

REINFORCING COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND INTERGENERATIONAL BRIDGES FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

A GUIDE ON COMMUNITY
ACTIVISM: SUDAN





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ACRONYMS

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPRs	Civil and Political Rights
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HD	Human Development Index
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDP	Internally displaced persons
INC	Interim National Constitution
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MP	Member of Parliament
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIF	National Islamic Front
PENHA	Pastoral & Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa
POR	Public Order Regime
PRA	Participatory Rural Assessment
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SHG	Self-Help Group
SIHA	Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa
SWU	Sudanese Women's Union
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TOT	Training of Trainers

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Hala Al Karib

SIHA Network Director

FORWARD

Activism for women's human rights has undergone many transformations over the decades in which it has grown within the Horn of Africa. Such transformations have been consequent upon the shifts in the economic, social and political developments that have taken place in the region as well as influenced by the donor agendas and international political engagements in the Horn countries. Alongside such transformations of the women's rights organisations, have also come transformations and changes to the limitations and scope of work for women's rights entities. Some of this relates to the policy environment for NGOs and CBOs working in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan, some shifts in approaches or increasing areas of need have come about through increasing Islamification of social roles in society – militant Islam has grown in countries such as Somalia and Sudan and the impact this has had on women rights and in turn their approaches to addressing such issues.

The Community Activism Guides produced here have been through a number of evolutions from what was originally conceived. Initially they set out to research and document best practices to highlight activities that work as a means to share skills and approaches that could be applied in other contexts across the horn or even within particular countries. The research however, rather than solely derive examples of best practice, identified the myriad challenges that women's rights activists must negotiate when seeking to challenge patriarchy and the various forms of subordination that they experience. Many of the challenges encountered were structural limitations imposed by governments, some were the creation of external actors – such as the donor community, whilst still others were cultural or religious in nature. Identifying these obstacles to women's activism subsequently became just as valuable an endeavour as the documentation of best practices alone.

Originally intended to be a single guide with a comprehensive overview of women's activism in Somaliland, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan, the publications have been separated by country focus, and can be read individually or hang together also as a collective whole. The guides explore the constraints upon women's activism in practical ways as opposed to theoretically debating approaches and as such provides a basis for tangible action on the issues. The exploration of women's activism in the Horn countries is by no means exhaustive, however its sets out key obstacles and challenges affecting women's activism in the countries detailed.

It is hoped that the guide will provide a groundwork for women's organisations across the Horn countries to interrogate not solely their own work and activism but further to consider the limitations around them and the scope for collaboration and/sharing of information, resources and skills in a bid to overcome the challenges being presented to them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Activism Guide (CAG) forms a central component of the Reinforcing Community Activism and Intergenerational Bridges for Women's Rights and Equality project, which serves as both a study into the nature of women's activism in the Horn of Africa as well as a tool to share successes and challenges. The aim of this guide is to come up with effective strategies that women's organisations in the Horn of Africa can use to deepen local community awareness and cooperation on women's rights issues. This guide examines the political, economic, social, cultural and legal contexts within which women's organisations in Sudan implement their work.

The study involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a number of women leaders, civil society actors, senior government officials, scholars, grassroots activists and youth representatives. Information was also gathered from informal conversations with local community members, both female and male.

Gender politics is perhaps the most politicised and polarised area in post-CPA Sudan. The most urgent question for women's rights and human rights activists in Khartoum is how to innovate and maintain momentum within a political and economic environment that is increasingly repressive and constraining, and to continue responding to the needs of local constituencies within this reality. Women's organisations working in the peripheries among ethnic minority groups are particularly isolated. The argument may be made that such exclusionary citizenships limit the ability of women activists to develop a collective definition of gender interests that could be built into the structure of democratic institutions in Sudan.

The relationship that currently exists between women's organisations in Sudan is not reflective of the rich history of organising and movement building that began in 1947 with the formation of the Sudanese Women's Union. Additionally, the work of women's organisations has become increasingly detached from the grassroots as more and more attention is directed towards the state. Solidarity and collective action among women's rights activists is needed.

MAIN FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Women's movements and especially those with broad grassroots reach are vulnerable to government cooptation as the state and political parties seek indirect control of the female vote.
- There are divisions, rivalry, distrust, conflict of interests and competition over funding that characterizes the relationship between women's organisations which is a significant setback to the task of community mobilisation and activism as the women's leadership cannot agree on priority areas of women's rights work.
- The need for women's rights activists to work collaboratively with women activist lawyers to combat the Public Order Regime is essentially acknowledged by both groups, yet a number of professional and personal challenges stand in the way of this relationship.
- Women's organisations can adopt various fundraising strategies that increase their level of financial autonomy both with regards to the state and state-backed funders.
- There needs to be awareness raising to sensitise communities regarding the circumstances of women and the factors that cause certain forms of insecurity for women and girls like SGBV and Zina laws. Involving the local community in the solution can increase effectiveness of programmes, deter perpetrators and indirectly engage communities on human rights discourses.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale



There is an observed tension between women's organisations and grassroots movements, and the slow cooperation, ownership, or 'buy-in' of the local community. This divergence can be attributed to, in part, the inability of activists to access and interpret the cultural, political, social and economic contexts within which grassroots communities exist. There are factors at both the national and community level that either support or constrain the achievement of gender equality. For instance, certain customary or formal laws can be at odds with the work of women's rights activists. Moreover, the widening generational gap within women's movements is hindering the progress of knowledge and experience sharing between veteran women's rights activists and younger activists. To determine the impact and effectiveness of activism, it is important to examine how women at the grassroots level perceive women's movements and women organisations.

Deepening understanding of the women's rights agenda among grassroots communities entails linking the women's movement to current issues affecting the communities within which they work and the broader society. Such an understanding relies upon the recognition and acceptance of the women's movement by women, the wider society, and government as well as their internal interpretation of common needs, aims, and activities. In other words, it is a two-fold, transformative process that requires self-understanding and recognition of feminism and feminist orientation.

