

# CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONFLICT IN SUDAN

Shifting Roles, Challenges and Priorities







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International IDEA  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34 Stockholm  
SWEDEN  
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00  
Email: [info@idea.int](mailto:info@idea.int)  
Website: <<https://www.idea.int>>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2023, fighting erupted in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its paramilitary wing, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), completely derailing efforts towards peace and democratic transformation. Despite setbacks, Sudanese civil society groups have shown resilience in responding to the crisis. This report, commissioned by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), seeks to shed light on these efforts, as well as on the overall current state of Sudanese civil society, and to provide actionable recommendations for supporting the sector and its ongoing efforts during these challenging times.

The report identifies four primary areas of programming that Sudanese civil society organizations (CSOs) are involved in: humanitarian action; ending the war and political dialogue; food security and livelihood; and human rights. Furthermore, to help with the understanding and analysis of civil society in Sudan, we focus on four different segments or types of civil society based on some unique characteristics such as historical roots, relative accountability and transparency, power and influence, and impact. These segments include modern civil society, *ahli* civil society, diaspora civil society, and new/revolutionary civil society. This study identifies and describes some of the key contextual and operational factors that impacted the efficacy of each of these segments. These factors include the current situation of the civil society segment; networking, collaboration and coordination; polarization and representation; engagement with donors and multilateral agencies; and engagement with the government.

A summary of the main conclusions and recommendations for each of the four areas of current programming are as follows.

### **Humanitarian action**

*Progress towards localization has been challenging due to entrenched approaches and a lack of strategy for localization. Developing a comprehensive and gender-sensitive strategy and action plan with national CSOs' participation is recommended.*

*There is very little thinking on operationalizing the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus. UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should proactively design their interventions to promote coherence and complementarity between life-saving efforts and any potential development and peacebuilding opportunities.*

*Coordination and operational structures for the humanitarian response remain inadequate. Developing decentralized and well-integrated area-based coordination mechanisms at the subnational level is recommended.*

### **Ending the war and political dialogue**

*There have been multiple failed attempts at bringing sustainable peace and recovery to Sudan through political dialogue and peace arrangements. Efforts to facilitate political dialogue among Sudanese civil society are also failing. Recommendations to change this include learning from past failures and supporting the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) with competent technical teams and accountability frameworks. Additionally, investing in leadership cultivation and post-conflict visioning, as well as providing increased financial support to grassroots peacebuilding organizations and incorporating conflict sensitivity into programming, can help achieve sustainable peace and recovery in Sudan.*

### **Livelihood and food security**

*Despite challenges, agriculture remains the main source of livelihood, even in conflict zones. Recommendations include providing smallholder farmers access to credit, mechanized equipment and post-harvest technologies. State institutions are also faltering due to war, and collaborative frameworks with state and non-state entities are recommended, along with temporary incentives for employees to remain in their positions.*

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**Coordination and operational structures for the humanitarian response remain inadequate. Developing decentralized and well-integrated area-based coordination mechanisms at the sub-national level is recommended.**

## Human rights

*Civic space has degenerated significantly. Journalists and the media sector have been severely impacted and media houses face censorship and insolvency.* Recommendations include supporting human rights-oriented CSOs in neighbouring countries with legal and financial assistance, as well as helping journalists and the media sector with relief funds, relocation assistance and technical support.

*As the war spreads to other parts of the country, patterns of sexual violence and forced disappearances are strengthening significantly.* Recommendations to change this include engaging with local civil society actors and leaders to develop area-based and locally driven civilian protection frameworks that are gender-responsive, increasing support to CSOs for raising awareness about sexual violence and its impact, and providing survivors with access to healthcare, psychosocial support, economic opportunities and justice.

Finally, as the war continues, it is also important to ask questions about the development opportunities that exist within the current context. It is also essential to consider how support and programming—whether humanitarian or not—can be integrated into broader thinking regarding an eventual recovery phase. This should be done regardless of how the conflict ends. The thinking process should be deliberately informed by the Sudanese themselves and the organizations that represent them.

# INTRODUCTION

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## BACKGROUND

In April 2023, fighting erupted in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its paramilitary wing, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), marking an end to what has been described as a fragile transitional process. The conflict caused widespread suffering and completely derailed all efforts towards achieving lasting peace and democratic transformation in the country.

Despite these setbacks and continued hardships, Sudanese civil society groups and organizations have shown resilience, playing a vital role on several fronts in responding to the crisis. As the conflict enters its ninth month—at the time of writing this report— with no signs of abating soon, and the socio-political scene remains unclear and fragmented, Sudanese civilians are looking to civil society inside and outside the country to address their needs and find a way out of the current predicament.

International actors and donors invested in Sudan are also emerging from the shock of the war, posing questions about the development opportunities that exist within the current context and how support and programming—humanitarian or otherwise—can be integrated into broader thinking regarding an eventual recovery phase, regardless of how the conflict ends. This thinking should be deliberately informed by the Sudanese themselves and the organizations that represent them.

Against this backdrop, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) initiated this report to shed light on the current state of Sudanese civil society in the aftermath of the present Sudanese civil war and the main areas of programming that Sudanese civil society organizations (CSOs) have prioritized.

The report also provides some actionable recommendations for stakeholders interested in supporting the Sudanese people and the civil society sector during these challenging times and in contributing to broader thinking on what to do next. The recommendations provided in this report are also based on relevant studies and input from civil society events and platforms in which members of the research team participated.

The remainder of this chapter offers a concise overview of the present-day context in Sudan, followed by a brief description of civil society. We focus on four different segments or types of civil society that are currently active in the civic space in Sudan and that are further described in Chapter 1 on findings. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the research's scope, outlining the approach and methodology used to comprehend the status of Sudanese civil society under the influence of the present Sudanese civil war and its areas of work in the ongoing crisis.

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## SUDAN CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Since gaining independence in 1956, Sudan has been plagued by political unrest and at least three civil wars (including the present one starting in 2023), with three short-lived parliamentary democracies toppled by military takeovers. This unrest has hindered the country's quest for peace, stability and economic prosperity. Despite numerous eruptions of violence and deep political and economic crises, a widespread non-violent movement eventually led to the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir, who had held power for over 30 years, in 2019. Following his removal, Sudan entered a three-year transition period, during which a transitional government, supported by an uneasy military coalition with ties to the previous regime and a diverse range of political forces from across the capital and the peripheries, was to lead the country towards democracy.

Upon the request of the prime minister to the United Nations Security Council to support the transition in Sudan, the Security Council

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**The transition was fraught with challenges. Internally, tribal tensions and inter-communal conflict flared following differences over parts of the Juba Peace Agreement that was signed in October 2020.**

adopted Resolution 2524 (2020) in February 2020, establishing the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) (UNSC 2020). Headed by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Volker Perthes, the mission's strategic objectives were to assist Sudan 'in its transition towards democratic governance, provide support for peace negotiations and bolster efforts to maintain accountable Rule of Law and security institutions' (UN 2020). However, the transition was fraught with challenges. Internally, tribal tensions and inter-communal conflict flared following differences over parts of the Juba Peace Agreement that was signed in October 2020. Political differences and wrangling between the civilian elements of the government and the military reached a climax and resulted in a military takeover of power on 25 October 2021 – dissolving the civilian government, deposing the prime minister and imposing a state of emergency.

The military coup was met with widespread protests across the country as well as regional and international condemnation. The African Union (AU) suspended Sudan's membership and its activities in the pan-African body until the civilian-led transitional government was restored. The UN Secretary-General and the Friends of Sudan Group publicly denounced the takeover, and the World Bank froze USD 2 billion of international development assistance that was about to be rolled out to Sudan. The combination of domestic and international pressure led to the brief reinstatement of the deposed prime minister in November 2021 through an agreement on power-sharing between the prime minister and the Military Council. Yet, the November agreement failed to provide renewed stability to the country. Sudanese citizens, backed by a wide array of political forces, continued their mobilization on the streets.

Following the resignation of the prime minister on 2 January 2022, just six weeks after his reinstatement, UNITAMS initiated its efforts to facilitate dialogue and find a solution to the impasse that had set in. A consultation process launched in January 2022 by the head of UNITAMS, Volker Perthes, culminated (in February 2022) in a report with conclusions from a lengthy consultation process, but failed to provide any practical recommendations or answers on several divisive issues. From May 2022 onwards, international dialogue and mediation efforts were facilitated by what was known as the Trilateral Mechanism, with UNITAMS in the lead and the involvement of the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Another parallel process was being led by the Quad (a group of external

partners that includes Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United Kingdom and the United States).

In December 2022, a Political Framework Agreement (PFA), signed by the Head of the Sovereign Council (Abdul-Fatah Al-Burhan), his deputy (head of the RSF Hamdan Dagalo), and the pro-democracy civilian faction of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), opened the way for further negotiations to resolve the divisive issues (UN 2022a). While the PFA was lauded by international actors such as the Trilateral Mechanism and many regional and international powers, it was protested against by national civil society actors such as the Resistance Committees, as well as by sidelined political forces such as the Democratic Bloc and the Sudanese Communist Party, who boycotted the signing ceremony (Said 2022). The PFA eventually broke down and led to open conflict between important generals (Al-Burhan and Dagalo), in the wake of disagreements between them on issues of subordination and integration of their forces—issues which were part of the negotiation process for the PFA (Bekele 2023).

Since the full-scale conflict erupted on 15 April 2023, the country has been thrown into a devastating humanitarian crisis and is on the brink of collapse. More than 6.7 million people fled their homes from April to December of 2023, taking refuge inside and outside the country (UNOCHA 2023b). The fighting has taken a heavy toll on infrastructure across all sectors, including education, health, banking, and telecommunications, and has caused massive breakdowns in essential services, especially in Khartoum and Darfur.

Schools have shut down, and education across all levels has been disrupted, which has led to the denial of educational opportunities for numerous children and young people. Both teachers and students have been affected due to displacement, and school buildings have been damaged or turned into shelters for displaced people. This disruption not only affects the immediate educational opportunities of Sudan's youth but also has future implications for the country's development (Kuyok 2023).

Intense conflict and inter-communal violence, coupled with the continued economic decline, have driven about 17.7 million people across Sudan (37 per cent of the population) into high levels of acute food insecurity, IPC Phase 3 or above (crisis or worse), between October 2023 and February 2024 (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 2023). Livelihoods have been disrupted due to job losses, displacement, increased prices, business closures, halted

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**The present civil war threatens regional stability and has geo-political spillovers for neighbouring countries.**

production, disrupted trade flows and market disruptions (FAO 2023a).

The damage and destruction of the banking infrastructure have affected cash flow, especially in Khartoum—the epicentre of the fighting and the city where all the banks were headquartered. Combined with a shortage of supplies and inflation, the lack of cash has affected people’s access to food and other essential services to varying degrees across the country, particularly in conflict zones such as Khartoum (ACAPS 2023).

