SUDANESE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ONGOING PEACE PROCESSES
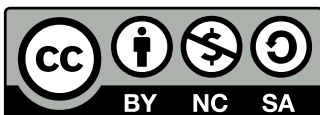
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sudanese people have witnessed a rapid deterioration in their safety, security and welfare since the outbreak of war in Sudan on 15 April 2023. Essential services such as healthcare, education, and electricity and water supply have been severely disrupted. The conflict has had a heavy impact on activists and human rights defenders. Many have lost their livelihoods and sources of income, and been displaced internally or forced to flee to neighbouring countries. The impact on women activists has been particularly evident.

Just as the Sudanese women's movement was beginning to reclaim space and assert its presence in the public sphere, the war stood in the way of their meaningful political participation once more. Displacement and the increased risk of conflict-related violence have restricted the ability of women to engage in political processes, further perpetuating their exclusion. The lack of representation of women in the processes intended to shape the future of the country prevents inclusive and sustainable solutions.

In the light of these challenges, Adeela Youth Organization for Art and Culture and International IDEA organized a consultative meeting in Kampala, Uganda on 17 and 18 January 2024, to examine the status of women's movements in the aftermath of war and their contributions to peacebuilding. The aim of this event was to provide a space for women's organizations to discuss emerging issues related to peacebuilding and women's participation in ongoing peace processes. It also served as a platform to engage on advocacy strategies.

The meeting was attended by 26 participants from different regions representing various entities, such as political parties, armed groups, civil society organizations, international organizations, grassroots structures, activists and journalists. Among the participating bodies were: the Darfur Women's Forum, Women Against War, SORD, No to Women's Oppression, the United States Institute for Peace, Nuweida, Taqaddum, Mothers of Sudan and the Kassala Women's Platform.

Key discussion points

- The war in Sudan has exacted a heavy toll on the Sudanese people, and women and girls are being disproportionately affected. There is an urgent need for targeted interventions to address the particular needs of women and girls. Equally important is the need to ensure that the diverse perspectives of women and girls across the country shape current and future interventions and peace processes.

- Grassroots structures, including women's and youth organizations, continue to emerge as unsung heroes providing essential services and advocating for peace. Their courage and resilience highlight the vital role of local actors in responding to humanitarian crises and dealing with the economic and social fallout from the war.

- The exclusion of critical voices from key peacebuilding processes casts a shadow over the commitment to inclusion and a diversity of perspectives and interests. Addressing this challenge will be essential to restoring public trust.

- The lack of transparency and poor communication breed disillusionment and erode public trust. To restore confidence in the peace coalitions and advance the prospects for a lasting peace in Sudan, meaningful engagement with diverse stakeholders, transparent decision-making processes and open communication will be essential.

INTRODUCTION

Sudan's long history of protracted conflicts and poor governance continues to devastate the country politically, economically and socially. The 2018 revolution, which brought an end to the Inqaz regime, ushered in a new era of hope; this era would not have been possible without the outsize role that women and girls from all walks of life continue to play. A sustainable peace and advancing women's rights were top of the transitional government's list of priorities but neither materialized.

Although Sudanese women are glorified for their part in the 2018 revolution, they are also often regarded as cheerleaders playing auxiliary roles rather than equal actors and revolutionaries in their own right. Thus, women's legitimate demands are framed as attempts to 'advance agendas' that deflect attention from 'important issues'. Categorizing women's priorities and demands as 'less important or inconsequential' further entrenches patriarchal values and reinforces factors that subvert women's rights.

Despite the lack of political will to prioritize the perspectives, needs and interests of women and girls, the transitional period saw an opening up of civic space. This provided a small window of opportunity to ensure that women were part and parcel of all decision-making processes could advance meaningful reform through: (a) the 40 per cent quota stipulated in the Constitutional Document; (b) the gendering of the Constitution, which culminated in the development of a comprehensive document; (c) the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and (d) legal reforms. Had these been implemented, the various gains would have had an impact on the status of women and girls and enhanced their political participation.

The few gains that were made during the transitional period were slowly reversed following the coup and the small democratic space that women and youth occupied shrank significantly. The outbreak of war on 15 April 2023 has

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had a further deleterious effect on the situation of women and girls. Since the war erupted, there has been a consolidation of male hegemony. According to one workshop participant: 'they [men] started the war, so they think they are the only ones who can end it'.

