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The Women of Sudan in Times of War and Peace

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After years of oppression, women were on the front line leading and forming the majority of Sudan's 2019 revolution. However, activism is not new among Sudanese women, who once resisted British colonial rule and protested in 1964 and 1985.¹ Moreover, today Sudan is in transition, with women forming 18.2 per cent of its sovereign council and 22.2 per cent of Sudan's cabinet.² Nevertheless, in 2017, under former President Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir's rule, women constituted 30.5 per cent and 11.4 per cent of the parliament and cabinet respectively, but were often sidelined from peace negotiations.³ As a result, less than 40 per cent of Sudan's intrastate peace agreements included gender provisions.⁴

Since al-Bashir was ousted in April 2019, relations between the Government of Sudan (GoS), the Transitional Military Council (TMC), the Sovereign Council (SC), the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF), the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), other armed groups and protesters have

¹ Nazik Kabalo, "In Sudan: Women Made Revolutions", in *Nazra for Feminist Studies*, 3 June 2012, <https://nazra.org/en/node/127>.

² AFP, "Sudan's New Cabinet Sworn in as Nation Transitions to Civilian Rule", in *France 24*, 8 September 2019, <http://f24.my/5uZ.T>.

³ Monash Gender, Peace & Security (GPS), *Sudan: A Situational Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes*, July 2018, http://mappingpeace.monashgps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Sudan-Situational-Analysis_ART-1.pdf.

⁴ Laura Stevens, Daphne Wang and Hashim Ismail, "Sudan: Freedom, Peace, and Justice", in *Failed and Fragile States Reports and Briefs*, 6 January 2020, p. 34, <https://carleton.ca/cifp/?p=2026>.

been unstable.⁵ Moreover, the marginalisation of women's groups and in turn achieving social peace is at high-stake.

In the midst of this turbulence and paradox, this chapter explores the ever changing relationship between Sudanese women and their habitus, and provides recommendations to ensure women's effective participation in Sudan's present and future. The methodology is based on qualitative analysis of the literature; press releases; personal communication with three Sudanese women and men, including a prominent scholar and a community leader; and focus group discussions with ten female refugees and asylum-seekers from Khartoum and Darfur.

2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUDANESE WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The first organised women's political group was the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU), which was formed in 1951 and was part of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP)'s goal to further engage women. It was led by Fatima Ibrahim, who succeeded in securing multiple rights for women and led demonstrations against the Commander in Chief of the Military of Sudan, Ibrahim Abboud, in 1964.⁶ The SWU was divided, however, as ties between the SWU and SCP members limited its autonomy.⁷ Moreover, radical Islamist members contested its demand for women's political participation.⁸

In 1965, Fatima Ibrahim became the first woman to serve in Sudan's parliament, while the other female nominee, from the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), lost due to lack of party support.⁹ One might question how

⁵ UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 2 of resolution 2455 (2019)*, 14 January 2020, <https://undocs.org/S/2020/36>.

⁶ Liv Tønnessen and Hilde Granås Kjøstv, "The Politics of Women's Representation in Sudan: Debating Women's Rights in Islam from the Elites to the Grassroots", in *CMI Reports*, No. 2010:2 (2010), p. 3, <https://www.cmi.no/publications/3643>.

⁷ Sondra Hale, "Testimonies in Exile: Sudanese Gender Politics", in *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2001), p. 85, 103-104.

⁸ Liv Tønnessen, "An Increasing Number of Muslim Women in Politics: A Step Toward Complementarity, Not Equality", in *CMI Briefs*, No. 2018:3 (May 2018), <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6534>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

a woman from the MB could nominate herself, given that radical Islamist women had left the SWU due to its demand for women's political engagement. In fact, the 1970s saw a great deal of turbulence that transformed the habitus of Sudan.

