CEPPS Gender Assessment Report: Sudan

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CEPPS
Strengthening Democracy
Through Partnership

Executive Summary

Program Background and Assessment Purpose

The purpose of this gender assessment is to provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the gender-responsiveness and inclusivity of the transitional elections and electoral cycle in Sudan more broadly, which CEPPS is supporting under the 39-month Improving Electoral Processes for Change in Sudan (IEPP) program. Under the IEPP program CEPPS will enhance the responsiveness and accountability of governance institutions; improve political party inclusiveness and capacity to conduct issue-based, citizen-responsive campaigns; and enhance the participation of citizens, civil society, media and other stakeholders in electoral and political processes.

From December 2020 to April 2021, CEPPS conducted a joint gender analysis using the CEPPS gender analysis methodology. CEPPS partners utilized an inductive, mixed-methods approach through desk-based review, followed by in-country interviews and other qualitative research. This holistic joint analysis looked across the three program objectives, combining the use of tested, rigorous inclusive data collection tools and politically informed analysis to assess the status of women's participation in the electoral process as protestors, voters, candidates, and election administrators, as well as their status in the broader political process as advocates, community mobilizers, peacemakers and more.

Additionally, CEPPS has designed an inclusive monitoring, evaluation, and learning (IMEL) approach to better ensure that an inclusion lens is integrated into all aspects of these processes. As a multi-dimensional, systematic approach utilized across all aspects of the program lifecycle, inclusion creates more responsive, representative and accountable social and political structures in which all individuals, regardless of identity, are able to fully enjoy their human rights and exercise their rights as citizens. CEPPS employs a multi-faceted technical approach to inclusion that includes the following elements:

> CEPPS's technical approach to inclusion requires thinking about our **partners**, **processes**, and **products** and asking key questions about:
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> - **Who** is included and excluded in the work we do?
> - **What** barriers exist that exclude or limit access for different groups or individuals?
> - **How** do we eliminate or mitigate barriers and increase access, participation, and representation in our work?
> - **What** should we do to increase access and inclusivity in our products/activities/ deliverables? What products/activities/ deliverables would increase access, inclusion, and participation?

1) Integrating an inclusive gender analysis into all aspects of program design, implementation, and evaluation that fully considers the ways in which individuals with multiple marginalized identities are uniquely impacted and how this affects both their access and barriers to participation in electoral and political processes;

2) Pursuing a dual track programming approach in which gender equality and social inclusion are both mainstreamed across all activities *and* specific activities targeting a particular marginalized group(s) are undertaken; and

3) Throughout the project lifecycle, key inclusion questions are consistently asked in the context of the 3 Ps of Inclusion, or our *partners*, *processes*, and *products*, or deliverables.

An IMEL approach, therefore, is grounded in the important questions and issues that should be addressed from an inclusion perspective throughout the program lifecycle, beginning with gender and baseline assessments.

The Status of Women and Women's Political Participation in Sudan

Sudan is currently undergoing an extraordinary process of political transformation. As the Transitional Government undertakes constitutional reforms, the creation of new institutional governance bodies, and the establishment of new political processes, there is opportunity for women to advocate for laws, social norms, and political processes to reverse the exclusion from public, civic, and political life that women faced for over three decades under the former regime and continue to face today.

While women played prominent roles in the protests that toppled the former regime and have long advocated for greater roles for women in public life, a web of overlapping, marginalizing factors continue to restrict women's participation in public life. Traditionally, in Sudan men are expected to play the dominant role in public life and to occupy leadership positions. Women, on the other hand, are expected to perform the domestic duties inside the home. As a result, women are under-represented in leadership roles in the public and private sectors. Moreover, despite women often suffering gender-based violence in political conflicts, especially in the peripheries of the country, they are excluded from local governing bodies and peace negotiations where these conflicts might be addressed. At the same time, the crushing economic crisis plaguing Sudan has disproportionately impacted women, whom law and custom have prevented from owning land and working outside the home. Women remain dependent on men for their livelihoods, even when men migrate away for brighter economic prospects. Their dependence on men is exacerbated by women's restricted access to educational opportunities. While the transitional government has made laudable progress in repealing some of the worst Bashir-era laws targeting women, Sudan has not made progress towards adopting several widely accepted international commitments to gender equality and human rights. What is more, harmful local customs, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), still limit women's roles and curtail their opportunities. The recommendations of this assessment, thus, have the potential to yield improvements, even if incremental, that include and go beyond women's participation in public life.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Category: Cross-cutting

