudan. The primary data was collected using informal and unstructured interviews with prominent NGO leaders and civil society figures in Sudan, as well as relevant government officials. This data collection method was chosen as it is appropriate for exploring stories and values of the interviewees; in order to get a broad understanding and an in-depth insight of their opinions (Best 2012). There interviewees' selection was done sensibly to ensure that they represent a diverse range of views of the most relevant stakeholders. Attention was given to quality rather than quantity, as this provided diverse, extensive and accurate results (Kumar 2014). The researcher used his wide network and connections within civil society in Sudan to identify the interviewees with the help of three renowned researchers in Sudan. The interviews' transcriptions were analysed and grouped into themes to build up the findings and develop a narrative to describe the situation.

The standard ethical academic research guidelines were considered throughout the study. Researchers, in carrying out fieldwork, inevitably face ethical dilemmas, which arise out of competing obligations and conflicts of interest. Specifically, the Ethical procedures prescribed by the University of Bradford were strictly followed: "The University is committed to maintaining high ethical standards in the research undertaken by its staff and students", for more information please see: <https://www.bradford.ac.uk/rkts/research-support/ethics/>. I recognise the need to be open about the aims of the research and not to involve any participants without their knowledge or consent. All interviewees signed a consent form that preserves their rights and protects their information, a sample of the consent form is attached in the appendices. For the safety and privacy of the interviewees, they have been kept anonymous and their personal information will not be disclosed.

A total of 12 unstructured and informal interviews were conducted with national and international NGOs leaders, civil society activists, researchers, Government-Organised NGOs (GONGOs) leaders and government officials. The interviews were all conducted in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, over a period of two weeks in July 2018. Interviews were categorized based on the interviewees' affiliations and the analysis will follow the same categorisation. The conducted interviews are illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Interviews List

No.	Code	Category	Position
1	NGO1	National NGOs	Director
2	NGO2	National NGOs	Director
3	NGO3	National NGOs	Programme Manager
4	INGO1	International NGOs	Project Manager
5	INGO2	International NGOs	Programmes Director
6	CS1	Civil Society	Civil Society Activist
7	CS2	Civil Society	Civil Society Activist
8	AC1	Academia	Researcher and Independent Consultant
9	AC2	Academia	Researcher and University Lecturer
10	GONGO1	GONGOs	Director
11	GOV1	Government	Registrar
12	GOV2	Government	NGOs Programmes Coordinator

## **1.4 Limitations**

Academic research is usually restricted by limited resources, thus the outcome is always "less than the ideal job" (Kumar 2014: 273). This study was constrained by some limitations. A major limitation of this study was the shortage of reliable data and information on development in Sudan and the role of NGOs in that context. Although primary data was collected, it was not as adequate and wide-ranging as desired, due to the limited amount of time. Additionally, the study used qualitative data only. The lack of quantitative data could be considered a limitation, however it opens doors for future studies to work on collecting it. The case study model provided an in-depth analysis of the specific context of Sudan, yet it cannot be broadly generalised to other contexts. This is a limitation associated with case studies, and it is noted that case studies are "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (Yin 2014: 21).

## **1.5 Research Organisation**

This research consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that explains the background and context of the research, the rationale and motivations behind conducting it, the scope of the study and the research question and objectives, as well as the research methodology employed. The second chapter provides a critical review of the literature and an engagement with the relevant current debates, looking at a wide range of papers and studies that addressed topics related to NGOs in authoritarian states. Chapter three presents the secondary data found in relevance to the role of development NGOs in Sudan, with more focus on the period of the current authoritarian regime. The fourth chapter displays the primary data collected from Sudan and an analysis which reflects the empirical interactions between NGOs and the Sudanese regime. In the last chapter, a conclusion of the work done is provided in order to address the research question and objectives, as well as recommendations based on the study findings.



## **Chapter 2: Development NGOs and Authoritarian Regimes**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide an overview of the current literature and relevant debates regarding the notions of development, NGOs and authoritarian regimes. Firstly, the background of development and the evolution of NGOs and their engagement in development are explored. Furthermore, it will look at the advantages that have supported NGOs in claiming their position in the development field, as well as the challenges they are facing in fulfilling their roles. The challenges of working in authoritarian states will be explored, in addition to examining the nexus between democracy and development, with focus on the ‘good governance’ agenda and the role of civil society in this regard.

### **2.2 NGOs and Development<sup>1</sup>**

NGOs are hard to associate with a specific definition. They vary distinctly in size, structure, role, motivation and source of funding. However, they tend to share some common characteristics, such as being non-governmental and not-for-profit (Pearce and Eade 2000; Lewis and Kanji 2009; Aldashev and Navarra 2018). There are many definitions for NGOs in the literature, Aldashev and Navarra (2018: 126) defined an NGO as “a non-profit and non-governmental aid intermediary that provides a public good or a public service and channels donors’ funds to projects in developing countries”. NGOs have a history that dates to the eighteenth century at least, and it is documented that in the 1910s there were over a thousand registered NGOs around the world (Peace 2005; Davies 2014; Obiero 2015). Although NGOs existed way before their involvement in the development field, they were smaller in size and in numbers (Lewis and Wallace 2000; Pearce and Eade 2000; Mitlin et al. 2007; Aldashev and

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<sup>1</sup> Development is generally referred to as a positive change and a sign of progress and growth. A working definition of development could be “the progressive improvement in the social, economic well-being of people so that they live longer, healthier and fuller lives within any given political entity” Morvaridi (2008: 8-9).

Navarra 2018). Before they engaged in development programmes, NGOs mainly worked in emergencies and short-term relief (Banks and Hulme 2012).

As of the 1970s and across the 1980s, NGOs attracted a lot of attention in the development field. NGOs were appealing to donors and aid agencies, as they seemed more efficient and less bureaucratic, in contrast with the governments of the recipient countries. By the 1990s, the role of NGOs in development increased significantly. They became the preferred channel of services provision and were viewed as “heroic organizations seeking to ‘do good’ in difficult circumstances” (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 19). Additionally, they were praised for their efficiency, autonomy and close connection with grassroots communities. It was claimed that NGOs are better at cost-effectiveness, working in ‘difficult’ environments, targeting the ‘poorest’ and involving marginalised groups (Bratton 1989; Pearce and Eade 2000; Aldashev and Navarra 2018). They were liked by donors and were also accepted amongst the grassroots. Certainly, NGOs became the preferred channel for aid and public services provision (Edwards and Hulme 1995).

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century lay the grounds for more trust in NGOs and higher expectations from them (Mitlin et al. 2007). The rising expectations led to many disappointments and questions started arising around NGOs’ legitimacy, autonomy, accountability and effectiveness. They were criticised for no longer being grassroots-oriented and not being as effective in targeting the ‘poorest’ anymore (Edwards and Hulme 1995; Pearce and Eade 2000; Eade and Ligteringen 2001). Besides, the accountability of NGOs is one of the main points they are criticised about, as the unclear accountability structures have caused serious concerns (Brett 1993; Lewis and Kanji 2009; Banks and Hulme 2012). Moreover, deep concerns regarding international NGOs accountability surfaced lately, following a report about sexual misconducts by Oxfam staff (Columbus 2018). In addition, NGOs autonomy is questioned and it is claimed that their dependence on donors made them less attentive to the actual needs of communities’ and more concerned about the requirements of the donors (Banks and Hulme 2012). Nevertheless, despite the ongoing criticism, it is undeniable that NGOs continue to play an important role in the development of people and communities (Edwards and Hulme 1995; Eade and Ligteringen 2001; Lewis and Kanji 2009). It is also recognised that

NGOs are aware of their shortcomings and that they have been working on reforming their structures and improving their work.

