Documenting The Contribution of Feminist Activists and Women Human Rights Defenders in Emergency Rooms and Grassroots Groups After The April 15th, 2023 war in Sudan

NOON FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Research and Documentation Team

“Nobody warned you that the women whose feet you cut from running would give birth to daughters with wings.”

- Ijeoma Umebinyuo

Abstract

It has been over a year since the outbreak of the war on April 15, 2023, in Sudan. This conflict is a disappointing outcome for the Sudanese people, particularly women, who have relentlessly pursued democracy since the country gained independence in 1956. Five years have passed since the December Revolution of 2019, which was a popular uprising against the National Congress Party regime—a military-religious fascism that ruled the country for thirty years.

Many stories of Sudanese women's struggles have been lost to history since Taya Abu Agla became the first martyr of the student movement against the Islamic Front coup. Sarah Abdel Baqi, who fell as a martyr during the September 2013 Uprising, was assassinated while tending to the wounds of another victim of state oppression. Sit Al Nufour, shackled by Al Bashir and her own family, persisted but was ultimately shot dead during the coup on October 25, 2021, in the city of Bahri.

More tragedies have continued to occur throughout the current war. A great woman, Roya Hassan, a writer and feminist researcher who studied the intersections of oppression affecting Sudanese women and men, left us too early due to the harshness of travel routes and malaria. Muhja Abdullah was

assassinated for documenting sexual violence against women in Darfur. Halima Idris was run over by Janjaweed militias using a military pickup truck (Thatcher) while covering events in Omdurman. Siham Mustafa was shot dead while trying to protect herself and her family from rape when the militia stormed their home. Taqwa Ibrahim, who was constantly displaced in an effort to escape the war, ultimately lost her life due to a lack of oxygen at medical facilities. She made the mistake of moving away from her home in Khartoum. During her last moments, she told her mother, "Mother, I am dying. Take me back home, take me back to Khartoum."

Sudanese women, regardless of their backgrounds or the diversity of their grievances and privileges, spared no effort to achieve justice. They demonstrated, held sit-ins, and raised banners reading, "Raped women demand that the Janjaweed be punished immediately." They marched through streams and valleys, traveling lightly with only their children and a few bags, determined to safeguard their right to a decent life. This occurred while the country faced ethnic cleansing, displacement, the dismantling of sit-ins, and abuse during demonstrations.

The repressive regimes raped women in Jebel Moon and continued their atrocities all the way to Palace Street in Khartoum, the capital, when women protested on December 19 during the coup of October 25, 2021. These countless

grievances are often overlooked by those who are privileged, unless they make a serious effort to search for and acknowledge them. Sudanese feminists have been working together to address these grievances under various banners, one of which declares, "It isn't just your right, it is the right of those marching behind you."

Violence against Sudanese women is one of the many ugly facets of this bleeding country, intertwined with its economy, politics, religions, customs, and social fabric. Since the founding of the Noon feminist movement at the beginning of 2019, we have committed ourselves to amplifying and documenting the voices of other women who have been silenced and marginalized, those who lacked a platform or the means to speak out against injustice or even describe it. We understood very well that our survival is collective, and we worked tirelessly to realize the connection of our destinies and the unity of our struggle based on that belief.

For the past six months, Noon movement's research and documentation team has been working on this project to document the contributions of activists and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in emergency rooms and grassroots groups in the context of the April 15, 2023, war in Sudan. The aim of the paper is to capture the experiences of Sudanese women, feminist and queer resilience since the outbreak of the war, which continues to this day. This paper seeks to

monitor the challenges faced by Sudanese women human rights defenders (WHRDs), Feminist activists and LGBTQIA+ activists , to celebrate their achievements, and to provide them with the support and solidarity they deserve. Additionally, it aims to advocate for legal proceedings against the perpetrators of human rights violations, raise awareness about the situation in Sudan, mobilize international support, and push for humanitarian efforts to respond to the crisis.

The data collection team documented the experiences of forty women human rights activists from the states of Gedaref, Kassala, and Port Sudan. The data collection phase faced significant challenges, particularly the interruption of internet networks across the country at the beginning of this year. This serious violation and isolation severely impacted everyone, limiting the access to individuals across the country's eighteen states and reducing the research sample to the three states mentioned above.

The research questionnaire explored the nature of the activities undertaken by the participants, whether individual or organized within various grassroots civilian groups. It also examined the specialization of the assistance provided by these actors during the war, the challenges they faced, and the forms of formal and informal discrimination they encountered, along with how they overcame them. The questionnaire addressed the challenges of emergency activities and

the breakthroughs achieved as the war continues, the role of feminist networks during their work, and their recommendations to both local and international civil society.

Methodology

The research conducted was socio-descriptive, utilizing the Social Survey Methodology, with questions designed to assess women's achievements during the war in alignment with the objectives of the analytical paper. The data collection team conducted and recorded interviews with forty participants from Gedaref, Kassala, and Port Sudan, either on the ground or via phone calls. Despite mobility challenges due to emergency laws and stringent security conditions, the data collectors, who were also involved in the research, persevered. Additionally, four focus group discussions (FGDs) were held. Two pre-FGDs included Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), feminists, and volunteers working or who have worked in emergency rooms after April 15, 2023. The two post-FGDs involved feminist researchers and women's rights advocates, including participants from four Sudanese queer groups and organizations. These discussions enriched the data, providing critical insights for the paper.

Terminology

Emergency Room: This refers to an organizational unit within a specific geographical area, established by young women and youth in neighbourhoods. It is part of a grassroots voluntary organization connected with the activities of the Sudanese resistance committees. These units were established after the outbreak of the April 15, 2023, war to address humanitarian needs.

Services and Change Committees: These are neighbourhood committees formed in 2019 alongside the Resistance Committees, serving as alternative basic service bodies to the Popular Committees of the National Congress. These committees work to meet the needs of their neighbourhoods, with each neighbourhood having its own Services and Change Committee.

Gendering: This term refers to the process of applying gender sensitivity to speech or activities. Gender-sensitive activities typically focus on, but are not limited to, the humanitarian, economic, political, and legal fields. For example, there can be gender-sensitive approaches to finance, the public budget, or the political process, among others.

Mobilization/Mobilized Soldiers: These refer to the battalions and personnel who are fighting alongside the Sudanese armed forces. They responded to an invitation issued by the Sudanese armed forces in June 2023 to train and serve within the ranks of the Armed popular resistance. This mobilization was aimed at

resisting the expansion of the Rapid Support Forces after the latter declared rebellion with the onset of the war on April 15, 2023.

Security Committee: This is a military council involved in managing the country's affairs since the removal of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. It consists of members from the Armed Forces, the General Intelligence Service, and the Police Forces, including the Military Intelligence of the Sudanese army. The Security Committee operates in direct coordination with authorities across different states of Sudan.

Emergency Law: This refers to a constitutional law that grants the government exceptional supervisory powers. These powers include the authority to confiscate property, restrict movement, prohibit organizations, detain individuals, and cut off communications if suspected of violating the law. The state of emergency was imposed in Sudan in December 2023.

Rapid Support Forces (RSF): The RSF is a paramilitary militia whose existence was legalized by the National Congress regime. Initially, the RSF participated in border guard duties in Darfur starting in 2003. In 2013, the RSF was restructured and placed under the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security and Service, with the Sudanese parliament passing the RSF law in 2017. Subsequently, the RSF was attached into the Sudanese army. After the December Revolution, which overthrew the al-Bashir regime on April 11, 2019, the RSF became a key partner in power, with its leader, Mohammed Hamdan Daglo "Hemedti," serving

as deputy chairman of the Sovereign Council. Although the RSF supported the coup led by army commander and chairman of the Sovereign Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, on October 25, 2021, the RSF was declared a rebel force against the state in September 2023 following the outbreak of war. The 2017 law and its 2019 amendments were repealed, effectively disbanding the RSF.