Jaafar Nimeiri, President of Sudan from 1969 to 1985, sought to secure his authority by creating a single-party system.¹⁰ Correspondingly, he suspended the SWU and formed his own Sudan Women's Union, which was dependent on him.¹¹ Furthermore, with the marketisation of Sudan's politics and the proliferation of the MB in the government and army, the path was paved for the MB to come to power, but they still needed to gain more support.¹² Therefore, one of the MB's most influential leaders, Hassan Al-Turabi, advocated for the importance of women's political participation to transfer women's voices and create a balance between soft and hard politics; women would focus on the former, which encompasses health care and maternity, while the hard politics of warfare, security and uprisings would be men's exclusive domain.¹³

When al-Bashir came to power, political groups were violently suppressed in order to decrease their political price and weaken the opposition in Sudan's political marketplace,¹⁴ correspondingly gender-discriminatory laws were imposed to oppress women and obliterate their political influence. Thus, only the party's "constructed" woman was welcomed, and with the outbreak of civil wars, the role of "Spartan mothers" was recalled through the Sudanese Women General Union in 1991, in order to encourage men to fight in Sudan's civil war.¹⁵

¹⁰ Peter Woodward, "Sudan's Fragile State, 1956-1989", in John Ryle et al. (eds), *The Sudan Handbook*, Woodbridge, James Currey, 2011, p. 158, <https://johnryle.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/JR-Publications-Sudan-Handbook-1.pdf>.

¹¹ Zaynab El Sawi, *Women Building Peace: The Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace in Sudan*, Toronto, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2011, https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_2_-_sudanese_women_empowerment_for_peace.pdf.

¹² Alex de Waal, "Sudan: A Political Marketplace Framework Analysis", in *WPF Occasional Papers*, No. 19 (August 2019), <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/files/2019/07/Sudan-A-political-market-place-analysis-final-20190731.pdf>; Peter Woodward, "Sudan's Fragile State, 1956-1989", cit., p. 162.

¹³ Liv Tønnessen, "An Increasing Number of Muslim Women in Politics", cit.

¹⁴ Alex de Waal, "Sudan: A Political Marketplace Framework Analysis", cit.

¹⁵ Zaynab El Sawi, *Women Building Peace*, cit., p. 6.

2.1.1 Women in peace negotiations

As difficult as it was, Sudanese women believed they could bring peace. The Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace movement (SuWEP) connected Northern and Southern women across Sudan and Nairobi. With international support, it included almost 1,000 active members from diverse groups. However, it couldn't secure ten seats for women in the Machakos (2002) peace talks.¹⁶ Moreover, in Naivasha (2005), women's position papers were accepted but were not included in the recommendations as the GoS rejected gender provisions on the basis that "they did not fight women". Additionally, Southern women who participated were not given sufficient time to prepare and were mocked while addressing gender issues.¹⁷

The Darfur Peace Agreement, on the other hand, included more than 70 gender sections as women's activism took a different path, creating a unified vision for women from diverse groups from all three states of Darfur. Moreover, a gender expert support team was created with international support, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) sent a gender expert to the mediation team and the African Union (AU)'s delegation included women. However, the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) did not ensure women's effective participation and was left utterly under government control. In order to advance the 25 per cent legislative gender quota, women unified their voices and created a voluntary gender experts team with international support.¹⁸

As for the Doha Peace Negotiations, women participated in the consultation forums. However, their representation in the official negotiations was limited due to lack of commitment by the negotiating parties and host government to gender issues, biased selection of civil society organisations (CSOs), women's isolation from the economy and lack of decision-making power, and absence of communication between women negotiators and activists. Additionally, women's participation in the final drafting of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) was not ensured.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ GPS, *Sudan: A Situational Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes*, cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jasper Linke, *Women in Peace and Transition Processes. Sudan: Darfur (2009–2017)*,

In contrast, the international community's pressure to include women, trainings provided to women's groups on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, workshops held by the mediation team with the conflict parties and CSOs, and coalition-building between women and CSOs to advance a unified agenda strengthened women's position.²⁰ However, there has been no progress on the DDPD since the fall of al-Bashir; thus, the future of Sudanese women's activism is unclear.