### **2.3 NGOs and Authoritarian States**

Since their emergence, NGOs acted as a balance to state power by giving people opportunities of participation and providing training for activists (Edwards and Hulme 1995). In many parts of the world, NGOs legitimacy came from standing for the people against states' violations (Cleary 1997; Pearce and Eade 2000; Lewis and Kanji 2009). Fundamentally, NGOs and states are different species in a juxtaposition, and the relationship between them is complicated and variable across countries and contexts (Bratton 1989; Lewis and Kanji 2009). A major determinant of the dynamics of the relationship is the nature of the ruling regime. Although governments in general disfavour independent centres of power, they tend to react differently. States with civilian constitutions and multi-party governments usually provide a more hospitable environment for NGOs, in contrast to military regimes and single-party states.

In an authoritarian state, the regime is typically dominated by one party or one leader that is more important than other political players. They are usually referred to as regimes rather than governments, as the political institutions are less-defined and undeveloped (Linz 1964). Authoritarian regimes are defined as: "political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, with elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones" (Linz 2000: 255). The concept of authoritarianism is quite similar to dictatorship and totalitarianism, with minor differences in the level of leadership's ideology development and intellectual elaboration. However, the distinction cannot be made clear-cut (Linz 2000).

Authoritarian regimes typically care less about their legitimacy and they are not legally accountable, in contrast to democracies. Therefore, they do not hesitate in repressing any potential threats of opposition, including civil society and NGOs (Geddes 1999). Considering

their role as providers of social welfare and public services that States are unable or unwilling to provide, NGOs gained remarkable popularity amongst people. Their existence can help in polarising the political arena, as they promote democratic values and participatory approaches (Bratton 1989; Pearce and Eade 2000; Heurlin 2010). As (Bratton 1989: 572 - 573) stated: “the general trend has been toward political and administrative centralization, with independent organizations swept under the wing of the on-party state or abolished completely under military rule. NGOs may sow seeds of political discontent and provide organizational channels through which opposition can be mounted against an incumbent regime”.

In addition to this, more of the international aid was being directed towards NGOs instead of governments, and states did not like that (Bratton 1989; Lewis and Kanji 2009; Aldashev and Navarra 2018). The total share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) aid channelled through NGOs increased massively reaching to 13% in 2012 (Aldashev and Navarra 2018) and the World Bank allocations for NGOs boosted to 70% in 2006 (Werker and Ahmed 2008). In practice, NGOs try to coexist peacefully with states (Bratton 1989). Yet, NGOs relations with authoritarian States were not consistent, as they represented both opportunity and hazard for States. On one hand, they were considered an opportunity, considering their potential contribution to development. On the other hand, their ability to mobilise people against the States was hazardous (Heurlin 2010). In all cases, NGOs existence in authoritarian states was consistently challenged and opposed.

Authoritarian states followed different strategies in dealing with NGOs depending on context. A valuable study that looked at the politics of the relations between states and NGOs in Africa, suggests that despite the variation in contexts between authoritarian states in Africa, all rulers in these states employed relatively similar methods to govern NGOs (Bratton 1989). The strategies used included monitoring, coordination, co-option and dissolution. Monitoring is usually achieved by regulating NGOs registration process and keeping records and information of their activities. For example, governments in Somalia, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe require annual reports of their activities. These governments have weak monitoring tools and complicated structures, which makes it hard for NGOs to comply with their requirements. Additionally, governments try to regulate NGOs operations in the name of coordination, but it

is always in a form of control. Governments have claimed that NGOs activities are not matching their plans, necessitating the need to coordinate or stop their work.

Moreover, co-option is also a widely used strategy where governments find ways to make the NGOs become part of regime. In Tanzania, heads of NGOs are usually officials who are enforced on NGOs to influence their behaviours in certain directions. The dissolution strategy is usually the short way for governments to deal with NGOs. However, they hesitate in using it to not lose the development contributions of NGOs. Dissolution of NGOs is more common during highly political tense times, as observed in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia. In Latin America, military dictatorships oppressed NGOs and managed to fully control them in the past, yet in South Asia most NGOs operated well in states like India and Sri Lanka. Africa is in between Latin America and South Asia, as “African governments are neither as democratically responsive as their South Asian counterparts, nor as effective at authoritarian control as Latin American military governments” (Bratton 1989: 584). However, the exact response of African governments to NGOs leading role in development, is still ambiguous. They bring valuable contributions but they motivate political resistance which is deemed as unfavourable by states.

Another study that examined NGO-State relations, focused on South Asia (Heurlin 2010). This study took the first steps in building a theory that explains NGO-State relations and suggests that states usually follow one of two approaches; corporatist and exclusionary strategies. The corporatist strategy is usually followed by single-party regimes, in which states tend to co-opt NGOs within the system and control them through various tactics. The exclusionary strategy is usually deployed by personalist regimes and aims to marginalise NGOs and replace them with state institutions. Examples of corporatist systems are China (1978 – present), Vietnam (1986 – present) and Taiwan (until 1987). The exclusionary strategy focuses on harassing and marginalising NGOs, as well as replacing them with state institutions. Examples of exclusionary rulers are China (1949 – 1978), Vietnam (1975 – 1986), Indonesia (1971 – 1998) and the Philippines (1972 – 1986).

Generally, NGOs services should complement state’s services rather than replace them. In many cases, replacing states with NGOs in social welfare and services provision, implies that the gap in public services is small and could be filled by NGOs; which is not the case in

many places (Pearce and Eade 2000). Another relevant issue is that donors tend to not trust the recipient governments and choose to channel more aid through NGOs instead. While this might facilitate delivering aid more efficiently and impartially; it weakens the failing institutions and diminishes their capacity and legitimacy, resulting in having a weaker state (Winter 2010). Therefore, coordination between States and NGOs is important. In this regards, a Donor-State-NGO (DOSTANGO) system approach was proposed to coordinate between the three actors in the process of development (Tvedt 2002). Nonetheless, Clayton (1996) drew attention to various examples in Africa, testifying that case studies have demonstrated that NGOs can have positive impacts, regardless of severe political restrictions. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that a healthy NGO-State relationship is hard to conceive unless both parties have the same priorities. As long as the governments' commitment towards development is weak, which is the case in most authoritarian states, they will always be wary of NGOs (Clark 1993).

## **2.4 Democracy and Development**

It is important to understand the relations between NGOs and authoritarian states, as there is an evident correlation between development and democracy (Eade and Ligteringen 2001). However, one cannot overlook the fact that many authoritarian states have achieved remarkable economic development despite not having democratic governments. Accordingly, it might be claimed that authoritarian regimes are better than democratic ones in delivering services using the few examples which attest to this. However, the vast majority shows that democratic countries are more developed than authoritarian ones and it is evident that the richest countries in the world are democratic (Ajawin et al. 2002; De Mesquita and Downs 2005). Democracy is valuable not only in its own right, but also because it contributes to sustainable development. Furthermore, democracy is associated with accountability and legitimacy. This entails that a majority of the population support the leadership and their programmes, and have the choice to withdraw the power from them if they failed to deliver what they promised (Barrow and Jennings 2001; Winter 2010).

### **2.4.1 The ‘Good Governance’ Agenda**

Although Democracy and development can be pursued independently in the short run, in the long run they are interrelated. NGOs seemed to be suitable actors to play leading roles in promoting both development and democracy. Subsequently, donors and international institutions lead by the World Bank, introduced the ‘Good Governance’ agenda in the 1990s to combine development programmes with democracy promotion (Nanda 2006). The agenda was principally introduced to encourage governments to be “fiscally disciplined and decentralized to discern and respond to citizen need, comprise politically neutral managers, and make and manage business-friendly policies” (Andrews 2008). The World Bank suggested that this would improve the development management (Kelsall 1998). The bilateral development assistance then became conditioned with good governance terms, including fair and multiparty elections, to encourage democratisation in developing countries. This was suggested to be facilitated by civil society and NGOs as a key component. Although there are still heated debates ongoing regarding the effectiveness of the good governance agenda and its indicators, it is manifest that it has put pressure on aid-recipient countries (Nanda 2006; Andrews 2008).

