



# **Women at the forefront of Sudan's political transformation**

## **Recommendations from a workshop on women's rights, representation and resilience in a new Sudan**

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A teal-colored circle containing the text 'Key messages' in white.

### **Key messages**

- International actors should support women's leadership in the movement calling for democratic change in Sudan in order to sustain their continued role in the country's political future.
- Sudan's new government should provide and enforce institutionalised guarantees of political representation through quota systems and the appointment of female ministers and other senior officials, and enact gender-equal laws and policies.
- Government, civil society, and international, regional and local institutions must work collaboratively to address socioeconomic issues, including through directed action on health and education.
- The experiences of people harmed by conflict and violence must be addressed, and those marginalised must have their voices amplified in the new institutions of power.
- Sudanese gender equality advocates and leaders must learn from other African experiences and movements and seek practical solutions to political challenges.

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# Acronyms

<b>AACSB</b>	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
<b>AMBA</b>	Association of MBAs (Masters of Business Administration)
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CEfRs</b>	Centres of Excellence for Research
<b>FGM</b>	Female genital mutilation
<b>GAGE</b>	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
<b>MHESR</b>	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (Sudan)
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

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# 1 Sudan at a crossroads: strengthening women's representation in a new Sudan

Women were at the forefront of the protests that led to the ousting of the al-Bashir regime in Sudan in the spring of 2019. The way in which they raised their voices to create change epitomised their resilience and strength. Reports estimated that at times women accounted for as many as 70% of protesters, despite threats and acts of violence and rape against them (BBC, 2019). However, fears remain that this largely informal participation will not be matched with equal voice and representation in the formal halls of power. As has occurred in a number of similar contexts across Africa and elsewhere, women often play an important role in driving political change, but are sidelined by the formal processes that follow.<sup>1</sup>

To address this challenge, Sudanese professionals, scholars and activists convened in London on 9th September 2019 under the aegis of the University of Khartoum Alumni Association of the UK and Ireland, the Sudanese Doctors' Union UK, and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The event focused on cementing and enhancing women's political voice and representation through the current political transformation in Sudan, with a particular emphasis on socioeconomics, law, health, education and conflict.

Sara Pantuliano, Acting Executive Director of ODI, opened the meeting with reflections on ODI's research on Sudan, and the Institute's ongoing interest in peace and conflict work across Africa. Participants also heard greetings from Zainab Bangura, ODI Distinguished Fellow former UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence and Conflict, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Health in Sierra Leone. Ms Bangura congratulated Sudanese women on their achievements, while also noting that 'now that you have won this battle, the real war begins'. In her comments she highlighted a range of lessons for advocates of women's rights in Sudan.

Ms Bangura spoke from her own experience as a female leader, saying: 'From my experience in my own country, Sierra Leone, and other countries in the continent and the world, women are normally in the forefront of fighting for peace in conflict and post-conflict countries, for democracy during dictatorship, but because it is the men who sit on the table to negotiate peace, lead and dominate the leadership of political parties, they end up being the winners in both cases'.

Ms Bangura offered advice on tackling these challenges in Sudan, stressing the following:

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1 See, for example, a discussion of women's prominent roles in the so-called 'Arab Spring' in the Middle East and North Africa, and subsequent challenges for meaningful transformative change for gender equality post-revolution in [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2012/457119/EXPO-JOIN\\_ET\(2012\)457119\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2012/457119/EXPO-JOIN_ET(2012)457119_EN.pdf), p.18.

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- Keep strong and stay together as women. Do not allow division.
  - Learn lessons from similar political transitions, including those experienced across Africa.
  - Don't hurt men's pride, engage in meaningful, smart and strategic ways.
  - Call on other African women and listen to their stories.
  - Prioritise family, find ways to bring children along with you on your journey, and teach them lessons.