2.2 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN OVERTHROWING AL-BASHIR

Sudanese women from different factions of society played a crucial role in the revolution: women's groups engaged in drafting the Declaration of Freedom and Change, and they held leadership roles in the Sudanese Professional Association where they determined the location of the sit-ins, their security and logistics, distributed food, and so on. Even those who couldn't leave their homes hid the protesters, and women from the diaspora engaged in solidarity protests and funded the revolution.²¹ Furthermore, the Kendakas of Darfur revolted, encouraged peaceful protests and distributed food.²²

Unfortunately, some women suffered severe levels of violence: officers threatened women with flogging, and women were victims of sexual violence and war crimes. Some parents tried to prevent their daughters from protesting, and slogans such as "the president is a woman because he is weak" emerged but were stopped by the activism of women on social media.²³

Moreover, after al-Bashir was overthrown, women knew they had to take part in Sudan's transition; however, when negotiations with the TMC took place, only one woman was allowed to participate. One of the justifi-

Geneva, Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (IPTI), September 2018, <https://inclusive-peace.org/node/557>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wilson Center, *African Women's Mobilization in Times of Unrest*, Symposium held in Washington on 5 June 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/african-womens-mobilization-times-unrest>.

²² Focus group discussion with Darfuri women, February 2020.

²³ Wilson Center, *African Women's Mobilization in Times of Unrest*, cit.; UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts...*, cit., p. 29; Urgent Action Fund Africa website: *How Torture and Intimidation Is Used to Tame Women's Rights Activists on the Frontline of Sudan Revolution*, <https://www.uaf-africa.org/?p=11588>.

cations of the coalitions of the FFC was the lack of women's experience in negotiating with the former regime.²⁴ However, women's groups were not the only ones to be sidelined, as the SRF had rejected the Constitutional Declaration.²⁵ Moreover, the FFC chose the list of the cabinet nominees and did not permit its amendment.²⁶

2.2.1 Juba Peace Negotiations (JPN)

Women's groups from the periphery to the centre are demanding the right to participate in peace negotiations; they have presented a National Action Plan (NAP) and a memorandum on the JPN to the SC. Moreover, the SC has declared that women's leadership is important and that their issues are crucial to the peace discussions. Representatives of Darfuri women attended the JPN and presented their agenda.²⁷ As for the Joint Field Committee (JFC), Najat Suleiman is representing the SRF Darfur track. While consultative forums were held in Darfur, equal gender quotas were given to representatives of internally displaced persons (IDPs) but none for civil society representatives to the JPN.²⁸

Taking a closer look at the demands of Sudanese women, they include participation in political life; implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325; accountability for war crimes; confidence-building; stopping arms exportation; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR); securing women's agency; rebuilding the economy; creating social peace; eliminat-

²⁴ Urgent Action Fund Africa website: *How Torture and Intimidation Is Used...*, cit.

²⁵ Katariina Mustasilta, "Three Scenarios for Sudan. From Non-Violent Revolution to Democratic Reform?", in *EU-ISS Briefs*, No. 10 (September 2019), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2361>.

²⁶ "SFR Can Accept Sudan's Governors Provided Taking Part in the Nomination Process", in *Sudan Tribune*, 18 April 2020, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69231>.

²⁷ "El Burhan: Sudanese Women Should Lead Peace Process", in *Radio Dabanga*, 18 November 2019, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/el-burhan-sudanese-women-should-lead-peace-process>; "Darfuri Women Demand Peace 'as Soon as Possible'", in *Radio Dabanga*, 9 March 2020, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/darfuri-women-demand-peace-as-soon-as-possible>; "Sudan Women Want Greater Role in Juba Negotiations", in *Radio Dabanga*, 26 February 2020, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-women-want-greater-role-in-juba-negotiations>.

²⁸ United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), *UNAMID Supports Consultative Conferences for IDPs and Darfur Civil Society for Sudan Peace Talks*, 3 February 2020, <https://unamid.unmissions.org/node/100062355>.

ing discriminatory laws; ending hunger, wars and the government's cycle of fear and silencing; and adopting gender quotas in the legislative and executive bodies and commissions.²⁹ Given these demands, it is necessary to assess whether the interim constitution provides a roadmap for the empowerment of Sudanese women.