### **2.4.2 The Civil Society’s Role**

As of the 1990s, the civil society, including NGOs, was often described as “a force of democracy” (Tvedt 2002: 364). Civil society was considered to be a bridge between policy makers and citizens, thus it was fortified to have a prominent role in realising both democracy and development. Whilst States are associated with control and the market is linked with profit-making and competition, civil society is stated to be outside all of these (Fowler 1996; Trivedy and Acharya 1996). Furthermore, Clayton (1996) suggested that empowering civil society would lead to sustainable good governance, as a strong civil society will demand a democratic state that is accountable and transparent. Civil society, which is often referred to as the third sector, is formed by a wide range of organisations of different natures, with NGOs being one of its main components. Civil society could be loosely defined as: “All the diverse

organisational forms that exist outside of the state and the market but which provide a counterbalance towards both the state and the market” (Clayton 1996: 7).

In reality, the NGO sector could not perform well as part of the civil society in claiming their expected role as good governance advocates. This is partly because the sector is inherently weak, but mostly because it was under continuous attacks by authoritarian states in the developing world (Kelsall 1998). In several occasions, officials of authoritarian states were explicit in expressing their disapproval of NGOs. For instance, members of the ruling party in Tanzania revealed during a public interview in 1997, that they were not happy with the fact that NGOs could be fully independent bodies. In the same interview, the prime minister was quoted in saying do not have major problems with NGOs as long as they are concerned with pure development work and are away from politics, otherwise the government will have to take actions against them (Kelsall 1998). Another example from Kenya shows that the government cancelled the registration of four NGOs in 1998 for engaging in activities that officials considered political and not in the interest of the security of the state (Tvedt 2002).

In the mentioned circumstances, NGOs and civil society in general must be careful in assessing the political climate in the respective states to determine borders for their work, recognise sensitive areas to avoid and identify points of breakthrough where they can have political influence (Clayton 1996). However, NGOs and CSOs have conducted relatively few studies on how to create safe spaces for their operations in difficult political environments (Trivedy 1996). Such studies are vital, as judging the situations from the publicly announced propositions and the formally written regulations is quite misleading. In addition, by not analysing the context properly, NGOs could end up supporting authoritarian regimes that have principles that are against theirs. For example, when Oxfam implemented the Chunya Integrated Development Programme in Tanzania in the 1970s, they did not analyse the situation well; which resulted in supporting the authoritarian regime of President Ujamaa (Barrow and Jennings 2001; Jennings 2016). In contrast, Oxfam implemented the Action Research Programme in Malawi in the 1980s, where they conducted a social research to find out which sort of programmes could be implemented in the respective political situation. The government thought it was just an academic research that would not have much consequences. When the



results of the research were publicised, the government was forced to adopt the recommendations (Trivedy 1996). This process enabled Oxfam to improve their decision making and acted as a guideline for other NGOs operating in Malawi back then.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the history of NGOs engagement in the development field and how this acted as a better alternative to governments. NGOs autonomy and effectiveness were what made them stand out, in addition to other advantages. However, later on, all their advantages were criticised, as NGOs seemed to have failed in keeping up to their promised mandates. One of the main challenges that have faced NGOs was operating in authoritarian states. Authoritarian leaders typically have no legitimacy and are not accountable to their citizens. Therefore, they tend to constantly oppress NGOs and restrict their activities. Additionally, studies show linkages between democracy and development, although there are few examples that do not testify to this. In order to combine development and political reform efforts, the 'good governance' agenda was introduced in the 1990s. The civil society was expected to play a huge role in advocating for this agenda, but they faced serious challenges by the authoritarian regimes in their respective countries.

## **Chapter 3: Overview of NGOs and Civil Society in Sudan**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will look at NGOs' operation in Sudan, in light of the current authoritarian regime governing the country. Firstly, an overview of Sudan's profile and context, as well as the history of civil society in Sudan will be presented. Then, an analysis of a range of secondary data, outlining the main challenges facing NGOs in particular and civil society in general in Sudan will be provided. Although this study is focused on the role of NGOs, there are many interrelations between NGOs and other CSOs in Sudan. Various published academic papers, NGO publications and accredited media reports will be used to enrich the analysis and findings. One of the key resources will be the Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index (CSOSI) report that is developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

### **3.2 A Glance at Sudan**

Sudan was formerly the largest country in Africa and currently the third largest with a population of almost 40 millions (World Bank 2018a). Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, lies in the central region at the confluence of the White Nile and Blue Nile, where they both form the great River Nile. Sudan is blessed with fertile lands, mountains and livestock, as well as widespread deserts (World Bank 2018b). Sudan gained its independence from the British-Egyptian colonisation in 1956. However, it soon fell into a trap of bad governance, wars and poverty that have plagued the country until this day. A major cause that beset the state was the long years of conflict between the central government and rebels in South Sudan. A war that has lasted for over 40 years, leading to the independence of South Sudan by popular vote to secede in 2011. Nonetheless, Sudan's wars and conflicts soon raged in other parts; Darfur, Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile (Iyob and Khadiagala 2006; Copnall 2014).

Post-colonisation, Sudan has had a vicious cycle of three periods of short parliamentary democracies, interrupted by three lengthy periods of dictatorship, with the years of dictatorship summing up to 51 years out of the total 62 years of Sudan's independent history. The current

government in specific, toppled the previously democratic one that ruled from 1986 to 1989, came to power through a bloodless coup on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1989. Since then, all conflicts and national dilemmas have been laced with extreme ideological policies. Wars, affinity towards terrorism and a shackled tanked economy led to Sudan's fall from grace since its heydays of democratic and intellectual growth in the 1960s and 1980s (Bilal 2005). Mass immigrations to cities or abroad and the complete crumbling of the infrastructural systems in health, civil service, education, agriculture and industry has led to the country's downfall in all economic and human indexes of development (GIZ 2018).

After signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 that ended the North-South war, the government have claimed to have introduced various reforms and improvement measures. However, Sudan is still getting 'poorer'(UNDP 2014). With 2,415\$ GDP per capita, Sudan was ranked 165<sup>th</sup> in the Human Development Index in 2015 (UNDP 2016) and the poverty rate reached 46.5% in 2009 (World Bank 2018c; World Bank 2018a). Also, Sudan is a highly-indebted country, with its external debt reaching \$50 billion in nominal terms. Although Sudan is eligible for debt relief under the Highly-Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, this cannot be granted under the governance of the current regime (World Bank 2018b).

Additionally, development in Sudan is clearly imbalanced. This started with policies followed during the colonisation era, but it was continued by most of the succeeding national governments (Niblock 1987). The development imbalance between the centre and the rural areas in Sudan is quite dangerous, as it has significantly contributed to the secession of South Sudan and there are threats of more division in other regions (Ali 2018; GIZ 2018). The current reality remains daunting; the president, Omer Albashir, is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity and the economy remains in shambles (UNICEF 2018). The reduced economic growth has resulted in sharp rises in essential goods prices, triggering waves of mass demonstrations since 2012 (World Bank 2018b). All these factors point towards a highly volatile and unstable environment with a dire need for development and progression towards social justice and economical reformation.

### 3.3 NGOs and Civil Society in Sudan

Origins of civil society in Sudan date back to the early 1900s, where it grew as an anti-colonial movement calling for Sudan's independence (Bilal 2005; Ali et al. 2016). As they were suppressed by the colonial government, most of these movements transformed into cultural groups and sports clubs. In 1937, the Graduates' Congress<sup>2</sup> CSO was found, which was a huge development in the history of Sudan's civil society (Bilal 2005; ICNL 2018). The Graduates' Congress was formed of Sudanese graduates and elites; who did not only lobby for the independence of Sudan, but also worked on cultural issues, health and education. After Sudan's independence more CSOs and NGOs were formed, but they mostly flourished and modernised in the 1970s after the severe drought and famine that hit the horn of Africa, including Sudan. Consequently, international NGOs started arriving and more funding was directed to Sudan which refreshed the whole civil society.