- *Finding 0.1:* Traditionally, women in Sudan arrive at careers in politics through diverse pathways. Some women focus on women's political participation from the start of their careers. Other women focus on social issues and eventually turn to politics and advocacy to try to make more systemic changes, particularly in relation to the challenges that face women.
- *Finding 0.2:* Women had a critical and influential role in the revolution. Their contributions took many forms, created real pressure on the regime, and established women as legitimate actors in political life. This contribution is a source of pride for politically active women in Sudan as well as the basis of their demands for equal inclusion in all aspects of the transitional government moving forward.
- *Finding 0.3:* Women's political activity is challenged by widespread "male mentality".[1] Women in politics feel that this mentality affects them within their own political party or government body as well as in their interactions with the public. Common examples of male mentality include undue questioning of women's competence for leadership roles, refusal to take women seriously in political roles, and relegating women to superficial positions.

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[1] "Male mentality" is the wording choice that CEPPS/IRI interviewees overwhelmingly chose to describe this dynamic. Some did use "patriarchy", which is how CEPPS partners best understand this term. However, to keep the integrity of the terminology and not presume a full understanding, the CEPPS partners will retain the language that was used and translated by Sudanese Arabic speakers.

- *Finding 0.4:* Women in rural areas, conflict areas, and northern areas have less opportunity to participate in politics versus women in the capital due to poverty, conflict, education, and a stronger patriarchal mentality in these more remote areas.

Category: Legal Framework
- *Finding 1.1:* Sudan has made significant progress in repealing domestic laws that are harmful to women and girls and in ratifying and recognizing international agreements that affirm women's equal rights. Though legal reforms are ongoing, gaps remain in specific implementation and enforcement mechanisms to bolster women's political participation.
- *Finding 1.2:* While Sudan has adopted a quota for women in parliament both in the 2008 Electoral law and in the 2019 Constitutional Charter, the quotas are too narrow and have not been effectively enforced.

Category: Election Administration
- *Finding 2.1:* Similar to other aspects of political and electoral processes, women have been excluded from election administration and management. The majority of key informants stated that it will be critical for women to have meaningful participation in all aspects of the electoral process.
- *Finding 2.2:* The majority of interviewees agreed that the new electoral framework, including the new EMB law, must include gender considerations in all aspects of election administration and management. This framework should provide a clear mandate for the commission and sufficient funding to integrate gender throughout the commission's work.
- *Finding 2.3:* Women in Sudan lack trust in the electoral system and election administration, given Sudan's history of contested and controversial elections and authoritarian governance. It is critical that the newly formed election commission is independent and demonstrates its neutrality and transparency to gain citizen trust in the election process.

Category: Voter Registration
- *Finding 3.1:* Obtaining required legal identification documents for voter registration is an obstacle for women's participation in elections and politics. These challenges are exacerbated for women in marginalized groups, including women in conflict, women in rural regions, and IDP women.
- *Finding 3.2:* Women, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas, face disproportionate barriers to voter registration as they often lack access to transportation, financial or other resources to go to voter registration centers.
- *Finding 3.3:* Lack of awareness of and mistrust in the electoral process has meant that women have low or no awareness of the requirements to register to vote.

Category: Civic and Voter Education
- *Finding 4.1:* In previous elections, voter and civic education initiatives were inadequate in reaching women and did not sufficiently include gender considerations such as social and cultural barriers.
- *Finding 4.2:* Low literacy and language diversity were identified as major barriers to women's access to key voter registration and election information, especially for women living in rural areas.
- *Finding 4.3:* Radio and TV were identified as the best media platforms to reach women in civic and voter education campaigns. However, interviewees noted that creative forms of communication that take into account linguistic, educational, age and other intersectional barriers will better tailor awareness raising efforts to the unique needs and challenges of women.