The present civil war threatens regional stability and has geo-political spillovers for neighbouring countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan (Darwish 2023). The external entanglement of regional powers such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE make for an added level of complexity that extends beyond the two warring sides. In summary, the longer the conflict persists, the higher the risk of regional instability.

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## **UNDERSTANDING CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUDAN**

Defining civil society in Sudan is a complex task, due to several social, cultural and political factors that make it difficult to establish a clear definition. While civil society is typically defined as everything outside of the bureaucratized state, and thus as a sphere including all social associations, there is a debate in Sudan regarding the inclusion of *ahli* (a.k.a. traditional) civil society and political parties within this definition.

*Ahli* civil society refers to structures based on tribes, sects, villages, presumptive bloodlines and the like. Some argue against the inclusion of *ahli* civil society and prefer to limit the definition to modern organizations based on citizenship and freedom of organization. However, traditional civil society is widely accepted and legitimate within its constituencies, and is considered part of the concept of civil society for the purposes of our research.

Political parties, on the other hand, are disregarded as part of civil society here because they aim to gain and exercise political power. In contrast, CSOs seek to influence and monitor political processes



more indirectly. Political parties have also been accused of infiltrating civil society, causing internal conflicts and factionalization.

To help with the understanding and analysis of civil society in Sudan, the sector is divided into four segments based on some unique characteristics such as the involved organizations' historical roots, relative accountability and transparency, power and influence, and impact. These segments include modern civil society, *ahli* civil society, diaspora civil society and new/revolutionary civil society.

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## PURPOSE, APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This report aims to provide an overview of the status of CSOs in Sudan following the outbreak of the present civil war on 15 April 2023. It also highlights the main areas of programming that these organizations have prioritized in response and offers some actionable recommendations for stakeholders with an interest in supporting the Sudanese people during these challenging times.

The approach involved carrying out an initial scan of recent literature related to civil society, which identified four main areas of programming that CSOs engage in: humanitarian action; ending war and political dialogue; food security and livelihoods; and human rights. The scan also identified key contextual and operational factors that influence the sector's efficacy in these areas. These factors include the current state of civil society; networking, collaboration and coordination; polarization and representation; engagement with donors and multilateral institutions; and engagement with the government. The main questions probed under each of the five contextual/operational factors are presented in Annex A.

Secondary data collection involved carrying out interviews with stakeholders representing the four different segments of civil society listed above and a few international stakeholders. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with civil society representatives inside Sudan and in the diaspora. In total 16 interviews and 6 focus group discussions were carried out.

Based on these findings, the report provides some practical recommendations for civil society and other stakeholders on how to further progress in pursuing significant results on Sudanese civil society's agenda of work.

## Chapter 1

# FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section provides an overview of programming priorities of Sudanese civil society in the current period and highlights their work in four key areas. The second section discusses contextual and operational factors that affect the impact and development of the civil society sector as it works in its priority areas.

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## 1.1. PRIORITY AREAS OF PROGRAMMING

### 1.1.1. Humanitarian action

Sudan has been embroiled in a protracted humanitarian crisis since before the turn of the century, which has been exacerbated by political unrest, violent conflict and economic underperformance. Since the conflict broke out between the SAF and the RSF in mid-April of 2023, approximately 6.7 million individuals have been forced to flee their homes and seek refuge both within and outside of Sudan. As a result of this crisis, Sudan has now become the country with the largest number of displaced individuals, as well as having the largest child displacement crisis in the world (UNOCHA 2023e).

The conflict has taken a heavy toll on civilian infrastructure, destroying facilities that are necessary for the functioning of essential services, including water, sanitation and healthcare. 'Since 15 April 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) has verified 58 attacks on the healthcare system, resulting in 31 deaths and 38 injuries—an average of 10 attacks per month. More than 70 percent of health facilities in conflict-affected states are non-functional, severely limiting access to healthcare for millions of innocent

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civilians', stated the Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, Clementine Nkweta Salami (UNOCHA 2023b). Disease outbreaks, including a troubling rise in cholera cases across several states, further complicate the situation (UNOCHA 2023c). Frontline responders are operating under significant risks, such as risks of direct attacks and interrogation. Since April 2023, at least 19 deaths have been reported among humanitarian workers (Carstensen and Sebit 2023).

According to the Humanitarian Aid Commission, as of May 2023, nearly 3,000 active humanitarian organizations have ceased their operations in Sudan. Among them, around 2,900 are national organizations, and 110 are foreign organizations. By late July of 2023, the number of active UN organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) that were operating in the humanitarian sector had dropped to 85, according to UNOCHA (n.d.). UN warehouses have been looted or burned, and hundreds of CSOs have had their operational capabilities and infrastructure severely jeopardized. A survey carried out by the Sudan NNGOs Forum estimated that the national organizations and associations that had a presence in the conflict areas suffered material losses amounting to over USD 177 million. These losses were mainly in the form of vehicles, power generators, office furniture, tools and equipment, cash, and other inventory/supplies (Sudan NNGOs Forum 2023a).

The outbreak of war has nonetheless also been responded to positively. According to the latest Humanitarian Response Dashboard (UNOCHA 2023f), between April and October 2023 approximately 4.5 million people in Sudan were reached by life-saving assistance from 154 humanitarian partners. Other more home-grown and localized initiatives, such as the Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs), have also been active at the grassroots level, providing aid and support to area residents and the internally displaced. Although accurate numbers of those reached or served by these mechanisms do not exist, Shabaka's Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (SCCU) has identified the existence and operation of at least 28 of these ERRs across seven states of the country. The UN's revised 2023 Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) (UNOCHA 2023g) estimates that 18.1 million people in Sudan will need life-saving multi-cluster and protection assistance, and yet only 38.6 per cent of the target level of USD 2.6 billion had been met by 7 December 2023. Other challenges to the humanitarian response include insecurity and limited access, bureaucratic obstacles, inadequate network and phone connectivity, scarcity of cash and fuel shortages for the movement of humanitarian staff and supplies, as well as problems with the

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generation of power needed for operations (maintaining cold chain storage, supplying water, and other functions).

### 1.1.2. Livelihood and food security

The food security and livelihood situation in Sudan is critical—millions of people are facing acute food insecurity due to multiple factors, such as conflict, displacement, economic crisis, climate shocks and poor harvests. According to an assessment released by the World Food Programme (WFP), one-third of Sudan's population, or 15 million people, are facing acute food insecurity (UN 2022b). The Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (CFSVA) shows that the combined effects of economic and political crises, conflict and displacement, climate shocks and a poor harvest in the past agricultural season are among the key drivers of the emergency. The CFSVA further shows that food insecurity exists in all of Sudan's 18 states and has worsened in 16 of the states. The 10 most affected localities are in greater Darfur, which have been ravaged by nearly two decades of protracted conflict (including the war in Darfur in 2003–2020) and displacement.

The 2023/24 season has been challenging for crop production due to several factors. All states have reported unavailability and high cost of agricultural inputs, a lack of finance for farmers, the absence of agricultural extension and services, a high fragility of the security situation, poor rainfall distribution and the widespread presence of plant pests and diseases. Crops planted were exposed to various risks that could affect harvests. These risks include crop damage due to pest infestations, lack of safe access to farmlands during the harvest, and conflicts with pastoralists, mainly along/near livestock migratory routes, which cause crop losses due to destruction by livestock (FAO 2023b: 4).

As for the livestock sector, the interconnectedness of poor rainfall, conflict, inimical pasture conditions and excess livestock mobility was a cause of stress on productivity and a threat to the country's livestock wealth. The conflicts between farmers and herders over access to livestock migration routes and grazing areas were expected to intensify during the winter and dry seasons. Several diseases are suspected to be prevalent in livestock, and there is a severe shortage of veterinary vaccines and drugs due to the ongoing conflict. The poultry and dairy industries have also been impacted, especially in urban areas (FAO 2023b: 6).

To address this crisis, the WFP and other humanitarian partners have been providing food and cash assistance to the most affected people, as well as supporting livelihood activities to help them recover and build resilience. Some of the interventions include training and engaging people in income-generating activities, such as sewing, handicraft making, vegetable gardening, and improved crop production; providing start-up capital and modern farming implements; and distributing school meals to children (World Vision International n.d.).

National NGOs, in partnership with the Food and Agricultural Organization, have also been distributing seeds and other agricultural inputs to over 266,000 small farmers in 10 of Sudan's 18 states (Sudan NNGOs Forum 2023b).

### 1.1.3. Ending the war and political dialogue

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the present civil war, there were widespread calls, both nationally and internationally, for an end to the fighting. Various initiatives led by civilians and national organizations emerged, both within and outside the country. Some of these initiatives were newly formed, while others were founded in pre-existing platforms that had been established before the present civil war, but for different purposes, such as supporting the democratic transition.

A recent mapping study carried out by International IDEA identified at least 15 of the most visible and widely known initiatives. Aside from calls to end the war, these initiatives were concerned with a wide range of issues such as justice and security sector reform, a unified civilian front, transitional justice and working towards a constitutional conference. Other less-known but nonetheless active organizations that have been able to gather larger numbers of participants exist in several states across the country.

At the international level, in an effort to end the present civil war and establish a ceasefire, the USA and Saudi Arabia have led the Jeddah process. On 20 May 2023, the process resulted in the signing of the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan by the two warring parties (the SAF and the RSF). The agreement was meant to create a week-long ceasefire and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid within the country. It was also expected to lead to a more permanent ceasefire and negotiations for a peace deal. Unfortunately, the agreement was short-lived— it collapsed a few days after it was signed, due to a surge of clashes between the two

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parties beginning on 23 May 2023. Talks resumed on 7 June 2023 but were fruitless, and the process was suspended until 26 October 2023, when the two parties agreed to resume talks once more. However, the talks were again unproductive, and the US and Saudi facilitators announced on 4 December 2023 that the talks had ended in a deadlock and were being suspended indefinitely.

**Calls for the formation of a transitional government and all-inclusive Sudanese-to-Sudanese conference had also been echoed inside and outside of the country by Sudanese actors.**

In addition to the efforts to end the war in Sudan, there has been growing attention paid to what steps should be taken after a successful ceasefire might be achieved. The 4th Meeting of the Expanded Mechanism on the Crisis in Sudan, held in Djibouti on 4 December 2023, concluded that the AU and IGAD should promptly execute their plan to organize an all-inclusive political dialogue among all Sudanese parties. This dialogue would deal with both the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and the formation of a civilian transitional government (AU 2023).

Calls for the formation of a transitional government and all-inclusive Sudanese-to-Sudanese conference had also been echoed inside and outside of the country by Sudanese actors. In anticipation of such dialogues taking place, a few coalitions and alliances have emerged and are preparing themselves to ensure they have a seat at the table. The most visible of these organizations are as follows.

The Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (Taqadum) was formed at a meeting in Addis Ababa to unify civil forces against ongoing conflict. It was initiated by the FFC, prominent individuals and civil society groups. They aim to convene a founding conference to articulate a national project for Sudanese democratic forces.

