NOON
FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Research and Documentation Team

The Sound of Bullets Gets Louder...

the Voices of the Marginalized Fades Out

“The chances of surviving the war depends on privileges… Even asking for help is not something all of us have the space to do, nor do we all receive a response.”

Through organized discussions with a group of feminists and researchers engaged in emergency response systems for the ongoing April 15, 2023 war, and activists in the sexual and gender pluralistic communities from Sudan and the Global South, we interviewed them to find out the spaces they were involved in, how they sought help, how they secured funding to support their humanitarian work, whether this funding was sensitive to the different intersections of oppression, and finally, whether their experiences of collective survival attempts received documentation that protects them from against oblivion and enables those who want to recall the experience to study it or salute the leaders and those responsible for it in these difficult moments in the life of the Sudanese nation. We wanted to know if their efforts are being preserved for future reflection or for honoring those leading these critical efforts during such difficult times in Sudan's history.

Throughout these discussions, we spoke with fifteen individuals whose work ranged from providing evacuation services, food support, reproductive and sexual health services, direct financial aid for displaced and refugee populations, housing services, access to mental and physical healthcare, legal aid, and the documentation of their experiences and violations.

The participants highlighted the lack of sufficient funding to address the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, particularly the weakness and insensitivity in addressing the needs of women, gender-diverse communities, and people with disabilities. They also pointed out the monopolization of access to funding by pre-registered bodies or organizations, which limited the effectiveness of institutions and collectives that emerged in response to the war. Additionally, they mentioned the bureaucratic nature of global funding systems, which did not account for Sudan's unique situation, a country already deprived of its economic rights due to 28 years of sanctions under the Islamic Front regime, followed by sanctions after the October 25 coup to pressure the military government.

"There is no flexibility in the absorptive capacity of funding as one of the elements of organizing its management process; the current structure isn't suitable for use in the context of an armed conflict. We cannot say there's trust towards donors on sensitive issues because of the scrutiny that comes with community funding, which doesn't always bless all interventions that are not subject to its cultural and social perceptions. Another challenge is the selective approach donors take towards specific issues. There are also legal and logistical challenges in resuming activities under new contexts."

Their individual and collective breakthroughs relied heavily on community or self-help, and even Global South bodies engaged in emergency efforts faced unsupportive conditions regarding their solidarity work with Sudan. The discussions raised important questions about whether social solidarity is a more sustainable and effective support system in a context such as the war in Sudan compared to relief projects, which are funded with hundreds of millions of dollars through United Nations agencies and other international organizations. Despite this, the services provided do not match the scale of grassroots social solidarity.

"I don't think we are a priority for donors. I sought this through their lack of interest in the results of our research on sustainable menstrual cycle options when we first presented it and their failure to revisit or inquire about it months later as an optimal economic solution."

When it comes to individuals from sexual and gender-diverse and queer communities, survival attempts were met with compounded complications. The war created a terrifying reality, pulling them out of the personal safety nets they had carved out of a rigid socio-economic landscape. The war dismantled the flow of health services, halting critical support such as psychological aid and almost entirely blocking access to medical care, as with hormone treatments, which were already difficult to obtain in Sudan before the war.

The horizon is clogged for the emergence of new organizations to receive a share of support to meet their goals, as prior engagement with donor's circle of trust networks is required—a vicious cycle. The unique context of queer and gender-diverse communities also necessitated the avoidance of committees and grassroots groups, the current primary actors in delivering

and providing services. This complex survival reality has created narrow circles of action that move cautiously.

"We have no relationship with the grassroots committees. For base-level information, we try to extract what we need through the networks of queer institutions."

One activist describes the need to "circumvent" funders, those they believed prioritized one life over another, by attempting to share their cultural privileges to at least help members of their communities access resources like evacuation grants and post-disaster living support.

"There is an ongoing controversy regarding the legitimacy of beneficiaries of funding, whether they are activists or members of gender-diverse and queer communities. There is also the challenge of the decline in the value of the allocations granted for continuous support, the difficulty and bureaucracy in applying for aid, the tension in global conditions, and the increasing number of communities and individuals needing support globally."

During our research into women's breakthroughs in responding to the emergency of the April 15 war, we were unable to find opportunities to document their achievements or the impact of these breakthroughs on their communities. We raised the question of whether they felt their demands were reflected in Sudanese feminist discourse. Commentated: The Sudanese feminist discourse is elitist, lacking an intersectional lens. In its efforts to gain acceptance and avoid stigmatization from heteronormative communities, it has neglected its duty to show queer feminist solidarity.

"Representing the interests of queer and gender-diverse communities is completely absent from Sudanese feminist discourse. Even those who believe in supporting our rights don't carry our discourse. The absence of their solidarity obscures us from the scene, and what's happening now is a complete separation."

A sobering realization from these discussions was that all the efforts and breakthroughs made by the women and individuals we spoke with had not moved beyond their memories into institutional spaces that focus on documentation and are accessible for future Sudanese to reclaim.

Sudanese activism, which adopted emergency intervention for most of its existence, has been severely impacted by the rapid changes in economic, social, and political conditions that have changed at a rapid pace over the past five years. None of the individuals or groups we spoke with had been subject to any request to document their efforts, and those who wished to do so were unable to, given the harsh circumstances of displacement and refuge, both personal and collective challenges. By broad agreement the intersectionality concerning physical abilities and the rights of people with disabilities to access survival resources were completely absent from emergency responses to the April 15 war. While this was not absent in design or planning, the lack of sensitive funding, data, and resources meant these considerations were left out of implementation.

In line with the principles of our Movement and as a result of our concrete practice and tangible experience, we once again recall the collective survival as the only way forward. We honor and salute the activists and organizers in the emergency response systems to Sudan's ongoing war and value their extraordinary efforts to survive against hunger, death, and oblivion.