The predicament of women and girls was already precarious prior to 15 April 2023, particularly for women from conflict-affected areas. However, events since then have ushered in a wave of new challenges across the country, starkly illustrating the gendered impacts of the conflict.

Chapter 1
A WAR AGAINST WOMEN

1.1. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Care work and loss of livelihoods

The burden of unpaid care work falls predominantly on women and girls. However, the war has exacerbated the situation for reasons linked to the hosting of large families, resulting in overcrowding and strained resources, as well as the loss of support networks and the heightened demand for care that followed the disruption of healthcare and education services. As a result, women have found themselves shouldering a heavier care burden, which has taken a toll on their bodies as well as their mental health.

Loss of savings and livelihoods

The ongoing war has decimated livelihoods. Entire industries have crumbled, infrastructure has been destroyed and workers have been displaced. Jobs in the formal sector have been lost, civil servants have gone unpaid for months on end and there has been a massive expansion in the informal sector. As a result, the loss of livelihoods continues to be an enduring challenge, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.

Looting of banks, markets and homes occurred in the very early days of the war, leaving the majority of those affected, particularly women, to face a double blow. The disruption of economic activities has meant that families and individuals are deprived of their primary sources of income, and are depleting their savings to sustain themselves and to escape war-torn areas, while also navigating the ordeals of displacement. The loss of financial security further exacerbates the challenge of rebuilding lives.

Employment prospects have been limited and working in new or different contexts has proved a huge challenge, particularly for women. Where women

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were previously able to access work mostly in the informal sector, they have had to grapple with various challenges linked to the volatile security situation and the risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which further restrict women's already limited mobility. In addition, emergency laws curtail movement and productivity as working hours are increasingly restricted, and there has been a resurgence of oppressive tactics as the security apparatus harasses working women, which is reminiscent of the practices seen under the previous regime.

In Darfur and Kordofan, the majority of smallholder farmers and farm labourers are women, and they have had to contend with new realities. Preparations were under way for the upcoming planting season when the war broke out. Displacement and the volatility of the situation have hindered the ability of women to tend to farms and heightened the risk of SGBV.

In Darfur, there have been reports of forced labour on farms owned by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Some women who were making their way to Chad were reportedly abducted and forced to work on the farms until harvest time. They were extorted for monthly payments in exchange for their security. Women who were able to harvest their parcels of land faced additional difficulties. Crops were looted or could not be sold due to the destruction of markets linked to the non-availability of cash. In addition, women engaged in economic exchange and cross-border trade with Chad and the Central African Republic saw their activities grind to a halt, which had a serious economic impact on women reliant on trade.

Despite these massive hurdles, Sudanese women across the country continue to mobilize through associations and grassroots networks to provide for their families and their communities.

Despite these massive hurdles, Sudanese women across the country continue to mobilize through associations and grassroots networks to provide for their families and their communities. The small businesses they have established fill service gaps and provide an inspiring model of impactful small-scale economies that will continue to be part of the future of Sudan.

Access to essential health services

The already fragile health system is in a state of disrepair. More than 70 per cent of hospitals in conflict-affected areas are out of commission (World Health Organization 2024). The toll of the conflict on sexual, reproductive and maternal health has been alarming. Women's access to lifesaving reproductive and maternal health services has been severely curtailed. Pregnant women have had to navigate treacherous landscapes and travel long distances to access medical care. In the event that they do reach a hospital, the lack of medical supplies puts their lives and their babies' lives in grave danger. Many expectant mothers have been unable to travel and had no choice but to deliver at home, which increases the risk or severity of complications. Moreover, the psychological toll of the war has affected pregnant women and expectant mothers, presenting significant challenges during and after delivery.

Another threat to women's health and mental well-being has been the inability of women and girls to access menstrual hygiene products. This shortage has been further compounded by the unavailability of water, sometimes for months on end.

Sexual and gender-based violence

Eleven months on [until the date of this workshop in January 2024], conflict-related sexual violence continues unabated. Harrowing accounts of SGBV continue to surface, from gang rape to sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, human trafficking, forced displacement, abduction and forced marriage, painting a grim picture of pervasive brutality. The use of SGBV as a 'weapon of war' is not new in Sudan and both conflict parties have a long track record of human rights violations that include a list of violations against women and girls, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains.

