

Driving Democratic Design in Sudan

Locally Driven Solutions for Long-Term Sustainability

In Sudan, after the uprising in 2019 that ended a thirty-year-long military dictatorship, a series of political and peacemaking agreements were made in the country. During this time of transition, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), with core partners the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), worked alongside Sudanese as they strived to create a more sustainable democracy through a program called *Improving Electoral and Political Process for Change* (IEPP).

In order to properly assist the Sudanese as they reconstructed their government, members of the consortium were forced to address many serious challenges like protests, coup d'États, and internal armed conflict, as well as tension and a significant lack of trust among key stakeholders. To help navigate these issues, CEPPS utilized a “test-and-apply”, which means training and activity interventions were updated to gauge and respond to fluctuating scenarios with a realistic and flexible suite of interventions. For example, if fighting continued, some activities could continue when others could not. However, if the political situation changed and partner’s needs shifted, new activities were proposed to meet those.

Additionally, the consortium’s partners prioritized holding regular feedback and reflection sessions with partners on the ground in order to adopt to short-term interventions based on scenario planning. While civil war broke out on April 15, 2023, forcing CEPPS partners to evacuate the country, these locally-led collaborating, learning, and adapting practices have allowed the consortium to offer meaningful, sustained support and operation to the Sudanese on the ground.



Sudanese citizens speak out in a town hall meeting.



IRI's Woman Coordination and Advocacy Agenda (WCAA) present position papers for inclusion into Sudan's draft political agreement

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Collaborating, Learning and Adapting Practices in Sudan

Adopt short-term, local-led implementation plans based on scenario planning. By holding reflection sessions with local and international stakeholders, CEPPS gained diverse perspectives on the political and operational environment in Sudan. A scenario matrix was developed to rank the most likely scenarios, the operating environment anticipated under each scenario, and potential interventions. This was followed up with validation sessions of the scenarios and interventions. Based on this, short-term implementation activities were planned for every 3–6-month period. These CLA practices have strengthened relationships among implementing partners, local stakeholders, and activity participants. Together, they have been able to identify new risks and priorities in a dynamic context and channel their collective resources to develop locally driven sets of short-term interventions.

Test and adapt a variety of approaches to foster positive engagement among contentious parties, including resistance groups, civil society, political parties, and civil society members. Tensions between grassroots resistance committees and the more established, mainstream parties and civil society organizations meant rapid changes were needed to workshops to build a more collaborative atmosphere. CEPPS found that a facilitation format that helped participants identify common ground worked and gradually built trust. Without adjusting the format, the workshops would have failed, undermining progress toward Sudan's inclusive, peaceful political transition.

Conflict resolution and communication training brought contentious groups together to work on common goals, expand their networks, and take ownership to lead pro-democratic initiatives. After the coup in 2021, the women's multi-party platform almost disbanded due to entrenched differences between stakeholder groups. CEPPS and the participants co-identified the need for and held training in communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, and dialogue. While communication between groups did not change overnight, they could use what they learned to address mutual problems and commit to a signed document pledging to work together. Ultimately, the women-led legal off-shoot of this group assembled a multi-stakeholder forum to review transitional charters that were proposed to guide the country's development and enactment of a post-conflict governing structure. At first, there was hostility and suspicion between these different groups, given their contentious history and differing views of the transition; however, fostering dialogue and effective communication between members of these groups helped them to identify their shared interests and possible ways forward to collaborate.

Learning Exchanges and Discussion Series fostered Local-Ownership of CEPPS-supported interventions. CEPPS launched a discussion series for pro-democracy groups to share technical expertise and international best practices on organizing transitional elections and drafting election laws. The series culminated in a workshop training that included Sudanese lawyers and pro-democracy actors. The participants of the workshop took it upon themselves to draft their own plans for a roadmap to elections and sought guidance from CEPPS. While the roadmap was not published because a broader political agreement never occurred, this process deepened relationships among these stakeholders and enabled CLA practices to continue.

A collaborative culture wrought strong relationships within CEPPS Core Partners and among their local counterparts. CEPPS partners, IFES, IRI, and NDI, have strong internal and external relationships and networks that have been built on mutual trust. Partners consistently and transparently communicated with each other, their local counterparts in Sudan, and relevant local and international partners and stakeholders, and regularly held reflection sessions and meetings to share and exchange up-to-date information. These relationships were leveraged to remain aware of developments across the internal and external operating systems. CEPPS also consulted internal resources such as regional, country, and security teams and subject matter experts for the short-term implementation planning of the IEPP activities in Sudan.