Oil development in the Sudan: Managing a tipping point between planned and catastrophic transformation

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Current trends of global oil systems’ drivers present a unique opportunity for transformation associated with a set of new challenges to people and places in plural developing oil-exporting societies such as the Sudan. These challenges are likelihood to increase and intensify stresses in the Sudan’s social, economical, political and environmental systems. If these challenges are not comprehensively addressed, catastrophic local or national collapses could occur, triggering undesirable regional and or global spillover. Desirable transformations could occur only by fostering changes in the core values underlying drivers of, interactions and feedbacks between models and policies of development. This requires a resilience framework that envisions links between global, national and a local lens, integrates human and national capital, fosters a culture of political consensus and accountability, builds trust and encourages a transparent partnership between all stakeholders, fosters economic and investor diversifications, and fosters public participation and polycentrism in making decisions.

Global oil drivers center on seven key variables: oil reserve, capital, economics, politics, security, science and technology, environment. Local concerns center on seven key variables: poverty, growth, conflicts, corruption, human rights, pollution, human health, transparency, accountability, wealth and power sharing. A resilience framework could link these global and local lenses to attain a just and desirable oil development and policies. The recent oil experience of the Sudan shows how resilience thinking improves the understanding of the linkages between these lenses and provides a basis for developing strategies to navigate the transformation. Thereby, the Sudan may minimize and/or avoid undesirable scenarios and attain a just and desirable oil development and policies. Attaining the latter would present the Sudan as a model for oil export from plural societies in 21st century.