Sudan has enjoyed a relatively strong and vibrant civil society until the end of the 1980s (Ali et al. 2016). In fact, the civil society has been a main actor in mobilising two successful revolutions in Sudan overthrowing military regimes in 1964 and 1986 (Abdelgayoum 2009). In 1989, the current regime came to power by a coup d'état, presenting its military and authoritarian nature, as well as religious ideology; as the coup was orchestrated by the military and the National Islamic Front (Ajawin et al. 2002; Mamdani 2009; Ali 2010; Ali et al. 2016). Predictably, they adopted a very aggressive attitude towards all civil society components including NGOs, women and student groups, trade and workers unions, and of course political parties. It is reported that hundreds of the civil society activists were harassed and detained, and at least one was tortured to death (Human Rights Watch 1996). The regime introduced a new set of regulations on NGOs, including strict registration policies, seizing of assets, co-option and establishment of GONGOs (Ali 2010; Ali et al. 2016).

Despite the strictness of the new regime, there were various reasons that encouraged the formation of many new NGOs in the 1990s. Many service provision NGOs surfaced, as the regime adopted a neoliberal economy and privatisation policies. Additionally, the raging wars

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<sup>2</sup> In reference to the graduates of Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum.

across the country, have opened the doors for more international NGOs presence and more funding was allocated for Sudan. Aid agencies and international NGOs played a great role in supporting local NGOs as they conditioned their aid with their participation in operations (Bilal 2005). After the signing of the CPA in 2005, the Sudanese government allowed more space and freedom for the civil society temporarily, which helped in the growth of CSOs and NGOs.

After 29 years of the current authoritarian regime and regardless of the harsh environment, it is claimed that NGOs managed to exist and remain active in Sudan; playing massive roles in times of difficulty and making up for the state's shortcomings (Abbas 2017; Ali 2018). Although there are no precise data available of the current number of NGOs in Sudan, the registrar of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in Sudan has stated that there are around 15,000 NGOs registered with only 10% of them active (USAID 2017). On one hand, it is obvious that room for NGOs to operate is still tight and they are continuously repressed. On the other hand, there is growing interest by the government to incorporate NGOs programmes in their plans as they have shown success and support by grassroots. Although the existence of civil society and NGOs in Sudan is crucial, not enough is known about the extent at which they are affected by the current regime and how their existence can be guaranteed (Ali et al. 2016).

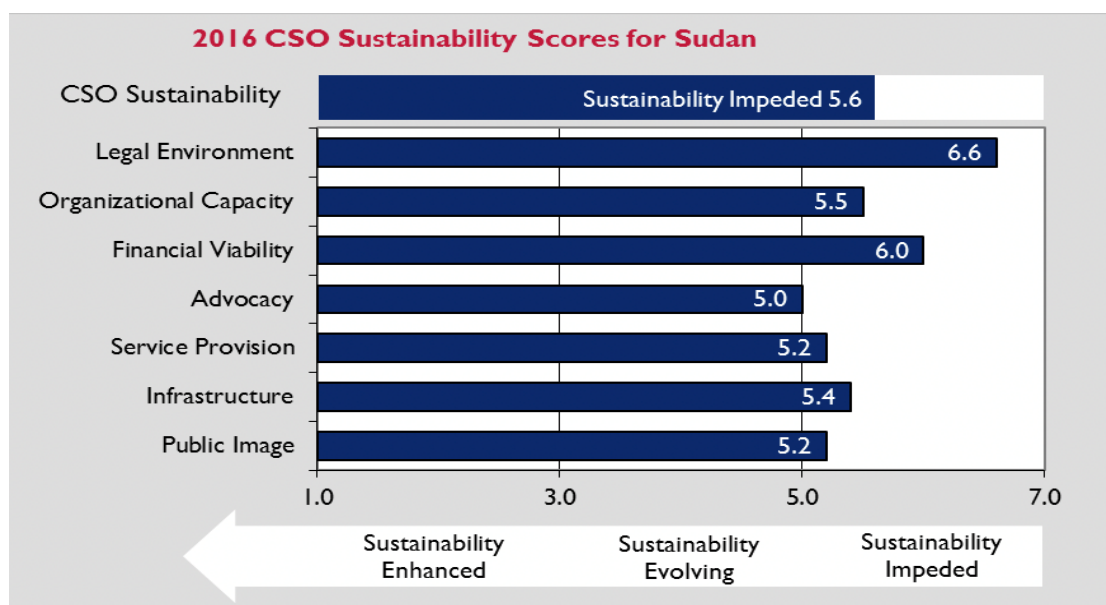
### **3.4 Sustainability of NGOs under the Authoritarian State of Sudan**

There are serious challenges threatening the existence of NGOs and the wide civil society in Sudan under the current authoritarian regime. The regime in Sudan has a long history of harassing NGOs and human rights defenders throughout the country (ReliefWeb 2006). This has consistently constrained the ability of NGOs in bringing relief and development to the underdeveloped populations in Sudan and in attempting to document and publicise human rights violations. It is evident that the situation keeps getting more dire with the continuous political and economic turmoil (USAID 2017). It has also been argued that one of the primary reasons underlying the deterioration of the relations between government and civil society is that CSOs have been getting more recognition lately from national and international

stakeholders as important players in providing a more comprehensive solution to the problems facing Sudan (Elmahdi 2015).

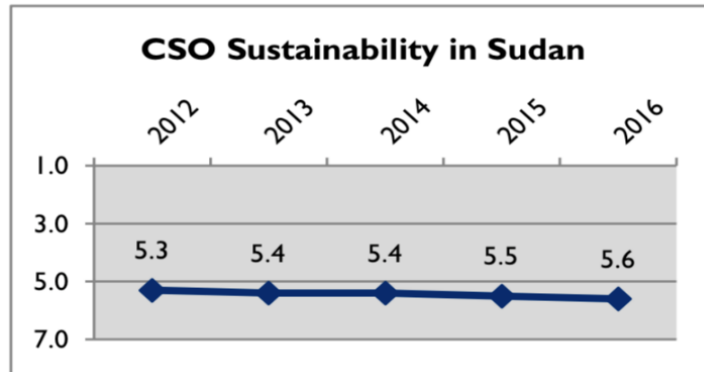
According to the CSO sustainability index of 2016, the sustainability of CSOs in Sudan is impeded as shown in Figure 1. Moreover, Sudan's score has been constantly getting worse in the past five years as illustrated in Figure 2. The intense political tension in Sudan only means decline in the civil society's sustainability. The sustainability index is based on seven indicators, each one of them discloses that the CSO sustainability in Sudan is extremely beset even when compared with other Sub-Saharan African countries (USAID 2017).

Figure 1: The 2016 CSO Sustainability Scores for Sudan



Source: Adopted from (USAID 2017: 226)

Figure 2: CSO Sustainability Scores for Sudan between 2012 and 2016



*Source: Adopted from (USAID 2017: 227)*

The legal environment is the greatest challenge for NGOs and other CSOs in Sudan and it keeps deteriorating (Abbas 2017; USAID 2017). According to the CSOSI, Sudan had the harshest legal environment in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2015 (USAID 2016). The Sudanese government established HAC to facilitate development and humanitarian programmes and to organise NGOs' work. However, their function has primarily been to control and monitor NGOs (Abbas 2017). It is known that HAC is controlled by the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), the regime's most powerful institution (USAID 2017). HAC operates under Sudan's Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act of 2006 (VHWA).

A study that was conducted by the International Centre for Non-profit Law (ICNL) suggests that the VHWA is one of the harshest NGO laws worldwide (ICNL 2015). Sudan's VHWA of 2006 has been found to be against human rights standards, international agreements and, ironically, against the Sudanese constitution (Abdelgayoum 2009; Abbas 2017; Adeeb 2017; Sudan Times 2017). In their study, ICNL stated that: "Sudan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and therefore is bound by all the international and regional standards

provided in those covenants with respect to freedom of association and the right to peacefully assembly.” (ICNL 2015: 7)

Whilst the Act does not explicitly impose many restrictions, HAC benefits from the vagueness of most of the terms in enforcing more restrictions. Moreover, it gives arbitrary power without any guidelines (ICNL 2015). Nabeel Adeeb, a leading Sudanese human-rights lawyer, emphasised that the VHWA is unnecessarily restrictive, suppressive and merely found to practice excessive control on NGOs (ICNL 2015; Adeeb 2017). Adeeb also added that the UN’s independent expert to Sudan had advised the Sudanese government to cancel this Act, as it restricts the civil society and creates a difficult environment for their operations.