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# 2 Resistance and resilience: matching women's participation in the 2019 revolution with ongoing institutional change

Mashair Saeed and Sara Abdelgalil, on behalf of the University of Khartoum Alumni Association of the UK and Ireland and the Sudanese Doctors' Union UK, opened the day's discussions with a focus on the future of Sudan. They stressed that, after more than four months of demonstrations, the future for Sudan is looking promising, but fragile. The Sudanese diaspora in the UK has been a strong supporter of human rights initiatives, for instance lobbying the government for around the 'Save Asim Omer' campaign on behalf of a student activist who was unjustly beaten and imprisoned, but further collaboration and effort is needed.

The relative absence of women in formal political spaces and decision-making roles before December 2018 and the newfound visibility of women today in Sudan must result in sustained and meaningful inclusion. Today's moment in Sudan suggests the potential for unprecedented gains for women, but women have been appointed to just two of 11 positions in the country's newly appointed Sovereign Council, set

to lead the country until elections in three years' time. This suggests that women risk being shut out of political spaces despite their active voice in the movement against the regime (Bhalla, 2019).

Workshop participants shared compelling stories and testimonies to demonstrate the unprecedented nature of events in Sudan. There was broad agreement that women individually and collectively took to the streets and pushed for change 'without invitation'. This 'natural' participation offered new insight into women's views and the potential for mass organisation in Sudan. How can the effectiveness of women in the revolution be matched by securing a voice in the new institutions of power that result? How can the kind of backlash seen in other contexts where women have participated in the public space be mitigated? Women's rights leaders and advocates are debating the key levers and tools to promote their continued and increased inclusion in political spaces in post-revolution Sudan.

A survey of over 10,000 Sudanese participants has identified that women find that labour unions

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are the most important platform for increasing women's visibility and access to decision-making.<sup>2</sup> Civil society and neighbourhood committees are also key areas for engagement. Importantly, political party affiliation was seen as least important (note that the political party space in Sudan is highly congested, with more than 120 political parties). These remain very masculine spaces. Debates are ongoing in Sudan about a female parliamentary quota. A 40% quota for women has been promised, but there is an active campaign for 50%.

Debates on quotas for women in political leadership and institutions – around 'who' is represented and the 'politics of presence' – remain central to our understanding of how to ensure gender equality in politics.

ODI research has shown that the percentage of women in government must not be relied on as a pure indicator of gender equality, as '[i]ncreasing the number of women in political and public positions is important, but this does not mean they have real authority or autonomy' (O'Neill and Domingo, 2016). The research also demonstrates that economic development alone does not guarantee more women in politics, and the position of women in parliament is not a direct indicator of their wider representation in power.

Studies have, however, noted that parliamentary gender quotas can have an impact on legislative change if combined with an independent parliament and 'the critical presence of feminist voices' (Tonnesson, 2011). Furthermore, gender politics must not be reduced to a single vision of women's views or needs. The diversity of female experiences must be acknowledged and adequately represented through the democratic process. Research suggests, for example, that women do not necessarily vote for women over men based on gender identity, but rather

their views and priorities are central (Rodgers-Healy, 2013). While women tend to support leftist parties in Western Europe, they tend to favour the right in post-communist countries, suggesting that women's voting blocs are not 'monolithic' or 'liberal', nor purely based on their gender identity (Kittilson, 2016).

Although increasing women's representation in government does not necessarily guarantee that the diversity of women's views is represented, the evidence is clear that the more closely a government represents society as a whole, the more stable and peaceful that government is likely to be (Mollmann, 2011). Research also finds overall that democracy and gender equality provide a 'mutually reinforcing relationship' – where higher levels of liberal democracy are a 'necessary, but not sufficient condition' for greater gender equality and physical security for women (Piccone, 2017). Crucially, democratisation does not in itself automatically increase gender equality (for example, some South American democracies and former Soviet states have improved their democratic records while their gender equality standards have lagged) (ibid.). However, it is clear that a robust, strong and consolidated democracy can provide the best conditions for gender equality gains.