The true extent of this crisis is obscured by the scarcity of data, underreporting and the widespread fear of reprisals. In July 2023, the Unit for Combatting Violence Against Women verified at least 88 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, noting that only about 2 per cent of cases are reported (Insecurity Insight 2023). Since the outbreak of the war, the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) has documented and verified 244 cases of SGBV across the country (SIHA 2024). Similarly, a December 2023 report by the UN Panel of Experts indicated that 262 cases had been reported between April and August 2023 (Sudan War Monitor 2024).

Specialized SGBV services were already limited before the war. Where they do exist, access can be difficult. Victims and survivors of SGBV face significant challenges in accessing post-exposure antiviral medications, as well as contraception and abortion medication. The loss of support networks and safe spaces further compounds the challenges faced by victims and survivors.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), demand has surged for SGBV services in Sudan since 15 April 2023. An estimated 4.2 million individuals are in need of such services (UNOCHA 2023). The number of individuals specifically targeted for SGBV services has risen to 1.3 million, a staggering increase of over 900 per cent in heavily affected states. UN projections suggest that the number of people requiring SGBV services is expected to be 6.9 million in 2024 (UNOCHA 2023).

Despite reports from numerous sources and personal accounts, some political parties either remain silent on the issue or vehemently deny the existence of conflict-related SGBV. This denial stems from political calculations in which accusing the warring factions is seen as a contentious or potentially dangerous move. However, this only serves to absolve the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) of responsibility for these atrocities, and to perpetuate a cycle of impunity that could endure for decades to come.

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Child and forced marriage

Since the outbreak of the war, there has been an alarming increase in reports of forced marriage, including child marriage. This increase has been attributed to economic hardships and a fear of reprisals from the RSF if families resist. RSF soldiers offer financial incentives to families, exploiting the economic hardships precipitated by the war. The disruption to education, particularly for girls, heightens vulnerability and exposes girls to child marriage and other human rights abuses.

In regions of Sudan where the physical ravages of war have not reached, its social aftermath has left an indelible mark. Foreseeing the potential threats to their daughters' safety, families reluctantly opt to 'marry their daughters off'. Another pressing concern arises from entrenched social norms. Some families insist that their daughters are married before allowing them to escape the turmoil of war. However, this decision transcends mere norms.

The situation in temporary shelters, displacement and refugee camps is nothing short of dismal.

The situation of women in IDP and refugee camps

According to UNOCHA and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 70 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 90 per cent of refugees fleeing to Chad are women and children. The situation in temporary shelters, displacement and refugee camps is nothing short of dismal. Access to food, water and medical services is limited. The centres and camps are overcrowded and unhygienic, and women and girls face an increased risk of SGBV.

Displaced and refugee women have taken charge of managing life inside the IDP camps. They have established committees within the camps, as well as temporary shelters to provide support and protection for one another and to resolve conflicts between groups.

In refugee camps in Chad, women have formed psychosocial support groups to help women cope with the loss of family members, homes and property. They make handicrafts as a means of making a living. In addition, women are organizing to raise awareness among young women of how to protect themselves from sexual violence, and engaging in discussions with mothers on the consequences of child marriage.

There are people from all walks of life and ethnicities in the camps. Whereas in the past they might not have interacted, they now find themselves living together. Women are spearheading initiatives to promote peaceful coexistence and acceptance of one another, and to combat hate speech.

The targeting of women human rights defenders and women's organizations

Human rights defenders have been under constant threat from both warring parties. Women activists as well as women working in emergency rooms face

the risk of harassment, sexual assault, arbitrary detention or murder. Women engaged in providing services have been systematically targeted and their movements severely restricted.

In October 2023, a member of al-Jiraif West Emergency Room was reportedly assassinated by RSF soldiers. In Nyala, South Darfur, a human rights defender, Bahja Abdelaa, was shot and killed by the RSF. Similar accounts have emerged in West Darfur, Blue Nile and Khartoum. Despite the great personal risks they face, however, women and women's organizations continue to tirelessly and selflessly provide services to communities in need.

Chapter 2

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE RESISTANCE

Despite bearing the brunt of the conflict, women continue to top statistics on displacement, and presence in refugee camps, temporary shelters and borrowed land. Ten months on,[January 2024], it is abundantly clear that the war in Sudan is not a war between generals but a war against civilians. Recognizing this fact, grassroots organizations such as Emergency Response Rooms, Resistance Committees and women's organizations have emerged as the unsung heroes of the conflict, demonstrating unparalleled bravery and resilience in the face of calamity. They are the lifelines of their communities.