One of the main issues with the law is the unnecessarily lengthy registration procedure. Although the registration requirements are not impossible, the final decision is up to the commissioner’s opinion (ICNL 2015). The other absurd issue with this long procedure of registration has to be renewed annually (Adeeb 2017). Many NGOs have experienced issues with the registration process. In 2016, the registration renewal of the Sudanese Development Initiative (SUDIA) and the Sudanese Human Rights monitor was frozen for over six months without any justifications, despite the fact that they submitted all the required documents. Accordingly all their activities were suspended for that period. Moreover, HAC has the authority to cancel the registration of NGOs at any moment. For instance the registration of the National Civic Front (NCF) was cancelled in the beginning of 2015 without any explanation and was only retrieved by the end of 2016 (USAID 2017).

In addition, both HAC and NISS have the power to dissolve any national NGO or expel any international NGO at any moment (ICNL 2015). Salmmah Women’s Resource Centre, an NGO that has operated for more than 17 years, was closed in 2015 without disclosing any reasons (Nuba Reports 2016). In 2013, HAC permanently shut down the Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development and Arry Organization for Human Rights and Development for receiving funding without getting the commission’s approval (ICNL 2015). It is worth mentioning that both NGOs were active in exposing human rights violations in Sudan. In 2009, the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development was



also permanently closed, which the African Commission for Human Rights found to be violating the right to freedom of association (ICNL 2015).

As for international NGOs, 13 international organisations were expelled in 2009 after the ICC issued an arrest warrant for the Sudanese president. The list included prestigious organisations like Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Furthermore, four NGOs were banned from working in Sudan in 2012 for vague reasons. An official from HAC stated that they decided to expel these NGOs because “there is a weakness in these international organisations, they failed in their planned projects and they work to destabilise the country” (BBC 2012: 1). Additionally, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Sudan was ordered by the government to suspend its work in Sudan. This was hugely significant, as the ICRC assisted over a million people in conflict zones around Sudan. An official from HAC stated that “The ICRC has not met the state’s guidelines for humanitarian work, which has made us suspend its work” (BBC 2012: 1). Generally, the government treats foreign NGOs with a lot suspicion and constantly accuses them of spying (ReliefWeb 2006; ICNL 2015).

In an extreme practice of power, NISS has raided NGOs premises and unlawfully detained NGOs members in several occasions. This excessive harassment usually targets NGOs that the regime classifies as anti-government organisations (USAID 2017), in an attempt to “intimidate and silence human rights defenders, journalists, members of political opposition, and others” (Human Rights Watch 2016). For instance, in 2016 the office of the Centre for Training and Human Development was raided twice. In the latter raid, NISS arrested everyone in the office. Most of them were release on bail, however two of the senior staff were detained for six months based on criminal charges for publishing false information. The charges which could have resulted in tough sentences like death penalty or life imprisonment, were dropped later (Nuba Reports 2016; USAID 2017). In addition, the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Degradation was also raided and shut down in 2009. It was reported that the staff faced detention and ill-treatment for a few months after the raid. Mohamed Badawi, who worked there said that “What is happening now is an extension to the closure of space for civil society groups in Sudan, especially those working on human rights. Civil society is moving towards living in a big prison” (Nuba Reports 2016: 1).

Similarly, four NGOs leaders were stopped by security officials at Khartoum Airport on their way to a high-level human rights meeting at the United Nations in Geneva in 2016 (Human Rights Watch 2016). According to the Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations (CSCSO)<sup>3</sup>, they have received 28 reports about state's violations against NGOs in Sudan in the first quarter of 2016 only, ranging between detention, closure and confiscation. In an interview with CIVICUS<sup>4</sup>, Abdelrahman Elmahdi, a prominent civil society activist and the director of SUDIA mentioned that: "The degradation and contraction of civil society space in Sudan is unprecedented. Civil society organisations are being routinely closed and leaders are increasingly being subjected to harassment and detention by security forces" (Elmahdi 2015).

A key problem with the VHWA is that it states that all NGOs' assets would belong to HAC whenever the NGO shuts down, whether or not closed by HAC. NGOs consider this an unfair term that makes them feel insecure about their resources (ICNL 2015). Additionally, the privileges offered to NGOs under the Sudanese law are considered narrow in scope and restrictive in nature. It is also found to be discriminatory and in favour of GONGOs, who get most of the benefits (ICNL 2015). For instance, NGOs are exempted from taxes and customs on imported products. However, the process to access these privileges is long and complicated; as the NGO would need to get the approval of the Minister of Finance and National Economy, which is only granted upon recommendation from the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs (ICNL 2015).

As mentioned earlier, HAC deals with foreign NGOs with high suspicion, therefore imposes further restrictions on them. International NGOs are required by law to implement all their projects jointly with national NGOs. These local partners are commonly GONGOs that are named by HAC. This leads to a lot of funds wasting, as these GONGOs are usually

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<sup>3</sup> CSCSO is an "informal coalition of independent CSOs working to safeguard its members and strengthen their capacities in realising a democratic community with good governance in Sudan through innovative approaches to capacity building, advocacy and networking" Elmahdi (2015: 1).

<sup>4</sup> CIVICUS is a "global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world" CIVICUS (2018: 1).

inexperienced and ineffective (ICNL 2015). The law also requires international organisations to add one of HAC members to its board of directors, in an explicit attempt to co-opt NGOs. Moreover, the Act also requires international organisations to sign a country agreement that covers all these laws and regulations and directives, in order to grant them entry into Sudan and conduct activities therein. Furthermore, they are required to sign technical agreements with HAC for each of their projects to get approvals to implement it.

On the national level, all NGOs are also required to sign technical agreements for their projects. A tool that HAC uses to stop the project that they do not like (Abbas 2017). In addition, NGOs are not allowed to receive any funding without getting HAC's approval. All approvals are granted based on intelligence and security views, rather than technical views (Abdelgayoum 2009; ICNL 2015). Funding restrictions impose various risks on NGOs sustainability (Adeeb 2017). Another restriction on NGOs, which applies for both national and international organisation, is that they need to get security permits for their members to access different states within Sudan. They are often denied access to conflict areas in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states (Abdel-Ati 2012).

Considering all the aforementioned difficulties, it is evident that the VHWA needs to be cancelled or at least reviewed. This act gives unjustified power to HAC and implies unnecessary restraints on NGOs. Civil society activists and human rights lawyers have conducted various forums calling for a new law, based on the fact that the current act conflicts with Sudan's Interim National Constitution of 2005 (Adeeb 2017; Dabanga 2017). In fact, the government has been working on a new law. A draft of the Organisation of Voluntary and Humanitarian Affairs Bill was introduced in 2016 to replace the VHWA of 2006. Disturbingly, the draft shows much more restrictions on NGOs, as it propagates all the problems of the 2006 Act (USAID 2017). The Commissioner of HAC has reportedly stated in a public forum that the new law is being formulated as a result of NGOs misconducts (Sudan Times 2017). Leaders of the CSCSO and other civil society groups have repeatedly expressed their deep concerns about the new law, indicating that the civil society was not allowed to be part of the law making process (Dabanga 2017; Sudan Times 2017; Ali 2018).