The overall objective of this guide is to generate tools to educate communities, transfer knowledge and experience among activists, and strengthen the interaction between women's organisations and the various social, cultural and political constituencies that affect and are affected by women's human rights and gender equality projects. The Community Activism Guide (CAG) forms a central component of the Reinforcing Community Activism and Intergenerational Bridges for Women's Rights and Equality project, which serves as both a study into the nature of women's activism in the Horn of Africa and also as a tool to share successes and challenges. The major aim of the guide is to come up with effective strategies that women's organisations in the Horn of Africa can use to enhance local community awareness and cooperation on rights issues. The guide will contribute to strengthening women's activism within the local context. It focuses on three main features of women's work:

- Identifying challenges and limitations women's organizations are faced with
- The aims and objectives of the organisations
- The extent of implementation and awareness achieved in the community.

The CAG will consider the extent to which women's organisations are able to achieve their mandate and objectives. This is a dual task: on the one hand this capability can be seen through examining the political, economic, social, cultural and legal contexts within which women's organizations implement

their work. This analysis is meant to expose the challenges as well as successes that women's grassroots organizations are recording. On the other hand, the methodology envisions communities as agents and as a result places emphasis on the actual needs and desires of community members. As such, it is a document that will set local communities on the path of voicing their demands, actively participating in the achievement of rights as they understand them, and equally important, enable women and youth to evaluate for themselves the effectiveness of various strategies being used.

The CAG aims to contribute towards unlocking the massive potential upon which women's movements are built, but which remain underutilized due to a variety of factors – ranging from the local (tradition, patriarchal norms, poverty and violence) to the global (insufficient/programmed development aid, fragmented movements and the alienation or weak positioning of states such as those included in this study within the global political economy). With the unique and broad insights empirically derived out of a broad base of information sourced during the study, SIHA believes that this community activism tool is as necessary for movement building as it is for ensuring continuity, succession and innovativeness in women's human rights work in the Horn region.

Four country case studies in the Horn of Africa were selected for this study based on their countries' political dynamics and the development of the women's movement: Ethiopia, Somaliland, South Sudan, and Sudan. Women's activists from Ethiopia, Somaliland, South Sudan, and Sudan with a broad cross section of focus have been engaged, from very small rural organizations to large unions and networks of women's groups. Each of these four country case studies offer critical insights into the socio-political, economic and cultural dimensions out of which women's rights and human rights emerge, and lessons from these countries are indeed not unique to women in these countries.

1.2 Objectives

- **Guiding Question:** How can we identify the value of activism for women's rights and well-being and how to sustain activism, make it effective and connect it to change across the Horn of Africa?

Specific Objectives

The specific objective is to help organizations and groups to design components of their programs to be directly connected to the community by providing the services and support that are needed by women in the community.

- To establish effective strategies to advance the capacity of women activists to campaign for gender equality in the identified locations (Somaliland, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan).
- To help activists bring their ideas and their work back to their communities by deepening links of critical engagement with communities.
- To devise strategies to aid activists to operate and interact more substantively with their different constituencies.
- Enhance inter-generational integration: to construct methods for veterans to transfer their experiences and ideas to young women who will take the lead on gender equality work.

1.3 Methodology

The study involved a detailed analysis of the work of women's organisations, selected through purposive sampling technique in each of the four study sites. The CAG has been mainly qualitative using the research tools of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to identify ways in which activists integrate concepts of gender equality and women's rights as functions of community development into their work. The approach to garnering information has been a feminist qualitative methodological one, which emphasizes the process of research as much as the content. A key component has been the need to involve the participants in the research at the various stages of

the production of the guidebook. In many ways the approach has been anthropological in its aim to discover and document the practices of women's organizations in the Horn of Africa, but the output is strategic in its aim to present this information in a way that can be used as a practical tool.

A comprehensive review of the internal documents of the selected women's organisations was conducted to analyse the organisation profile, its position in the community, and the gaps between the two. A number of indicators, which cover the breadth of activism in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres in local community settings, were incorporated into the research design and methodology. To this end the research adopts a structural approach, a concept that contends that gender should be viewed as a social structure, which shapes individuals but is also shaped by individuals. In addition to exposing the structural imbalances of power between women and men, a gender analysis of this sort must reflect the ways in which women's choices and opportunities are also shaped by larger issues of class, poverty, political culture, ethnicity and geography, as well as their exclusion from political channels existing within the formal political system and in civil society.

The study undertook a detailed analysis of the work of 13 women's grassroots organisations, unions, and youth groups selected through purposive sampling, with more than 43 respondents in Khartoum State (see Annex 1). This guide also drew on findings from outreach visits conducted by SIHA staff members in Alfath, Gazira, Gabarona, and Ghadarif early in 2012. The organisations selected were involved in a variety of work aimed towards addressing women's rights and achieving gender equality, including those working in the areas of food security, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), political activists groups/forums, young women's associations, shelters or safe houses for battered/abused women, peace and security issues, and sexual and reproductive health rights. The study was mainly qualitative, and its core aim was to expose, through in-depth interviews and a series of consultative forums, the ways in which women's rights activists conceptualise issues of gender equality, human rights and women's rights as key components of community development, and the ways in which these concepts are integrated into their work as activists.

II. CONTEXT

2.1 Historical Context of the Status of Women in Sudan



Although largely dominated by men, Sudanese women activists celebrated the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signing in 2005, which saw the first opening of the political space since the 1989 coup that had brought the National Islamic Front (NIF) to power.¹ The reign of the NIF had been a particularly harsh one for Sudanese women. It saw an intensification of the war in the South and the instigation of new conflicts in the North, leaving millions dead, displaced or vulnerable to sexual violence. The regime's "civilisation project" which set out to Islamicize the country through changes to the civil service, school and university curriculums and public order legislation and rested upon the pillars of forced Arabization, regarded women as prime targets for civilising. Along with the banning of political parties came the suppression of women's organisations and their replacement with new structures loyal to the regime. Laws, blind to gender concerns under previous administrations, became downright hostile to women under the NIF, with arrests, intimidation and flogging of women for everything from adultery to "immoral dress" with few avenues for redress available.²

Although the CPA was silent on the issue of gender equity in government, women activists hoped that it would bring forth constitutional and political reform. Contending that a key reason underlying women's marginalization in wider society was their distance from power, women began mobilising and demanding a quota for women in power structures. In 2008, the quota became law with the Elections Act mandating 25% of seats for women at the National, South Sudan, and state level assemblies.³