With these issues in mind in the context of dynamic changes in Sudan, participants at the London workshop discussed the need for comprehensive gender equality efforts across sectors. These areas require both deep sectoral work and initiatives for gender equality in relation to political changes and opportunities, as well as cross-sectoral collaboration in order to bolster more comprehensive and sustainable reform efforts. Participants focused in this regard on the following areas: socioeconomics, law, education, health and conflict.

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2 The survey was hosted on Twitter, and is available at <https://twitter.com/Sarajalilo/status/1165535444890730496?s=19>.

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# 3 Ensuring women's participation across all levels of society

## 3.1 Socioeconomics

ODI research demonstrates how crucial it is that government budgets account for the 'different resources, roles and responsibilities of men and women' as 'gender-blind budgets can miss out on opportunities to use public spending to improve the position of women in

society' (Welham et al., 2018). According to Oxfam, a gender-responsive budget is 'a budget that works for everyone (women and men, girls and boys) by ensuring gender-equitable distribution of resources and by contributing to equal opportunities for all' (Stephenson, 2018). Workshop participants (see Box 1) called for a gender-responsive budget across the national

### Box 1 Socioeconomics workshop recommendations

1. Implement a rigorous gender-responsive budgeting exercise to examine the government's policy and spending practices in support of women and minority-disadvantaged groups (e.g. children and the elderly) in Sudan, in all sectors. Gender mainstreaming should also apply to all non-government projects targeting Sudanese women and children.
2. Mandate free education for all girls, facilitating it by providing transport, teachers and other resources. Ban girls' involvement in work (formal or informal, paid or unpaid).
3. Develop a more just social care system, accompanied by economic reforms to acknowledge and redistribute women's unpaid care work.
4. Abolish any legal restrictions on 'informal' work by women. Legally recognise entrepreneurial and informal forms of employment, such as tea-selling, and increase support for them (e.g. no taxation).
5. Reform legislation to reduce the dependence of women on men, by empowering their financial decisions, their right to own property and financial protection in case of separation from men after marriage (e.g. social pension, parental leave, unemployment benefits).
6. Promote leadership programmes by governmental and non-governmental agencies, and across all horizontal and vertical levels, to enable social and economic reforms by challenging the structural dominance of men in decision-making in formal and informal settings.
7. Implement positive discrimination to enable the redistribution of jobs in the economy between men and women, to increase the representation of women in more profitable sectors and jobs.
8. Identify female experts inside and outside Sudan to support public sector reform and political activity, and create a network to support women in Sudan in various fields.

Source: notes from workshop participants

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and local council levels to be designed in Sudan. This is a tall order in a country where public financial management requires strengthening across the board, but attention can be given to bringing a gender lens to budgeting as new and more effective financial planning and monitoring systems are developed by the incoming government.

Participants highlighted that such budgetary exercises must also be complemented by socioeconomic reforms. Key areas for reform include the right for all to education, access to paid and decent work, support for childcare, equal access to assets and financial services, leadership and mentorship, social protection, and fiscal, legal and regulatory reforms. These are high-level aspirations that will require time, political will and dedicated resources to come to fruition, but participants felt that it was important to articulate how critical these issues are, and their interdependence. They also emphasised that the lifting of economic sanctions can benefit in particular women, children and the elderly, when matched with social and economic programmes and reforms that ensure more equal distribution of wealth and opportunities and access to services.

Participants also highlighted the importance of seeing Sudanese women not as one group: their roles, for example, in agriculture and animal husbandry, trade, government, and the service sector all need to be recognised to ensure that the needs of all women, and not simply some, are addressed.

## 3.2 Law

Box 2 details the recommendations from the workshop on law. The legal system in Sudan must be reformed to make it more gender-equal, both in the letter of the law as well as in practice. Some more gender-equal laws in Sudan are not effectively implemented, and there are other laws that are outright discriminatory. Both problems require redress.