These frontline responders work tirelessly to provide essential services, negotiate access, bridge information gaps and broker localized ceasefires and peace agreements. They continue to confront all manner of emergencies and challenges head-on at great personal risk. These mutual-aid structures are the glue that keeps entire communities together. They organize and mobilize to advocate not only to put an end to war, but also to foster social peace.

Despite the persistent challenges, women are playing crucial roles in building everyday peace, but their contributions to peacebuilding before, during and after conf icts receive scant attention.

In the face of human tragedy and the loss of support networks, women's organizations and associations have proved particularly crucial. Nonetheless, women activists, feminists and human rights defenders continue to face a slew of attacks and to be confronted with the question: Where are the feminists and what have they done? The answer is quite simple. Women are everywhere and they are doing everything from shouldering the burden of care work and providing essential services, to advocating for and working to put an end to the war and pave the way for a more inclusive peace. Despite the persistent challenges, women are playing crucial roles in building everyday peace, but their contributions to peacebuilding before, during and after conflicts receive scant attention.

Amid waves of displacement and turmoil, women have mobilized and organized, and turned social norms on their head; they are also reclaiming their

agency in unprecedented ways. For instance, women have defied conventional gender and social norms by travelling alone to cities in Sudan or abroad to provide for their families. Another significant shift is breaking the silence on taboo subjects such as SGBV, contraception and abortion. Women and girls are courageously speaking out and demanding attention for issues that have long been considered off-limits. Moreover, in places like Kassala where there are stringent societal restrictions on women, there have been accounts of women challenging traditions by fighting for their rights, including inheritance rights, and to be able to host and support displaced people. These are only a few examples that serve to demonstrate how women and girls are subverting entrenched gender roles and social norms in trying times.

2.1. WOMEN'S INITIATIVES FOR PEACE

A number of new women-led initiatives have emerged since the beginning of the war, such as the Peace for Sudan Platform, Women Against War, Mothers of Sudan, the Red Sea Organizations' Initiative and Women's Situation Rooms.

Some of these grassroots initiatives took shape in the first weeks of war. For instance, in Blue Nile state, the Mothers of Sudan chapter crystallized out of a need to stem the recruitment of young men into the RSF or the SAF. The RSF was offering hefty financial incentives to young people and their families if they joined but the cost of war and of the loss of life was deemed much higher. This compelled many to call for an end to the war, fearing the recruitment of their sons and an escalation of the conflict.

Although they work at different levels and engage with different actors, the ultimate goal of these initiatives is to establish a Sudan where peace and security reign, and where women are part and parcel of peace and political processes. In addition, they aim to document human rights violations, particularly those perpetrated against women, as part of their advocacy efforts. Finally, they seek to involve women in post-war reconstruction and development, recognizing the indispensable role they will play in shaping the future of the country.

2.2. THE PRIMARY CHALLENGES FACING THESE INITIATIVES

The security situation restricts women's movement and by extension their ability to provide humanitarian relief services or engage in peace advocacy work. For instance, when Mothers of Sudan organized its second silent march, several women were arrested by the security services and accused of working for the Communist Party. Similarly, all attempts by No to Women's Oppression to organize a forum for women have been unsuccessful.

Communication challenges and information gaps precipitated by Internet blackouts and disruption to telecommunications networks pose a significant challenge for groups working on the documentation of human rights violations, as well as organizations and networks that seek to support grassroots initiatives.

Limited movement coupled with information gaps have made coordination within and between groups difficult.

Chapter 3
THE PARTICIPATION OF SUDANESE WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES

Despite the sheer suffering that civilians continue to endure and the remarkable efforts of grassroots organizations, their voices and the voices of those most affected by the conflict continue to be conspicuously absent from national and regional peace initiatives. This glaring absence raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy and inclusivity of peacebuilding efforts and begs the question of what is meant by 'civilian engagement'.

Sudanese women continue be instrumental in building local peace and advocating for meaningful inclusion in formal peace processes. The absence of women from the negotiation table is nothing new. Women constituted only 8 per cent of the negotiators during the 2006 Darfur Peace Process, for instance, and just 10 per cent during the Juba Peace Process. Nor did women form part of the negotiation team for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Council on Foreign Relations n.d.).