Sudanese women enjoy a long and rich history of political and social organising. The role of women in civil resistance started with the leaders of women's societies of the 1920s, as well as ordinary women who participated in the anti-colonial movements and protests that began with the White Flag movement in 1920s, culminating in Sudanese Independence in 1956. The first women's organization in Sudan was the Women's Association (or League), founded in 1947. Their objective was to mobilise educated women, to advocate for women's education, and provide health and women's health classes. About the same time, in 1948 a teacher's association was established to focus on issues

¹FScholars agree with the widely held view that the signing of the CPA in 2005 ushered in a relative degree of political pluralism and freedom, which in turn allowed political criticism by many actors to come to the fore. This has created space for political critique and debate on Islam and the politics of the state generally, and on Sharia and women in particular. But the debate is intensely politicized and polarized: the accusations of apostasy toward opposing political contenders show that powerful symbols and fundamental values are at stake – see Tonnessen, Liv (2011), *The many faces of political Islam in Sudan: Muslim women's activism for and against the state*, PhD Thesis, University of Bergen, Norway <http://eng.kilden.forskingsradet.no/c52781/publikasjon/vis.html?tid=79118> (accessed 24/05/12)

²Abbas, Sara (2011), *Sudan: a lonely road for women MPs in opposition*, Open Democracy, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/sara-abbas/sudan-lonely-road-for-women-mps-in-opposition>

³When elections finally came in April 2010, they were a far cry from the hopes vested on them at the time of the CPA's signature. Citing intimidation and fraud, northern opposition parties staged a last minute boycott. In the South, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the other party to the CPA, swept nearly every seat. In the North, the National Congress Party (NCP), the NIF's political organ, dominated the polls. The 112 quota seats in the National Assembly fared no better, with every quota seat in the South going to the SPLM and everyone in the North but six going to the NCP. Following secession, this imbalance is set to become more acute. In anticipation of the split, all seats representing southern constituencies were recently eliminated, leaving the National Assembly firmly in the hands of the NCP. Only five opposition women MPs remain: two from the SPLM representing Blue Nile and South Kordofan states and three from the Popular Congress Party (PCP) representing South Darfur. A sixth represents North Darfur, but her party is allied with the regime.

specific to women teachers, calling for equal rights such as equal pay with male teachers. In 1952, the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) was founded by women graduates and teachers to bring Sudanese women into politics through educational, cultural and social activities. Its main agenda was the emancipation of women and the full public ownership of the means of production and anti-privatisation for women through fighting against poverty and illiteracy. The SWU was very effective in transforming women's opinion in Sudan and in shaping the history of the struggle for emancipation.⁴ One of the ways this was done was through the flagship women's monthly magazine, *Sout Almaraa* (Women's Voice), which was founded in 1955 with a circulation of about 3,000 copies in the mid-1950s. By the mid-1950s, women's groups were gaining membership as more women became involved in the anti-colonial, nationalist movements.⁵ In 1965 Sudanese women gained political rights and the first Sudanese woman, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, was elected into parliament.

2.2 Current Context of Women and Women's Rights in Sudan

Gender politics is perhaps the most politicised and polarised area in post-CPA Sudan. In recent years, there have been escalating incidents and reports of public floggings, rapes, arrests, and harassment of women activists showing an Islamist state trying to impose Sharia or Islamic law on citizens at a time when the government faces fierce national and international pressures. Women's rights activists in Sudan are engaged in resistance to, co-optation, and negotiation with the authoritarian Islamist state. Posing two alternatives to the official Islamist position of the state, competing Islamic voices advocate an "emancipated" Muslim woman, framed within a rights-based approach which assumes that Sharia law agrees with international women's human rights (Islamic feminism); and on the other hand, a "protected" Muslim woman, framed within a conservative, gender-segregated doctrine which refutes all non-Islamic laws (Salafism).⁶ These competing Islamic models pose particular challenges for Sudanese women seeking to rebuild movements; while these nuances are barely discernable at the grassroots, they remain influential in the various forms of activism being adapted among elite Sudanese women.

2.3 The Context in Khartoum

Following years of economic growth, with some years reaching double-digit growth figures, the socioeconomic situation has become more precarious. Facing the risk of losing highly needed revenue from oil, of which an estimated 75% of the country's reserves goes to South Sudan, along with a sudden drop in foreign currency reserves, the government has initiated the placing of certain restrictions on the outflow of foreign currency. In order to strengthen state finances, certain imports have been banned and, state subsidies on certain vital commodities, such as sugar and fuel have been reduced. These macroeconomic initiatives, probably more than the oil revenue of the South have led to sporadic popular protests in several towns of Northern Sudan in the early part of the year. In particular, protests in Khartoum intensified and were inspired by the regional and neighbouring revolutions were met with heavy-handed riot police, later characterised as human rights violations. The significance of these protests have been judged differently by analysts and protesters, but it has to be kept in mind, that on two previous occasions popular revolts/intifadas have turned the tide of politics in Sudan, and this notion is very much alive in Sudanese folklore. Hence this part of the history of Sudan, may explain both the momentum of some of the protests, as well as the strict response.⁷

⁴Amina Alraheed Nayel, *Sudanese Women in Exile: Islam, Politics and the State*, p. 14 (http://www.sudan-forall.org/sections/ihitiram/pages/ihitiram_issue4/amina_alraheed.pdf) accessed 22/05/12.

⁵See "Women in Sudan: A Historical Background", at <http://www.mwcoalition.org/quotas/id3.html> (accessed 23/05/12). See also <http://www.suwepmovement.org/SWHistory.asp> for a brief introduction to some of the pioneering women doctors, educators, novelists, politicians, and leaders who blazed the trail of the women's movement.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Pedersen, Jens (2011), *The Political Economy in North Sudan and Internal Politics, African Arguments* (<http://africanarguments.org/2011/06/24/the-political-economy-in-north-sudan-and-internal-politics/>), accessed 23/05/12).