Objectives

Identify Tools: To identify the tools used by the research sample (service providers) in their breakthroughs in public work, particularly in rapid response efforts during the April 2023 War emergency.

Understand Networks: To understand the nature of the work conducted by networks, including feminists, LGBTQ+ activists, emergency rooms, and grassroots groups, as well as their organization and coordination.

Analyze Work Systems: To analyze the mechanisms and challenges within the current work systems, such as emergency rooms, feminist emergency rooms, queer organizations, Resistance Committees, and individual initiatives.

Organizational Effectiveness: To understand the effectiveness of feminist and queer organizations in providing services within the context of the armed conflict in sudan.

Highlight Feminist, women and queer Resistance: To highlight the resilience within grassroots groups in the context of armed conflict in sudan post april 15 2023..

Dedicated to the Hard Working Women of Sudan.

T.N: *"We should focus on the economic empowerment of society and Sudan so that we can develop and achieve economic stability. The breakthroughs of women in the state of Gedaref are significant, and in other states as well, we have always heard of women'being on the frontlines."*

The State of Gedaref

The emergency room for the state of Gedaref was established on April 21, 2023, with a basic organizational structure designed to provide shelters and meet food and health requirements in the state. However, the State Security Committee opposed the emergency room's activities, aiming to maintain its monopoly on the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid. As a result, the Committee began restricting the emergency room's activities starting in May 2023. The emergency room was eventually suspended, and humanitarian organizations

continued their work through government and non-governmental organizations registered with the Humanitarian Aid Commission.The state of Gedaref has been under a heightened state of security alert, with a large number of mobilized forces in multiple army training camps, prepared to defend the state against a potential invasion by the Rapid Support Forces. This tense climate imposed significant obstacles on civil and voluntary activities, with actors facing threats of arrest, surveillance, or detention, primarily by army intelligence.In this analytical paper, we highlight the individual and collective efforts organized to achieve humanitarian breakthroughs and ensure that the voices and needs of women—who are bearing the brunt of this conflict—are heard and addressed.

A.W.: *"During the emergency period, the burdens on women are doubled, as are the violations they endure."*

Ten women from the state of Gedaref, aged between 18 and 48, were documented. These women included both citizens of Gedaref and displaced persons, some returning to their hometown in the state, while others were displaced from other areas to Gedaref. The participants were women with strong educational backgrounds, having completed their secondary and university education, with some holding advanced degrees. The documentation covered a

range of activities, including collective initiatives, individual initiatives, and independent projects under the umbrella of existing associations. In total, nine initiatives were documented, including four that were established before the war. Additionally, eight organizations were networked with after the outbreak of the war, resulting in the creation of two new projects. One event was an individual initiative in cooperation with these networks.Moreover, there is a Social Enterprise business that actively contributes to these efforts. The organizations differentiated between grassroots organizations, local individual or collective initiatives, emergency rooms, and the efforts of international organizations.

Areas in Which Humanitarian Aid Bodies, Projects, and Initiatives Operate in Gedaref

Supporting economic empowerment.

Providing psychosocial support.

Promoting peaceful coexistence.

Engaging in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Addressing the needs of women.

Monitoring violations.

Developing small enterprises for displaced women.

Meeting ration and clothing needs for displaced women and their families.

Offering feminist training and raising awareness programs.

Advocating and raising awareness to reduce gender-based violence.

Raising awareness about forms of discrimination against displaced women with disabilities.

Integrating internally displaced persons (IDP) communities with host communities.

Enhancing women's political participation.

Hosting awareness and business activities for displaced women.

Organizing social sessions, such as "Coffee Gatherings," as a feminist expression of solidarity.

T.A.: *"Our challenges as women are significant during wars, conflicts, and even in the pursuit of peace. We are undoubtedly peacemakers. How do we raise*

awareness, play an active role, and ensure that we have the most significant impact in peacemaking and public action?"

Challenges of Civil and Humanitarian Action in Emergency Situations

The complexities of the situation, as described by the women involved, include a range of challenges such as displacement, the fragility of the security situation, and the manifestations of repression and political restriction. These challenges are particularly severe for women who belong to political organizations or grassroots bodies like the Resistance Committees.

The social complexities associated with gender-based discrimination are further exacerbated by family tensions, even among those from more open backgrounds who feel compelled to comply with the state's social norms. Women face the additional fear of experiencing war in conflict zones and the threat of sexual violence, which has been systematically used as a weapon during the April 15 war. These women also endure gender-based violence within the host homes of extended families and in shelters run by the state commission, which often ignores complaints of harassment and abuse by uniformed and official personnel. Furthermore, there is the challenge of limited funding opportunities to support and sustain their activities. The actors in

Gedaref face significant and increasing psychological pressure due to displacement, loss, and the responsibility of voluntary solidarity for collective survival. This ongoing struggle places these women in a continuous and daily challenge to complete their voluntary and humanitarian tasks.

N.N.: *"The challenge comes from within my family because I'm the only one doing voluntary work, especially since my father passed away. People have been saying what they want about me, but my mother is supportive and even has ideas to contribute."*

Sh.S.: *"My first encounter with the security forces was during the preparation for a consultation meeting, where we were asked to obtain four licences (from the NISS, state security, etc.). When I objected, I was asked to pay a bribe to allow us to hold the event. I refused to pay and managed to organize it secretly."*

Between the Hammer of Action's Difficulty and the Anvil of Urgent Need

These complications have prompted active women to find creative ways to continue providing assistance without directly clashing with either the social context of the state or its security systems. Some have used social strategies, such as involving a brother within the family or relying on the support of mothers to persuade male family members to allow their daughters to organize

activities. Others have chosen to work with regular government organizations and bodies to avoid arrests and secure necessary clearances for various events.In addition to these strategies, the women have developed networking and training methods, learning from previous experiences in Sudan and the broader regional context of working during times of war and under strict security measures.

This situation raises an important feminist question: Why does it always fall on women to mitigate the effects of war and its socio-economic consequences, despite their lack of support for, involvement in, or adoption of any military orientation or activity?

This paper draws attention to the fact that grassroots organizations and active individuals are unable to openly express their opposition to the war and support for peace. Such statements could lead to facing the state's security forces, who may accuse them of supporting the "militia" Rapid Support Forces and providing political cover for them.

A.K.: *"The people at home called me a 'free maid,' and I struggled to balance my job, my studies, and the challenging security situation."*

Continuity and Interruption of Emergency Work

Despite the numerous challenges, none of the women documented completely ceased their work in emergency response. Although some experienced temporary halts due to psychological stress, burnout, constant displacement for safety, or even leaving Sudan, they all eventually resumed their emergency work. Their efforts continued, albeit in different forms and often without the same level of field presence.