The National Mechanism for Democratic Transition, led by former Sovereignty Council member Aisha Musa, have presented their vision and roadmap to end the ongoing war in Sudan and form a temporary transitional authority to the head of the Sovereignty Council, Al-Burhan, on 3 October 2023. The plan includes ending the war, establishing an emergency government, providing relief to Sudanese affected by the war, and opening humanitarian corridors for aid to reach the states of Khartoum and Darfur.

An initiative called the Framework for the Return to Civilian Political Path was formed by Sudanese traditional leaders, native administration representatives, Sufi orders, and political actors in Cairo in October 2023. Our findings in this study indicate that the

initiative aims to unite national civilian ranks and form an upcoming transitional civilian government with a transitional programme.

Previously, in October 2023, the AU had intended to host a 'Civilian Dialogue' event on Sudan, aimed at uniting civil society groups and politicians to develop a consensus-based approach towards creating a united civilian front. The meeting was cancelled, but without any explanation provided for the sudden change of plans. It is believed that influential stakeholders had expressed criticism over the selective process of identifying invitees and the lack of a clear and transparent process. This serves as a reminder of the previous difficulties encountered in engaging with Sudanese civil society during the transitional period.

#### 1.1.4. Human rights and civic space

Prior to the onset of conflict, Sudan's civic space had already been classified as 'repressed' by numerous credible and independent sources (UN OHCHR n.d.a; CIVICUS n.d.).<sup>1</sup> Regional and national monitoring entities, including the Sudan Civic Space Monitor and the Horn of Africa Watch, regularly reported on the various limitations and violations imposed by state authorities, which had a detrimental impact on civic space in the country.

Based on the 2022 Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index for Sudan, published by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the legal environment in which CSOs operate was a major factor affecting their sustainability in 2022. Most of the organizations affected were NGOs registered under the Sudan Voluntary and Humanitarian Works Act of 2006. Despite showing some improvement after the revolution of 2019 in Sudan, the legal environment began to worsen in 2021 and deteriorated even further after a military takeover in October 2021, disrupting the process of reforming laws and procedures that affect civil society (USAID 2022: 242).

After the outbreak of the present civil war, further changes have taken place in the civic space. Previously, CSOs suffered restrictions and disruptions coming from Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) personnel and actors affiliated with the central national security apparatus. However, now the main opponents of CSOs are military intelligence operatives and RSF commanders. The state-level HACs

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<sup>1</sup> The civic space can be defined as the environment which enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/civic-space>>, accessed 9 December 2024.

were accountable and reported to the state governors, but as of October 2023, the state-level HACs report and are answerable to the federal-level HAC, which is now headquartered in Port Sudan in Red Sea state. Bureaucratic impediments such as requirements on the issuance of visas for international NGO staff, travel authorizations, technical agreements, and restrictions on partnerships between INGOs and national NGOs during the implementation of activities have reportedly worsened.

Significant progress and achievements on the human rights front in Sudan were being realized up until the outbreak of fighting in April 2023. In 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights established a fully mandated UN Human Rights Office in Sudan, including four field offices in Darfur, Blue Nile, South Kordofan and East Sudan (UN OHCHR n.d.b). In October 2020, Council Resolution 45/25 ended the mandate of the Independent Expert, a position that had been in place for over six years since Aristide Noonsi was designated as the first Independent Human Rights Expert for Sudan in 2014.

With the outbreak of the present civil war, the human rights situation has been described as having become 'dire and alarming'. The RSF and the SAF are believed to be the main actors behind this worsening human rights situation, and according to a recent statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, 'have committed serious violations of international law ... including violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law' (UN OHCHR 2023). Amnesty International (2023a) has also urged the international community to take urgent action to protect civilians and hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes. In a report entitled '*Death Came to Our Home*', the organization (Amnesty International 2023b) has documented numerous violations of human rights and humanitarian law by both parties, including unlawful killings, torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and attacks on health facilities.

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**In October 2020, Council Resolution 45/25 ended the mandate of the Independent Expert, a position that had been in place for over six years since Aristide Noonsi was designated as the first Independent Human Rights Expert for Sudan in 2014.**

As the conflict quickly spread from Khartoum to other parts of the country, the region of Darfur was hard hit with human rights violations, with civilians being targeted in ethnically motivated attacks (Amnesty International 2023b: 8). Some of the worst attacks took place in El-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state, and following the killing of the state governor by RSF forces on 14 June 2023, an exodus of many members of the Masalalit community took place to eastern Chad (UN 2023).



During a special session held on 11 May 2023, the Human Rights Council in Geneva adopted Resolution S-36/1, which enhanced the mandate of the designated Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Expert on Sudan. The resolution was also aimed at enhancing the monitoring and documentation of human rights violations and abuses committed since the 25 October 2021 military takeover, including those arising directly from the current conflict, and also provided for reporting to the Council. Later, on 11 October 2023, the Council passed Resolution A/HRC/54/L.18, which opened a probe into the human rights abuses in Sudan. The resolution also called on all parties to cease hostilities, respect human rights and humanitarian law, and engage in an inclusive political dialogue to end the crisis.

Despite the shrinking civic space and the conflict's impact on the CSO sector, several national organizations continue to work on issues related to human rights in Sudan. Some of these include the Sudan Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) and the Darfur Network for Human Rights, which monitor, document and report on human rights law violations. The SHRM is a national NGO that was established in 2005 and is registered under the HAC in Sudan. Regional organizations/networks such as the Strategic Initiative for the Horn of Africa (SIHA) have also been at the forefront of promoting and advocating women's rights, calling for pressure to be exerted on the warring parties to 'secure safe spaces where survivors of sexual violence can receive essential medical services' and without risk of reprisal (SIHA 2023).

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## 1.2. NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY STANDING

This second and final section of the Chapter provides an overview of the state of Sudanese CSOs after the present civil war broke out on 15 April 2023. It focuses on a few contextual and operational factors which affect the sector's development and impact in its priority areas of programming. These areas include the current situation of society; networking, collaboration and coordination; polarization and representation; engagement with donors and multilateral agencies; and engagement with the government. Each of these areas will be analysed separately, for each of the four different segments that make up present-day civil society in Sudan.

### 1.2.1. Modern civil society

Modern civil society in Sudan has its roots in the early 20th century, with the emergence of movements such as the White Flag Society and the Graduates' Congress. These movements played a significant role in attaining Sudan's independence from colonial rule in 1956 and gave birth to political parties in Sudan. After independence, civil society became more diverse and expanded to include professional trade unions, student and professional associations, and rights groups like the Sudanese Women's Union, which advocated women's rights to education, equal employment opportunities and equal pay.

During successive iterations of authoritarian/military rule in Sudan over the past five decades, modern civil society's autonomy and influence were severely eroded due to various factors. The repressive environment and attacks by the state apparatus aimed to silence any criticism or forms of organization that might undermine or threaten the state's grip on power. Political ideologies seeped into these modern organizations, leading to fragmentation and in-fighting within organizations, and a loss of credibility among constituencies. Many CSOs were increasingly perceived by the public as elitist organizations pursuing self-service and a hidden political agenda.

Today, modern civil society in Sudan is primarily comprised of NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), trade unions, professional associations, cooperatives, clubs, cultural groups, civil society networks, research institutions, think tanks, and training centres. These are registered under various laws, such as the Sudan Voluntary and Humanitarian Works Act of 2006 (SVHWA), which is used to register both national and international NGOs working mostly in the humanitarian sector. However, statistics on the size of the modern civil society sector are unavailable, and a significant number of NGOs registered under the SVHWA of 2006 are inactive, as highlighted by the latest Sudan Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index published by USAID (2022).

#### *The current situation*

The present conflict has had a significant impact on modern CSOs. Their programmes and projects, as well as their collaborations and partnerships with other organizations, have been greatly affected. As of May 2023, the HAC reported that 2,900 national and 110 foreign humanitarian organizations have ceased operations in Sudan. By July 2023, only 85 UN organizations and INGOs were active in the sector. UN warehouses have been looted, and CSOs have suffered losses amounting to over USD 177 million. According to reports from the

syndicate of Sudanese craftsmen and artisans, over 270 workshops in Khartoum state have been destroyed or looted. Additionally, more than 3,200 small shops and outlets in various neighbourhoods across Khartoum state have suffered the same fate. The closure of 600 factories has also led to a significant rise in unemployment among their workers in Khartoum and Khartoum state, forcing many of them to relocate to other parts of the country.

Those organizations that relied on full-time paid staff, as opposed to volunteers, have been forced to let their staff go because their funding has been discontinued. Even volunteer-based organizations that were running activities in conflict areas such as Khartoum, Greater Darfur or Greater Kordofan have lost their volunteers and staff due to many fleeing their homes.

Many organizations have either disbanded, have suspended their operations or are in the process of re-establishing themselves in safer parts of the country or neighbouring states. Those who are trying to establish themselves in neighbouring countries face particular challenges. However, the challenges vary depending on the country where they are trying to set up their presence. Many are attempting to establish themselves in neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda, where many Sudanese have fled. In countries such as Egypt and Ethiopia, it has proven to be extremely difficult to pursue formal registration and establishment, due to encroachments on civic space and non-conducive environments that are generally hostile to civil CSOs. However, this is less of a challenge in countries such as Uganda or Kenya, where there are reportedly greater funding possibilities available.

Organizations in Sudan that are attempting to establish themselves in new areas of the country where they were not present before the present conflict find the process to be relatively easy. For example, NGOs that are registered under the HAC can easily obtain permissions and registration licences for national NGOs, as the HAC has relaxed the strict registration requirements that were previously in place. Additionally, national NGOs seeking to renew their licences have been exempted from presenting their audited financial reports and holding their general meetings, which was not possible before. Funding represents a formidable challenge. Since the present civil war started, the funding opportunities for national NGOs working outside the humanitarian or emergency field have decreased significantly. Many foreign donor-funded programmes that were previously operational in the country have downsized or suspended

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**Many organizations have either disbanded, suspended their operations or are in the process of re-establishing themselves in safer parts of the country or neighbouring states.**

their activities. This is mainly due to the need to re-evaluate how best to continue with the changes in the context. Other challenges include difficulty in accessing cash due to the banking system's instability, high prices of goods and services, inflation, shortages of skilled workers, and limitations imposed by military intelligence on certain activities.

Due to difficulties in securing funding, many national NGOs have shifted their focus towards humanitarian action, as this is where most of the foreign funding is currently available. Some organizations have also restructured their projects and activities to make them feasible within online and virtual platforms. For instance, educational, training or awareness-raising activities are increasingly being developed online, with participants attending remotely. Others are trying to explore new modalities of delivery by outsourcing activities to grassroots CBOs that already have a presence on the ground and are better able to manoeuvre with respect to the logistical and procedural challenges in their localities. Organizations pursuing outsourcing are also relying more on outside help for the execution of project activities.