2.2.2 Gender analysis of the Constitutional Declaration

The constitution addresses women as citizens, emphasising the importance of their participation in the public sphere, empowerment and the enjoyment of equal rights to men. Moreover, it seeks to eliminate discriminatory laws and practices and adopt positive discriminatory measures. It also includes provisions on entitlements to free health care for mothers, children and pregnant women. Furthermore, it acknowledges the importance of seeking justice for war crimes committed under al-Bashir's rule and the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 NAP.³⁰

While the constitution includes the implementation of international and regional agreements that Sudan has ratified to advance women's rights, Sudan did not ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Moreover, the constitution ensures equal civil, political and economic rights and the participation of women in the peace process based on UNSC Resolution 1325 and AU resolutions. Furthermore, it includes the formation of a Women and Gender Equality Commission but does not include any gender quotas in the independent commissions, including transitional justice, while the only quota (40 per cent) is included in the transitional legislative council.³¹ However, in order to implement these provisions and ensure the substantive representation of women, a number of recommendations are necessary.

²⁹ NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, *Statement by Ms. Alaa Salah at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security*, New York, 29 October 2019, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/statement-unc-wps-open-debate-october-2019>; "Darfur Women Demand More Power", in *Radio Dabanga*, 23 March 2020, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/darfur-women-demand-more-power>; "Women's Rights Movement Is Growing in Sudan", in *Radio Dabanga*, 14 January 2020, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/women-rights-movement-is-growing-in-sudan>.

³⁰ Sudan, *Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period*, 4 August 2019, p. 4, 15, 18, <http://constitutionnet.org/node/17011>.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10, 13, 14, 15, 18.

2.3 CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A dichotomous and patriarchal relationship exists between Sudanese women and the ruling party, which considers them as a separate and dependent unit. Additionally, there is a spillover effect between the ruling party's strategy to secure its power and its relationship with women's groups. For instance, Nimeiri created a non-autonomous single party and follower SWU. Al-Bashir used violence against opposition groups and women to decrease their political influence. Finally, the SRF was excluded during the meetings in Addis Ababa and signature of constitutional declaration with the TMC,³² consistently, only one woman was allowed to participate in these negotiations.

Peace negotiations have focused on wealth-sharing between the government and armed groups. Additionally, due to the masculinisation of hard politics in Track 1 negotiations, women believe that the current negotiations are focused on ceasefire and disarmament agreements and do not include state-building, and that their role will follow later.³³ Therefore, there is a disconnection between social peace and Track 1 peace negotiations. Another view is that men want to dominate politically and that women will continue to be sidelined at a later stage.³⁴ Given the divergence of women's opinions, it is necessary to attempt to understand their self-identification.

2.3.1 *The identity of Sudanese women*

While the majority of women from the focus group discussions arrived to Egypt in 2018 and 2019, they drew themselves and Sudan's habitus differently; women from Khartoum portrayed themselves as the flame of the revolution, sisters, mothers, educated and half of society. In contrast, women from Darfur drew weapons, burnt houses, tears and fleeing.³⁵

Furthermore, women from Khartoum and Darfur mentioned their need for safety versus peace respectively. While safety includes walking in

³² Personal communication with Hamid Eltgani Ali, April 2020.

³³ Personal communication with a Sudanese woman, April 2020.

³⁴ Focus group discussion with women from Khartoum, February 2020.

³⁵ Darfuri women couldn't write, thus they only drew.

the street or staying at home without fear of becoming a victim of crime, peace for Darfuri women meant the end of war and disarmament. Moreover, women from Khartoum mentioned that they could not talk about incidents of rape with men and would prefer to talk with women, especially foreigners, due to social stigma.