A.M. (person with motor disabilities): *"No sane person would want this war. Sudan is in a fragile situation, and for us as persons with disabilities, this fragility is doubly challenging due to the war. We have women with disabilities who have lost their homes and jobs and are now forced to take on marginal work. Some people from the deaf community have even been killed—like when the RSF spoke to them, and because they couldn't hear, they were shot dead. We have reports of such incidents in Khartoum and Jazeera. All this has compelled us to be part of the emergency response for people with disabilities. We are focusing not only on women but on all groups. Currently, we are working on a food security project for people with disabilities to help them access food safely."*

N.H.: *"Government agencies are unable to help society and solve its issues, especially with the war ongoing. We are in a period where we need to stand together."*

Mechanisms for the Development of Emergency Work

The actors we interviewed employed self-learning strategies to make use of their time, adapting to the impacts of the war on the various activities they had previously engaged in. This adaptation was particularly necessary due to the imposition of the state of emergency, which included curfews starting as early as 6 pm in normal months and 10 pm during Ramadan, lasting until 6 in the morning. By reviewing other experiences in similar situations, the women engaged in remote training and rehabilitation via the internet and developed their action plans accordingly. In addition, they networked with local grassroots organizations within the state and reorganized their structures to better communicate with regional and international organizations. They also worked through allied registered organizations to secure funding for their humanitarian and awareness activities. Approximately 70% of the women whose experiences were documented relied on feminist organizations within the state or in nearby areas. These organizations provided material assistance, rehabilitation, and

consultations, even reaching beyond state borders when necessary. Additionally, the women sought assistance to meet specific needs related to sexual and reproductive health services, including support for childbirth, the purchase of sanitary pads and related supplies, and assistance in responding to sexual violations against women fleeing war zones.

G.L.: *"My motivation to engage in this field is to provide sources of income for women, especially during the war, when they have lost their work and all their property. This is to prevent them from becoming reliant on services from organizations, like many displaced women. By creating opportunities for women to earn a living, I aim to help both displaced families and the host community. From my experience, when women work, it reduces violations within the family and fosters a healthier atmosphere."*

Did the Feminist Movement Make a Difference in Emergency Work?

Although many women actors did not collectively identify themselves as feminist actors, they agreed that feminist groups, whether through networking or direct field presence, had a significant impact on humanitarian assistance during the war. **These groups played a crucial role in drawing attention to the specific needs of women**, engaging emergency organizations, Resistance

Committees, the host community, and the state government in addressing these needs.

Feminist groups also focused on and organized discussions around peace, the fight against gender-based violence, and initiated conversations on issues such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. They operated on the principle that humanitarian assistance should go beyond providing shelter and food, emphasizing that gender-sensitive relief and assistance are essential for survival.

Documenting the Feminist engagement

Feminist movements in Gedaref are characterized by a strong commitment to documentation, especially as the number of humanitarian aid organizations has grown in response to increasing needs. This has led to a heightened interest in civil documentation within the state. Many of the actors involved are women who were part of grassroots organizations during and after the revolutionary movement in 2019. They are keenly aware of the importance of documenting women's experiences, having been involved in feminist documentation efforts before the outbreak of the war. Their focus on documentation includes recording events and the outcomes of interventions, as well as monitoring violations against women. Additionally, they document personal experiences with some organizations engaged in humanitarian work in the region.

Recommendations for Local and International Civil Society

Solidarity and Networking: Foster solidarity, networking, transparency, and credibility among and between grassroots civic bodies.

Avoid Political Agendas: Maintain a distance from political agendas in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Conflict-Sensitive Support: Scale up support in a manner that is sensitive to the conflict.

Strategic Partnerships: Develop a clear strategy that fosters real partnerships between the international humanitarian sector and national NGOs and grassroots organizations working in emergency rooms.

Recognition of National Organizations: Global organizations should recognize the leading role of national organizations in humanitarian response, which should lead to increased funding.

Civil Society Intervention: Civil society must intervene in the operations of shelters, particularly given the absence of a voice addressing women's violations and the response to them.

Balanced Cooperation Conditions: International organizations should establish balanced and objective conditions for cooperation, including alternative solutions to the registration requirement for working with grassroots entities.

Respect for National Sovereignty: Ensure that international assistance does not interfere with national sovereignty under the guise of providing aid.

Focus on Shelters: International aid should prioritize support for shelters.

Gender-Sensitive Assistance: Provide gender-sensitive assistance and train specialists to deal with cases of sexual assault.

Pressure to End War: The international community should apply pressure to stop the ongoing war.

Women's Role in Public Sphere: Strengthen the role and participation of women in the public sphere.

Training and Empowerment: Focus on the training and empowerment of women in public work.

"I believe that any woman who was able to survive these circumstances is victorious."

Success stories

"The women at the NR school and I collaborated on an operational workshop focused on baking, pastry, and food production, We trained them for two days. After the training, they were given the necessary materials, They started selling their products in the market, recovered the capital, and made a profit, and purchased an electric oven. We also recived part of the profits as a Union to provide more materials. Another part of the profit was used to improve the school by installing lighting and planting trees in the center. The center has become self-sufficient. Instead of relying on organizations, the women can now provide for all their needs, including tea, sugar, diapers, toothpaste, soap, and milk, by living off the profit. They even grow vegetables, sell homemade drinks at school, and work two shifts, morning and evening. One woman was able to buy medicine for her son, managing to afford treatment after the project's success."

"Fatima Al-Doma came from Khartoum with just a light toub (Sudanese attire worn by women) and was seven months pregnant. Her psychological state was distressing, especially after she give birth. Despite this, she was determined to find work. She was able to get a tea stall to sell tea in the market in al-Gedaref, she took her daughter with her and was able to meet her needs and provide for her daughter."

M.KH: *"I constantly think about how to discuss the spread of hate speech among our societies, understanding the reasons behind the attacks, and finding ways to rebuild peace and live together again. But every time, new conflicts and disputes would arise, culminating in the coup 2021. And after the coup, what happened was a second round of fighting and war. The 2023 war brought back those same memories, and I felt an even stronger desire to return to writing. I decided to ask and share the questions in my mind and to interview active people who had taken initiatives that were effective in reducing hate speech back in 2019."*

Port Sudan, Red Sea State

On April 30, 2023, a government decision was issued to declare the city of Port Sudan the new administrative capital of the Sudanese government, following the fall of Khartoum to the Rapid Support Forces. The official announcement set the initial period for this change at three months, starting in May, with the possibility of renewal. Port Sudan, a coastal city in Red Sea State, has since become the headquarters for government institutions, the central bank, and major international organizations. On May 31, 2023, a curfew was imposed, and the city experienced a severe security crackdown following the fall of Al-Jazira

State to the Rapid Support militias. This crackdown was marked by the intensified presence of the Security Committee and the Popular Resistance Brigades. The city of Port Sudan is known for its rich cultural diversity. However, this diversity has also led to complex issues, which have, in turn, created more opportunities to discuss peaceful coexistence and the importance of peace among different communities. This focus on peace has been particularly relevant since the civil fighting in 2019 in eastern Sudan, which helped to develop a good understanding of emergency response systems in the region.

The state is currently experiencing heightened security tensions and extensive security measures, compounded by the presence of a large number of displaced people. These tensions are occurring amid limited spaces for cultural activities, which are closely monitored. Despite these challenges, women's contributions to civil work have been significant and varied. They have made breakthroughs in supporting communities with disabilities and in children's education. Additionally, through data collection, it has been observed that women's participation in humanitarian work now spans a more diverse range of ages. There is also a growing awareness of the importance of mental health and psychological support.

M.S.: *"Official bodies or government agencies are generally not interested in mental health and tend to view it as a luxury. Only certain sectors are active in this area. The Family and Child Protection Unit is one of the few that functions,*

but they focus on protecting children from violations rather than providing psychological support. The biggest challenges are financial, as people often have to choose between their physical health, mental health, and basic needs like food and water."