Surviving in such harsh circumstances is not an easy job. Civil society activists recognise that there is much for NGOs in terms of advocating and lobbying to ease the tension and create a healthier environment for their operations. Yet, there is a lot for the international community to do. Political and diplomatic actions should be taken to place pressure on the government of Sudan and to protect the civil society members, as well as providing capacity building opportunities for civil society leaders (Elmahdi 2015), “we further ask the international community to increase support for national CSOs that work on human and civil rights and good governance” (Abdel-Ati 2012: 1). Furthermore, political solutions cannot be substituted and political reform should be pursued besides the development programmes; all civil society components will have to coordinate and work together to achieve this (Macrae et al. 1997).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed secondary data in relation to development NGOs operation in Sudan under the current authoritarian regime. Indicators disclose consistent deterioration of Sudan’s economic and political situation. In such tough conditions, there is a lot for NGOs and the civil society in general to do. Although civil society has existed in Sudan since the early 1900s, it has faced serious challenges under the current regime. The government’s main tool to control NGOs is HAC, which operates under the VHWA of 2006. Evidently, HAC and its laws enforce excessive control and restrictions on all aspects of NGOs operations, including registration, funding, projects approval, members’ movement and assets ownership. Additionally, HAC has absolute powers in dissolving NGOs and halting their operations. As a result, many NGOs were closed and expelled for no legitimate reasons, and NGOs members were constantly harassed and unlawfully detained. Given all these severe concerns, civil society activists have been calling for improvements in the law to create a better environment. Whilst NGOs and other CSOs must start acting and lobbying to enhance the situation, the support of the international community is highly needed.

## **Chapter 4: Stories from the Field**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter is dedicated to the findings and analysis of the primary data that has been collected by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The primary data collection methodology was specified in details in the first chapter of this research. As mentioned, the data was collected from Sudan using informal and unstructured interviews. The findings from the interviews are laid out in six categories, based on the interviewees' background. Additionally, the researcher's personal observations will be presented.

### **4.2 National NGOs Perspectives**

National NGOs in Sudan have existed as organisations with modern structures since the 1970s (Bilal 2005). Their numbers have been increasing until the separation of South Sudan in 2011. According to *NGO1*, ever since then NGOs numbers have been declining as a result of the government's tough grip, as well as the decrease of the ODA funding. *NGO1* stated: "of course many NGOs would decide to shut down and suspend their operation. HAC makes it very difficult for you to operate, almost impossible!". Both *NGO1* and *NGO3* agreed that the bizarre requirements of HAC inundate NGO staff with numerous amounts of unnecessary paperwork to get permits for every single step, "soon, they will require us to get permits before we breathe!" said *NGO3*.

It seems to be very confusing to deal with the authorities, as officials have different opinions and follow different regulations. It is claimed that HAC officials on provincial levels seem to be more cooperative and less restrictive, in comparison with federal officials. *NGO2* argued that HAC federal officials are more cautious of NGOs for political reasons, whilst provincials are concerned about where the NGOs activities are implemented, as they expect them to target their own localities/tribes/etc. *NGO3* claimed that they spend so much time and resources in getting their way through and making sure they have all the required permits for

their projects to go relatively smoothly, except that the weak governmental institutions and the vague regulations make it very difficult, “it is all one big mess!” she concluded.

The vague procedures by HAC leave a wide room for corruption. Some NGOs would just decide to “buy their way out” said *NGO1*, to save both time and resources. *NGO2* claimed this is a common practice in some of the big international NGOs, as the delays in their programmes are very expensive. Most of the NGOs refuse to engage in this, albeit how often it happens; *NGO2* said: “I would never do something like this, not my NGO. What is our value as NGOs and civil society if we lost our principles? How can we have anti-corruption projects, and get it approved with bribery? That’s ridiculous!”. *NGO1 and NGO2* said that they had to cancel projects in many cases, where the permits were extremely delayed by HAC and the donors could not wait and asked for the projects to be suspended.

Persistence and flexibility are the only ways to stand out in such a harsh context. The interviewees said that they developed their strategies to be able to exist and adhere to their mandates. The government allows certain types of basic service provision work, but anything that would raise people’s awareness is rejected. *NGO3* said: “the government wants us to build schools and dig wells. But informing people about their rights as humans is forbidden”. NGOs go around these restrictions by implementing sensitive activities, within service provision projects. They all agreed that the government thinks of development as service provision only, anything else is politics. The organisation of *NGO2* was suspended for almost a year for engaging in human rights monitoring activities, “they said our work is political. I went to HAC’s office every day until I was allowed to meet the Commissioner, I asked him to explain what they mean by political and offered to explain what development is and how all the activities conducted actually fall within our mandate. He didn’t want to have that conversation and said our registration will not be renewed. I didn’t give up and kept knocking on their doors every day, until they renewed our registration”. *NGO1* stated: “They [government] are so sensitive about human rights and public policy issues, it is a red line. We really live in an undeclared state of emergence!”.

According to the interviewees, the main obstacles facing national NGOs in Sudan can be summarised as difficulties related to HAC and the NGOs law, funding issues, security-related issues, corruption and incompetency of the government institutions. However, all of them were explicit in criticising the NGO sector in Sudan. They agreed that regardless of the harsh conditions, NGOs own shortcomings prevent them from fully utilising the space. *NGO2* said: “We should do better. NGOs need to have more collaboration and coordinate their work. We also need to get better at advocating and lobbying for our issues”. It is clear that NGOs need to work on their capacities as organisations and enhance their strategies. Nonetheless, they are confident that their existence is vital, *NGO3* said: “Regardless of anything, NGOs are the ones who are providing services in Sudan. If NGOs don’t have an effective role in development in Sudan, who does?”.

### **4.3 International NGOs Perspectives**

International NGOs might have more funding and stronger organisations that would help them be more effective. Nonetheless, the government thinks of them as spies and treats them with great suspicion, thus imposes extra restrictions on them. *INGO1* and *INGO2* both agreed that HAC controls them by interfering in every single detail of their work. *INGO1* claims: “We are labelled by nature, therefore the government gives us a very hard time. Not only we do have to sign an endless number of agreements with HAC, they also interfere in our decision making and in our staff recruitment. They force us to work with GONGOs in most of our projects”. *INGO2* emphasised what some of the national NGOs said. He argued that GONGOs waste their resources due to their incompetency and internal corruption. *INGO1* added that they are also required to partner with ministries and other governmental institutions. Although they work on building their capacities as part of their programmes, these institutions are exceptionally weak and sinking in corruption. *INGO1* and *INGO2* equally agreed that there are serious corruption risks, especially that HAC officials blackmails them sometimes.

*INGO2* claimed that they invest enormous amounts of resources on continuously monitoring the political climate and analysing the changes, and act accordingly. They

developed a security mitigation system to avoid risks. She thinks that most of the NGOs do not do enough in this regards and end up getting in troubles with the government. Adding “We are always keeping our eyes open, and decide on which programmes to carry on with according to the current context. There were so many occasions where we deferred all our operations and kept a low profile until the conditions enhanced”. Additionally, *INGOI* said that they identify governmental partners that are more cooperative and less strict to partner with. He said, “One big trap that NGOs in Sudan fall into is considering that all governmental entities are a homogenous group, this assumption could not be more wrong. Identifying the right governmental partners is an important breakthrough for every organisation and would open doors for opportunities”. *INGOI* added that they have been working on empowering the civil society in Sudan but they have not succeeded due to the current government, “It is a vicious circle; an oppressive regime would lead to a weak civil society, and having a weak civil society means that the oppressive regime will remain longer in power”.

Meanwhile they both agreed that they often manage to find their ways through, *INGOI* and *INGO2* stated that it is not an easy job. *INGOI* stated that measuring the impact of the government restrictions on development programmes can be difficult, but it is evident that the operational difficulties negatively affect the programmes output and cause massive waste of resources. Furthermore, both *INGOI* and *INGO2* agreed that NGOs development programmes in Sudan are to some extent superficial and not sustainable, as NGOs cannot operate freely. *INGO2* said: “We spend so much time and efforts overcoming government obstacles. It is a real struggle that we work through every day. Our lives could have been way easier with a different government”. Despite the hardships and struggles, international NGOs believe that their presence in Sudan is makes a difference in peoples’ lives. “It is all worth it. We might not see huge immediate impacts, but we are investing in the time yet to come!” said *INGOI*.