There are also three identities and views of armed women in the periphery: those who had lost hope and their families, and picked up weapons in a suicidal yet brave act; wives of generals who had to protect internal areas when the men went to war, whose orders were obeyed; and women who were forced to turn to weapons to protect themselves and their children.³⁶

It is clear that women in Sudan have different identities and roles; therefore, sidelining them from the JPN would not result in social peace.

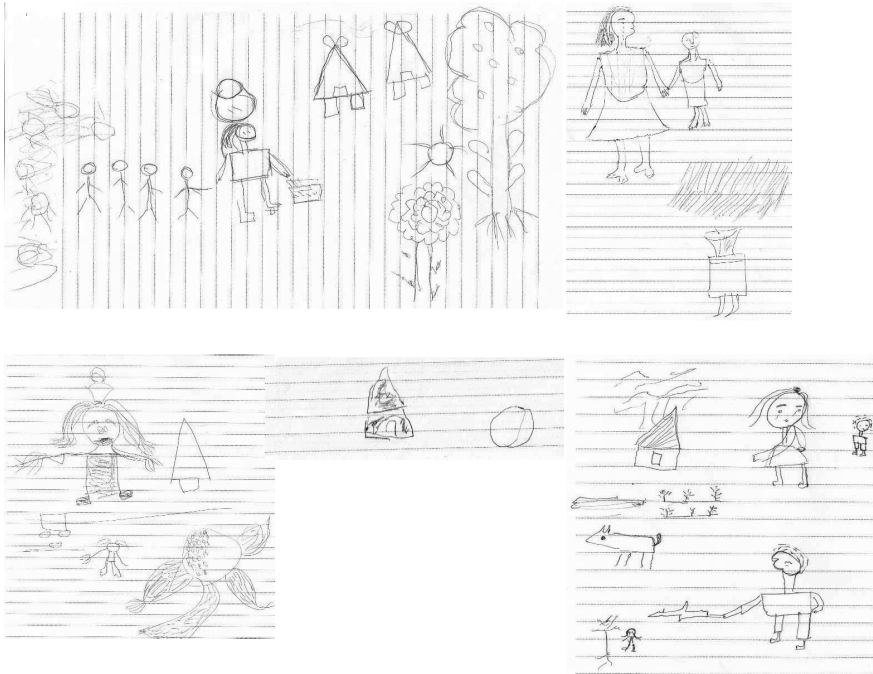
Figure 1 - Khartoum women's drawings



Note: The comments on the drawings were written by the Sudanese women, only the comments between grey brackets were written by the researcher during the focus group discussions quoting what the women were saying to further understand their message.

³⁶ Focus group discussion with Darfuri women and personal communication with a Sudanese woman.