M.X.: *"In psychotherapy, there's a saying: 'The best approach is to seek mental health services so the motivation is strong.' This way, a person learns to help themselves rather than relying on help that is offered without their request."*

In conversations with most women, the economic pressure and the challenge of balancing voluntary humanitarian work with the need for a stable personal income emerged as significant concerns. This is especially true in Port Sudan, where the cost of living has skyrocketed since the start of the war and the relocation of all government institutions, service agencies, and UN missions to the state, all while jobs remain scarce.

Despite these challenges, there has been a high level of cooperation in humanitarian work between displaced women from war zones and women from Port Sudan. Although the city is not typically known for vibrant feminist activity, the mixing of communities and the influx of many women from areas with intense feminist activism have led to increased feminist networking. This has resulted in greater attention to data collection, awareness, training, and

empowerment initiatives, showing a strong commitment to feminist collaboration across different bodies.

M.H.: *"I joined the Scouts at an early age, and our motto was 'Be prepared,' so helping others became a way of life for me. It also fostered a sense of empathy and selflessness because, in difficult situations or disasters, people often don't know how to act in the moment."*

Documentation was gathered from 10 women in Port Sudan, with their periods of relocation to the city varying. Some were displaced at the beginning of the war, while others arrived more recently from Khartoum after communication networks were disrupted, continuing their humanitarian work. The group also included women originally from the state. Their ages range from 21 to 42 years, and all have received a university education. There are various forms of organization in their fieldwork, including women's organizations, emergency rooms, international organizations, initiatives for women and people with disabilities, and numerous individual initiatives. However, none of the women mentioned any involvement with organizations related to the Resistance Committees.

The women's tasks in civil work were largely focused on providing humanitarian assistance and psychological support, followed by addressing feeding needs and

sexual and reproductive health requirements. They frequently relied on "cheese discussion sessions" for these activities. Additionally, economic empowerment was a key goal, particularly in initiatives aimed at helping women with disabilities integrate into the Port Sudan community, as well as assisting people with disabilities displaced from conflict zones to integrate into the local community as a whole.

T.R.: *"Before the war, we visited girls in their homes because not all of them could afford to go to school, and the percentage of girls attending school was low. We also organized entertainment programs and trips to help the girls communicate with their parents and address any psychological issues they might be facing while staying at home. After the war we reorganized ourselves to assist deaf people who had come to Port Sudan in need of help and networking. One of the mechanisms we used was training them in making accessories, so they could rediscover themselves, rebuild their self-confidence, and reintegrate into society."*

M.Q.: *"The violence inside the center and shelters, especially during the distribution of aid, is a significant issue. Supervisors often have to manage this violence, but their treatment of people in the shelter can exacerbate the situation. Once, a woman was injured and suffered a herniated disc from a fall. The way supervisors treat the residents has led to violence being directed at*

service providers, which can negatively impact the overall situation and hinder the ability to provide help."

The Complexities of Civil and Humanitarian Work Under Emergency Conditions

The security challenge emerged as the most significant issue, as described by the women. This was documented with two girls who were displaced from Khartoum after communication networks were disrupted. Additionally, two women working in the health field, in an area under the control of the Sudanese army, faced serious challenges. One of them was arrested by military intelligence and was only released on the condition that she stop working at the health center and leave the state. Another woman reported the arrest of members of her team and highlighted the constant fear that women involved in civilian work experience in Khartoum state. The women also pointed out that, despite their efforts, along with other medical workers, to negotiate with conflicting parties to facilitate the entry of medicines, they were often asked for large bribes. Even after paying, the parties frequently failed to honor their promises of security and protection services.Moreover, corruption is pervasive in many health institutions, which often reject the involvement of volunteers, viewing it as an encroachment

on their established systems. This corruption further complicates efforts to provide much-needed humanitarian assistance.

The second challenge is the fear of speaking out against the war and its consequences. Expressing such views is considered a security offence, leading to arrests that can last a long time in Port Sudan. This has created a "security catalogue" that varies according to the situation and the type of event.One of the women spoke about a new type of violence occurring within the shelter centers, driven by the fear of losing support. This has led to hierarchical violence, where service providers exert control over the behaviour of the displaced individuals in the shelters, fueled by their own fears. Additionally, violence is perpetuated by supervisors towards the displaced, and in turn, by the displaced towards the supervisors, creating a cycle of tension and aggression. In addition to the societal challenges, the mixing of several cultures in the context of war has created additional pressures. These cultural differences cast a heavy shadow on women who are distinct from the dominant societal norms, further complicating their situation and experiences.

K.K.: *"When I was displaced to a village in Al-Jazeera, I constantly found myself in conflict and discussions with the local community, especially the men. They believed I was filling their women's heads with ideas and causing them to disobey. On top of our social roles in the community as women—especially those of us with responsibilities like caring for family, children, and the elderly—*

we are also expected to contribute to society, particularly in the context of conflict and war. Given the difficulty and seriousness of the situation, we are expected to make an even greater effort. Additionally, we have a role in productivity, as we need to be productive and earn an income because we've lost our livelihoods."

D.B.: *"I received a summons and a threat, questioning who we are and what we are doing. At the time, we were busy with the 16 Days Against Violence campaign. We are located in areas controlled by the army, and the classifications have now become societal rather than political. Anyone who opposes the war is labeled as a supporter of the other side. These are all factors that make you think a thousand times before engaging in any activity or training. The war is still ongoing, and war is not just the absence of violence—there is currently widespread militarization in public spaces, and we don't feel safe."*

F.R.: *"I suffer from harassment and am unable to directly engage with beneficiaries due to interference from law enforcement members in our voluntary work. Policemen are present inside the shelters, and since we have no official designation, we can't stop their bad behavior or even file complaints against them. Unfortunately, providing services and programs is tied to law enforcement bodies and the armed forces—we can't do anything without their presence. Additionally, security approvals take a long time to be issued."*

F.Q.: *"I continue to work from a place of empathy—I can't sit comfortably at home knowing that others are suffering and in need, especially when I feel that I am capable of helping. Moreover, I feel truly human when I help others."*

Overcoming the challenges

Women working in emergency rooms have managed to overcome challenges through four common strategies.

Sustainability, raising awareness, networking, and continuously assessing the security situation. They formed partnerships with the local community, cooperated with government agencies, and, in some cases, worked in secret. These strategies are adaptable, changing based on ongoing assessments and continuous monitoring of shifting security conditions and humanitarian needs. Despite the high risks, only one woman stopped working on the ground due to security threats and continued her work abroad. The rest agreed that humanitarian intervention must continue, as women, children, and civilians are bearing the brunt of the war.Their suspension from work is only considered if they are forced to leave Sudan, which they hope will not happen, and that the war will eventually come to an end.

B.K.: *"No matter how much hardship I face, I will not stop. What helps me is the unwavering support and encouragement from my family. They stand by me in everything I do, and they even participate with me."*

The development of their experience in emergency work was directly tied to the humanitarian mechanisms adopted by women within their grassroots organizations, emergency rooms, or individual initiatives. Four initiatives were built on the development of their work through personal relationship networks. Three of them relied on the internet and collaborative teamwork with local initiatives, with twenty-two WhatsApp groups serving as the primary mechanism for statistics and inventory of needs. Additionally, five initiatives focused on development through the establishment of physical activities and discussion sessions.

The importance of grassroots work and local advice lies in understanding the solutions and needs, as well as how to implement them effectively. This approach is reflected in the demands of civil groups, who emphasize that international organizations should listen to grassroots organizations and local initiatives when it comes to providing humanitarian aid.