#### **4.4 Civil Society Perspectives**

There seem to be a consensus opinion among civil society activists. They believe that none of the issues related to civil society or development in Sudan can be solved without a



substantial political solution. *CS1* and *CS2* agreed that development NGOs cannot isolate themselves from the political change process. *CS1* said: “Many of the development NGOs think that they could focus only on developmental programmes. It might not be their core mandate, but political change is definitely one of their core needs. The whole civil society needs to start working together to change this regime, everything else could be fixed afterwards”. On the other hand, the regime accuses NGOs for being politicised and becoming tools for political parties. Civil society activists do admit that many of the political parties’ leaders are active with the NGOs, but this is mainly because the regime allows a little more space for NGOs than it does for political parties. *CS2*: “The government harshly cracks down on political parties. It is only normal that some of the political activists would then become active with NGOs to have a role in the community in a more flexible sector. We all have the right to hold political opinions, it is not an excuse to place more restrictions on civil society”.

Notably, NGOs and civil society in Sudan lack advocacy skills. As a result, NGOs lack public support which makes them very fragile. There are only few campaigns that the civil society was successful in advocating and mobilising the public for. *CS2*: “There are always issues in Sudan that we need to lobby and advocate for. Everyday there is a new horrific story that needs action, but the civil society lacks the skills. There is not enough coordination among CSOs and NGOs”. Nevertheless, the civil society campaigns have improved to some extent, with the use of social media, “Social media has provided us with a safe platform to advocate for our campaigns. A very recent and successful one was the campaign to save Noura Hussein<sup>5</sup> from death. It worked well and we had an incredible outreach” said *CS2*. Coupled with coordination, NGOs need training and support to improve their advocacy capacity and enhance their social media use. *CS2* added: “We do not have to tackle the big issues in Sudan as a whole; every time we organise a successful campaign, we win a small battle that contributes to fixing the bigger issues and motivates us to keep working”. Both *CS1* and *CS2* agreed that the civil society should collaborate urgently to act against the new humanitarian and voluntary work law, as a matter of priority.

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<sup>5</sup> Noura Hussien is a Sudanese girl that was forced into marriage at the age of 16 and was later sentenced with death penalty for killing her husband after he raped her. The death sentence was overturned after a strong international campaign, led by the civil society (Amnesty 2018).

## 4.5 Academia Perspective

Academia is considered to be quite a neglected field in Sudan. *AC1* and *AC2* complained that they are not only ignored by the government, but also by the civil society. NGOs do not have much collaborations with researchers and academics, thus there are very few studies about NGOs in Sudan. According to *AC1*: “NGOs and the wider civil society do not adequately realise the importance of research. There are not enough studies about NGOs, their operations and their sustainability in Sudan. They could make use of research that would produce recommendations for their work”. Studies about NGOs roles and missed opportunities are highly needed, as *AC2* said: “It seems that NGOs have found comfort in the victim seat, where they are calling out on the government and not acting upon it, they do not work on finding breakthroughs. Some of the governmental bodies, like governmental universities and research centres, are relatively cooperative and NGOs would benefit from partnering with them; instead of taking a corner and entirely boycotting all governmental institutions”. Moreover, *AC2* stated that most of NGOs development programmes are not efficient as they are based on inaccurate data provided by the authorities. *AC1* raised the point that, as a result of NGOs weaknesses, a big number of voluntary youth-led groups emerged and have been very successful in implementing great development projects, “These youth movements have had good achievements. They are mostly unregistered to avoid the harassment and control of HAC, but this will cause strategic and organisational issues” added *AC1*.

Notably, the interviewed academics are somewhat critical of NGOs. They claim that although the government is filling development roads with obstructions, NGOs have several internal deficiencies that prevent them from functioning properly. *AC2*: “NGOs all around the world have fallen in a lot of traps, all these issues are amplified in Sudan. Sudanese NGOs have major issues of sustainability, in terms of their own survival as organisations and the impact of their programmes. What is more is that they have drifted from the grassroots they claim to represent and tend to prioritise the donors needs rather than the beneficiaries’ needs”. *AC1* argued that despite that many NGOs started to realise their shortcomings, they have not done any noticeable reforms to improve, “If this regime leaves power right now and NGOs became free, they will still not be able to operate effectively unless they address their own internal

issues". Both *AC1* and *AC2* suggested that NGOs should refer more to academia and hire consultants to identify their gaps and find solutions. "More collaboration with research centre and academics would be very useful for NGOs. They need to listen to us more often!" added *AC2*. Finally, *AC1* concluded by saying that NGOs and the civil society need to put their efforts together to improve as a sector, as that would improve the whole country and added the following quote: "Civil society is the context and substance from which a healthy state emerges" (Beauclerk et al. 2011: 12).

## 4.6 GONGOs Perspectives

There is a big number of NGOs in Sudan that are founded by the government or at least associated with it. They receive huge funds from the government or from international NGOs under the influence of HAC (Abbas 2017; USAID 2017). Whilst the civil society claims that GONGOs get it all easy, it seems like GONGOs do not agree. *GONGO1* claimed they face difficulties in their operations too, "Our projects are often delayed as a result of delays in permits and other paper work by HAC. These delays cost us a lot of money and we do not get compensated for that". However, *GONGO1* said that they rely on personal connections in getting their work done, "If a permit is taking too long, I would eventually call someone at HAC or the ministry [Ministry of Social Welfare] and that usually works. We cannot just wait!". She also admitted that they do not have funding problems, "We usually have sufficient funds to run our projects; our NGO has not faced a similar problem".

*GONGO1* does not seem to approve of the NGOs classification based on political affiliation, "Some people tend to label our organisation as a governmental organisation, which is not accurate. We are non-governmental, but we are also not against the government! We are neutral and all NGOs should be neutral" added *GONGO1*. Notwithstanding, *GONGO1* admitted that dealing with governmental bodies is difficult and complicated. She suggested that this is a result of the incompetency of these bodies. "Governmental institution have good intentions in most cases but they lack the know-how. That is why we end up having some conflicts with them". *GONGO1* believes that the conflict between NGOs and the government

in Sudan is solvable. “The government is not fundamentally against NGOs, but we seem to have different priorities and that is why our relationship is not at its best. We have approached HAC several times to ask them to set the development priorities and then we can follow it, but they did not”. Then she added: “Many NGOs have actually shut down because of HAC difficulties. The government should lead the efforts in creating a healthy environment because they have the power and authority to do this”.

#### **4.7 Government Perspectives**

Governmental officials, who are part of HAC, seem to have a unified opinion on NGOs. Both *GOV1* and *GOV2* claimed that the government does not have a fundamental issue with NGOs, rather with their unauthorised activities. They also said the law is created to organise NGOs work and to make it more efficient. *GOV1* said: “The law is created to support NGOs. As long as they follow, things will go smoothly. Unfortunately, they seem to continuously breach the terms”. *GOV2* argued that everything has to be regulated and NGOs have laws everywhere, “Even the developed countries have regulations for NGOs, this is how it is supposed to work”, then he added: “What do NGOs expect? This country has a government that is responsible for everything within it, we are only doing our job”. *GOV2* shared the same view and justified the strict regulation: “There is a lot of international interest in Sudan. We also have some conflicts ongoing in the country. We have to be conscious of this and make sure we know what is happening on our own land. The security of the country and its people is our priority, Sudan’s security is a red line”.

The Sudanese government officials believe that NGOs are heavily politicised. They believe that NGOs are often used by certain parties to serve political agenda. *GOV2* said: “We are aware that NGOs are being used by political parties, we have our ways to find out about such activities and we are right to stop it”. As for international NGOs, they are also believed to have agenda. “Foreign organisations have good projects, but we have to closely monitor them. No one would go to another country merely to help, they all have agendas. We are a country of full sovereignty, we will not allow foreigners in to operate freely without

monitoring, many of them are here to spy and serve Western agenda”. *GOVI* concluded by saying: “We are very supportive and cooperative. We are happy for national and international NGOs to contribute to the development of Sudan. However, they all have to follow the rules, stick to development work and stay away from politics. Whoever wants to be political should join a political party, not an NGO. We have to be strict to control and protect our country, otherwise it will be chaos”.