Figure 2 – Darfuri women’s drawings



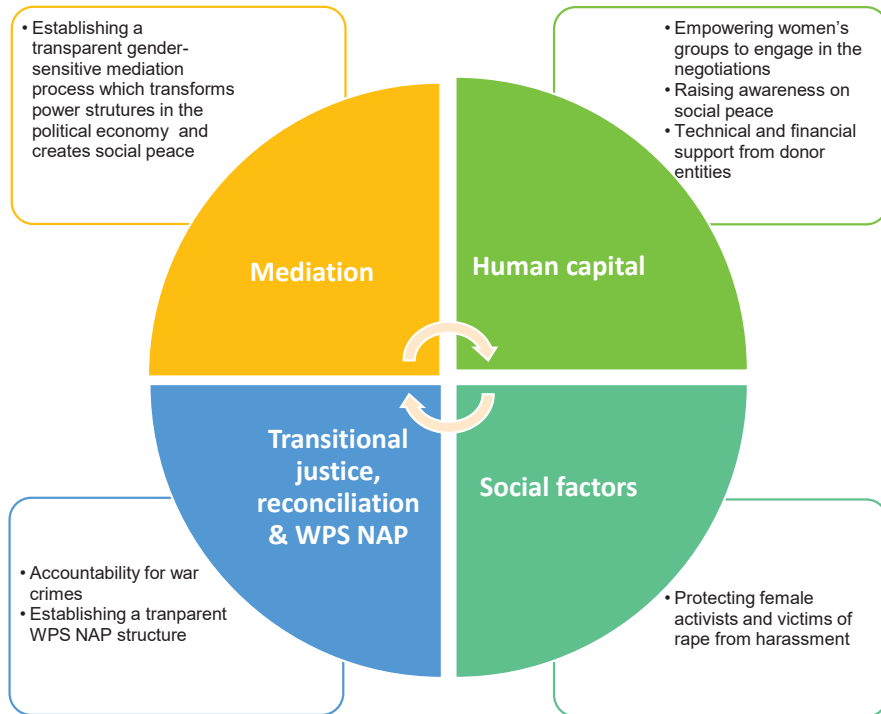
2.3.2 Policy recommendations

Women’s engagement in Sudan’s present and future can be ensured through focusing on four main spheres: (1) mediation; (2) human capital; (3) transitional justice, reconciliation and implementing a Women Peace and Security (WPS) NAP; in addition to (4) addressing social factors.

1) *Mediation.* The stance of mediators affects the inclusion of women’s groups; therefore, it is necessary to create a gender-sensitive mediation process through training mediators on gender-sensitive conflict analysis, allocating gender experts to mediation and negotiation parties, and collecting sex-disaggregated data on the participants and stakeholders, duration of their discussion, topics discussed and interaction. It is also important to ensure the participation of women as advisers on technical topics such as gender and land rights and to create parallel forums and working groups while accounting for women’s family obligations.³⁷

³⁷ UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), *Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Media-*

Figure 3 – Women’s engagement in Sudan’s four main spheres



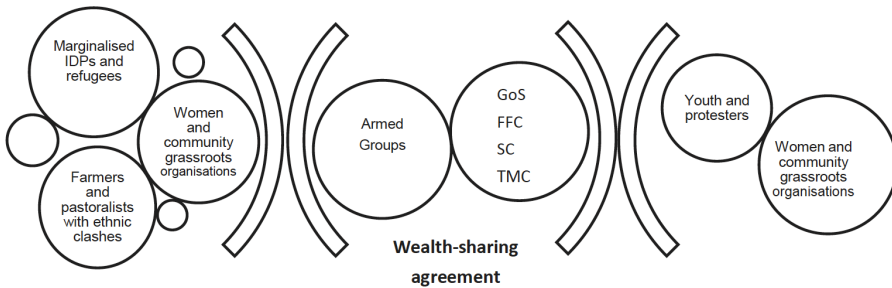
In order to create social peace in Sudan and engage women, it is necessary to analyse the context of the political economy and power dynamics. The mediation process has to be inclusive and extend beyond the government, the SC, TMC and armed groups to include all stakeholders and opposing parties. Thus, it is important to engage youth, women and community grassroots organisations, as well as IDPs and refugees in marginalised areas, to ensure that the negotiations extend beyond the elites.³⁸ Moreover, the selection of

tion Strategies, 2017, <https://dppa.un.org/en/node/184561>; Leena Avonius et al., *Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes. A Toolkit*, Vienna, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, December 2019, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/440735>; Miroslava Beham and Luisa Dietrich, *Enhancing Gender-Responsive Mediation A Guidance Note*, Vienna, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, October 2013, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/107533>.

³⁸ Hamid Eltgani Ali, "How Sudan Transitions", in *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, No. 36 (Winter 2020), p. 101-111, <https://www.thecairoreview.com/?p=10605>; Laura Stevens, Daphne Wang and Hashim Ismail, "Sudan: Freedom, Peace, and Justice", cit.

representatives for Track 1.5 negotiations from the opposing parties should be based on transparent and gender-equitable measures. Additionally, with the disagreement between the FFC, SRF and GoS on the nomination process and selection criteria of civil state governors, it is necessary to ensure that the nominated candidates truly represent the community.³⁹