2.4 The Context in Darfur

In Darfur, the systematic use of sexual violence, torture, cruel and degrading punishment, like flogging, and other forms of gender based violence continue to be one of the major security threats and tools of repression targeting women and communities. There is a wall of silence in Sudan surrounding sexual violence. Such violence is rarely reported due to the near total impunity for perpetrators of sexual crimes, intimidation and humiliation of survivors by the authorities, stigma, social repercussions, fear of reprisals, and risk of being convicted of adultery if the victims fail to prove rape. Article 149 of the 1991 Criminal Act in Sudan conflates the crime of rape with zina (adultery). So women who report rape may risk being convicted of adultery if they cannot prove that the sexual act was non-consensual. However, this wall of silence is being slowly broken by the courageous testimonies of a number of sexual violence survivors, and the tireless work of Sudanese women's rights activists and regional and international organisations bent on fighting this heinous crime to the end.⁸

Case Study : Sudanese women beginning to speak out against rape

On 13 February, Safia Ishaq, a *Girifna*⁹ activist, was in a bookshop when she was forced into a car by two National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) agents. At around 10pm, she was taken to NISS offices in Khartoum North, where she was raped. She was interrogated about her political affiliations, alleged leaflet distribution and inciting others to demonstrate. She was forcibly stripped of her clothes, and repeatedly beaten and subjected to obscene verbal abuse. Ms. Ishaq fell unconscious, and when she regained consciousness found one of the NISS agents raping her. All three agents raped her while the others watched. Official medical reports, including a prosecutor report, also confirmed that she had been repeatedly raped, though at first the NISS refused to file the reports. Ms. Ishaq went public with her testimony.¹⁰ The widely publicized video testimony in which Safia spoke out about her gang rape by the three agents from the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) in Khartoum shone the light on the use of rape and persecution of political opponents by state security agents. Safia's public testimony was widely supported in Sudan and she was applauded for her tremendous courage. However, Safia and her family faced intense intimidation and threats from the NISS on account of her testimony. A group of political leaders and human rights activists who visited Safia's family to show support after the incident were interrogated and arrested by the police. Recently as well, at least 6 women activists provided testimonies - using their real identities - to the Africa Center for Justice and Peace Studies about the sexual violence and harassment they faced at the hands of state security agents.¹¹ Such public accounts of sexual violence are hugely important as they give survivors a face and a voice that is powerful and hard to ignore. Indeed many of the women who were subjected to sexual violence and threatened with rape went public with their testimonies in efforts to halt the NISS' use of rape and reduce stigma surrounding sexual violence. Some of these testimonies were published by Hurriyat newspaper and by the Sudan Democracy First Group.¹²

⁸Gorani, Amel (2011), *Sudanese Women Demand Justice*, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/amel-gorani/sudanese-women-demand-justice> (accessed 02/09/2012)

⁹Girifina is a student and youth civil rights movement in Sudan.

¹⁰African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (2011), *Silencing the New Front: the Emergence of Widespread Torture against the Youth Movement*, p. 14, http://www.acjps.org/Publications/Reports/2011/SilencingtheNewFront_theEmergenceofWidespreadTortureagainsttheYouthMovement%5B1%5D.pdf (accessed 17/09/2012).

¹¹Ibid, pp. 13-15

¹²Ibid.

2.5 The Context in South Kordofan

In the South Kordofan state elections for the new governor in May of 2011, the participation of women in voting was either equivalent to or exceeded that of men. This was a remarkable but under acknowledged achievement by the women of South Kordofan, who mobilised women to vote in this strategically important conflict zone on the border between the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan. The accomplishment should be celebrated especially given the limited opportunities and multiple constraints on women's public participation in this traditional and predominantly rural society, where illiteracy is so prevalent that some villages may only have a handful of women who are literate. Women's activists and women's organisations such as Ru'ya (Vision) were heavily involved in the election process. The work consisted of equipping 10 women candidates from 5 parties with skills for campaigning and outreach and the endorsement of a state-wide joint woman's agenda, agreed upon by women's representatives from all 12 political parties active in South Kordofan. Some of the priorities articulated in the agenda were:

*The need for maintaining peace and opposing violence; adoption and ratification of international and regional women's rights conventions; maintaining continued and good relations between women in Sudan and the new state of South Sudan; women's economic empowerment; citizenship rights; rights of disabled women; freedom of movement; and the right to dual Sudanese and South Sudanese citizenship.*¹³

The elections in May were a critical flashpoint in the ensuing violence that has engulfed South Kordofan, the only oil-producing region in the Republic of Sudan. The work of women's organisations was disrupted and many forced to relocate. Ru'ya, for example, was in the process of concluding the final report on its elections work when the Sudanese Army and allied paramilitary forces began their attack on South Kordofan's capital, Kadugli and other locations throughout the State in June 2011. Ru'ya's offices were raided in the wake of the attack, their documents, computers and all their equipment stolen. Ru'ya's staff had to flee the city among tens of thousands of other civilians. Thus, compounding the problem of lack of documentation that national and international institutions have given to women's work in the South Kordofan elections, the internal documents that tell the history of this innovative movement, have been nearly obliterated. The vital story of these women's activism now only exists in the oral history of scattered persons involved in the movement. The resurgence of the conflict in South Kordofan has interrupted Ru'ya's work plans for the post election period and the implementation of the adopted women's agenda. They have found themselves once again forced to confront the calamities of war and the multitude of challenges generated by a context of repression, insecurity, persecution, displacement, and poverty.¹⁴ In addition, amid the conflict and desperate humanitarian situation, as of July 2012, at least 400 women and girls have been abducted and their whereabouts are still unknown.¹⁵ Women and girls face other problems such as exploitation, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trauma.¹⁶

2.6 The Context in Medani, Gezira State

Most civil society activists are avoiding tackling the issue of women's rights in Medani and are instead focusing on providing services and charity. Organisations have adapted the strategy of including members who are aligned to the NCP to facilitate their work with security officials and governmental institutions. This may also be a strategy of receiving funding from the government as is being witnessed among some women's organisations in Khartoum state. In addition to restrictions imposed by the security forces, there are Islamic fundamentalist groups that act with impunity in deciding on and implementing punishment for any acts they deem to be criminal. Women's activist work is caught in this context of political restrictions, insecurity and repression.¹⁷

¹³Gorani, Amel (2011), On the record: women in South Kordofan, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/amel-gorani/on-record-women-in-south-kordofan> (accessed 18/09/2012).