The organizations we reached to in Port Sudan exhibited diverse structures and focuses. These included two feminist organizations, two feminist initiatives, a grassroots civil society organization, and two initiatives aligned with emergency rooms. Additionally, two individual initiatives worked on networking between feminist bodies, initiatives, and emergency rooms. There was also an initiative dedicated to addressing the concerns of women and people with disabilities. This variety in organizational forms and focuses highlights the complexity and breadth of the feminist and social support landscape in the region. Through their connections with other key organizations, these groups collectively produced three initiatives that address the needs of women, particularly the provision of sanitary pads. They also developed a project for psychological support for children in art shelters, led by a group of artists.

What these organizations have in common, whether they identify with a feminist vision or focus on broader humanitarian assistance for both women and non-women, is their commitment to seeking advice and support, providing training, spreading awareness, and engaging in advocacy efforts inspired by feminist groups.

The participants in the research sample agreed that the influence of feminist groups began to emerge, albeit slightly, in eastern Sudan after the December Revolution in 2019. During the ongoing war, this influence became more evident

in areas such as psychological support, sexual and reproductive health issues, promoting peaceful coexistence, rejecting war, and building peace.

They noted that as the war continued, many of the women's initiatives were widely successful, which not only increased their visibility but also boosted the confidence of those already involved in these efforts.

M.A.: *"The presence of women in any space encourages us to consider issues from a broader perspective."*

R.B.: *"I believe that in times of peace, women are marginalized, but in times of war, they become visible."*

According to the actors, the presence of many women in civil work now provides an opportunity for economic empowerment, as many of these women are the primary breadwinners for their families.

G.A.: *"I wasn't interested in documentation before, but I recently realized how important it is, especially after the war. It was a hard lesson because we lost everything. There was no documentation, and if we had been documenting, we wouldn't have lost our archive. What I've learned is that it's essential to document every experience, even if it seems small."*

There is significant awareness of the importance of documentation in Port Sudan, particularly for cultural activities, awareness campaigns, and advocacy programs. However, there is a noticeable absence of self-documentation of personal human experiences among the actors. Documentation efforts are often hindered by security threats, which negatively impact the issuance of periodic reports and, more generally, the ability to conduct continuous follow-up and evaluation. This, in turn, directly affects the formulation of goals and the identification of needs.

Recommendations for Local and International Civil Society

Address Deficit in Humanitarian Assistance: Focus on the significant shortfall in humanitarian aid in shelters, particularly regarding the needs of children.

Needs Assessment: Conduct surveys to identify needs and prioritize the provision of basic necessities.

International Pressure to Stop the War: Urge the international community to exert pressure to end the war.

Emergency Response Training: Raise awareness and enhance the skills of members of various entities involved in emergency work through specialized

workshops, focusing on the management of technical offices within volunteer organizations to improve prompt response and implementation.

Strengthen Moral Commitment: Foster a strong moral commitment to the humanitarian situation to enhance the efficiency of actions.

Enforce International Human Rights Laws: Pressure the international community to enforce international human rights laws and intervene urgently to protect civilians in Sudan.

Advocacy Campaigns: Implement advocacy campaigns and pressure mechanisms aimed at stopping the war.

Capacity Building: Raise the capacity of communities in education and health awareness.

Strengthen Civil Society Roles: Reinforce the roles of actors and civil society organizations.

Protect Women and Girls: Enact laws or find ways to protect girls and women from sexual violence and violations across Sudan.

Promote Collaboration: Emphasize the importance of bonding, teamwork, and networking.

Decouple Aid from Politics: Ensure that the provision of aid is not linked to political considerations.

Include Mental Health in Primary Care: Mandate primary health centers to incorporate mental health programs.

Rights-Based Approach for the Deaf: Treat deaf individuals based on the principle of rights, not charity.

Create Safe Environments for People with Disabilities: Ensure the creation of safe environments for people with disabilities.

Promote Teamwork and Participation: Foster the value of teamwork and participatory approaches.

Evaluation and Follow-Up: Regularly evaluate and follow up on the work of organizations to ensure effectiveness.

Success stories

"There was a very supportive lady who provided medicines from her pharmacy. Her three daughters also worked with us at the center. The entire family was incredibly supportive and contributed to the treatment of many people. Additionally, two children, no older than ten years, came from a long distance to help us with the cleaning work at the center. When we asked them why they came, they said, 'You help people, so we came to help you."

"Altruism and selflessness led us to forgo a material grant allocated to an emergency room in Khartoum municipality in favor of another emergency room suffering from severe hunger. The first emergency room was under siege, making it impossible to benefit from the grant at that time. As the representative of the emergency room, I waived the material grant after consulting with the membership and reaching an agreement on this decision."

"In the Red Sea countryside, we find women like Halima, for example. She was the only one in her community to receive an education and fought to establish feminist organizations and empower women in those areas. She reached a point where she could confidently say 'NO' to FGM in a community where it is frowned upon for a woman to even raise her voice."

"I'm not sure whether to call it a victory or not, but my sense of responsibility has definitely increased. I've built many strong relationships and friendships with people from all over Sudan, and I've found a second family. What drives me is the feeling that I am capable of helping. There are many emotions involved—more than I can express. I'm truly proud of myself for continuing to do voluntary work for a year now without tiring, and I will keep on going."

"I worked in a center in Umm Al-Qura as part of a group of women. Initially, they didn't want to accept each other, but after six sessions, they began to accept one another and adapt to the new environment. This change was so profound that it influenced their behavior, and soon, other women wanted to join similar sessions. We organized two additional groups, and we were able to answer their questions and help them adapt. We discovered that when people have food, drinks, and a sense of safety, they are more responsive and are able to move forward."

"A child came in from a children's camp, having already experienced trauma—his mother had died before the war. He was living with his sister and grandmother, but when the war broke out, he was separated from them and came to Port Sudan with his aunts. The move traumatized him further; he didn't like people, didn't interact with anyone, and had issues with violence. However, in the camp, these behaviors gradually changed. I used collective cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), where we focused on how to manage our emotions and express our needs. He is now playing with other children non-violently and is responding positively."

"For those of us who were preparing for the exhibition, many deaf girls were initially afraid of dealing with people and worried that others wouldn't understand them. They were hesitant to go to the market and buy what was needed for the exhibition. But once they broke through that barrier, their self-confidence returned, and they were very happy. They could move around town and rely on themselves without needing a sign language interpreter. Additionally, opportunities have opened up for deaf women in the initiative. They were trained to work with accessories and baked goods, and they have remained productive and self-reliant, even gaining customers for their products."

"During the breast cancer awareness sessions, we collected money and created a small fund, with the sum going to one of the participants each round. During one of the sessions, we discovered that one of the members had breast cancer. We connected her with the oncology hospital, and within two months after her operation, she started to feel better. All the women in the shelter supported her throughout the process."

M.A.: *"I believe one of the most important needs right now is for us to view the war fairly and intersectionally. We need to recognize how the consequences of war impact women in unique ways and how it affects all of us without*

exception. It's crucial to develop mechanisms that address women's problems more fairly and intersectionally. At the same time, we should strive to fill the gaps that currently exist on the ground, especially concerning women's needs."

Kassala State

This chapter is dedicated to Fajr (her name means the Dawn) who was deprived of light in this world unlike her name.

Now we know dear Fajr, and we will not forget.

The city of Kassala in eastern Sudan is characterized by its distinctive geography and complex social, cultural, and religious dynamics. Additionally, the region has low indicators of access to public services for its citizens. Kassala witnessed a surge in feminist activity following the escalation of the revolutionary movement in 2019. The first major address was delivered at the University of Kassala for the feminist platform, Lazala. This platform was created to address gender-based violence and domestic violence, particularly in response to incidents of assault and murder of Sudanese women during the quarantine period in response to the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021. Despite widespread indignation and threats, the feminist platform in Kassala continued its efforts, sharing a link to the site Saraha (where messages are sent anonymously) and documenting a

large number of cases of domestic and community violence that had been covered up. Although the platform was temporarily halted during the war, it has since resumed its work.