3.1. PEACE PROCESSES AND THE VENEER OF INCLUSION: THE JUBA PEACE AGREEMENT

In 2020, the international community commended the transitional government for the efforts that culminated in the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement. Despite women's advocacy at the local and national levels for inclusion
in peace and decision-making processes, however, they were sidelined throughout. The situation is no different today.

The tireless advocacy of women paid off, however, as women's groups were invited to some tables. Others lobbied in the corridors and some were merely consulted. Organizations such as the Darfur Women's Forum developed concept notes outlining the protection and political participation of women

Women's groups were able to initiate discussions around questions of security, and the meaning of security to conflict-affected communities in particular.

as top priorities. Women's groups were able to initiate discussions around questions of security, and the meaning of security to conflict-affected communities in particular. They articulated that no conflict party should be charged with the protection of civilians and called for security sector reform that entails the gendering of the security sector rather than the militarization of women. Finally, they advocated for a renegotiation and rethinking of the relationship between the security apparatus and civilians.

When women are not meaningfully or intentionally engaged with in peace and decision-making processes, there is a tendency to treat them as unwelcome guests. Although women are part of the armed movements and they have fought alongside men, their participation in the Juba Peace Process was deemed unwelcome.

Speaking about her experience in the Juba Peace talks as an observer, a participant added:

> When it was time to sit at the table we could not find chairs at the front. They were all occupied by men. So we ended up sitting at the back. It wasn't until a UN official asked why we're sitting at the back that we started to claim the chairs at the front of the room. The men were not too happy. Every man would walk up to us and state that this is his seat. When we refused to move, they brought their chairs forward until we eventually found ourselves at the back again.

This rejection did not only come from men: women were also gatekeepers during the Juba Peace Process.

3.2. **EXCLUSION FROM ONGOING PEACE PROCESSES: THE CASE OF TAQADDUM**

During the transitional period, for many reasons, political bodies such as the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) fell short of delivering meaningful reform. Detached from the everyday realities of large segments of the population, the political elites prioritized power-sharing over genuine engagement, raising serious concerns about their legitimacy and credibility. Accusations of pandering to military institutions further eroded public trust and underscored the need for a fundamental shift in the FFC's engagement modalities—a shift that moves beyond narrow elitist interests to place the diverse perspectives and needs of the Sudanese people front and centre.

Today, Taqaddum coalition grapples with the same challenges that rendered the FFC obsolete, mirroring its shortcomings and echoing its past failures. Taqaddum's inability or lack of political will to actively engage with the general public and those most affected by the war has raised persistent questions

about its legitimacy, credibility and accountability, and whose interests it truly serves.

Exclusion remains the order of the day. Although an initiative spearheaded by civilian democratic forces that calls for more representation and champions inclusivity, the general sentiment points to a different reality. While the sidelining of women, youth and historically marginalized groups from political processes is nothing new, it is precisely at junctures like these that all voices must be heard and amplified.

Women's representation within Taqaddum's structures currently stands at 30 per cent, a figure that is seen by women's groups and organizations as dismally low and perceived as a reversal of past gains and a repeat of past patterns. The engagement of women in crucial decision-making processes is still perceived as mere tokenism or an afterthought. That critical voices are still missing from the conversations that seek to chart a path forward is more proof that little has been learned from the transitional period.

Manufacturing legitimacy

The accusations levelled against the coalition highlight a fundamental challenge facing Taqaddum. There is a delicate balance between opening channels of communication between and with the warring parties while avoiding complicity in the perpetuation of violence and oppression. Taqaddum is undoubtedly walking a tightrope. The coalition finds itself under heavy scrutiny for actions and rhetoric that many regard as a way of bestowing legitimacy on the RSF. A meeting held in Addis Ababa on 1 January 2024 is one such example. The optics of the meeting sparked an outcry and the signing of the Addis Ababa Declaration emerged as a troubling and divisive issue.

The Addis Ababa Declaration serves as a poignant example of Taqaddum's top-down approach and communication shortcomings. Nearly two months after the declaration, there was little clarity on what emerged from the signing of this agreement. One of the purported reasons for signing was to hold the RSF to account. However, the unabated atrocities, the targeting of civilians and the expansion of the RSF's territory call the utility of this agreement into question.

Moreover, the failure to communicate effectively and engage with the broader population perpetuates a sense of disillusionment and further erodes public trust in the peace process. The question arises: will the Addis Ababa Declaration be yet another roadmap to nowhere?