In the aftermath of the war's outbreak, modern CSOs have grasped the significance of institutionalizing their processes and minimizing dependence on a select few individuals. Prioritizing decentralization and adopting new technologies for information management have become crucial. The loss of physical offices has led to the disappearance of hard-copy accounting records and institutional memory. Furthermore, regular contextual analysis and preparedness for potential scenarios have emerged as vital areas that were previously undervalued.

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#### *Networking, collaboration and coordination*

Regarding networking, collaboration and coordination, there are some civil society networks and coalitions that are still operational, while others have either disappeared or transformed into new networks or coalitions. In the humanitarian sector, the Sudan National NGOs Forum was established in late 2022, and has gained prominence due to its focus on humanitarian issues and the wide geographic footprint of its members. Politically oriented civil society coalitions/networks, such as the Civil Society Initiative and the Civil Forces Alliance, which were part of the FFC, have become inactive and less visible.

Collaborative efforts among modern CSOs were felt to be most effective when pursuing advocacy regarding issues related to peace,

civilian governance and human rights. In early October 2023, multiple Sudanese CSOs joined forces with over 50 humanitarian and human rights organizations to call upon the international community to address the unfolding disaster in Sudan. During the 54th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) delivered a joint statement on behalf of these organizations, urging the establishment of an independent and international fact-finding mission on Sudan. These advocacy efforts played a pivotal role in the passing of Resolution A/HRC/54/L.18 by the UN Human Rights Council on 11 October 2023 (International Service for Human Rights 2023).

Modern CSOs occasionally work together and collaborate informally, but these efforts tend to be short-lived. However, these short informal collaborations are often beneficial because they are practical and usually focus on mutually agreed goals or deliverables. Sometimes, longer-term formal collaborations are pursued, but they typically occur as part of consortium arrangements led by INGOs. An initiative that is actively promoting cooperation between CSOs, individuals and international bodies is the Framework Mechanism for Peace. This informal and semi-autonomous advocacy platform regularly holds online sessions to facilitate the exchange of information, updates and perspectives among these actors.

### *Polarization and representation*

Representation and legitimacy within modern civil society networks or alliances is a contentious issue. Networks or alliances claim to represent the views and positions of their members; however, members within some of these networks have complained of not being consulted or of being excluded from decision-making processes. In certain networks or alliances, decision-making processes may be influenced by a select few individuals who hold leadership positions. Alliances and networks may be governed by a constitution or some form of declaration of principles, but beyond that, governance procedures and internal policies or regulations are very scant.

In the modern civil society sector, polarization has been increasing for the past two decades. Polarization within modern CSOs is more acute when it comes to issues such as ending the war and political dialogue on a return to the civilian path. Polarization also revolves around the contentious issue of the political affiliation of certain CSOs or actors and their alignment with political parties or foreign-driven agendas. In recent years, prominent political figures have left

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**Representation and legitimacy within modern CS networks or alliances is a contentious issue.**

their parties to join or create NGOs or CSOs. Working as civil society actors, these individuals have better opportunities that may not have been available to them under the banner of a political party. These opportunities include employment, regular income, and the ability to either serve political parties' ideologies/agendas from outside the parties or pursue a more individualistic agenda that may be at odds with those of political parties. In fact, the first transitional cabinet of ministers under Prime Minister Abdulla Hamdok, who himself came from a UN/international organization background, was mainly composed of members with connections to modern CSOs. However, these individuals also held political affiliations and inclinations. Consequently, polarization intensified immensely during the transitional period over political issues such as transitional justice, legislative and judiciary reforms, security sector reform, the transitional parliament (or legislative assembly), and the membership of the cabinet of ministers following its reshuffle after the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020.

In the course of the present civil war, modern CSOs working on issues related to ending the war and political dialogue have maintained a significant level of influence and power. They have an advantage over political parties due to their access to foreign funding and their ability to easily interact with foreign governments so as to garner support. Some political alliances that involve both political parties and modern CSOs have an edge over others as they can utilize their access to foreign funding and support for convening meetings, travel, and covering other expenses required for advocacy or shaping the political landscape.

In the humanitarian action domain, polarization is less acute and driven mainly by competition over funding, access to international donors, or government support. These disputes hinder collaboration and create rifts between CSOs.

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**In the course of the present civil war, modern CSOs working on issues related to ending the war and political dialogue have maintained a significant level of influence and power.**

Engagement with international actors was more pronounced before the present civil war, with many international organizations and donors maintaining a physical presence inside the country during the pre-war years. Across multiple areas of programming, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian, cooperation with internationals centred around funding where the bulk of funding available for modern CSOs came from international organizations as well as bilateral and multilateral institutions, such as the European Union, USAID, the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, the Swedish International Development

Cooperation Agency, and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. This funding was captured mainly by the formal state-regulated NGOs registered under the SVHWA of 2006, primarily headquartered in Khartoum (USAID 2022).

The CSOs registered under the SVHWA, especially those based in Khartoum, were far more privileged than any of their counterparts (cooperatives, trade unions, professional associations and the like) in terms of engagement with international actors and multilateral institutions. This was largely seen as a result of their ability to secure funding and attract skilled and experienced personnel.

Following the present civil war and displacement of modern CSOs, as well as the withdrawal of many international actors and donors from Sudan, engagement with multilateral institutions and international actors has become increasingly limited. Presently, only a few organizations with advanced communication and networking capabilities, or those that have succeeded in re-establishing themselves in neighbouring countries, have the ability to interact and engage with the few international actors that remain invested in Sudan and continue to offer funding to CSOs outside of the humanitarian sector.

Engagement now mainly pertains to issues related to the humanitarian response and human rights violations, as well as ending the war and political dialogue. Some of the notable engagements here include advocacy efforts with the UN Human Rights Council, in which more than 100 CSOs called on states to convene a special session of the UN Human Rights Council. They advocated the establishment of an independent mechanism tasked with investigating human rights violations and abuses by all parties involved in the present Sudanese conflict. Other examples of activity on the humanitarian front include the convening of the Sudan Humanitarian Crisis Conference in Cairo during the period 18–20 November 2023. The conference was funded by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office and the Norwegian Refugee Council and was attended by upwards of 400 participants, some of whom came from diplomatic, international and UN organizations active in Sudan (Sudan Humanitarian Crisis Conference 2023).

#### *Engagement with government*

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The increase in cooperation, and the jointly perceived urgency of responding to the rapidly deteriorating situation and the reduced capacity of the government due to the losses of human resources and infrastructure, have led to a higher reliance on CSOs by state institutions. However, there are disparities from state to state, and the degree of collaboration depends on the individuals in the state institutions rather than on any deliberate policy.

Examples of high levels of engagement have been reported in the health sector, where CSOs have had to work and coordinate closely with the ministries of health at both the federal level and the state level in responding to needs and availing health services and medicines—especially in response to the cholera outbreak in several parts of the country.

### 1.2.2. Ahli civil society

The term *ahli* represents the compassionate bonds between community members based on kinship, common geography, or shared beliefs. In Sudan, *ahli* civil society is primarily based in the tribal system and the religious Sufi sects, both of which have their roots in the early 1800s with the founding of the Kingdom of Sennar.

Following the collapse of the Mahdiya in 1898, the tribal system regained prominence and power when the British colonial authorities introduced the native administrative system in the 1930s. This system relies on traditional leaders and customary laws and has three primary levels: paramount chiefs, *omdas* and sheikhs. This system is crucial in the local enforcement of justice, natural resource management, conflict resolution and communication with external actors. However, the system faces several challenges and criticisms. It excludes women and youth, has the potential to fuel tribalism and division, and lacks accountability and transparency. This category of traditional civil society is also frequently referred to with the term ‘the traditional authorities’, as they wield a substantial amount of power and authority at the grassroots and community level and their role is officially recognized by the formal authorities and the state.

Another influential group in *ahli* civil society are the religious Sufi orders. They have a significant influence on religious matters and provide social services to communities by establishing schools, health centres, religious institutes and specialized schools for learning and memorizing the Qur’an, known as *Al-khalawi*. *Al-Khalawi* have fostered a close relationship between the Sufi orders and society, and have helped reduce ethnic differences and tribal



tensions in communities. The Sufi orders have a network of internal institutions similar to a miniature state, which includes departments for education, healthcare, finance, and more, overseen by the order's sheikh.

In areas of Sudan where there is fighting, such as Khartoum, Kordofan and the Darfur region, all the different forms of *ahli* civil society have been affected, although some have been affected to a lesser extent than others. For example, semi-formal groups such as the Sufi sects or the Ansar, who had assets and infrastructure and were more formally structured, have lost their assets and their ability to mobilize or continue their activities.

Other groups, such as the representatives of the traditional administrative system (and tribal groups), have also been affected by the conflict, with the extent of impact varying depending on the conflict area. In states such as Western Darfur, which is mainly inhabited by the Masalalit tribe, traditional authorities have been targeted by the RSF, who waged a campaign of killing and rape that expelled most of the ethnic-African Masalalit tribe from the Sudanese city of El Geneina (Michael and McNeill 2023). These attacks were ethnically motivated, and traditional authorities had to flee to neighbouring countries or more secure areas within the country. In other areas under RSF control, traditional authorities who were not persecuted or targeted by the RSF had to show allegiance and submit to the RSF's authority.

### *The current situation*

In areas of the country that were not reached by the fighting, such as the Eastern region (Gedaref Kassala and Red Sea states) or parts of the Central region (White Nile, Blue Nile), the impact of the conflict has been somewhat mixed. On the positive side, tribal tensions between different ethnic groups have reportedly decreased, and a generally conciliatory tone of relations between tribes that were previously at odds with each other has emerged. Additionally, relationships with formal state authorities, such as the police or military, have reportedly improved in these areas. Findings from our study indicate that this was because formal state authorities were now working more closely with traditional authorities to prevent any communal unrest that could exacerbate the situation.

There has been very little change in the work and activities of traditional civil society in these areas. Religious groups and Sufi sects continue to provide spiritual guidance and strengthen the

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**Religious groups and Sufi sects continue to provide spiritual guidance and strengthen the social fabric of the country. They have shifted their charitable efforts towards serving displaced communities by providing shelter and meals for displaced families.**

social fabric of the country. They have shifted their charitable efforts towards serving displaced communities by providing shelter and meals for displaced families.

Traditional authorities continue to play a crucial role in all parts of the country. In areas under their mandate or geographical control, they work with community-based structures and take the lead in sustainable land and water management, rehabilitating degraded land areas, preventing tree cutting and preserving forests, demarcating livestock migration routes, and ensuring that farmers do not encroach upon them. They also work on shelter and fire belts and combat desertification.