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Nobel Women's Initiative (2012), New Report: Update on the Violence in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan State, Sudan, <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/2012/07/new-report-update-on-the-violence-in-the-nuba-mountains-of-south-kordofan-state-sudan/> (accessed 18/09/2012).

¹⁶Ibid

¹⁷SIHA (2011), Algezira State outreach report, pp. 10-11

2.7 The Context in Eastern Sudan

The region is one of the poorest and least developed areas of Sudan. With huge dependency on humanitarian aid for the population, the decades long conflict in the region (sometimes referred to as the forgotten conflict in Sudan) has affected the lives of the entire region's population. A 2006 peace agreement¹⁸ managed to halt the armed conflict, yet aspects of the agreement remain unfulfilled and unimplemented.

Studies have identified many obstacles facing women in their ability to make tangible economic, social and political contributions to their communities. Such obstacles facing pastoral women include a lack of capital, a lack of access to information, illiteracy, early marriage a lack of knowledge of the importance of political participation and decision making.¹⁹

Even in the most urban locations in Eastern Sudan, studies have indicated severe restrictions in women's freedom. Of note, a survey conducted in 2009 by the Pastoral & Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA) showed that in Kassala state only, 65% of women married in the ages of 10-17.²⁰

¹⁸On October 14th 2006, the government of Sudan and the East's Front (with technical support from Norway and mediation of Eritrea) have signed "Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) in the Eritrean capital, Asmara,

¹⁹PENHA (2009), Socio-Economic Baseline Survey for Women in Eastern Sudan, Kassala State, p. 57, <http://www.penhanetwork.org/attachments/Sudan%20baseline%20rept%20Draft%2027-12-09.pdf> (accessed 18/09/2012).

²⁰ibid

III. Steps to Reinforce Women’s Rights Activism within the Local Context

3.1 STEP 1: Regaining Political Autonomy in the Face of State Cooptation of the Women’s Rights Agenda



A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

It has been the bane of women’s movements across Africa to deal with the strategic question regarding how to position themselves in relation to the patriarchal state and dominant political parties. Women’s movements and especially those with broad grassroots reach are vulnerable to cooptation, as the state and political parties seek indirect control of the female vote. As a result, women’s organisations become closely tied to state policies and end up serving their interests instead of the interests of the women they claimed to support. This trend has been observed in Kenya with the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation under KANU; the ANC Women’s League in South Africa, with the women’s movement under the NRM in Uganda, and also in Sudan where the government continues to regard NGOs, which are critical of the government’s policies, with a security mentality.²¹ To this end, the Humanitarian Affairs Council (HAC) was established in 2000 to monitor all national and international NGOs and control their registration and activities.²²

B. CHALLENGES

Under HAC, NGOs need permission to carry out activities such as workshops and conferences, as well as conducting research.²³ In a similar vein, ‘networks’ vaguely defined as “a group of organisations working to achieve the same objective, implement the same programmes or advocate the same agendas” have to register in a complicated and expensive process, only to make themselves scrutinized and their assets controlled by HAC.²⁴ Another strategy to restrict critical NGOs from gaining too much influence is the establishment of parallel bodies by the government or co-opting existing ones.²⁵ In the post-2011 secession period, however, there has been an immense rollback, and the little autonomy that women’s organizations exercised is not severely circumscribed.

²¹ Nageeb, Salma (2008a), “Negotiating Peace and Rights in Sudan: Networking for the Agenda of ‘Violence Against Women’”, in *Negotiating Development in Muslim Societies: Gendered Spaces and Translocal Connections*, eds. Gudrun Lachenmann and Pera Dannecker, 193-219. Lanham/New York/London: Lexington Books, p. 209

²² For example, a women’s rights organization was shut down by HAC in 2006 because they failed to seek admission from HAC before submitting a proposal to the European Union, although the submission was prior to the passing of the new Voluntary Work Act providing for this ‘security measure’ (http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/international_justice/regions/sudan/alert-050406-awoon.htm) accessed 24/05/12.

²³ Badri, Balghis (2008a), “Introducing Sudan” in *Sudanese Women Profile and Pathways to Empowerment*, ed. Balghis Badri, Omdurman: Ahfad University for Women, p. 28

²⁴ Nageeb, Salma (2008a: 209)

²⁵ The case of the Sudan Council of Voluntary Association, formed as an independent body in the 1980s, but currently coopted by government gives an example.

Women's rights and human rights organizations in Sudan at present can be understood within three main strands:

- i. Those that are aligned to the state and enjoy access to funding resources from many sources affiliated with the state and also relative operational flexibility albeit within a state-defined agenda.
- ii. Those critical to the state, are politicized and retain relative programmatic and funding autonomy despite facing numerous obstacles and repression
- iii. Those that claim neutrality, but which nonetheless are circumscribed by a state-defined agenda, and who are cooperating with organizations across the political spectrum

C. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHALLENGES

- Women's organizations should stand up for clear positions with regards to the actions of the state which women's rights activists perceive as suppressing, thus putting the government in check. Such actions could include releasing press statements to condemn human rights violations, organizing protests and campaigns, civil resistance actions such as boycotts, etc.
- Women's rights organisations can minimize the influence of the state on their activities by seeking alliances and cooperation with organisations that are relatively independent. The advantages of adopting such a strategy include:
 - Gain more leeway and credibility to articulate views that are in line with international human rights standards;
 - Becoming more emboldened to 'do the right thing' when an organization's stand and actions earn it a positive reputation both nationally and internationally;
 - Increases the trust that women's organisations can develop among their grassroots constituencies. Trust is an important element for organisations seeking to implement programmes effectively at the local community level. Such alliances may also open up alternative avenues of funding which may eventually reduce or eliminate the organization's dependency on government funding or government-backed funding sources.
- Cooptation of the women's movement has also manifested in the form of anti-feminist propaganda pushed by the state – labelling women as “improperly dressed,” “immoral,” or “unruly”. Women, especially in isolation, tend to internalise these insults and may involuntarily side with conservative elements in the belief that this maintains their ‘purity.’ It is therefore critical for the women's movement to learn to read into these labels and teach women to be able to differentiate between truth and myths.
- The road to co-optation of women's movements was paved by the focus on women to attain civil liberties and rights, e.g. the right to vote, political participation, inclusion in state structures and so forth. Through what is described as ‘state feminism’²⁶, women sought to influence the state to gain certain minimum guarantees. Engagement with the state was in some instance at the expense of mobilisation at the grassroots, and subsequent loss of this crucial constituency. Changing tact, mobilizing support for women's objectives from below, and decentralizing women's activism projects (or ‘playing outside of the state’) can produce equally significant catalytic impacts for change.