The impact of this stigma became evident during the documentation of violations against civil and humanitarian work during the war. Different opinions emerged regarding the role of feminist groups, leading to confusion in distinguishing between feminist and women's efforts, as well as calls for greater influence of feminist groups. Kassala faces a security situation very similar to that in Gedaref. On January 16, 2024, the governor of Kassala dissolved all Services and Change Committees, replacing them with steering committees formed by local executives. The decision explicitly excluded former members of the Services and Change Committees. Additionally, the Joint Security Committee maintains control, with mobilized soldiers exerting authority in the streets, markets, and shelter centers.

The research documented the experiences of 20 women from Kassala State, with ages ranging from 18 to 59 years. The participants had diverse educational backgrounds, including secondary, university, and higher education. The documentation included several organizations: six organized initiatives, six local organizations, one international organization, two local foundations, and two individual initiatives—one led by a feminist researcher and the other by a volunteer nurse—alongside the Kassala emergency room. These entities

produced one project, networking with two organizations, one initiative, one foundation, and two grassroots associations.

During the documentation, it was noted that women are actively participating in various areas through their organizations. Their efforts range from providing humanitarian assistance, such as food, to supplying basic needs in displacement centres, including beds, bedsheets, clothing and fundraising to support evacuation operations began at the start of the war and gained renewed importance after the fall of Al-Jazira State. Women have also been involved in environmental sanitation for schools, health and medical aid—particularly in providing medicines for cancer patients—psychological support, and the creation of recreational and educational spaces for displaced and street children. Additionally, they have focused on combating child labor, addressing issues related to motor and mental disabilities, and promoting the importance of integrating these individuals into society. Their work includes psychological and financial support for pregnant women up until delivery and primary care for their children. One of the significant initiatives in reproductive health was the distribution of reusable sanitary pads. Women also facilitated discussions around their use and documented the experience, as reusable cloth pads are not widely popular in Sudan. The first factory for these pads opened on March 20, 2023, just three weeks before the outbreak of war.

Other key areas of their work include raising awareness about gender-based violence, monitoring violence in shelters, combating female genital mutilation (FGM), promoting economic empowerment, and supporting emerging initiatives.Their desire to engage in work in response to the emergency context was deeply rooted in their experiences of war and displacement, which continually motivated them to persevere and continue their efforts.

Y.A.: *"Coming from a supportive family and having volunteered since high school and university, you realize that volunteering has been a part of you at every stage of your life. As you grow older, volunteering becomes even more integral to who you are. For me, helping others means helping myself first and foremost, and this value was further reinforced by the revolution."*

K.L: *"We are a group of women who identify what is needed, then come together to prepare food. Young people assist by finding out where the food is needed and delivering it. We also collect clothes, sheets, and children's clothes, wash them, and ensure they are delivered to those in need."*

H.J.: *"In emergency situations, there are many needs, but the interventions often don't match the scale of those needs due to various circumstances. Here, we rely solely on national organizations and initiatives. Our sense of responsibility drives us to take action. However, there are still unmet needs for women that have not been adequately addressed."*

M.D.: *"I am based in a shelter where I have never encountered a man who complained about the treatment by police officers, but I have seen more than four or five cases of women being harassed by them."*

Between volunteering and state threats

According to the majority of the respondents, the biggest challenge to women's involvement in fieldwork was the security threat, followed by official resistance to women in procedures such as obtaining permits and the right to enter shelter centers. These challenges were compounded by direct or indirect security threats from the Security Committee and informants, which could lead to arrest and increased pressure on all volunteers, particularly women. This pressure often manifested as harassment and intimidation by security forces inside the centers.

N.A.: *"Before the state of Kassala opened shelter centers, the government was resistant to the work being done by our Emergency Room. We were demanding that they open schools and boarding facilities for us to use as shelters. Instead, we were harassed and told that our work was already being handled by the state's High Central Emergency Room, and that we should join them. They insisted there was no need to open more shelters, so we were individually pressured to stop what we were doing."*

N.F.: *"Recently, working in the shelter centers has become more challenging due to the presence of security committees inside the centers. If we have providers offering any treatment services, they are stopped until the committee verifies which party we are affiliated with, causing delays in the operation or services. Additionally, some school principals' committees did not accept the presence of any organization providing assistance, which further delayed the delivery of health services."*

N.N.: *"I was a representative of the emergency room in the Security Committee and was in charge of food distribution. While at the center, where Security Committee officials were responsible for guard duty, I witnessed violations against women in the shelter—they were beaten, harassed, and even subjected to unofficial arrests. I reported these incidents to the responsible authorities within the committee, but as a result, I was denied entry to the shelter centers."*

A.S.: *"I was threatened by the Kassala Intelligence Bureau, who told me that we were not suited for the work we were doing because we are girls and wouldn't accomplish anything."*

T.S.: *"We had issues with the Kassala Intelligence Service regarding the transportation of sanitary pads from Port Sudan to Kassala."*

Even women who are actively involved in raising awareness about the humanitarian situation in the state and trying to collect contributions have not been spared from threats by the Security Committee, particularly those who have openly expressed their opposition to the continuation of the war. In addition to the curfew law, which one of the actors with motor disabilities considered to be insensitive.

S.R.: *"The societal challenges and the nature of eastern Sudan, combined with the type of emergency work we do, meant that we often had to return late, which was a significant obstacle for us. Additionally, there was the existing security challenge, as we were classified as anti-regime because we called for an end to the war. The presence of mobilized soldiers and their poor treatment also added to our difficulties."*

KH.B.: *"After the curfew was enforced, no consideration was given to us or the youth in delivering meals, and they didn't make it easy for us to obtain permits. After the governor's decision to dissolve the youth committees and transfer supervision to school principals, the process of entering and working in schools became much more complicated."*

Then there are the societal challenges, where the community is strongly resistant to women's movements and their presence in public spaces, especially during times considered late. Additionally, there is limited access to pregnancy and childbirth follow-up services, making it difficult to reach the entire target population.

G.M.: *"We are providing a basic service that raises awareness among women during pregnancy and lactation. We are also working to reduce maternal mortality and decrease the incidence of childhood diseases. The first challenge is reaching the target group and interacting with them, considering the geographical and intellectual environment. Building trust with women is crucial to accessing real information that serves the purposes of evaluation and follow-up."*

A.D.: *"The challenges start at home, with defining working hours and dealing with families who don't understand working alongside young men. They often ask about remuneration for voluntary work, and I even faced problems during meetings with young men to coordinate our efforts, as some families refused to accept this collaboration. This situation was very stressful for me, and I constantly had to explain and justify the work to them."*

R.M.: *"There are challenges largely related to displacement, war, and the psychological state of those affected. Then there is the loss of privileges in general—the privilege of movement and the privilege of housing. Another challenge is analyzing the context of Kassala and understanding the specific problems and obstacles facing women's work in general, so that they can move and operate more effectively."*

The actors we interviewed spoke about the psychological pressure they face, attributing it to continuous displacement and the ongoing war. This pressure is similar to the economic challenges they encounter, particularly the lack of funding opportunities. Most initiatives and grassroots organizations, especially those providing food, clothing, and other necessities, rely on community funding, which they promote and collect through social media. The active women also expressed concerns about the unreliability of their input in the government institutions they dealt with. This issue was evident in the lack of accurate statistics within government agencies or organizations regarding the situation of displaced people and humanitarian needs. The state experienced an internet outage at the beginning of the year, which has gradually improved, but the instability and fluctuation in connectivity continue to affect humanitarian work. This is particularly challenging for many initiatives that rely on communication tools, in addition to the ongoing interruptions in electricity.