To address discriminatory laws, Sudanese gender equality advocates and legal reform initiatives should leverage international policy commitments to justice and equality under the law, such as Sustainable Development Goal

(SDG) 16 and the related SDG commitments around gender equality in SDG 5 and others. Similarly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), while controversial in the Sudanese political context, should be leveraged as a platform for promoting Sudanese alignment with global standards on gender equality law. While Islamist women's groups in Sudan have at times rejected the CEDAW in principle and there has been a perceived tension between the Convention and Sharia law, they have embraced some policy positions to empower women politically and economically (Tonnessen, 2013). Where possible, the principles of gender inequality in certain laws identified below should be exposed, and the laws reformed to eliminate clearly discriminatory legal standards and align with wider commitments to empowerment and equality promoted by Sudanese women's movements.

ODI research highlights the importance of legal implementation beyond an analysis of the law in letter only. 'What matters after constitutional and legal change is whether laws are implemented and make a difference to the lives of women and girls. Government commitment, policy coherence, capacity, and incentives for civil servants to implement law and policy are all vital for the success of policies that challenge powerful vested interests' (O'Neill and Domingo, 2016).

Particular laws that require abolition or amendment to meet the standards set out in the CEDAW are the Public Order Act of 1996 and the Penal Code and Personal Matters Act (both 1991), which regulate the behaviour and dress of women and girls (setting out harsh punishments for violations). The law setting out the age of marriage must also be revised, with the age rising to 18 to align with international standards.

The Public Order Act gave police the power to arrest women and girls for 'indecent or immoral behaviour or dress' (wearing trousers or leaving hair uncovered could lead to fines and public lashings). Some 40 women were brought to court each day in Khartoum for violating the code (*The East African*, 2019). Islamic laws of inheritance can also reinforce gender-unequal economic conditions for women, and

customary barriers to women's access to land, particularly in rural areas, is putting women at a disadvantage to men. Alongside legal reform and

the promotion of more gender-equal customary systems, legal education and aid must be made more accessible, especially in rural areas.

## **Box 2 Law workshop recommendations**

1. Abolish and/or amend laws and articles that are discriminatory against women and girls and address discriminatory interpretation of the law by legal practitioners.
  - a. Abolish the Public Order Act 1996, articles 152 and 154 of the Sudanese Criminal Act 1991 and amending discriminatory articles in the Personal Matters Act 1991 such as the article pertaining to the minimum age of marriage and other discriminatory laws and articles.
2. Empower women, including marginalised groups, and protect their rights.
  - a. Increase participation of women and ensure that women at the grassroots level are the real decision-makers and are consulted on the changes that are needed, and how to go about making these changes.
  - b. Ensure that law enforcement officers do not infringe human rights, especially women's rights, as they do their jobs. Train law enforcement officers so that they are sensitised to human rights, and especially women's rights, and are subject to penalties, as safeguards to these rights, should they breach them.
  - c. Provide access to justice and legal aid services to women and girls, especially in rural areas. Set up legal aid clinics across the country, a free legal aid hotline, and media campaigns to raise public awareness of human rights and women's rights.
3. Legislate gender-sensitive laws and generally adopt a gender-sensitive legal framework.
  - a. Harmonise Sudanese law with the international treaties and conventions of which the country is a part.
  - b. Encourage the signing and ratification of international treaties and conventions that protect women's rights, such as CEDAW, developing clear implementation plans.
  - c. Monitor the application of articles addressing women in the Transitional Constitutional Declaration.
  - d. Introduce an Equality Act and impose positive discrimination clauses in favour of women and marginalised groups, where needed. These groups should be consulted as the Act is designed.
  - e. Sensitise parliamentarians and political party members towards gender issues so as to legislate more gender-sensitive laws and prioritise women's agendas and participation, as opposed to party agendas.
4. Adopt a bottom-up mechanism as opposed to the current top-down model to improve women's participation on all levels, especially at the grassroots.
  - a. Push further women's issues by women's groups and civil society activists through campaigns, advocacy, lobbying, etc.
  - b. Set up a non-governmental monitoring body to review amendments in laws that pertain to women's rights and their effects by publishing reports and working closely with legislative bodies such as the Ministry of Justice.
  - c. Set up regular workshops and seminars to highlight the Constitutional Conference due to take place before the end of the transitional period. Ensure this conference creates a constitution that will improve women's rights by establishing the effective participation of women in the conference to make certain their perspectives are included in the upcoming Constitution.