While Taqaddum acknowledges the shortcomings of its communication strategy, little substantive action appears to have been taken to rectify these deficiencies. The persistence of opaque decision-making processes and limited engagement with key stakeholders only serve to further alienate large segments of the population. There appears to be more focus on outreach

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to other political actors and the international community, prioritizing these engagements over public outreach.

Taqaddum's litmus test will be its responsiveness to constructive criticism and its ability to swiftly address pressing challenges. Failure to do so not only risks further eroding its credibility but also jeopardizes the prospects for sustainable peace in Sudan.

3.3. CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ONGOING PEACE EFFORTS

- *Political will.* Patriarchal political parties restrict women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes. There is also a long-standing issue of women's representation within parties, as they tend to be distant from decision-making centres. Moreover, national platforms that comprise political parties tend to act as gatekeepers when dealing with regional and international actors.

- *Structural challenges*. Women bear the burden of domestic responsibilities, making it difficult for them to participate fully. In the current context, travel to participate in political activities or peace processes poses significant risks.

- *Insecurity*. Even in areas not directly affected by the war, security forces restrict all forms of organization. Women activists have been subject to arrest and intimidation, which deters others from joining peace efforts. Increased militarization further threatens the safety of women.

- *Poor coordination and information gaps*. Ongoing processes are characterized by poor communication and a lack of transparency. Effective communication with diverse stakeholders remains a significant challenge. Without clear information sharing channels, organizations working at the grassroots level become isolated.

- *Training and funding*. Negotiations and participation in peace processes often require external support. Where training is provided for women, it is often limited or rushed, restricting their ability to participate effectively in negotiations or navigate the politics inherent in negotiation processes. Donors tend to favour the participation of men, which means that funding for women's participation in peace processes is often limited.

3.4. THE LESSONS NOT LEARNED

Women's interests, perspectives, needs and voices remain conspicuously absent from current political initiatives. The narratives and discourses

presented are merely a repetition of outdated narratives and a reproduction of old structures. These efforts, although crucial, merely echo existing rhetoric without attempting to address the challenges that deter or hinder the participation of women and other marginalized groups. Instead of deconstructing and rebuilding, these initiatives perpetuate old values. This poses a critical problem in the political sphere, where the dominant political discourse revolves largely around men and masculinity, and often features extremely violent content.

This also raises the question of how women's movements can navigate a political field that reinforces impunity and attempts to whitewash a history of widespread criminality. What counternarratives can women produce and what political practices?

History has shown us that wars can be opportunities for social change, whether positive or negative. There has been a notable increase in feminist awareness not just among feminists themselves, but also among women in various regions across Sudan. This feminist consciousness has been about rejecting injustice and hierarchies of power. It is about questioning unbalanced power dynamics and being vocal about violations against women. Women's voices have always been loud but in the midst of this war, they have grown louder.

There is an opportunity to steer discussions in a positive direction, to empower women, to balance power dynamics and to amplify the voices of marginalized groups. This is a significant opportunity for the feminist movement today. The concern should not only be to bring more women to the table. When political elites fail to walk the walk, the message they send is loud and clear: women's rights and their meaningful and equal participation in the very processes that will shape the country's future are side issues.

There has been a notable increase in feminist awareness not just among feminists themselves, but also among women in various regions across Sudan.

Chapter 4
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The response of the international community has been lethargic. The political will or appetite to engage meaningfully to put an end to the war has been sorely lacking. The stakes for Sudan and its people have never been higher. As the war rages on and the country teeters on a precipice, business as usual is no longer an option and a paradigm shift is more urgent than ever.

The recycling of tested but ineffective approaches by Taqaddum has profound implications for Sudan's future trajectory. The framework agreement conceived before the outbreak of war aimed to facilitate a representative process that engaged with broader segments of the population, providing platforms to address long-standing issues that have long plagued the nation. The ongoing process appears to be nothing more than a repeat of the process that preceded the outbreak of the war. The opaque nature of that process reflects the lack of transparency evident in the current approach.

If there was ever a time to rise to the occasion, it was a year ago. It is imperative that Taqaddum and the international community reflect on their approaches, address the shortcomings and engage with civil society and grassroots organizations to work towards a roadmap that reflects the urgent needs, aspirations and interests of the Sudanese people in all their diversity.

4.1. POLICYMAKERS AND DONORS

- *Peace processes should not be monopolized by the warring parties*. Civil society groups and women's grassroots organizations must be included from the outset. Groups that have been disproportionately affected by the war and historically marginalized groups should all be represented. These groups must be equal participants and their demands, needs and perspectives should be integral to any peace process.