Moreover, the role of traditional civil society in managing and resolving local disputes within and between communities and administering justice through their local courts has become indispensable in the face of the absence and weaknesses that have beset state institutions such as the judiciary and the police. According to a survey carried out in early 2020 covering the region of Darfur, respondents believe that local leaders represent the most influential peace actors at a local level, followed by youth and women leaders. The survey also revealed that local leaders, Community-Based Reconciliation Mechanisms (CBRMs) and religious leaders were considered to be the most compelling actors in reducing and solving local conflicts and disputes, followed closely by the police and women (UNDP 2019: 36).

The survey also found that 75 per cent of respondents believe that native administration is the most influential advocate of peace and stability, followed by women and youth. Additionally, when facing safety issues, respondents prioritize seeking help from local leaders, native administration or the police, in that order.

In some areas, such as Adayin in East Darfur and Al-Fashir in North Darfur, traditional authorities have been relatively successful in brokering ceasefires and preventing fighting between the SAF and the RSF in their areas (UNOCHA 2023a).

#### *Networking, collaboration and coordination*

Coordination and collaboration among traditional civil society actors can take on different forms depending on the context. Some groups may act competitively, while others may be more collaborative. For the traditional administration, alliances and coordination are subject to constant change in response to the ever-evolving socio-political

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**In the period that preceded the outbreak of the present war, examples of rivalry between alliances of traditional authorities were evident in Eastern Sudan, when two significant alliances were pitted against one another over the Eastern Track of the Juba Peace Agreement.**

landscape. In the period that preceded the outbreak of the present war, examples of rivalry between alliances of traditional authorities were evident in Eastern Sudan, when two significant alliances were pitted against one another over the Eastern Track of the Juba Peace Agreement. The Higher Council of the Beja, headed by Al-Nazir Tirik, was opposed to the Eastern Track, and the Native Administration Council in Eastern Sudan, chaired by Ali Mahmoud Nazir of the Al-Amrar tribe, was in favour.

On the other hand, it has been observed that certain groups, such as Sufi orders and religious organizations, tend to work together towards common goals. Before the conflict, these traditional civil society actors played a significant role in mediating and facilitating dialogue to resolve the political deadlock that arose after the October 2021 coup in Sudan. For instance, in August 2022, a round-table conference of the 'People of Sudan' was organized by the religious figure Al-Tayeb Aljid. Similarly, in September 2022, a mediation initiative led by the religious cleric Mohammed Al-Jaali was supported by pro-democracy parties and opposition groups, but unfortunately, it failed to gain momentum (Bashir 2023).

After the war, several platforms emerged that brought religious leaders together. One of these is the Imams and Preachers platform, which was created by preachers who fled the capital Khartoum. They aim to promote a culture of peace and coexistence while combating hate speech. Another initiative is called *Ta'alu ila Kalimat in Siwaa*, which translates to 'Come to a Common Word'. It was created by activists and national figures from inside and outside Sudan, calling for peace and an end to the war. In the diaspora, the sheikhs of Sufi orders based in Cairo launched a recent initiative called 'Together for the Homeland'. Its purpose was to provide aid to Sudanese refugees in Egypt.

Another significant and noteworthy alliance comprised of various members of the traditional civil society has also surfaced in the diaspora. This alliance has emerged under the banner of the 'Framework for the Return to Civilian Political Path'. The document outlines seven steps for a return to civilian rule in Sudan, which mainly focuses on the organization of an all-inclusive national conference and the establishment of a transitional national unity

government. The leaders involved in this initiative represent a diverse range of perspectives within traditional civil society.<sup>2</sup>

Polarization among traditional civil society groups is primarily evident within the tribal groups and the traditional administration system, and is influenced by the evolving socio-political context. Polarization ebbs and flows in the different regions of the country depending on the prevailing socio-political context. Before the present civil war, polarization among the tribal groups in Eastern Sudan was most pronounced over the Eastern Track of the Juba Peace Agreement. The agreement pitted the Higher Council of Nazarat Al-Beja, who were opposed to the track, against the Supreme Council of the Native Administration in Eastern Sudan who were in favour of it.

More recently, the rivalry between these two groups resurfaced when, in November 2023, civil servants from the Beja people launched the 'Initiative of Beja Civil Servants' with the aim of promoting peaceful coexistence and organizing an all-inclusive conference on political issues in Eastern Sudan early in 2024. However, this initiative caused a rift between the two groups, as the Native Administration Council in Eastern Sudan denounced it, claiming that it excluded influential parties and groups in the East. They accused the initiative of dividing Eastern society on a regional basis and excluding members of the traditional administration, Sufi orders, and community and political leaders. The council considered the initiative to be an attempt to hijack the will of the people of Eastern Sudan (Radio Dabanga 2023).

The present civil war has also polarized tribal groups and traditional authorities in the Darfur region, with some groups declaring their support for the RSF. Tribal leaders from Beni Halba, Turjum, Habaniya, Fallata, Misseriya, Ta'isha and Rizeigat in South Darfur expressed their support for the RSF and called on their tribesmen who were serving in the army to leave and join the ranks of the RSF.

Polarization is a major issue that is further intensified by hate speech, which has a particularly negative impact on tribal civil society. According to a report titled 'Discrimination and Hate Speech

2 Signatories to the document included the Sultan of the Mima Tribe (North Darfur) and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Native Administration in Sudan, Sultan Sa'ad Abdul Rahman Bahar Al-Din, Sultan of Dar Massalit (West Darfur), Nazir Muhammad Surur Ramli, Nazir of Jumba'ab (Northern state), his Eminence Sheikh Dr Abbas Al-Fateh Ghareeb Allah of the Samaniya Order, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Rayah Hamad Al-Nil, Head of the General Qadiriya A'arkiya Order (Khartoum State) and Khalifa Habbani, Wakeel Nazir of the Hassaniya and Hussunat Tribe (White Nile state).

Fuel Violence in Sudan', published by the NGO Rights for Peace in March 2021 (Rights for Peace 2021), instances of hate speech and incitement to violence often trigger violence between ethnic groups. The report highlights several examples of hate speech that have contributed to violent tribal conflicts in Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Kordofan.

### *Engagement with international actors and multilateral institutions*

Engagement between *ahli* civil society and international actors, as well as with multilateral institutions, was better before the present war, particularly with regard to the political dialogue and the extremely powerful role that *ahli* civil society (especially the native administration at the leadership level) has had in influencing politics. UNITAMS held several meetings with leaders from the native administration and the Sufi orders as part of their consultations with Sudanese actors in early 2021. During the closure of the Port Sudan–Khartoum main road, the EU and other international actors, such as the USA, also convened talks with the leadership of the Higher Council of the Beja Nazirs.

Outside the political dialogue track, and given the important role played by native administration at the grassroots level in relation to conflict resolution and natural resource management, engagement with local authorities at the grassroots level takes place within the context of a lot of the peacebuilding projects and programmes that were being implemented by UN agencies and international organizations.

In the aftermath of the war's outbreak, engagement has significantly decreased, and interviews with leaders from this segment of civil society indicate that they often feel excluded from the anticipated political dialogue negotiations that the AU and IGAD have been planning.

### *Engagement and government*

Of all the segments of civil society, engagement and cooperation with the government for *ahli* civil society is the strongest, especially given the conflict resolution and justice enforcement roles that this important segment plays. The native administration is a key mechanism used by the government to resolve conflicts and tribal problems, often in cooperation with the police. It is frequently employed to prevent further escalation of issues. For example, in cases where smugglers are killed during police raids or pursuit, the government works with the local traditional civil society leaders to

handle the situation within the framework of local customs, and to prevent potential retaliation from the deceased's family. The competent authorities responsible for forestry also collaborate with native administration to monitor and prevent illegal tree cutting and manage community forests. Additionally, the native administration is represented in agricultural committees within the Ministry of Agriculture, where it works in conjunction with other agencies to resolve disputes between farmers and herders.

**As the state relapsed into authoritarianism under the continued rule of the National Congress Party (NCP) and the economic situation of the country worsened, protests intensified, and new forms of resistance and organization began to emerge.**

### 1.2.3. New civil society

Sudan has witnessed the emergence of new forms of civil organization and mobilization at the end of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2010 and the secession of South Sudan in 2011. As the state relapsed into authoritarianism under the continued rule of the National Congress Party and the economic situation of the country worsened, protests intensified, and new forms of resistance and organization began to emerge. Youth-driven underground movements, such as the We Are Fed-up (*Girifna*) and Change Now (*Al-Taghyeer Al-Aan*) movements (calling for an end to the regime of Omar Al-Bashir) were instrumental in stirring up the earliest street protests in 2013. The most prominent role was played by the Sudanese Resistance Committees (RCs), also known as the Neighbourhood Resistance Committees, which were vital in mobilizing citizens, advocating change and contributing to the success of the 2019 revolution (Alneel 2021).

Soon, disbanded unions and associations joined the fray, and anti-regime rhetoric gained traction through a surge in social media activism. These included the Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA), an umbrella group of the clandestine trade unions and professional associations that had been disbanded by the state, women's coalitions, and other networks, such as the Women of Sudanese Civic and Political Groups, Sudanese Women's Union, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, and MANSAM. These groups formed the backbone of the political alliance known as Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC, or Alliance for Freedom and Change), which was to negotiate the Transitional Constitution of 2019 and eventually enter a power-sharing arrangement with the Transitional Military Council in 2019–2021.

In the aftermath of the war's outbreak, some of these groups continue to play a pivotal role in advocating change, demanding justice and pushing for democratic transformation. However, the focus has shifted to calls to end the war and respond to the

humanitarian crisis. The Neighbourhood Resistance Committees have been quick to adapt to the harsh new reality, and have morphed into what has become known as the Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs)—home-grown and localized initiatives, active at the grassroots level and providing various forms of aid and support to area residents and the internally displaced who have arrived in their areas. Other community-led initiatives have emerged with the backing of diaspora networks and the private sector. These include individuals who provide shelter to displaced persons, as well as ad hoc groups, professional associations, and traditional leaders who are helping to provide assistance and support to informal shelters (Harvey et al. 2023).

New civil society initiatives to end the war have also been active in the aftermath of the war's outbreak. A recent study commissioned by International IDEA mapped and analysed 15 of the most visible, coordinated, and best organized of these with the aim of providing a platform for national civilian actors to work together and build a common position on the regional and international diplomatic efforts in progress. Five of the most prominent of those identified included the Sudanese Civil Actors and Activists Speak with One Voice; Concerned Sudanese; the National Mechanism to Support Civil Democratic Transition; the Sudan Peace, Development, and Democracy Platform (SPDP); and Sudan All Inclusive National Convention (Jalil and Kameir 2023). However, the report does point out that the mapping and analysis of such initiatives did not include civil initiatives developed at local and micro-levels in different parts of the country.

The influence and representation of this segment of civil society remain significant; their resilience and adaptability are pronounced, making them a crucial force in Sudanese civil society going forward.