L.N.: *"I continue to work because I feel that society still needs us. People are still struggling to move forward after the trauma they experienced following the events of the April 15th War. It is our duty to provide psychological and social support, helping people to at least move on and live a normal life in the best way possible."*

Always moving forwards

Overcoming the challenges faced by women reflects a wealth of experience gained from continuous follow-up and evaluation, along with a commitment to finding all possible ways to facilitate voluntary humanitarian work. This includes cooperation and meetings with the state government and security committees, leveraging civil relationships and knowledge of government agencies, and direct confrontation—particularly regarding violations occurring inside shelter centers—through media pressure. Networking between organizations, using the support of friendly circles, and gaining the backing of families who recognize the importance of this humanitarian work have all been crucial, despite the security and community concerns justified by the current context.

One of the researchers shifted her focus after an experience that hindered her work with emergency rooms and decided to start a non-profit company aimed at economic empowerment.

H.M.: *"I returned and began working on my non-profit company project, which aims to uplift and improve the economic situation for families affected by the war, while doing work in a field I am deeply passionate about—visual arts. I am focused on making handicrafts with the participation of families impacted by the war, contributing, even if slightly, to increasing their income. My goal is to raise the income level of 200 families annually."*

Some actors have stopped working in the field but continue their efforts by networking to meet needs and mobilizing on social media. The work of these women persists, driven by the constant need that demands global attention, as their efforts are focused on collective survival.

T.Q.: *"Through our work, it's clear that there is a feminist movement. This isn't about bias towards women; rather, it's a recognition that most of the working cadres are women. There is good work being done, but there is a lack of coordination. If this work is better organized and coordinated, the situation will improve, and we will achieve better results."*

Development of Emergency Work

Women have relied on networking as the most powerful tool to develop their work in emergencies over the past year. This has been followed by continuous

evaluation and follow-up, self-education, and learning from the experiences of emergency situations in neighboring countries. They also requested training workshops for team members from organizations with the capacity to provide this support. The emergency room volounteers we interviewed had opinions that raised questions and criticism regarding their reliance on feminist organizations during their work. There was a notable difference in their understanding of feminist and women's movements. Those who adopted networking, sought advice, and requested assistance from feminist movements to meet the needs of women were primarily displaced women who were actively involved in emergency work.

W.A.: *"The feminist movement in civil work made a very noticeable difference during the war, whether through the assistance provided or the sessions held for women in general, and for those affected by the war in particular. The impact was positive and clear. Even the presence of women in emergency rooms, in general, had a truly positive impact."*

M.R.: *"It definitely had an impact. Feminist groups were actively caring for women who were raped. The feminist movement grew and became more visible during the war and the revolution, offering many forms of assistance despite the attacks aimed at them. Women supported women, and the distortions aimed at the feminist movement were nothing but dirty tactics used by the Keizan (NCP*

members) from their hateful perspective as opponents of the feminist movement."

W.H.: *"As an emergency room, we focus on health and livelihoods. When the war broke out in Medani, and earlier in Khartoum, it became clear to us that there are specific needs for women in shelters that we cannot address without assistance from feminist organizations. For example, providing health kits—this is something we honestly couldn't have done without contacting feminist movements and organizations. This is an aspect that is almost forgotten, and without these bodies, no one would look out for women's needs. 'Women are aware of women's needs.'"*

The actors in the city of Kassala felt that feminist organizations made their presence known at the beginning of the formation of emergency rooms but did not achieve a major breakthrough.

F.M.: *"The feminist platform in Kassala was present from the first day the emergency room was created. They worked hard, supported the room, and helped meet the girls' needs. But when pregnancies began to appear, they were nowhere to be found. They should have been prepared to support the girls who suffered violence. Their roles are now being filled by others. For example,*

organizing the distribution of contraceptive pills—this is something the feminist movement should have been handling."

S.A.: *"In my opinion, it made no difference because in this war, women are the most affected. I would have expected a bigger role from feminist organizations and networks, particularly in highlighting the suffering of women during displacement, their treatment by security forces, and the violations committed by the authorities. Given all this, it was crucial that these situations be made visible. Maybe this is the role feminist networks should have taken on. If these issues had been brought to light, they might have served as a pressure factor to help stop the war."*

Some have criticized that feminist organizations have focused primarily on the provision of sanitary pads, which has limited their role in addressing other humanitarian needs and protection efforts. They believe that if these organizations had broadened their focus, their presence could have made a more significant impact.

Z.K.: *"During the emergency period, the role of women was very significant. For example, there is a woman who has been supporting 27 families in her home for months, even up to this moment. However, in general, the feminist movement—women's organizations and bodies—has been performing very poorly, and I can*

say it is almost completely absent. Especially in terms of protection, their efforts were limited to holding sessions and providing sanitary pads. While providing pads is an important task, the overwhelming focus on this has led them to neglect many other issues that women face inside the shelter centers."

S.S.: *"Feminist networks really need to step up and take action to make a bigger difference, beyond just covering some women's needs."*

R.A: *"They were not able to create safe spaces for us to gather and discuss our needs."*

Some feared the societal stigma attached to feminist organizations within the city community.

H.A: *"I didn't rely on feminist organizations because I was afraid to associate with them due to the societal backlash they faced during the 'Our Homes Are Not Safe and the Lectures to Overthrow the Patriarchy' campaign that took place some time ago at the University of Kassala."*

Nevertheless, they noted the rise in women's awareness and the amplification of their voices and demands since the war began, particularly among the women

of eastern Sudan. This has occurred despite the intersectionality of community violence and the violence experienced during displacement inside the shelter centers.

"The level of awareness among women has increased, and they have become more attuned to their needs. They are developing themselves, working on their personal growth, and moving beyond the confines of their previous circumstances. They are trying to integrate more with society and engage in public work. The tragic aspects of this war have motivated people in many ways, making them more active."

"I spent a long time in Kassala before recently moving to Khartoum. During my time in Kassala, particularly from the beginning of the revolution to the end of 2022, I observed a tremendous change in the awareness and social interaction of both young and adult women. Their engagement with societal issues and topics evolved significantly, even through simple Facebook groups. I felt that society had genuinely changed in many ways. While the impact of this change has become more evident due to the war, the suffering has motivated people to do more. However, the increase in awareness in Kassala was noticeable even before the war."

"If you educate a man, you educate one individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation. The causes of war and harmful behaviors in Sudanese society are the result of violence that has affected individuals and

groups for long periods of time. We need to make peace among ourselves and put an end to the violence."

N.K.: *"We have always been mindful of the privacy of displaced women and the sensitivity of their situations when it comes to documentation. Direct documentation was not our primary option, but there was some individual documentation done with consent. We used this to document activities, and later, we were able to analyze the problems faced by displaced women, understand their causes, and identify the gaps in humanitarian assistance."*

The Tales of Women from the East

Documentation is a sensitive and intersectional issue, particularly due to the societal sensitivity toward the presence of women in the public space. There is also a delicate issue surrounding violations and the community's complicity in hiding them through "cover-up," whether these violations occur within the home, on the streets, by officials inside shelters, or involve sexual assaults on displaced women from conflict zones.In addition to the security threat, circumvention and covert actions have become necessary means to sustain humanitarian and civil work. There is a low percentage of personal documentation or documenting the experiences of other women. Instead, there

is a greater reliance on documenting donor-sponsored activities or through monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Success Stories

"I organized coffee sessions for women during the war period. The purpose of these sessions was to provide a safe space for women, both inside and outside the shelter centers, where they could discuss their problems informally and raise issues and needs. A psychologist was present in these sessions to offer support. Additionally, I also supported working women, handicraft owners, and small business owners."

