
OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING PROCESS IN THE SUDAN

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Preamble:

Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an area of one million square miles. Its population is estimated to be 27 millions¹. It composes about 600 ethnic groups with different languages & dialects. It is true that the Northerners people are mostly Muslims and Arab oriented, and the Southerners are Christians and African oriented. The country is rich in natural and human resources but there is economic disparity between the North & South regions. This disparity created by the colonial authority since 1920 when they introduced the "Closed Area Policy" which prohibited contact between the two regions. Similarly, affected the Nuba Mountains area. Thus, this policy had led to social injustice and conflicts since 1955.

The current war has been going on for 45 years, only between 1973 and 1983 the country enjoyed peace. But, recently it has taken a national dimension, spreading to some parts of the Eastern Region, Nuba Mountains and parts of the Blue Nile. As the result, death of (2.9) millions people occurred, five millions refugees were settled in neighbouring countries and abroad. In addition to the displaced who moved to the northern parts. A significant portion of the national income is annually spent on this civil war, creating tremendous poverty situation in both north and south. However, since the independence in 1956 until today many peace talks, agreements and initiatives were made but no permanent solution is obtained. The most serious ones are the.... Juba Conference (1947), roundtable (1965), Congress of all Sudanese parties (1966), Addis Ababa Agreement (1972), Sudanese Peace Initiative, SPLA-SPLM (988), Kokadam Declaration, Abuja & later Nairobi (1989), the IGAD, the Libyan-Egyptian initiative and the Declaration of Principles which was accepted by the warring parties as a basis for

¹**Sudan Population Census**, 1993.

negotiation. Generally, both men & women had participated in the war as well as in efforts to manage and solve conflicts but in different way and to a different degree, where as men generally have been dominating the political and military conflict, women have participated on a smaller scale. For instance, women participated in SPLA/Women's battalion when the conflict started a sizable number of unmarried girls cut short their education to take part in the war. Women also participated in Government Popular Defense Force training. They offered also an appeal for assistance to the UN representative in Khartoum to encourage peace. However, the participation of women in peace making is very little compared with men in the above mentioned talks. However, women involvement in peace negotiations is almost nill.

□ **Women & Peace Making in the Sudan:**

The issue of engendering the peace process in the Sudan emerged from the Nairobi Forward looking strategies for the advancement of women to the year 2000, following the Mexico discussion in 1975. The Beijing (1995) International Platforms & Beijing+5 put great support for action to be implemented in regard to gender studies and the ideals of equality, democracy and peace. Accordingly, many women groups in the Sudan are started to involve in peace building at both sides of the conflict: The Sudanese Women Union (SWU), New Sudan Women Federation (NSWF), SPLA women's movement, Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies (BBSAWS), Sudan National Committee on Traditional Practices (SNCTP), Sudan Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP), Women Action Group (WAG), Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi (SWAN), Nuba Women Peace Group, Mandi Group and the Nuba Relief Rehabilitation and Development Society (NRRDS). In fact, many individual organizations and group-organizations from the above mentioned put great efforts in raising various initiatives and training in the issue of peace building.

□ **Constraints facing Sudanese women to achieve successful peace activities:**

In 1997, the groups working in peace building identified the following obstacles:

- Erosion of familiar and traditional peace mechanisms system of kinship are replaced by civic organizations which lack women representation and a relation to the home land, specially when based outside of the war-affected areas. The role of intermarriage, inter-cultural assimilation and traditional conflict resolution has changed due to interventions from outside².
- Members of women's groups are usually overwork and carry too many responsibilities. Some have little education or training for mobilizing grass-root women. Limited access to information.
- Men play the most important roles in both political and military affairs in Sudan and there are little attention of political organization to voice women's concern.
- Travel between North and South is extremely difficult.

*** The Netherlands Initiative:**

The aims of this initiative are; to encourage and facilitate Sudanese women to come together to work wards and engendering peace agenda. Apart from that, to encourage them to participate actually in the peace process. The concept of engendering the peace process is based on:

- The acknowledgement that women & men are both stakeholders affected by the conflict differently;
- The recognition of both women & men in peace building;
- The identification of the need to involve women more actively whilst addressing their particular concerns as women in all peace building efforts.

²A. Bari, **Sudan Between Peace & War**, UNIFEM, 1998.

For instance, in the facilitation process address should focus on the following questions:

- What do Sudanese women think about the existing peace agreement & Declaration of Principles?.
- Are the problems & efforts of Sudanese women addressed?.
- Are Sudanese women included in the decision making process related to conflict prevention, resolution and management in the Sudan?.
- How to incorporate their concerns into the agendas of international actors on conflict resolution, i.e., IGAD, the IPF, the UN, OAU and the EU? Are there any female international actors?.

However, the outputs of the Sudanese initiative which involve the committees of SPLM/SPLA united & Civil Society (Structure Nairobi Southern Sector) and GOS/NDA/Southern Women/Nuba Women & Civil Society (Structure Khartoum) reflected hard work on the issue but the Sudanese women in the civil society built a strong Net work for peace building in which approx. (35) NGOs are affiliated. They are now getting more & more determined to participate in the peace process and make their efforts in building a lasting sustainable peace visible at national, regional and international levels. However, this group had addressed a letter to the IGAD to support their efforts & engage women representatives in the IGAD forum for wider recognition by the regional and international community. Regarding strategies, the Maastricht Declaration of Sudanese Women's Peace Initiative April 13, 2000. Attached in Annex (1). It becomes the strategy for all parties & groups to formulate from it action plans for immediate implementation, follow-up and evaluation phases.

Ancient Africa:

In the past days, there were various forms of African traditional strategies for resolving conflict in homes and the community. Sudan,

used to have brave songs and other many forms of traditional communication mechanisms being utilized in peace making or warm making in the rural societies of the western and northern regions. Some of the songs still are used in the march of the military forces and even some women were awarded prize by the former head of state (Nimeiri) for bravery.

Challenges:

Lack of support nationally as well as international community. Difficulty to disseminate culture of peace in the war zones. Weakness in the network on peace among the various groups or committees as well as lack of coordination. Lack of feminist consciousness on concept of peace among women. Lack of representation of women in formal peace forums and official decision making on peace issues at national & regional levels. There is a huge gap between the elite women and the grass-root regarding the issue concerned.

References:

1. Sudan Census, 1993.
2. A. Bari, A. Bari, **Sudan Between Peace & War**, UNIFEM, 1998
3. International Conference on Sudanese Women & Peace Making Maastricht, the Netherlands 11th-13th April 2000 (unpublished paper).
4. Sudanese Women in the Civil Society Agenda for Peace , 15th Jan 2000 (unpublished paper).
5. Amna Rahma, **Women & Peace Making in Sudan; Roles and Vision of Sudanese Women**, paper to Hague appeal for peace conference, 11th –15th May 1999 (unpublished paper).