Source: notes from workshop participants

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### 3.3 Education

In line with SDG 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education) and SDG 5 (achieve gender equality), an inclusive, quality and gender-equal education system accessible to all members of society is needed, both in order to achieve gender equality aims and to ensure a more peaceful and prosperous Sudan. According to UNICEF, Sudan has one of the largest populations of out-of-school children in the Middle East and North Africa region, with over three million children aged 5–13 years old not in school (UNICEF). Conflict has been a significant barrier, as well as low classroom teaching quality. But some important progress has been achieved, including increases in primary school attendance and gender parity in primary schools. Further, a successful education system requires stability, with adequate representation of women at all levels. International treaties and conventions must be adopted, especially as they relate to vulnerable people including women in conflict zones. National resources such as the National Bureau of Statistics must also be strengthened in order to shape more successful education systems that truly reach all Sudanese people and meet their needs.

The national census must also be updated to garner more accurate population data and align Sudanese education work with wider SDG programming. Education work must be matched with media campaigns to empower women, coalescing with alliances of women's rights groups.

Recommendations from the workshop (see Box 3) included the need to ensure education strategies line up with wider national strategies, improvement in the quality of and expansion in teacher training (addressing, for example, social norms blocking women from studying medicine), and advisory groups to manage and implement diversity and social care in schools. Finally, compulsory nursery education must be funded.

### 3.4 Health

Health workshop participants focused on the need to coordinate health activities with other ministries and agencies to achieve more meaningful change for women and girls (see Box 4). Despite promises, including recent

commitments to public health crisis prevention at the World Health Organisation (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office and African Preparedness regions, health issues, particularly their gendered dimensions, need urgent financial and political follow through. Health challenges in Sudan are closely linked to economic and governance issues, with nearly half (46.5%) (UNDP) of the population living below the poverty line. The country is also dealing with the strain of supporting over 770,000 refugees and other migrants. Addressing malnutrition and ensuring improved sanitation and infrastructure remain key priorities to enable all Sudanese to thrive and engage in a democratic future. The Lancet recently observed that 'Sudan is on a trajectory towards a health and humanitarian crisis because of a near total collapse in national governance' and 'chronic underfunding' (The Lancet, 2019).

Gender is a significant piece of the overall landscape of public health reform. Participants highlighted that women's health and gendered aspects of health service provision and wider social services are in need of urgent political commitment and reform. The intersection of gender and health remains strong; according to the WHO, gender is a 'key social determinant' of health and well-being, and gender also interacts with other forms of social disadvantage to contribute to health outcomes. A healthy society is required to enable a thriving and inclusive political system, and to address the barriers holding people back, including women and girls. Health systems that lack gender awareness can particularly disadvantage girls and women.

Key challenges in the health sector in Sudan include deficiency in health staff overall, pressing challenges of malnutrition and maternal mortality, and training, education and resources.

