NOON
FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Research and Documentation Team

Sudan's War and the Stories of Women

Since the outbreak of the April 15th war in the capital, Khartoum, with its brutal spread across the states of Kordofan, Darfur, Gezira, and Sennar, and the looming threat over other safe regions, women have clung to one another. They've turned to each other to share their feelings, plans, dreams, and calls for survival. War has shown us that women are the most courageous. They are the ones extending a lifeline, bearing the heaviest and cruelest costs of this war.

Sexual slavery, abduction, detention, and trafficking—along with less violent but still devastating practices like forced conscription—have escalated gender-based violence to unprecedented levels in Sudan. Globalization has played its part in destroying survivors' right to privacy. Once again, women are being violated, not just as victims of war, but for political purposes, their images and videos of abuse circulated by their aggressors, contributing to documenting devastating moments in the lives of these women, fighting the narrative of the aggressors, actual victims or potential victims. The war has trapped women in a helpless narrative denying their strength, resilience, and resistance. For women's narratives, we began documenting their actions, the process of spinning survival nets.

To reclaim these women's stories, we began documenting their acts of survival, weaving a tapestry of resistance. We met with ten women from Khartoum, Gezira, Nile River State, Kassala, and the Red Sea region. Some remained in Sudan, while others have fled. Some rely on grassroots aid and organizations such as resistance committees and emergency rooms, others work through local and international organizations. They shared their responses to the emergency that broke out more than a year ago, and through their words, let us learn about their response to the context

of emergency action since the outbreak of war a year or more ago, and learn of their courage.

How Can We Help?

In the early days of the war, women's first reaction was not fear but action: "How can we help?"

Of the ten women we interviewed, one was the initiator of the idea to start an emergency relief room in her community. It was later revealed that one of the participants in the same area remained inside the war zone and worked in the same emergency room for a period of time and for a longer period, relying on the basic structure established by the initiator.

Providing Community Aid

Women quickly realized where the gaps were. Sexual and reproductive health services, access to hospitals and clinics, the nearest hospitals that provide birth and postpartum care services, the availability of medication, operating pharmacies locations, and the provision of sanitary pads in shelters and besieged cities. In addition to inventorying water sources and forming groups to monitor the provision of food and distribute it as needed.

The Justified Fear

Alongside limited resources, these activists faced a more personal challenge: their families and the families' acceptance of their engagement in an act, based on the justified fear - according to their description - that the family always fears for women. The use of systematic sexual violence in the April 15th war was a horrifying reality. As one participant recounted,

her family tried to dissuade her from helping outside the home by telling her, “Men can be out there; nothing happens to them. But you’re a girl.”

Some women attempted to reassure their families by using the method of persuasion by explaining the importance of their work. Others brought male relatives into their emergency groups to put their families at ease. Still, many migrated to states with more security stability and joined active groups there, and some hid information about their work in the emergency room from their families to avoid challenges and obstacles. Daily.

Finding Safety in Safe Zones

Even in supposedly "safe zones," movement was fraught with danger. The Sudanese Army Forces and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) maintained strict security controls, with checkpoints creating long delays and sometimes leading to interrogations or searches that could last hours. Women adapted, finding clever ways to navigate these zones, such as using wheelbarrows to transport supplies through narrow alleys.

Most women described their families, especially their mothers, as supportive—mothers who stood up against the male members of the family, who believed the best way to protect women was by keeping them locked inside.

Security Challenges

One of the biggest obstacles these women faced came from Sudanese intelligence and local government corruption, making it difficult for civilian groups and emergency rooms to participate in grassroots work and operate. In some regions, local emergency committees have prepared

schools to shelter displaced people and children, coordinated with hospitals to ensure access to healthcare, and collected donations for food supplies as an immediate response.

However, the local government, which was mired in administrative and financial corruption, used its bureaucratic apparatus (the Humanitarian Aid Commission - HAC) to control and direct donations blocking these efforts, and refusing to allow any unregistered grassroots initiative to operate. Bureaucratic barriers prevented new initiatives from registering, while even doctors and psychologists were denied entry to shelters without security permits.

Despite these barriers, women relied on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to organize. But with frequent internet blackouts and communications outages in some areas and the continuous power outages in some areas for nearly six months, they had to resort to local networks. Starting from their immediate geographic areas, they worked with initiatives in other regions to provide healthcare, post-rape protocols, and emergency funds to evacuate those trapped in conflict zones as they expand despite the Sudanese army's attempts to re-impose control and reopen health centers, communicating with organizations to provide needs such as medicines and medical equipment, and coordinating the work of psychological support groups. These efforts were essential to meet the growing demand for aid.

They also shared their feeling of alienation from their new worlds, the feeling of being unable to integrate despite losing everything except responsibilities.

As they worked to sustain their communities, these women shared a feeling of disconnection from their former lives, carrying only the weight of new responsibilities while everything else seemed lost. They

acknowledged the importance of mental health support for female activists, but in their current reality, addressing such issues felt like a luxury they couldn't afford.

A Dark Isolation

As we began documenting these women's acts of resistance, Sudan was cut off from the world. In February 2024, the government severed communications, leaving the country isolated amidst an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, which it confronted with the ferocity of its sons and daughters inside and outside its land. The women we spoke with faced a bleak darkness—no chance to tell their stories or ask for help.

"I'm fine, but I'm thinking about ending my life"

after nearly a month without contact this was the first message from one of our colleagues inside a conflict zone.

Caught between our worry for our families and friends and the larger pain for everyone suffering, we resumed our work when communications were partially restored. Yet the reality had worsened. Security barriers prevented emergency rooms from operating, girls sought urgent help to end pregnancies from rape, and others approached childbirth without any access to medical care for themselves or their children, and news from those who did not receive news that prevented them from even crying. For their relatives who passed away suddenly.

Despite this, we resumed our work to confront the constantly changing reality for the worse. We worked to create rules of action based on the reality of war to communicate voices and document experiences so

that they would not be forgotten under the roar of cannons. Where those women continue their fight, forging paths of survival in the face of constant violence. Their stories, their resistance, must be documented and remembered—because here, Sudanese women are resisting.