Figure 4 – Social peace and empowerment agreement

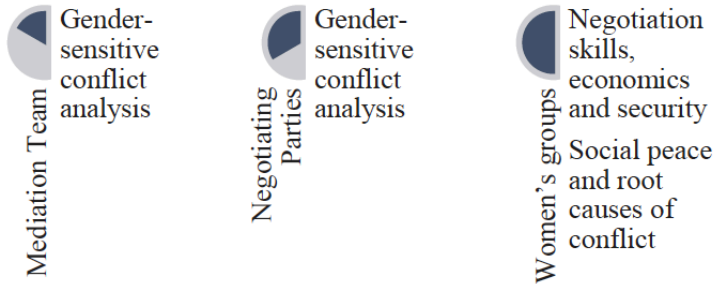


The negotiation agenda should include empowerment issues such as a WPS NAP, and address political economy from a gender perspective, including the gains of women leaders in armed groups and the exclusive warfare economy in relation to women’s political power. Additionally, the possibility of shifting from wealth-sharing towards impact indicators, such as the percentage of government expenditure on education in the states, should be studied, and a gender approach should be adopted by the Friends of Sudan fund. Moreover, ceasefire and security agreements must address rape as a weapon of war, not only as a crime.

Mediators should choose unbiased local actors and women’s groups to participate, and determine milestones for consultation with them throughout the mediation process. Finally, mediators could deliver gender-sensitive training to the negotiating parties; facilitate meetings between women’s groups, women in the negotiating parties, the mediation team and FemWise-Africa; and hold workshops between the government ministries, SC, armed groups, CSOs and women’s groups.

³⁹ “SRF Can Accept Sudan’s Governors Provided Taking Part in the Nomination Process”, cit.; “Sudan’s State Governors Saga: Umma Party Calls to Review Selection Criteria”, in *Sudan Tribune*, 21 April 2020, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69239>; “SPLM-N Hilu Slams SRF Rejection of Governors’ Appointment in Sudan”, in *Sudan Tribune*, 19 April 2020, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69235>.

2) *Human capital.* Women's groups need specific capacity-building training, logistical support and networking opportunities, such as training on security, governance, economics and DDR, to effectively participate in Track 1.5 negotiations. Additionally, awareness-raising on social peace and the importance of their inclusion from the beginning is crucial. Furthermore, links should be established between women's groups, female refugees and IDPs, and between women from the centre and the periphery, and these parties should be given greater roles to break the divides between them. Finally, it is important to advance their agenda as part of the civil society agenda through coalition-building.



Donor entities have a crucial role to play, including creating links between female mediators from donor entities, foreign female activists facing similar conditions and Sudanese women's groups. Moreover, they should provide financial and technical support to ensure women's participation in peacebuilding through training them on negotiations and drafting NAPs and earmarking projects for UNSC Resolution 1325 NAP.

3) *Transitional justice, reconciliation, and implementing a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) NAP.* Trusting former regime members and their supporters is a great concern for Sudanese women; therefore, it is necessary to hold perpetrators accountable for war crimes they have committed; provide safe spaces for female victims of rape to tell their stories; create gender quotas in transitional justice and truth finding committees; and integrate women in DDR programmes. Moreover, the possibility of creating a Sudanese Female Police Force and integrating female fighters from the periphery should be considered.

Finally, institutionalising a WPS NAP department formed by a con-

sortium of ministries, including justice, security and finance, and linking it with the women and gender equality commission is crucial. The NAP should include accountable entities, a budget, a timeline and reliable monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and should address specific topics.⁴⁰ Furthermore, women's groups from different tribes and ethnicities must participate in drafting and developing the agenda and its monitoring mechanism.

4) *Social aspects.* Female political leaders and victims of rape must be protected from harassment, violence, rumours and social stigma. Through collaboration with influential local leaders and youth, online and offline campaigns can be created and laws introduced that criminalise such violations, thus allowing women to speak up safely.

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⁴⁰ Henri Myrntinen, Laura J. Shepherd and Hannah Wrigh, *Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the OSCE Region*, Vienna, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, January 2020, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/444577>.

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