"A success story involves my friend who was distributing sanitary pads in Medani. She was conducting surveys and distributing the pads but faced significant challenges with the NISS (intelligence service). She reached a point where she actually had to confront them, and in the end, they demanded bribes or to be involved in the distribution process. It got to the point where soldiers were deciding who among the girls would receive pads and who would not. I also documented 15 cases of violence and harassment by security forces in Madani. These women suffered greatly until the program was moved to Kassala due to the war reaching Medani."

"It is our destiny to open schools for our brothers and sisters who are physically disabled, deaf, and visually impaired, despite the absence of support from government agencies. However, we have overcome the challenges and provided for all their needs."

"In our project focused on protecting women from rape and harassment, we worked to raise awareness in the localities of Kassala, rural Kassala, West Kassala, Khashm Al-Girba, Halfa (Al Jadeeda), North Delta, and Aroma. We were able to stop female genital mutilation in some localities and reached areas that had not been reached before. We connected with individuals and groups who had never been informed or addressed on these issues."

"One of the feminist groups focused on providing psychological support, emphasizing the importance of having women in shelters who could offer psychological support to other women. By doing this, we were able to establish safe spaces in several shelters where women could discuss their problems and learn how to deal with them."

"One of the stories I'm most happy about involves two people with mobility disabilities who traveled from Medani to Kassala, a journey that took nine days using mobility scooters. By the time they arrived in Kassala, their condition was poor, and they were also dealing with illness. One of them had a leg injury, with one leg already amputated and the second at risk due to complications from the journey. We worked on her treatment for a long time because she was threatened with another amputation. I was very pleased with the successful treatment and that they made it through despite the long and exhausting trip. Additionally, their mobility scooters were maintained in excellent condition. Thank God for this outcome."

"There was a 70-year-old man with amnesia in a shelter center whose health condition deteriorated significantly. We took him to the hospital, where they discovered he was in a state of shock and transferred him to the mental health ward for a while. Unfortunately, his condition worsened, and he fell into a coma. He hadn't been receiving the care he needed, especially regarding meals, but later he stabilized. We tried to gather information to locate his family. He mentioned a specific state and repeated certain names, so we reached out to acquaintances in that state. Using the names he mentioned, we were able to locate his family after a month of him being with us, and they were reunited

with him. Facilitating a family reunion like this is one of the most rewarding experiences in my emergency work."

"The first shelter center set up by the emergency room was in the family home of Al-Nour Hassan Taqalawi in Kassala. At that time, the government was refusing to open shelter centers, but the family generously offered their home. To be honest, their house was very large, and if they had rented it out, they would have made a lot of money. We accommodated 10 families of women with children, whose men had either disappeared during the war or were widowed. The success story happened during the middle school exams period. This home housed 8 students—six from this home and two from another area who were also part of the families sheltered there. They took their exams, and all of them scored over 200 points. Three of them were particularly brilliant: one scored 273 points, another 268 points, and a boy scored 275 points."

Recommendations for Local and International Civil Society

Ensure that interventions are informed by real data from a variety of stakeholders, rather than relying solely on government agencies. This approach helps tailor responses to the actual needs of the affected populations.

Aligning Interests: aligning the objectives of active organizations with the genuine needs of citizens. This ensures that efforts are both effective and relevant to those in need.

Encourage collaboration and networking between different actors during their work. This fosters a more unified and efficient approach to addressing challenges.

Draw attention to the barriers imposed by state institutions on the humanitarian civil sector. This helps advocate for necessary reforms and improved access to humanitarian services.

Media Advocacy: Promote the role of the media in reflecting and highlighting critical issues since the onset of the war on April 15. Media can play a vital role in raising awareness and driving action.

Support for Anti-War Civil Action: Provide support for civil actions aimed at stopping the war, emphasizing the importance of peace and stability in the region.

Focus on amplifying the voices of women, especially those in remote regions, ensuring their experiences and needs are heard and addressed.

Maintain ongoing documentation of the war's impact, ensuring that the experiences of those affected are recorded and used to inform future actions.

Integration and Accessibility: Prioritize the integration of individuals with disabilities, providing them with necessary mobility aids and communication tools to ensure their inclusion.

Emergency Work Development: Commit to the continuous development of emergency response work and the ongoing training of staff to improve effectiveness and preparedness.

Implement continuous monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian efforts to ensure they are meeting their objectives and adapting to changing circumstances.

Discuss challenges from multiple perspectives to develop real, sustainable solutions that address the root causes of issues.

Focus on reducing competition among humanitarian actors, prioritizing collaboration and the interests and needs of citizens above all else.

Supporting Grassroots Initiatives: Provide support for grassroots initiatives, recognizing their critical role in driving change at the community level.

Accountability in Women's Organizations: Ensure that women's organizations take actions that align with their responsibilities, with a focus on quality, dedication, and accountability.

Avoid involvement with the corruption of government organizations or institutions, maintaining integrity and transparency in all humanitarian efforts.

Work to understand and study societies in all their diversity, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Educate communities about their basic rights, empowering them to advocate for themselves and avoid exploitation.

Translate documentation into actionable solutions that directly address the challenges faced by affected populations.

Raise awareness in host communities about how to avoid exploitation and greed, particularly in the context of displaced populations.

Psychological First Aid Training: Provide training for young people and frontliners in psychological first aid skills, preparing them to effectively respond to emergencies and war-related trauma.

Emergency Management Training: Train supervisors and organizations on how to manage emergency situations, improving their ability to respond effectively.

Provide both material and psychological support to volunteers in fronlines during emergencies, recognizing their critical role and the challenges they face.

Advocate for necessary changes and improvements, pushing for policies and practices that better protect and support vulnerable populations.

Civil society should not wait for the end of the war to take action; proactive efforts are necessary to address ongoing challenges.

Establish and enforce strict laws against GBV, SGBV and CRSV, particularly for women working in humanitarian aid, ensuring their safety and dignity.

Develop a humanitarian plan that protects the dignity of the displaced during aid distribution, avoiding the need for documentation to receive assistance, and ensuring equitable access for all.

Finally

Since the beginning of work on this paper, the situation of military operations on the ground in Sudan has changed significantly. Approximately five major states have fallen, and Gedaref is now nearly besieged by the Rapid Support Forces following the fall of the cities of Sinja and Dandar in Sinnar State. About six thousand citizens have been displaced, and more than a thousand have been lost. The need for humanitarian operations, particularly for women, has dramatically increased. Despite the growing fear of the Rapid Support Forces' invasion, women, especially in Gedaref, have not hesitated to start new initiatives to provide sanitary pads and primary health care for pregnant women and children. With the increasing difficulty in obtaining funding, the tightening of economic security, and the control over funds reaching various voluntary bodies, the presence of women in the ranks of humanitarian aid and emergency breakthroughs represents a display of epic courage that deserves

documentation, support, and facilitated access.We encourage supporting bodies and civil society organizations to make greater efforts in facilitating communication with grassroots movements and providing more opportunities for training in documentation and protection mechanisms. The Sudanese government should grant these initiatives more freedom of movement and cooperate in mitigating the disastrous consequences of this war on the Sudanese people. Despite the wealth of experiences, there are still untold tales that need to be heard.

Research and Documentation Team

Noon Feminist Movement

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