### 3.5 Conflict

The final session focused on the importance of recognising the particular experiences of Sudanese people in conflict when developing policies and initiatives (see Box 5). Sudan's long experience of conflict includes two civil wars costing the lives of more than 1.5 million people, and ongoing conflict in the Western region of Darfur, killing more than 200,000 and driving millions from their homes. Sexual violence and

### Box 3 Education workshop recommendations

1. General education (pre-school, primary and secondary education)
  - a. Align education strategies with national strategies.
  - b. Restore a system based on 12 years of education (evaluate alternative systems, e.g 6/3/3 or 4/4/4).
  - c. Place all the country's *khalwas* (religious schools) under the auspice of the Ministry of Education.
  - d. Give priority to education in conflict-affected contexts.
  - e. Create Quality Assurance processes and monitoring structures (for teachers, inspectors and social workers in schools) and strengthen accountability mechanisms.
  - f. Enhance campaigns for the education of disabled and special-needs children, displaced children and refugee children; Create educational programmes for street children.
  - g. Ensure universal and free pre-school and primary education.
  - h. Fund infrastructure: schools, boarding schools, laboratories, libraries, IT facilities, etc.
  - i. Provide continuous teacher training especially in the sciences and mathematics.
  - j. Ensure gender training for teachers and school administrators.
  - k. Provide leadership training for teachers, public speaking, etc.
  - l. Promote vocational training.
  - m. Include gender-sensitive content across curricula and remove stereotypes.
  - n. Provide programmes to increase students' self-esteem and critical thinking skills.
  - o. Ensure that syllabuses foster civic education and an understanding of legal structures and practices affecting gender issues, property rights, etc.
2. Higher education
  - a. Introduce governance systems at higher education institutions that observe academic freedoms, elections of Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors, the appointment of teaching staff, freedom of association and representation of students, etc.
  - b. Establish Centres of Excellence for Research (CEfRs) and Research Councils for funding higher education and CEfRs.
  - c. Consolidate existing higher education institutions.
  - d. Create mechanisms for ranking higher education institutions regionally and internationally.
  - e. Reform/streamline admissions policies to remove gender bias and allow girls access to all academic programmes.
  - f. Establish a quality assurance body and systems.
  - g. Build capacity within the Accreditation Department at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.
  - h. Partner with international accrediting bodies for universities to build required capacity for international recognition (AMBA, AACSB, etc.)
  - i. Clarify the funding model for public sector universities.
  - j. Provide grants (tuition and maintenance) for disadvantaged students.
  - k. Establish scholarship programmes with donors.
  - l. Provide funding for research centres and universities.
  - m. Ensure access to international sources of knowledge including international funds, subscriptions and e-learning (requires the lifting of economic sanctions).
3. General
  - a. Promote health, wellbeing, nutrition and other areas across programmes in Sudan
  - b. Promote human rights and diversity in education.
  - c. Tackle gender-based and age-based violence in schools.
  - d. Provide sustainable funding for adult education and life-long education.
  - e. Partner across Sudanese schools and communities in the diaspora and global networks and platforms (such as ODI and the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence programme (GAGE)), and implement existing recommendations of workshops and conferences held by other bodies that are in line with the recommendations on education of this event.

Source: notes from workshop participants

#### **Box 4 Health workshop recommendations**

1. Acknowledging that health issues in Sudan are complicated, the government's recent adoption of proposals from the Sudanese Doctors' Union is a step in the right direction. More needs to be done.
2. Sudan should agree and sign international conventions supporting the principle of the right to health (emphasising health of women) and child protection (including female genital mutilation).
3. The lack of health personnel is a major obstacle facing health programmes in Sudan. Health education, training, and the rehabilitation of medical and allied health cadres must be prioritised during this transitional period.
4. The following issues for health must be addressed as top priorities:
  - a. Focus on conflict zones and give them priority in health projects and planning, taking into account the health and social care challenges in these areas.
  - b. Offer treatment and support for survivors of assault (sexual, physical and psychological).
  - c. Address malnutrition of children and pregnant women.
  - d. Tackle maternal mortality and improve health and access to family planning services.
  - e. Improve access to childhood immunisation.
  - f. Address sanitation problems, especially the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sewage systems.
5. Adopt gender-balanced budgeting.
6. Ensure health goals are integrated in all relevant policies, and address the wider determinants of health such as poverty, education and healthy work places.