#### *Current situation*

Many of the new forms of CSOs that were visibly active during the transitional period (2019–2021) have continued to exist since, albeit with less visibility and activity. Women's groups and alliances such as MANSAM, the Eastern Sudan Women's Platform, and No to Oppression against Women Initiative still exist, and have also reconstituted themselves with others under newer formations, such as the Women Against War group. These organizations are actively involved in discussions concerning the current context. They deliberate on shaping their contributions to stop the war, incorporating advocacy and issuing joint statements.

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**The influence and representation of this segment of civil society remain significant; their resilience and adaptability are pronounced, making them a crucial force in Sudanese civil society going forward.**

The primary activities of the RCs have been severely restricted due to a highly securitized environment, which has hindered their freedom of movement. Consequently, all political and democratic transition-related activities have come to a complete halt inside the country. Furthermore, members of some of the RCs who called for an end to the war have been detained, which has made it difficult for them to communicate and collaborate with other anti-war groups. They have redirected their efforts towards the humanitarian sector and are now catering to people's needs through their new setup, better known as the ERRs. A team of volunteers comprising medical and other technical experts operate these ERRs, which represent support hubs within the community, delivering information, guidance, and welfare services to the locals (with a particular emphasis on urban areas).

Community initiatives, including the ERRs, are facing significant challenges due to the competing priorities of their members. Many volunteers who staff these initiatives struggle to balance their personal and family needs with their commitment to providing voluntary services. As a result, these initiatives are often thinly stretched and overworked. They rely heavily on local community contributions to sustain the goods and services they provide to those in need, and the deteriorating economic situation is making it increasingly challenging to secure such local contributions. While international aid organizations have attempted to provide support to the ERRs and other community initiatives, they have struggled to do so on a large scale. The Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF) has provided grants to ERRs, but funding remains low overall (Sudan NNGOs Forum 2023b). According to a spokesperson interviewed as part of a recent survey carried out by Humanitarian Outcomes (Harvey et al. 2023), less than 10 per cent of the USD 2 million pledged by international actors for ERRs in Greater Khartoum had materialized by late September 2023. Concerns about upholding humanitarian principles and guidelines when working with and through these localized, indigenous structures are cited as the main excuse. Other challenges include harassment, detention and killings of ERR members by the warring parties.

### *Networking, collaboration and coordination*

Coordination and communication between ERRs within the same state and across states tends to be weak, although this varies from region to region. Some factors impacting the willingness and ability of ERRs to coordinate with each other include their proximity to one another, personal relationships, and the stability of communication infrastructure in the region, and, more importantly, the availability



of resources that might be needed for improved coordination and collaboration (such as mobility, phone credit and the like). In some states, ERRs have established a coordinating body to share resources, attract financing, exchange information and speak in a unified voice to international humanitarian actors. The Khartoum Central Emergency Room is the most advanced in this regard, but not all ERRs in Khartoum state are part of this structure (Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit 2023: 11).

In some regions, ERRs' collaboration with other civil society segments (including modern civil society and *ahli* civil society) has also been evident. Kassala ERRs have collaborated with Al-Sharq Center, which provided their members with training and capacity development opportunities. They also frequently use the facilities of the Kassala Civic Labs to hold meetings and workshops. Other organizations, such as SORD (Sudanese Organization for Research and Development), provide them with assistance for transportation costs, while another organization, the Youth for Construction and Development, has provided them with a site/house that is being used as shelter for displaced people. Since the beginning of the crisis, the Preliminary Committee for the Doctors' Union, another semi-formal CSO, has been coordinating between ERRs and medical facilities, as well as with diaspora medical organizations (Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit 2023: 12).

New initiatives for an end to the war have also been found to be communicating and interacting with each other, especially those that exist outside the country and are unhindered by the challenges posed by the warring parties inside the country. The collaborative nature of these initiatives has, in some instances, even led to mergers, and as the processes of coordination and amalgamation between initiatives continue, it is expected that their ultimate number will be significantly reduced (Jalil and Kameir 2023).

### *Polarization and representation*

According to the interviews we have conducted, politics, ethnicity and geography remain significant factors in driving polarization and representation within emerging forms of civil society, with a particular focus on the divide between Khartoum and the peripheries. However, the impact of these factors has been less pronounced than before the war.

While newly emerged ERRs are also affected by these issues, their predominantly humanitarian focus has made them less susceptible

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**ERRs in some regions are increasingly being pressured to align themselves with one or the other of the warring parties, lest they be targeted or have their work and efforts undermined.**

to political polarization. Nonetheless, ERRs in some regions are increasingly being pressured to align themselves with one or the other of the warring parties, lest they be targeted or have their work and efforts undermined.

#### *Engagement with international actors and multilateral institutions*

ERR coordination and engagement with international actors do take place, although to a very limited extent. The UN institutions most familiar to the ERRs include UNOCHA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), who have reportedly engaged with them to discuss their needs and how they can be supported. However, representatives for ERRs express frustration with these partners, and are increasingly finding the ad hoc engagements pursued by them to be useless, rarely leading to concrete action which is more than symbolic. In some states, ERRs participate in cluster meetings, but the power to access such spaces remains mainly concentrated in the hands of international actors.

Critiques of engaging with international actors have been expressed regarding the difficulty in accessing them. 'UN and INGO offices are like fortresses—you just can't get in, and if you try, you are humiliated', reported the Humanitarian Outcomes 'Survey on the Coverage, Operational Reach, and Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid in Sudan' (Harvey et al. 2023). Other challenges of engaging with international actors cited in the report include having to work with forms and procedures in English rather than Arabic, and the emphasis on online meetings when many local organizations lack basic connectivity, making it hard for local organizations to get information about funding or partnership opportunities.

New initiatives aimed at ending the war and promoting political dialogue with international actors and multilateral institutions such as the AU or the IGAD are largely dominated by actors outside the country. Some initiatives are perceived to receive preferential treatment from international donors, who provide them with technical and financial support to advance their agendas and position them favourably for participation in any upcoming political process. In their analysis of the most pronounced of some of these initiatives, Jalil and Kameir (2023: 25) note that 'examining the beliefs (explanations) and activities of these initiatives makes it clear that their overall objective is to actively participate in the upcoming political process and to have a role in the design of the transitional post-war structures'.

### *Engagement with government*

Disparities in government involvement and support for ERR efforts have been observed across various states and government institutions. According to reports we have collected, the HAC has been uncooperative with ERRs in Kassala state, obstructing their registration despite the fulfilment of all registration requirements. However, in other regions, such as northern Darfur, the HAC has been supportive and frequently cooperates with the Zamzam Displaced Camp ERR. In Kassala, the Chamber of Zakat has been an instrumental partner, providing support (mostly in the form of food items and consumables) to the ERRs. Localities have also played a supportive role, providing physical spaces for ERR recreational activities targeting the displaced. Collaboration with government institutions is critical in facilitating the work of ERRs and mitigating prolonged permission procedures and security-related challenges.

Initiatives to end the war very rarely engage with the government, in fear of reprisal against their members or in fear of being seen as siding with one side of the conflict.

#### **1.2.4. Diaspora civil society**

Sudanese civil society in the diaspora has a history that is connected to the multiple waves of migration caused by the political, economic and social challenges faced by Sudan over the years. Sudanese communities in the diaspora are present throughout the world, with major populations in countries such as Canada, the UK, the USA, and several Middle Eastern countries, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The Sudanese diaspora also includes civil society actors which, facing a harsh crackdown on civil society within Sudan, were compelled to relocate to other countries in recent years. This exodus of civil society leaders was often a response to increased government repression, limitations on freedom of expression and a challenging environment for NGOs within Sudan. In their new host countries, these civil society actors demonstrated resilience by re-establishing their organizations in the diaspora. Despite the physical distance from Sudan, these reconstituted organizations continued their advocacy work, focusing on human rights, social justice and democratic reforms.

In the past four years, the Sudanese diaspora has become increasingly visible and involved in responding to the country's social and political climate. The actions pursued in the diaspora

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**Initiatives to end the war very rarely engage with the government, in fear of reprisal against their members or in fear of being seen as siding with one side of the conflict.**

*The actions pursued in the diaspora have included mobilization, collective action and the formation of diaspora-led CSOs.*

have included mobilization, collective action and the formation of diaspora-led CSOs. The diaspora has leveraged their connections to international platforms to raise awareness about Sudan, advocate, and exert pressure on the international community regarding events such as the 2019 revolution, Covid-19, the 2021 military coup, and the present civil war.

The recent conflict has spurred the creation of several new, informal diaspora networks. Some of them are formally registered and have a governance structure, while the others are informal networks or collections of diaspora individuals, many of which have formed in response to the present conflict. The Sudanese diaspora's response to the crisis has spanned most sectors and activity types, and they remain active in all four areas of civil society programming currently prioritized in Sudan. However, there has been a relatively distinct evolution of response activities from information-sharing to material support and now to longer-term thinking beyond the conflict, which has matched the evolution of the crisis.

#### *The current situation*

The impact of the ongoing conflict on civil society in the diaspora can be observed through the structuring of two distinct categories of organizations. The first category consists of diaspora-initiated and formally registered CSOs, while the second category includes civil society entities which have fled Sudan and sought refuge in other countries after 15 April 2023. Some of these organizations are still deliberating their course of action, while others are continuing their operations in Sudan with reduced capacity.

Diaspora-initiated and registered CSOs faced fewer losses as a result of the present civil war, due to their reliance on international partnerships and the absence of a physical presence in Sudan. Conversely, civil society entities in the diaspora that had branches inside the country encountered substantial challenges, including restricted movement, project and fund suspensions, office shelling, asset and resource looting, staff sustainability issues, communication impediments and cash flow difficulties.

The CSOs in the diaspora are adapting to the challenges posed by the conflict. They have been relocating what remains of their work inside the country to safer regions, training activists as on-call staff, providing mental health support and adopting online or hybrid working modalities. They are also engaging with civil society

representatives and beneficiaries to adapt to the new realities and to revise their *modi operandi*.

Programming has shifted towards humanitarian and emergency response, including support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, training in income-generating activities, mapping local responses and awareness campaigns on gender-based violence. However, some entities engage in activities beyond the humanitarian scope, such as combating hate speech and fellowships for activists.

The CSOs in the diaspora are proactively adapting their strategies and working methods to function within the current context. This includes embracing online or hybrid work models, even in the face of challenges posed by Internet connectivity and power outages. Some groups are considering shifting their focus from supporting IDPs in Sudan to refugees in neighbouring countries where improved Internet access allows for online work. Furthermore, these organizations are exploring reliable alternatives for financial transactions due to disruptions in the banking system, particularly for crowdfunding that reaches grassroots communities with limited financial options. To overcome obstacles in accessing target groups and operational capacities, more CSOs in the diaspora are collaborating closely with grassroots networks and other CSOs to carry out their activities. They are also opting for short-term planning and regularly reassessing the situation due to the rapidly changing context and uncertainty about future scenarios. Humanitarian-focused diaspora-initiated CSOs are showing a more structured and continuous response towards Sudan, in contrast to their seasonal engagements during floods or disease outbreaks before the war. However, the crisis's scale and its personal impact on diaspora members who support their small and extended families in Sudan are making it increasingly difficult to rely on funding from individuals in the diaspora.