Steps for effective collaboration among women:

Decentralization works brilliantly to maintain a project because there is no “head” to cut off, no “body” that will wither when the head is cut. Multiple sites of struggles with multiple styles, methods, focal points, and even political priorities is a strength, not a weakness. But seeing this requires that we attack directly the old style male aggression of internal competition for leadership, and call it out for what it is.²⁷

²⁶State feminism has been defined as “activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women's status and rights”. It is facilitated when women with feminist aims have some access to women's policy machineries – see Ossome, Lyn (2011), “Feminism and Elections in Kenya: Obstacles and Strategies”, in *Perspectives*, Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, p. 23

²⁷Alcoff, Martin Linda, *Feminism and the Left: An Interview with Linda Martin Alcoff*,

3.2 STEP 2: Intergenerational Uptake of the Women's Movement and Tapping into the Benefits of the Movement's Rich History

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

There is a generational divide within the women's movement, which is reinforced by age differences and perceived political incompatibilities. This gap is a cause for concern and much discussion in women's rights discourses and feminist movements in both Africa and the West. "The most pressing task of our time...is a passage of legacy, wisdom, memory and yet unanswered questions and unresolved conflicts belonging to political and intellectual struggles that are much larger than life and much too important to leave behind without dialogue across the generations."²⁸

The women's movement in Sudan suffered under successive military (and civilian) regimes in its development of the general struggle for other groups in society. Such disruptions affected the women's movement's capacity for stability and development, and over time, cracks along the lines of social structure and class became more visible, with divisive impacts on the women's movement as a whole. These class divisions and intra-class tensions are even more pronounced at present and many women accede to the fact that a women's movement today is barely identifiable in Sudan.

There are disparate opinions regarding the need for a women's movement in the current political, cultural and economic context: while some see movement building as a distraction from the practical goals that civil society organisations and activists ought to be working towards,²⁹ other women's rights activists believe that it is the individualism of civil society activism that is obstructing the women's movement, and insist on the "need to work for the benefit of the movement and not for our own benefit."³⁰ The conviction behind this latter sentiment derives from the fact that the work of the SWU and its illustrious history was possible because it was deeply rooted within Sudanese society and among grassroots communities. The divisions, rivalry, distrust, conflict of interests and competition over funding that characterizes the relationship between women's organisations is a significant setback to the task of community mobilization and activism as the women's leadership cannot agree on priority areas of women's rights work. Equally unsettling is the alleged 'neutrality' of certain influential women's organisations, which chose not to engage directly with the dynamics of a repressive political regime with its concomitant impacts on women's rights activism.³¹ Last but not least is the need to highlight and support the work of a small but significant section of women's rights activists who retain deep and organic links to the local communities, who are openly political in their approach towards women's rights work, but whose work is ironically, limited by this political approach.³²

B. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHALLENGES

- Internal self-reflection of the women's movement in Sudan is a critical exercise if women's rights activism is to get a new lease of life, and if an autonomous women's movement is to develop in South Sudan. The process of critically examining the history, trajectory, failures, and achievements of women's rights work in the country is delicate and requires a great amount of honesty and willingness on the part of activists.
- Struggling against ruling party cooptation to regain autonomy is necessary. Although it might be impossible for the women's movement to achieve complete autonomy in the short run, struggling for internal self-identity can give women confidence to articulate and make specific demands towards the state rather than implementing the demands of the state as is the case at present.
- There is a need to document the history of the women's movement in Sudan for the benefit of the younger generations. There is value in identifying heroines of the Sudanese struggle for independence, and the struggle for women's rights, and using these to mediate an intergenerational dialogue between younger women in the movement and more seasoned

²⁸Zita, Jacqueline N (1997) "Third Wave Feminisms: An Introduction." *Third Wave Feminisms. Special Issue of Hypatia* 12(3):1-6.

²⁹Interview held on 23/04/12 with Ilhan Ibrahim and Ahmed Abdalsalam Omar at SORD offices, Khartoum, Sudan.

³⁰Interview held on 24/04/12 with Dr. Ihsan Fagiri, Chair of the SWU in Khartoum, Sudan.

³¹Interview held on 28/04/12 with Dr. Duria Mansour, Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies (BBSAWS) in Omduram, Khartoum.

³²Interview held on 26/04/12 with Dr. Asma Mahmoud Mohamed Taha in Omdurman, Khartoum.

women's rights activists. It is significant that the recent protests in Khartoum were initiated by female students at the University of Khartoum, and became a coordinated effort between youth movements and the women's movement.

- It is important to include grassroots leaders and organizers in campaign planning processes, in consultative forums, and in mobilization processes. One of the major problems with elitism is the top-down approach taken towards articulating women's rights concerns at local, national and international level. Elite women are constantly speaking on behalf of the majority. Ensuring that participation is generated from the grassroots also ensures support for the project.
- Winning back the hearts and minds of women activists, especially the younger generation – the task of bridging the intergenerational gap seen in the women's movements is key to nurturing a future generation of women's rights activists who believe in the merits of activism, and who are motivated by the interest of veteran activists to pass on a legacy and deepen the roots of activism and movement building. Intergenerational dialogue can take place in formal and informal settings, and should be mediated to ensure that hierarchies and divisions or tensions originating from class, race, or age differences are properly managed.
- Women and organizations should take advantage of the international human rights machinery. The crisis in Darfur brought significant global attention not only on the situation of women in Darfur, but also on the status of women in Sudan as a whole. There have been numerous campaigns and actions, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of key political figures, and ongoing campaigns among local and regional non-governmental organisations and celebrities to redress perceived human rights violations against women. These interventions offer a critical opportunity for Sudanese women to demonstrate their capacity to actualize the gains made from these campaigns and investments and work towards restoring the rights of women. In other words, women's organisations can unite to follow through in ensuring that the promises and commitments made to Darfuri women are met. These are highly politicised contestations, and women's rights activists ought to be sensitive to the nature of resistance they are likely to face in taking sides with international human rights frameworks of justice.