#### **4.8 Researcher’s Observations**

It is incredibly clear that there is a serious lack of communication and coordination between NGOs amongst themselves, with other civil society components and with the government. Additionally, whilst all interviewees were interested in giving their insight, NGOs interviewees spoke with more passion and had endless stories to support all the points they raised. Government officials were quite conservative when speaking, yet expressed interest in having more conversations about their relationship with NGOs. Generally, there seemed to be no differentiation between development NGOs and other types of NGOs among the NGO sector in Sudan. Another interesting point is that most of the interviewees expressed similar views, with the exception of government officials. Finally, the interviews were long and multi-dimensional, the perspectives above are an attempt to reflect the summary of the interviewees’ opinions.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a collection of stories collected from the field in Sudan. The stories aimed to represent the views of people involved with NGOs and development in Sudan. Interviewees from national NGOs expressed that the Sudanese regime, particularly HAC, have constantly imposed regulations that restrict NGOs operations and affect their impact and sustainability. Moreover, international NGOs face extra control by HAC as they are always accused for having agenda. However, international NGOs seem to be more efficient as they

keep monitoring the political climate and plan their operations accordingly. The wider civil society is equally targeted by the Sudanese regime and facing extreme hostility. CSOs in Sudan have been working on improving the environment and expanding the space allowed by the regime, yet their advocacy skills are quite limited so they could not achieve much. Moreover, NGOs work in Sudan is very much affected by lack of research. Academics believe that NGOs do not conduct enough studies that would guide their operations in Sudan. There are many NGOs in Sudan that are affiliated with the government. Although these GONGOs do admit that the government restricts their work, they justify by it lack of adequate coordination. On the other side, the government claims that they are right to control NGOs to protect the country's stability and sovereignty.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter will provide a summary of this research findings from the analysed secondary data, the collected primary data, as well as the researcher's observations. Based on the study findings and results, a number of recommendations will be proposed as a practical outcome of this study.

### **5.1 Research Conclusion**

This research has shown that the role of development NGOs in authoritarian States is outstandingly difficult. NGOs in authoritarian States have crucial roles, yet their existence is consistently challenged. Authoritarian regimes disfavour NGOs, as they represent independent centres of power. Historically, NGOs have been in the frontlines of human rights protection, which is a threat to authoritarian rulers. Consequently, NGO-State relationships in authoritarian States are usually very tense. It is evident that authoritarian regimes follow a range of strategies and tactics to control NGOs and monitor them. These strategies include complex registration procedure, co-option and dissolution. Nevertheless, NGOs have developed resilience and survival skills to operate in harsh political environments.

The case study of Sudan shows extreme levels of hostility by the regime against NGOs and other civil society components. The regime, which has been in power for about three decades so far, has used a mix of strategies to crack down on NGOs depending on the situation. The HAC is undoubtedly a tool to control, monitor and suppress NGOs. With HAC being fully controlled by NISS, it has absolute powers and authorities. Studies have shown a countless number of NGO staff harassment by HAC. NGOs face unnecessary difficulties and complication in the registration process. Furthermore, they are required to get permissions for each step of their operations, including projects proposals, funding sources and staff movement between different regions. Many NGOs have reported unjustified delays on their annual registration renewal, taking up to several months. Additionally, various NGOs were

permanently shut down by HAC without any justification or for reasons that were considered invalid by NGOs. Moreover, studies have revealed that a lot of NGOs members were harassed, detained and charged with sentences up to the death penalty for their involvement in human rights violations monitoring. It is recognised that the main obstacle set against NGOs by the regime in Sudan is the NGOs law of 2006. Not only is the law tremendously strict, but it also gives HAC and the Commissioner absolute powers in suppressing NGOs. What is worse is that the government is in the process of formulating a new law that is considered to be harsher, without allowing the civil society to part and have input in this process. Besides, the CSOSI (USAID 2017) and ICNL (ICNL 2018) show that the political environment in Sudan is one of the harshest environments for NGOs operation worldwide. Understandably, indexes and publications by international institutions stress that the situation in Sudan is dwindling in all aspects whether economic, political or social. In such circumstances, the role of development NGOs becomes exceptionally crucial. Ironically, the government of Sudan became further strict in this light of this deterioration, fearing a potential civil uprisings.

The collected data explicitly shows the aggression of Sudan's regimes against NGOs and other CSOs. The stories of the people in the development field in Sudan reflect the hardships and struggles they go through every day. National NGOs are classified by HAC into a pro-government group and an anti-government group. The latter group, also the larger, is continuously harassed and strictly monitored by the regime. Members of these NGOs have repeatedly emphasised that HAC only makes their work difficult. Oddly, even the GONGOS which are known for their close relations with the regime and its leadership, have stated that HAC processes are time-wasting and pointless in most cases; this only shows how extremely strict the Sudanese regime is. Furthermore, the situation in Sudan is considered more difficult for international organisations, given that they are inevitably labelled as foreign spies serving Western agenda. HAC does not only monitor international NGOs, but also interferes in their work by assigning a HAC member on their boards of directors as well as obliging them to partner with GONGOS. Whilst the government officials did not deny the strictness of the law and regulations, they justified it by stating that their priority is the country's security and sovereignty.



The opinions investigated in this study have covered a diverse range of civil society figures, as well as government officials. Whereas they generally agreed on the aggression of the regime, there were clear gaps in communication within civil society components and with the government. Although many of the civil society leaders, particularly the academics, have visions to improve the situation in Sudan, their ideas are not communicated through. Moreover, NGOs are suffering from various internal issues that are not necessarily caused by the regime. Additionally, NGOs do not have adequate advocacy and campaigning skills and have become quite disconnected from the public in Sudan. As a result, NGOs and the whole civil society in Sudan became weak and fragile, struggling to act as a counterbalance to the government's power. However, it is acknowledged that repression of the current regime makes it very hard for NGOs to address these issues and find solutions. Having said this, NGOs in Sudan have proven to have a considerable and vital role in the development field despite all the internal and external challenges, particularly with the absence of the government's role in services provision.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The recommendations below are proposed to the Sudanese civil society, as well as the international community involved in development in Sudan; given that they have interest in improving the environment for development NGOs operations.

- In order for NGOs and the civil society as a whole to function better, the international community should support the Sudanese civil society in forming proactive and effective networks and alliances. These networks would act as a mean of communication between different civil society components, resulting in a more unified and stronger sector.
- NGOs cannot act as a powerful counterbalance without engaging with the public and mobilising them. Therefore, it is recommended for NGOs to enhance their advocacy skills and build their campaigning capacities.

- For NGOs to have a more effective role, they must fully understand and analyse the context they are operating in, keep up-to-date with the fluctuating conditions and identifying the potential breakthroughs whenever they surface. To achieve this, NGOs are advised to invest in collaborations with research centres and academics to conduct periodic studies and assessments. These studies should particularly focus on assessing the political situation in Sudan, as well as producing more credible data and statistics regarding the economy.
- The NGO-State relationships in Sudan are quite complicated. However, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a good opportunity and platform to engage the government and NGOs in joint activities. In particular, goal number 17 calls for partnerships for the SDGs, NGOs can seek to partner with appropriate governmental bodies under this goal, given that the Sudanese governments signed on the SDGs as a member of the United Nations and is obligated to it accordingly.

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# Appendix A

## Sample of the Interviewees' Consent Form

### Consent Form

#### Research Title

The Role of Development NGOs in The Context of Authoritarian Regimes: Case Study of Sudan

#### Aim of the Research

This study will aim to find answers to the following question: To what extent are NGOs able to contribute to the development of a country under an authoritarian regime?

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of Development NGOs in Sudan, considering the context of the authoritarian regime governing the country for the past three decades.

#### Consent

I have read and understood the attached information sheet giving details of the research. I had the opportunity to ask the researcher questions that I had about the research and involvement in it and I understand my role in the respective research.

My decision to consent is entirely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that the data gathered in this research will be used for academic purposes. I understand that my name will not be used in the research report and that every effort will be made to protect my confidentiality. Based on this, I agree to take part in this study.

Interviewee's name:..... Date:..... Signature:.....

Researcher's name:..... Date:..... Signature:.....