- *Commit to long-term financial and technical support for the women's groups, organizations and networks involved in peace efforts*. This support should not be for one-off events but ensure women's sustained engagement throughout the duration of peace processes.

- *Scale-up funding for women's organizations*. Prioritize funding for humanitarian aid as well as SGBV services.

4.2. **POLITICAL PARTIES**

- *Prioritize genuine engagement.* All political parties must be better attuned to the realities on the ground and the needs of their constituents. This can be achieved by ensuring that there are robust communication channels in place, as well as feedback mechanisms that take account of the interests, needs and perspectives of large segments of society.

- *Bridge gaps*. It is imperative that civil society and political parties bridge the gap and foster genuine dialogue, involving women's voices within political party structures in particular.

4.3. **WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS**

- *Strategic communication*. Develop clear plans for engaging with institutions. Grassroots and advocacy groups often lack a coherent plan for communication. It is essential to strategize meetings with key stakeholders and send concise emails to bodies such as the African Union. Clear communication allows for meaningful discussions on the success or failure of initiatives.

- *Seize opportunities*. Act swiftly to leverage golden opportunities when important figures visit or significant meetings occur. Women's organizations must seize these moments as they rely heavily on specific individuals. Failure to do so could result in missed chances to advocate for pertinent issues.

- *Documentation and analysis*. Document and analyse past experiences comprehensively, learn from them and build on the successes of previous processes. This approach will ensure that efforts are not compromised and that common challenges are identified and addressed effectively.

- I*nternational frameworks*. Build on international and regional frameworks such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to advocate for women's inclusion and rights in peace processes.

Women's organizations must seize these moments as they rely heavily on specific individuals. Failure to do so could result in missed chances to advocate for pertinent issues.

- *Work in solidarity*. Collaborate with regional and international women's organizations and networks to strengthen advocacy efforts and amplify the voices of Sudanese women.

- *Counter narratives*. Advocate for a feminist peace agenda, using narratives that emphasize the necessity for peace and the inclusion of women in conflict resolution processes.

- *Use various media channels to amplify voices and advocate for grassroots interests*. Effective storytelling can garner support and influence agendas, ensuring that grassroots concerns are adequately represented.

- *Engage with political parties*. Establish links with political parties and create channels for dialogue, ensuring that women's voices are heard and agendas are developed collaboratively.

- *Bridge divides*. Address internal divisions and bridge the gaps between different women's groups, ensuring that all women are working towards common goals. Empower grassroots voices by ensuring that they are included in decision-making processes and that their concerns are effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders.

4.4. **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

- *Bridge the gap between civil society organizations and the communities they serve*. For the most part, civil society organizations are not attuned to needs and efforts at the grassroots level. For tangible change to take place, communities must be meaningfully engaged.

- *A clear vision that takes account of the needs and interests of large segments of society*. Without clear goals and a roadmap, the agendas of political parties and the warring parties will take precedence.

Chapter 5

ENVISIONING A POST-WAR FUTURE

In the workshop's closing session participants were invited to share their hopes and aspirations for Sudan and to reflect on what they would like to see in the political, economic and social spheres of post-conflict Sudan. The following statements represent their visions.

5.1. PEACE AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

- We envision more inclusive and bottom-up peace processes, where the issues, concerns and priorities of historically marginalized groups are placed at front and centre. We want to see all groups, particularly those working at the grassroots level, to be represented at the negotiation tables. To be able to speak on their issues directly and not be spoken for.

- We envision the building of the military institution from the ground up, starting with a comprehensive review of its tasks, structures, curricula, doctrine, and strategy. We call for a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, we envision a military-civilian relationship that is transparent and well-defined.

- We envision a future where the military's relationship with the economy is clearly defined in the constitution. We also call for the exist of military institutions from the political scene.

- We strive for a reconceptualization of security that aligns with the needs and expectations of the citizens, acknowledging that definitions of security may diverge. We envision a military strategy that is developed

in collaboration with civilians, ensuring their input and participation in its creation. The role of civilians is crucial in shaping the military strategy, and we reject the notion that civilians should be excluded from this process.