Category: Political Parties
- *Finding 5.1:* Women in political parties, government, and civil society perceive political parties in Sudan as having done little to promote women to influential party positions or to invest in policies

pertinent to women. Civil society widely distrusts political parties and generally avoids them when working on gender equality issues.

- *Finding 5.2:* The transitional period is an opportunity to enhance women's participation, capacity, and the commitment of political parties to the inclusion of women's leadership and perspectives.

Category: Civil Society

- *Finding 6.1:* Women in civil society have extensive skills and past experience working with communities on issues pertinent to women in Sudan. Women in civil society have immense leadership skills and are highly motivated to increase women's participation in political life and propose gender equitable policy. In spite of these efforts, women in civil society have been sidelined from participating in formal roles in the transitional government, and they are demanding increased inclusion.
- *Finding 6.2:* Civil society is the largest advocate for women's participation in politics, providing expert knowledge to transition processes, and monitoring the transitional government's implementation of reforms related to issues that impact the lives of women and girls in Sudan.
- *Finding 6.3:* Unsurprisingly given the diversity of the population, there are divisions within and among politically active women in Sudan. These divisions manifest in the competition among politically active women for the small number of formal roles in politics, the absence of shared agendas, and differing priorities for women from the different groups and regions of Sudan.

Category: Election Observation

- *Finding 7.1:* Ongoing conflict and insecurity in some regions in Sudan will make it challenging for women to safely participate in elections and difficult for observers to effectively monitor pre-election and election-day activities. Gender-based violence and limitations on women's mobility due to insecurity and patriarchal gender and religious norms are also likely to limit women's access to polls. Online violence against women in politics, gendered disinformation and violence that occurs within the private sphere are areas that are under-explored or historically difficult to gather data on and will need focused attention in the upcoming election.

Category: Electoral Dispute Resolution

- *Finding 8.1:* There has been no formal electoral dispute resolution process in previous elections in Sudan. Further, women have not had equal access to tribal dispute processes that are available, especially, in rural areas. Where they have had, they are unlikely to have been treated as equal to men before the law.

Category: Gender-Based Violence

- *Finding 9.1:* Though some important changes to legal frameworks have begun to challenge and change the violence and harassment women experienced under the al-Bashir regime, gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in Sudan, stoked by patriarchal gender norms and ongoing conflict.
- *Finding 9.2:* Gender-based violence - particularly in conflict areas - has reproduced longstanding racial hierarchies and entrenched discrimination of different groups of women including by police and security forces.

Category: Governance and Representative Institutions

- *Finding 10.1:* Despite strong networks of women's rights organizations and women's leadership throughout the political transition, women's participation and leadership in formal institutions in Sudan remains low. There are currently few or very weak official mechanisms responsible for enforcing gender policy and legal frameworks for gender equality, which makes equal gender participation in parliament, the cabinet, the TLC, and other government entities unlikely to succeed in implementation.

- *Finding 10.2:* Those women who have been able to participate in political leadership in transition entities and government institutions have had narrow pathways to power, where their roles and purview are often curtailed by pervasive socio-cultural and religious gender norms.
- *Finding 10.3:* While there has been considerable effort made by women's rights CSOs and others to meet the national-level gender quotas, the same level of attention is needed by existing power-holders and civil society to ensure women's participation and leadership in local governance and peace-processes. Beyond the national level, it is essential that the perspectives and priorities of diverse groups of women are influencing decision-making nationally, including in rural areas and conflict zones.

Category: Media
- *Finding 11.1:* Women's access to media is more limited than that of men.
- *Finding 11.2:* Coverage about women and for women is lacking, not reflective of the diversity of Sudanese women, and often perpetuates stereotypes of women.
- *Finding 11.3:* There appear to be limited incentives for media outlets and journalists to provide fairer and more equal coverage of women and women's perspectives.
- *Finding 11.4:* Internet sites and social media are more gender inclusive media spaces. Internet sites and social media are also now increasingly trusted sources of information for many in Sudan, including women. However, the internet can also be an unsafe space where hate campaigns and disinformation can put women at risk.
- *Finding 11.5:* Significant barriers continue to limit women's participation in the media workforce. These include social and cultural barriers, such as sexual harassment, and lack of access to formal and informal networks. There is a lack of female representation in positions of power in the media. This limits women's contribution to media content.