Case study: Young Women Protesting for Change

In June 2012, Sudan was gripped by a series of protests, direct actions and activities under the name #SudanRevolts. Friday 13 July 2012, named Kandaka Friday after Sudan's ancient Nubian Queen Kandaka who defeated foreign invaders, has brought the central role of women in the current Sudanese civil resistance to the fore. Women have led and participated in #SudanRevolts protests, the first of which was led by the female students of the University of Khartoum. Women leaders and members within the new youth movements are also playing a key role. Women are also active as documenters and voice of the #SudanRevolts as citizen journalists, bloggers and social media activists. Sudanese women are not new to political activism and the history of women involvement in politics and other sectors of the public sphere has been key in shaping the political consciousness of the new generations as well as the culture of resistance to the NCP regime policies of oppressing women. The targeting of female activists since the beginning of #SudanRevolts and particularly on Kandaka Friday is a sign of the regime's knowledge of the power and influence of women in Sudan. #SudanRevolts have proven to be a unifying force, not only are its main actors the youth movements and the university students from all parts of Sudan, but they also speak about the concerns not only of the central areas but also of the marginalised areas, and the activities prior to the #Sudan protests have focused on the issues of the marginalised areas.³³

³³Bakhit, Gafar Rawa (2012), Women in #SudanRevolts: heritage of civil resistance, Open Democracy, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rawa-gafar-bakhit/women-in-sudanrevolts-heritage-of-civil-resistance> (accessed on 19/09/2012).

3.3 STEP 3: Addressing Ethnic and Class Loyalties and Building a Unified, Collective Women's Movement

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

*"Tribal considerations are becoming more powerful than sisterhood between women."*³⁴

This sentiment is a reflection of the changing dynamic observed in the relationship between grassroots women who prior to the secession of South Sudan considered themselves as having a common cause and struggling against common oppressions. In the post-secession period there is much more pronounced ethnic profiling among the general population as previously marginalised communities are now pushed to the very margins of society. The women's movement in Sudan has never been ethnically homogenous. Nonetheless, the earlier movement was able to transcend class, racial and ethnic differences by strategically focusing on goals that could benefit women across a wide spectrum. As the state is weakened further by an uncertain future regarding its relationship with South Sudan, and identity politics become the means through which various groups can access resources or lay claim to power, there is a likelihood that women's organisations will begin to identify with ethnic or identity issues. While identity politics can sometimes be useful for women's rights activism in asserting women's unique claims it shouldn't negatively impact the broad, collective aims of women.

In the same line, significant differences have been highlighted between elite and highly educated women and the vast majority of women at the grassroots level. Distinctions can be made between elite women in civil society organisations and those who occupy positions of public office or in political parties. The former grow out of sometimes long histories of women's non-governmental organisations (as in the North) or recent burgeoning of these organisations with funding from the donor community in the South. In North Sudan, women's groups include: those who advocate more secular forms of democracy; pro-democracy Muslim women's organisations such as the Republican Sisters who accept a closer link between state and religion; or those associated with the ruling party such as the General Union for Sudanese Women. In both the North and South, including within the ruling parties, women are occupying public offices and participating in political groups. Some of the smaller opposition parties also include women within their ranks, such as the Umma party and the Democratic People's Union in the North. In varying degrees across parties, however, women consistently continue to have limited space to lead decision-making processes. Women at the grassroots in the North and South comprise the vast majority of Sudanese women. To date, many of the achievements described above seem to have provided new opportunities (and new access to resources) primarily for elite women, either within the state or outside of it. For many women at the grassroots, their voice remains invisible, and they often face multiple forms of discrimination, violence and general vulnerability.³⁵

B. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHALLENGES

- The strategy of unifying women around a single action point has been demonstrated to work in the South African context. Back in 1991, the Women's National Coalition was created to bring South African women together. While the women were divided on many political, social and economic issues, they were able to agree on one unified action point: achieving a clause in the constitution that guaranteed equality between all South Africans regardless of race, sex, class, age, or sexual orientation.³⁶ In the case of Sudan, women's unified action could focus on the Public Order Law, which is affecting women across class and ethnic divides.
- Ethnic identities are being prioritized over all other identities in the pursuit of economic, social and cultural interests among women. During times of crisis, women do not appear to abandon their identities; in fact in some cases the polarization between women may become more intense. During periods such as the present one when women are struggling to find common ground around political issues, women shall represent different, often conflicting

³⁴The question of intergenerational dialogue is discussed in greater detail below.

³⁵Anonymity of the respondent is maintained in due recognition of the sensitive nature of this discussion.

³⁶Watan for Palestinian Women (2011), Summary report of workshop – July 5 and 6, p. 2, <http://www.undp.ps/en/newsroom/publications/pdf/other/wworkshop.pdf> (accessed 18/09/2012)

backgrounds. Engagements between women, therefore, need to be based upon an open and honest assessment of the different expectations and interests of the various actors involved in the process.

- Elite women are usually already co-opted by political party elites, ethnic and traditional leaders into pursuing a divisive and patriarchal agenda. The role of elite women leaders in the women's movement in fostering ethnic rivalries amongst women demonstrates the difficulty of overcoming ethnicity in movements largely led by the elites. It is important to sensitize women at the grassroots on ways of identifying divisive ethnic trends/actions/discussions among themselves and from their leaders, and empowered to resist any actions that might exclude some women on the basis of their ethnicities.
- Celebrations of significant days or achievements in women's activist calendar can provide an avenue through which women from across ethnic, religious, class and age divides can recall the significance of their common struggles, as women. The International Women's Day is one such platform when women celebrate together and are unified around common themes, not only at the local level, but also in solidarity with the international women's movements. Bridging internal divides may ultimately entail seeking to build international bridges with women from diverse backgrounds and struggles.
- Creating strong networks for the function of achieving specific short to medium-term agenda. Women's networks should articulate within their strategies clear benchmarks and aspirations by which women at the grassroots level will be incorporated into the network's activities within the duration of implementing the specific agenda identified.