Source: Notes from workshop participants

#### **Box 5 Conflict workshop recommendations**

1. Include female victims of war (survivors/victims of rape and sexual assault) in the peace process and post-war reconstruction, and in consultations and decision-making.
2. Enable the effective participation of victims of war in all levels of decision-making. Rehabilitation is vital in empowering women and helping them gain control of their lives.
3. Achieve rehabilitation goals, and provide the following key resources:
  - a. Medical treatment and counselling/therapy for victims.
  - b. Increase of the capacity of government health organisations and the private health sector.
  - c. Intensive professional training in dealing with trauma.
  - d. Improve and increase the capacity of mental health establishments and mental health professionals in areas affected by conflict.
  - e. Lift restrictions on civil society organisations and international organisations and enable them to operate in vulnerable areas.
  - f. Provide resources and funding for civil society organisations.

Source: Notes from workshop participants

rape have also occurred. A particular focus was on the needs of displaced women in Darfur, Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, especially victims of rape in Darfur, and of mass rape during paramilitary crackdowns on female protesters outside the army headquarters in Khartoum on 3rd June 2019.

As ODI research has identified, '[s]upporting women in post-conflict and transitional settings is a fundamentally political objective' (ODI, 2014). There is growing attention including among

international actors on ensuring women's political participation in post-conflict political settlements, and these efforts must reflect women's own experiences of living in conflict. Part of the way forward is to ensure that women play a role in shaping the outcomes of peace processes and the political transition. Sudan presents an opportunity for these efforts to be redoubled and to ensure that women including victims of war are consulted and heard, and that they serve a leading role in creating and enacting political solutions.



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# 4 Conclusions and overall recommendations

Enhancing women's voices across all levels of society and government in Sudan requires a comprehensive, cross-sectoral and purposeful effort that engages with the political realities of the transitional period. Efforts to ensure women's representation in the transitional Sovereign Council and ensuing political structures must make sure that representation is inclusive and not tokenistic, representing a diversity of people including women from different socioeconomic levels and their perspectives, and enabling positions of real power and influence for women across society.

Education is central to achieving women's adequate representation and agency in Sudan's new political system. Education is key for equipping future female leaders with skills and knowledge to participate in leadership positions, and a more equitable education system is crucial to enabling a more gender-equal society and economy to support robust participatory democratic governance. Health and wellbeing of all women and girls, as well as men and boys, is also crucial. A third of girls in Sudan are married before the age of 18, with the highest absolute number of child brides in the world, and FGM remains common (Girls Not Brides). In line with commitments to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage and other human rights instruments, action in the areas highlighted in this report is critically needed to ensure more equitable and sustainable progress towards the robust participation of women in Sudan's future, as well as their rights and dignity.

Promoting female leadership, mentoring and opportunities to input at all levels and sectors of society is required to support gender-equal policy-making and programming and enhance women's leadership skills, including through training. The vulnerabilities of women and girls affected by conflict in particular, including victims of rape and sexual abuse, and the experiences of the marginalised, including in rural areas, must be a priority. This must include ensuring that a diversity of women's voices are represented at all levels of politics.

Beyond thematic recommendations and reflections, the workshop closed with the following recommendations for ways ahead for development practitioners and women's rights advocates, with a focus on clearly identifying priorities and engaging diverse actors to support women's rights in Sudan during this critical period.

## **Final recommendations from the workshop**

- Recommendation 1: Map issues and priorities.
- Recommendation 2: Eradicate clearly discriminatory laws.
- Recommendation 3: Focus on education as a tool to enhance critical thinking and build skills among youth.
- Recommendation 4: Learn from other African women's rights movements and political activists.
- Recommendation 5: Mobilise the diaspora.
- Recommendation 6: Demand a Sudanese solution, engage with international actors as helpful but keep Sudanese women at the heart of negotiations and solutions.

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