#### *Networking, collaboration and coordination*

While some civil society diaspora CSOs operate independently without aligning with networks or coalitions, others actively participate in networks which have either existed previously or emerged in response to the war's outbreak. Some of these networks were formed independently and have evolved over the years, being used for coordination, advocacy and collective action. Collaboration with networks or coalitions is also prevalent, and is used to address the tangible consequences of conflict on the ground. For example, the pre-war Female Journalists' Network is currently discussing ways to support female journalists in Sudan, whereas the Sudanese

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**Programming has shifted towards humanitarian and emergency response, including support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, training in income-generating activities, mapping local responses and awareness campaigns on GBV.**

Journalists in Egypt, a new initiative, aims to assist journalists who have sought refuge in Egypt. Another instance involves a network of youth democracy activists who are alumni of CSO capacity-building programmes and are actively involved in civic education and advocacy within their communities.

On the political front, several coalitions, including MANSAM and Women Against War, are actively discussing ways to end the war and promote peace. They are incorporating advocacy and issuing joint statements to shape their contributions. Recently, the Declaration of Principles was established, consolidating the objectives of civil forces and various post-war initiatives into a unified document. This effort led to the formation of a broad alliance called Taqadom, which is coordinating democratic civil forces to bring an end to the war. However, civil society entities in the diaspora often lack participation in coordination platforms within their specific domains, even while occasionally collaborating with broader coordination bodies such as the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) Forum and the SCCU for information exchange, discussions and coordinated efforts. These collaborations are instrumental in fostering trust, providing spaces for dialogue and establishing common agendas.

The collaboration among CSOs in the diaspora has been extensive, despite limited participation in local coordination platforms. These collaborations range from short-term arrangements for project implementation or information exchange to long-term partnerships. Partnerships extend to grassroots groups, local and national NGOs, and native administrations. Less established CSOs with limited operational presence often partner with others to access resources, such as office spaces for training, and expand their outreach to target groups in different states.

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**MANSAM and Women Against War, are actively discussing ways to end the war and promote peace. They are incorporating advocacy and issuing joint statements to shape their contributions.**

During these challenging times, collaboration has proven to be effective in responding to crises. Decentralized and contextualized responses aligned with the principles of localization have yielded positive results. However, communication challenges have emerged in some areas of Sudan, hindering the ability to reach ERRs and other CSOs. While many CSOs are willing to collaborate, concerns have been raised about working with individuals whose stances are inconsistent with pro-democracy ideals, including those who advocate military mobilization or propagate hate speech. Despite respecting diverse perspectives, some CSOs refuse to collaborate with anyone endorsing systematic state violence or dictatorship.

### *Polarization and representation*

The current state of civil society reflects a noteworthy shift from past periods of polarization. At present, a sense of unity prevails within civil society in the diaspora, largely attributable to a shared objective of halting the ongoing war. This unity contrasts with the divisive landscape observed during the transitional period, where conflicting views prevailed.

Nonetheless, the historical instances of polarization during the transitional period linger and continue to cast shadows on trust and collective action within the diaspora civil society. Tensions exist over issues to be tackled by any upcoming political dialogue, for example, the nature of civil and democratic governance, the composition of the united civil front, the formation of the transitional government, how to realize comprehensive peace, and the organization and timing of any constitutional conference (Jalil and Kameir 2023).

However, the diaspora civil society is actively working towards regaining cohesion, with many voices advocating unity among civil society actors. While this collaborative and reconciliatory spirit within civil society in the diaspora is apparent, there is also a recognition that as the conflict persists and additional parties become involved, polarization may emerge as a challenge in the future.

### *Engagement with international actors and multilateral institutions*

The CSOs in the diaspora have strong connections with international organizations, with a notably robust relationship compared to multilateral institutions. These engagements serve various purposes, such as funding acquisition, donor relations, advocacy and information sharing. CSOs like Shabaka play an active role in forums that unite the Sudanese diaspora with the international community. Through these engagements, successful money transfers have been facilitated, and links between international organizations and local actors in Sudan have been fostered. Advocacy-oriented CSOs frequently engage with multilateral institutions such as UNITAMS, IGAD, EU and the AU. Overall, engaging with the international community is significant, and plays a crucial role in managing connections and coordination between CSOs and international organizations.

Key challenges include the protracted process of transferring funds from outside Sudan, often leading to delays in planned activities. Additionally, inadequate follow-up and in-person monitoring by some INGOs hinder effective project implementation.

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Communication issues, including delayed responses to queries, occasionally negatively impact projects. Sustaining effective two-way communication is also a challenge. While positive engagements involve information and resource sharing, bureaucratic systems within international organizations often lead to delays. The lack of transparency and information sharing about opinions, priorities, agendas and crisis-handling strategies creates a communication gap. The bureaucratic hurdles within international organizations stand out as obstacles that need addressing to enhance the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

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**Technical collaborations for project implementation with various government authorities have ended since the present civil war began, with the exception of coordination with the Ministry of Health for health-related interventions in emergency response efforts.**

### *Engagement with government*

The CSOs in the diaspora have had limited engagement with the government, mostly limited to HAC registrations and technical agreements. Technical collaborations for project implementation with various government authorities have ended since the present civil war began, with the exception of coordination with the Ministry of Health for health-related interventions in emergency response efforts.

Diaspora CSOs have become increasingly cautious in their engagement with government actors and institutions due to concerns about corruption, misappropriation of funds and security risks. To protect their partners on the ground, CSOs prefer to work with trusted local actors to ensure neutrality and impartiality. However, increasingly, diaspora CSOs have little trust in government authorities and question their legitimacy, blaming them for describing them as a big intelligence system that puts them and their partners in danger. The government's minimal engagement with diaspora CSOs is also characterized by a lack of interest in collaboration, as well as by a lack of understanding for these organizations' activities, suspicion and mistrust.



## Chapter 2

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter aims to draw conclusions from the findings and provide recommendations for civil society and other stakeholders to pursue. The conclusions and recommendations are organized based on the four key areas that civil society currently focuses on.

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## 2.1. HUMANITARIAN ACTION

### Conclusion 1

Progress towards a localization agenda remains elusive, despite the growing need for national ownership and support for localized initiatives. Entrenched approaches, a difficult operational environment and the absence of a strategy/plan for localization are all contributing factors behind this. This is especially problematic given reduced humanitarian funding and significant access challenges that are curtailing the scale-up of the humanitarian response.

### *Recommendations*

- Develop a comprehensive and gender-sensitive Humanitarian Country Team localization strategy and action plan with national CSOs' participation, including clear benchmarks underpinned by a collective and comprehensive risk management mechanism, joint monitoring and an institutional capacity-building plan.
- Continue to scrutinize the allocation system and eligibility criteria of the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF) and encourage

collaborative and joint actions among diverse civil society segments.

- Shift from transactional relationships focused on bureaucratic requirements to more sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships, which include the broad spectrum of civil society segments. These partnerships should be more strategic and sufficiently resourced, and must place national civil society actors in the driving seat.

## Conclusion 2

Very little thinking has been done on operationalizing the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus. Despite a shared understanding of the HDP nexus, there is very little thinking on how to go about putting it into practice. While the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) at the global level has undertaken some steps to contribute to operationalizing the HDP nexus, much remains to be done at the country level (IASC 2023a).

## Recommendations

- UN agencies and INGOs working on emergency response at the national level should proactively design their interventions in a way that promotes coherence and complementarity between life-saving efforts and any potential development and peacebuilding opportunities. Collaborative and coordinated efforts are required for data collection, analysis, planning and programming, along with the involvement of civil society actors. In addition, UN agencies, INGOs and cluster leads can refer to the recently released IASC Guidance Note for further guidance on this matter (IASC 2023b). Pursue an area-based approach in some of the safer and more accessible states of Sudan, such as Red Sea state, where the seat of government now sits and where there is substantial presence of UN agencies, the private sector and CSOs.

## Conclusion 3

Coordination and operational structures for the humanitarian response remain inadequate. The current humanitarian response seems to have some shortcomings in terms of coordination and operational structures. Coordination mechanisms in conflict areas, such as Khartoum and Greater Darfur, are lagging. Even in relatively calm regions, the engagement with and inclusion of national actors and local responders in these structures/mechanisms is inadequate.

### *Recommendations*

- It is imperative to develop decentralized and well-integrated area-based coordination mechanisms at the subnational level. However, it is important to avoid imposing rigid top-down structures that may not be suitable in practical situations. Subnational structures must recognize the crucial role played by ERRs and other local initiatives and ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes related to the humanitarian response. Effective leadership of area-based mechanisms should be based on the footprint, expertise, operational capacity and needs of organizations focusing on each area of activity, rather than being dominated by a single UN agency or INGO.

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## **2.2. ENDING THE WAR AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE**

### **Conclusion 1**

Multiple episodes of political dialogue and peace arrangements brokered by national and/or international actors over the last several years have failed to put Sudan back on the path to sustainable peace and recovery. Moreover, efforts underway that are being led by the AU/IGAD to facilitate political dialogue within Sudanese civil society are failing to learn from the failures of the past. If they are not addressed, these failings will only worsen the situation, and contribute to further polarization and fragmentation of Sudanese civil society.

### *Recommendations*

- Learning and drawing lessons from political dialogue and accommodation efforts during the previous transitional period are of central importance. There is a need to rethink how dialogue, whether by international or national actors, is facilitated, and there is also a need to avoid gravitating to ready-made templates or approaches that have become counterproductive routine practice, hindering rather than facilitating accommodation and consensus-building. Such routine practices have, at best, been ineffective in facilitating positive transitions and, at worst, have impeded them.
- The AU/IGAD should be given support for their ongoing dialogue and consensus-building efforts, and accountability should be built into this process. The convening role and capacity of the AU/IGAD must be augmented with a competent and multi-disciplinary technical team with both expertise and knowledge about Sudan,

but more importantly, technical expertise in dialogue facilitation approaches and methods. Additionally, any dialogue process should be preceded by the development and articulation of an accountability framework that is endorsed by both the convener and those being convened.

### **Conclusion 2**

The CSO efforts, especially those that are most visible and supported by international actors at present, do not necessarily reflect the aspirations and demands of large sectors of the Sudanese people in various parts of the country, and are primarily led by groups of urban-based activists and professionals and intellectuals from the Sudanese civil society in the diaspora.