- We envision the abolition of over-inflated military budgets. Security agencies, such as the police, should be allocated sufficient resources to fulfill their roles without draining funds that should be used fund basic needs, such as healthcare and education. We believe civilians must have a say in these budgets. Moreover, we envision women playing an integral role in all security-related bodies, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed within these structures.

5.2. **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

- We dream of strong, effective and impactful political participation in all forms, such as peace processes, political parties, government offices, local governance, as well as in unions, grassroots organizations and legislative councils. We also discussed the presence of women in security agencies and the armed forces, but we did not reach an agreement on this issue. We emphasized that participation should not be about numbers alone; we want women's presence to reflect their interests and ensure social justice and protection. This means that women's direct interests should be represented—not just an agenda, but that every woman, regardless of her position, should have her interests reflected in policies and beyond.

- Regarding the women's movement, we dream and work towards the creation of an alliance that addresses all aspirations and common interests. For these things to happen, there must be peace, freedom, balanced development, justice in resource distribution, a decentralized system, democracy, a feminist constitution, feminist policies, good governance and rule of law.

- We must move towards local governance and focus on organizing in residential and work areas. If we succeed in this, we will be able to create a form of change that replaces the old system in all its forms, and the decision makers. This will shape the new form of local governance we aspire to. Local governance is our right.

5.3. **POLITICAL ECONOMY AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT**

- We envision a fair distribution of resources and sustainable development at the regional level. Women already contribute significantly to the local economy, particularly in agriculture, industry, and animal husbandry, but their contributed remain uncounted and they lack support. This lack of support highlights the need for a development approach that goes beyond economic growth and focuses on equitable distribution. Economic

development should not only increase GDP but should ensure that the benefits are distributed equally and fairly.

- We want to see a state that plays a social role by providing basic services and welfare to its citizens. This includes a rights-based system in education, housing, energy and other basic needs. Additionally, we want to ensure that productive institutions, such as agriculture, industry and cooperatives, have protective measures in place, including job security, suitable working conditions and gender considerations in place.

- Gender mainstreaming in all aspects of development. When discussing education, health and housing, we emphasize the importance of gender considerations, such as focusing on girls' education and ensuring that housing in conflict areas addresses the specific needs of women and children. In energy, we highlight the long distances women and girls travel in Darfur to gather fuel, which could be alleviated with better infrastructure.

- To build a true state, we must move away from a model built on extraction and exploitation to one that seeks to investing in rural economies.

5.4. **JUSTICE**

- We envision a reformed legal system where prosecutors and police are trained to handle cases of rape and sexual violence with the sensitivity they require, removing all barriers to accessing justice. Women must be part and parcel of these institutions, including the police and the judiciary. New legislation must be enacted, and law enforcement agencies need to be qualified and equipped to enforce justice.

- We dream of a geographically accessible justice system, where police stations, prosecutors, and courts are spread out to ensure victims do not have to travel long distances to report crimes or attend hearings.

- Protecting witnesses and ensuring the privacy of survivors is crucial. We envision a court environment and hearings free from public judgment and harassment, where survivors are treated with dignity, especially young girls and those affected by domestic or sexual violence.

- Compensation and reparation for survivors should be prioritized. We see two types of reparations: individual compensation to victims and collective reparations in the form of community services like schools, hospitals and other public institutions.

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About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

WHAT WE DO

We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and Democracy Tracker.

We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials and civil society. We develop tools and publish databases, books and primers in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas.

We bring states and non-state actors together for dialogues and lesson sharing. We stand up and speak out to promote and protect democracy worldwide.

WHERE WE WORK

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

We have a catalogue with more than 1,000 publications and over 25 databases on our website. Most of our publications can be downloaded free of charge.

<https://www.idea.int>

International IDEA organized in August 2024, in Kampala, Uganda, a roundtable with the Adeela Foundation to discuss and evaluate the role of Sudanese women in peace and ending war initiatives. The dialogue covered the war's economic, social and political impacts on women's groups. Also, it addressed the violations that Sudanese women are subjected to in a systematic and regular manner by all parties to the war without exception.

The participants discussed the role of Sudanese women in establishing women's initiatives to stop the war and the role of Sudanese women in peace initiatives and ending the war led by regional and international institutions. Among the important topics discussed by the participants was the issue of the challenges and difficulties that hinder the participation of Sudanese women in building peace and restoring stability in Sudan. The participants agreed on practical, responsive and implementable recommendations. The dialogue results and the final recommendations were directed to local, regional, and international policymaking institutions.