

The Double Face of Privatization: Outsourcing Governmental Water Supply in Khartoum

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In the framework of neoliberal reform programs promoted by the Sudanese government since the beginning of the 1990s[1], privatization policies were introduced to the governmental body responsible for water management in Khartoum since 2001. Privatization, which can be defined as the “transfer of ownership or management responsibility” from the public to the private sector (Bakker 2003: 7), was particularly enhanced in order to increase the efficiency of the water supply system. While the privatization of the governmental water supply body itself has so far only been discursively touched on, several parts of the governmental water supply system were in recent years outsourced to private companies, such as water fee collection, well drilling, and water network replacement, maintenance and installation.

However, due to the lack of an adequate control system, the outsourcing of parts of the water supply system was implemented on the basis of family-based, friendship-based, and/or profit-based relationships between parts of the responsible governmental staff and private companies. Instead of enhancing the efficiency of governmental water supply in Khartoum, an “uncontrolled” implementation of privatization thus led to an increase of corruptive practices and of mismanagement in governmental water supply. Due to specific relationships, private companies were paid for services which they in some cases did not accurately provide. In the words of one employee of the governmental water supply body, “the companies stole our money”. [2] Most of the privatized companies are thereby managed by members of the Sudanese political and economic elite who are closely affiliated to the government. Suliman (2007: 2) therefore assumes that privatization policies in Sudan were used to increase the economic and political power of the ruling party. The case study of the Manara water supply project in the Northwest of Greater Khartoum will outline these logics in further detail.

Bibliography

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Suliman, O. (2007), *Current Privatization Policy in Sudan*, The William Davidson Institute, Policy Brief # 52.

[1] The “Sudan’s Structural Adjustment Policies” which explicitly consider privatization as a key to economic growth were launched by the Sudanese government in 1990 without any direct interference of the World Bank or the IMF (Musa 2000: 42). Privatization policies were adopted in order to enhance economic activities, to increase efficiency and to release the financial burden of the government which suffered from severe budget shortages. Interview with the former federal Minister

of Finance Abdurahim Hamdi, Khartoum, 8/2/10.

[2] Personal communication, Khartoum, November 2009.