### *Recommendations*

- Invest in leadership cultivation, networking and dialogue facilitation. Reform efforts in highly challenging conflict, transitional and conflict settings require leadership contributions from multiple and diverse actors who collectively have the legitimacy and capacity to lead change. More so than any other sector in Sudan, leaders from civil society have the potential and legitimacy to collectively articulate the aspirations of the Sudanese people and direct the trajectory of Sudan's future. However, more coherence and collaboration across the leadership of different civil society segments is required. This can be established by creating opportunities/spaces for dialogue but, more importantly, by strengthening capacity and incentivizing the adoption of innovative dialogue facilitation tools and approaches that have been tested and used in similar contexts elsewhere in the world.
- Post-conflict and recovery visioning. Political dialogue and discussions should be accompanied by discussions that bring together civil society and international actors (including UN agencies) to explore development opportunities and plan for an eventual recovery phase. State-building elements and a phased approach to recovery can be explored and developed immediately, and can also act to constitute a space where common ground and a collective post-conflict recovery vision might be developed.

### **Conclusion 3**

Funding for peacebuilding efforts has dwindled to almost zero, undermining and curtailing the ability of grassroots peacebuilding actors to continue playing their role in conflict resolution and maintaining social cohesion. Moreover, conflict sensitivity and do-no-

harm principles can be better incorporated into both humanitarian and non-humanitarian programming.

### *Recommendations*

- Provide increased financial support to CSOs, which have a proven track record in designing and executing peacebuilding initiatives. Furthermore, promote the adoption of peacebuilding approaches that incorporate the improvement of livelihoods and the strengthening of community-based mechanisms for conflict resolution, while building mechanisms that incentivize and support traditional authorities in carrying out their roles/duties.

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## 2.3. LIVELIHOOD AND FOOD SECURITY

### **Conclusion 1**

Despite the challenges (high price of inputs, problems with finance, etc.), the agricultural sector remains the principal source of people's livelihoods, even in the heavily affected conflict zones. The disruptions and pressures caused by displacement require more attention to this sector and efforts to increase food productivity.

### *Recommendations*

- Help smallholder farmer organizations and cooperatives increase their productivity by providing them with agricultural extension services, access to credit and mechanized equipment. In areas where irrigated farming is prevalent, it is important to shift away from irrigation systems that rely on fossil fuels and switch to clean energy sources such as solar power.
- To enhance the benefits and returns for smallholder farmers, it is crucial to provide them with access to post-harvest technologies. Additionally, setting up grain storage facilities for village clusters can play a crucial role in reducing vulnerability in the event of looting and pillage of more centralized and larger-capacity grain stores. This approach not only enables smallholder farmers to store their crops safely but also helps them to sell their grains at a better price on the market.
- Pilot innovative and sustainable contracting and purchasing modalities that build on the existing contract-farming system that is used in Sudan, but that introduce local CSOs as a third

intermediary to play a brokering and capacity-building role in ensuring favourable results and impact.

### **Conclusion 2**

Due to the ongoing war, state institutions such as the Agricultural Bank of Sudan and the Ministry of Agriculture are becoming increasingly fragile. As a result, these institutions are struggling to pay their workers, leading to a mass exodus of staff from their posts. This has left these institutions with a severe shortage of manpower and expertise, making it difficult for them to continue functioning and fulfilling their purpose.

### *Recommendations*

- Propose and test innovative, collaborative frameworks that facilitate the integration of state and non-state entities in joint ventures aimed at achieving well-coordinated actions and maximizing the complementary advantages of each partner. Key partners may include state-level ministries, UN agencies (such as the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme), microfinance institutions (such as the Ebdaa Microfinance Bank), agricultural cooperatives and CSOs.
- Provide temporary incentives that are time-limited to employees in important state institutions (Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Health). These incentives should be linked to performance targets and serve as a means to motivate employees to remain in their positions and continue to provide the essential services and policy directives that enhance food productivity.

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## **2.4. HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIC SPACE**

### **Conclusion 1**

Civic space inside Sudan across all four pillars (freedom of assembly and association, access to information and freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination, and public participation) has degenerated significantly. Journalists and the media sector have been severely impacted, with many journalists having to work without pay, and with media houses facing content restrictions and censorship and operating with significant losses.

### *Recommendations*

- Provide technical and financial support for human-rights oriented CSOs that are trying to establish a legal and formal presence in the neighbouring countries they have fled to. The relevant technical support can entail assisting the CSOs in identifying the legal requirements for registration, such as the necessary documentation, filing procedures and deadlines. Linking them up with like-minded CSOs can help them access valuable advice and guidance and possibly gain access to facilities and services. Financial support can cover any expenses related to the registration process, such as registration fees, legal fees and other administrative costs.
- Support and resources are to be directed to journalists and the media sector to keep it from complete collapse. This can take the form of a relief fund to alleviate the hardships faced by journalists inside or outside the country, relocation assistance for those who are trying to leave Sudan, and direct support (both financial and technical) for collaborative efforts that enable journalists to pool resources and support one another, enabling them to adapt and continue to practise their profession.

### **Conclusion 2**

As the present civil war has spread, patterns of sexual violence and forced disappearances are strengthening significantly. The scale and seriousness of the violence committed against women and girls is also grossly underreported, as many survivors cannot come forward out of fear of reprisals and stigma.

### *Recommendations*

- Engage with local civil society actors and leaders to develop and operationalize area-based and locally driven civilian protection frameworks that are gender-responsive—noting that the success of these frameworks depends on the support and enforcement of traditional authorities and tribal leaders, and the crucial role they can play in ensuring that these frameworks are properly implemented and adhered to.
- Increase support to CSOs for raising awareness and advocacy efforts that educate communities about sexual violence, its impact and available services to communities in conflict-affected areas. Ensure increased and expanded access to healthcare, psychosocial support, economic opportunities, and justice for survivors while combating stigma associated with sexual violence.

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# Annex A. Questions to explore the contextual/operational factors impacting civil society

## A.1. Current situation

1. What new civil society initiatives have emerged after the conflict and in service of what purpose/objectives?
2. How has programming within the different civil society actors changed (if at all) following the conflict—and what has been the reasoning or thought process behind these changes?
3. How have civil society organizations been impacted by the conflict (assets, institutional memory, resource base, etc.)—and how, if at all, are they able to overcome the setbacks and continue their work?
4. What is the potential for impact on the work that these NGOs are doing in the current circumstances? What are the priorities under the current circumstances?
5. What are the gaps (funding gaps, capacity building gaps, etc.)?
6. How have civil society groupings evolved? What are the power shifts or spheres of influence for the different segments of civil society? And what is influencing and driving these shifts?
7. How have some of the key dimensions of civil society sustainability changed since the outbreak of the present conflict?<sup>3</sup>
8. What are some of the important lessons that can be drawn from the past? What, if anything, is being done differently now?
9. For activists and civil society actors who were forcibly displaced to neighbouring countries, how does becoming a part of the diaspora affect the prospects for their organizations/initiatives? What future plans do they have?

## A.2. Networking, collaboration and coordination

1. What are some of the civil society networks or platforms that have been able to continue operating even after the conflict—and why? Which ones have fizzled

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<sup>3</sup> Dimensions of sustainability include legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image, as defined by the USAID Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (USAID 2022).

- out or completely disbanded—and why? What new ones might have emerged—and why?
2. Are there examples of CSOs working in partnership, either formally or informally, with each other, the private sector, and/or with government? What goals or objectives are pursued?

### **A.3. Polarization and representation**

1. How, if at all, is polarization within civil society manifesting itself? Around what specific issues? At what time? And what are some of the triggers or drivers? What can civil society do to mitigate these dividers? What can international organizations or multilateral institutions do?
2. What are some of the connectors that enhance collaboration and confidence between civil society organizations? How can these be strengthened?
3. What are some key recommendations that can be drawn?

### **A.4. Engagement with donor/multilateral institutions**

1. Which donors or multilateral institutions are currently active in Sudan and with what agendas?
2. In what ways are different segments of civil society engaging with these multilateral institutions and donors? In what contexts? What does that engagement look like (i.e. regular dialogue, enhanced information-sharing, improved coordination, and joint approaches and activities)? What are the challenges?
3. How are donors identifying and prioritizing their support for civil society efforts in the country or in neighbouring states? In what areas is this support materializing and how is it aligned with priorities as seen by civil society?
4. How and in what ways are donors' and multilateral institutions playing either a positive or negative role in relation to ending the conflict and restoring a transition to peace and democracy? How, if in any way, have things (or approaches) changed from the past? And what has been the impact or results thus far?
5. What are some key recommendations that can be drawn?

### **A.5. Engagement with government**

1. What has been the government's attitude towards CSOs since the present conflict erupted?
2. Is the government authoritarian, viewing CSOs as a potential threat and alternative centre of power, or is the government relatively democratic and open to input from CSOs?
3. What, if anything, has changed from before the conflict broke out in terms of the government's position/attitude towards CSOs?
4. To what extent are different segments of civil society engaging with government stakeholders? In what contexts? What does that engagement look like?
5. What are some key recommendations that can be drawn?

# About the authors

**Abdel-Rahman El-Mahdi** is a seasoned international development expert with over 25 years of experience in peacebuilding, human rights and civil society strengthening. He has held senior positions in national and international organizations and has extensive experience working in conflict-affected regions of Sudan. El-mahdi is a leading figure in the Sudanese civil society sector, serving on the Executive Committee of the national NGO SUDIA (Sudanese Development Initiative) and playing an advisory role in a few Sudanese NGO networks and platforms.

**Lugain Mahmoud** is a seasoned Gender and Development Practitioner with over seven years of professional experience in programme management, design, research and monitoring and evaluation. She has a diverse portfolio specializing in gender policy, programming and organizational change, collaborating with national and international organizations, as well as grassroots initiatives. Lugain's work is driven by a commitment to advancing women's and youth's political participation, strengthening civil society, and fostering the growth and sustainability of grassroots movements through innovative resourcing and funding strategies.

**Izzeldien Abdelhamed Al Faki** holds a PhD in Sociology and Social Anthropology, he is a distinguished administrator, university professor and humanitarian activist. With strong expertise in programme design, management and implementation, he has published many scientific research and produced a wide range of technical and consultancy reports, making significant contributions to academia and humanitarian work.

# About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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**International IDEA**  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34 Stockholm  
SWEDEN  
+46 8 698 37 00  
info@idea.int  
www.idea.int

This report examines the role of civil society in times of war in Sudan, using the definition and scope of civil society to include all its modern and traditional formations – those working in humanitarian assistance or those working in governance and the rule of law. By documenting the role of civil society during armed conflict and providing information – which would have been difficult to obtain in a single study under the current war conditions in Sudan – the report highlights the successes and failures of civil society during political transitions in Sudan, and provides practical and implementable recommendations to improve the capacity of civil society to carry out its tasks in Sudan under war conditions.

Through scientific and objective analysis at different levels, this analysis followed extensive procedures for collecting information, interviewing specialists, and analyzing political reports and the legal framework governing civil society in Sudan. The result is a comprehensive report covering all aspects of the role of civil society in times of war in Sudan. By publishing this report, International IDEA aims to benefit researchers and civil society activists, as well as civil

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