Case study: Ru'ya – organizing women for political participation

The Ru'ya Association played a key role in getting out the women's vote, and kept statistics and diligent records of its work, outreach and achievements. Working in 54 villages within four localities of South Kordofan, namely Lagawa, Kadugli, Dilling and Heiban, Ru'ya provided civic and voter education to 5000 people who in turn disseminated information about the election system in their different communities. It trained 30 women in outreach, communication and non-violence in 13 of the 18 localities comprising the State of South Kordofan. These women then mobilized other women to register as voters. Ru'ya's tracking of results shows their success in registering a total of 23,000 women voters for the elections. Another area of their election work consisted of helping ten women candidates from five parties with skills for campaigning and outreach and the development and endorsement of a state-wide joint women's agenda, agreed upon by women's representatives from all 12 political parties active in South Kordofan.³⁷

- Uniting women around "bread-and-butter" matters such as transport, electricity and water which women deal with on a daily basis.³⁸ The importance of focusing on such concerns is because these are the struggles that are most immediate to women at the grassroots, which represent their most immediate needs, and around which it may be most practical to mobilize women initially. Focus on local issues, however, should go hand in hand with focusing on national issues.

³⁷Gorani, Amel (2011), On the record: women in South Kordofan, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/amel-gorani/on-record-women-in-south-kordofan> (accessed 17/09/2012).

³⁸Watan for Palestinian Women, p. 2

3.4 STEP 4: Building Coalitions to Challenge the Public Order Regime (POR)³⁹

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The current draft of the Social Control Act, 2011⁴⁰, for Khartoum State entrenches repressive features of Sudanese public order law within the capital. The law carries particular symbolic weight for Sudan as a whole and fails to reflect any of the concerns or proposals for change that have been expressed and made in recent years. Besides signalling a lack of responsiveness and willingness of the State legislature to constructively engage in public debates, the current draft demonstrates a disregard for human rights, in particular women's rights. This is starkly illustrated in the types of punishment envisaged, especially flogging as a staple sanction for a range of infractions, however trivial. A reading of the draft suggests that the order envisaged by the law is not for the public but to be imposed upon the public. Given the recent history of public order laws, its broad scope further opens the door to arbitrary law-enforcement, often at the expense of individuals and groups who are already marginalised. Indeed, the very name of the draft law makes its use as a tool of control explicit and does not bode well for the post-separation period in Sudan.⁴¹

B. CHALLENGES

The cumulative effect of the provisions of the draft Social Control law, intended for application in the State of Khartoum, violates several basic rights and freedoms of the Interim National Constitution (INC) and the International Bill of Rights. It also contains several provisions of offences already defined and punishable under the Criminal Act in force in the country, though with some variations. Some of the offences in the draft Act are also made punishable with imprisonment, fines or flogging without specifying the maximum length of the period of imprisonment, the amount of the fine to be imposed or the number of lashes to be inflicted. This seems to be left exclusively to the Magistrate trying the case, which raises the spectre of arbitrariness. No reference is made to the procedure to be applied at the trial, especially the right of appeal and the powers of the appeal courts in relation to such cases.

In almost all cases punishment, especially flogging is imposed immediately upon pronouncement of sentence, rendering the possibility of appeal to no real value, the damage having already been done.⁴² Some aspects of the Act purport to address issues that at face value seem reasonable and desirable. Examples of this are the provisions governing vagrancy and beggary, cleanliness of the environment and public places, nuisance to others, unlawful peddling, sale of food, tea and coffee in public etc. However, such otherwise desirable objectives must not be enforced by threat of disproportionate punishments.⁴³ Certain provisions in the Act are widely seen as a pretext for harassing "tea ladies" and others. For example there is no definition of "appropriate" or "Islamic" clothing and women are regularly abused and intimidated and forced to pay bribes to escape punishment for violating legislation that seeks to enforce a non-explicitly defined dress code.

One of the key allies that the women's rights activists in Khartoum identify as being crucial in the struggle against the POR are female human rights lawyers. Thus far, lawyers in the Legal Forum have played two roles in relation to the repressive law:

- i) They have been raising awareness on the POR and its violation of rights in Khartoum state;
- ii) Lawyers have been taking on court cases and representing victims of the POR.

In spite of this, however, the outcomes recorded remain few and mostly intangible. This is largely due

³⁹ Refer to SIHA (2012), *Beyond Trousers: The Public Order Regime and Human Rights of Women and Girls in Sudan*, <http://www.sihanet.org/index.php/sihans-published-work/reportspublications/file/28-beyond-trousers> (accessed 19/09/2012).

⁴⁰ Dr. Amin Mekki Medani *The Draft Social Control Act, 2011, for Khartoum State: Flogging into Submission for the Public Order (2011) Redress*, CLRS and Sudan Human Rights Monitor <http://www.pclrs.org/downloads/1206%20Draft%20Public%20Order%20Law%20November%202011%5B1%5D.pdf>

⁴¹ See Redress, CLRS, *Sudanese Human Rights Monitor, The Draft Social Control Act 2011 for Khartoum State: Flogging into Submission for the Public Order*, p. 2

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 16

⁴³ *The prohibition of the sale of such items during the month of Ramadan should take into consideration the number of Sudanese non-Muslims, and foreign nationals who would have to satisfy their thirst or hunger even during Ramadan. Also, prohibition of throwing away garbage and litter requires civil education, public media campaigns and supply of items such as bins, barrels, collection vehicles, public baths in the streets and squares. Civil education through the family, school curricula, the media, civil society etc. are prerequisites for raising awareness among the general public, which should come before inflicting punishments, particularly on marginalised and impoverished citizens looking for sources for their and their children's next meal (Ibid, p. 16).*

to the fact that the mere awareness of the POR and court processes cannot stop the application of the law. One key outcome of this broader activism through the law is that the public now know that they can process their cases of harassment and abuse through the court system. In addition, the involvement of lawyers as a mediating factor is believed to have made judges more professional in handling the cases than in the past.⁴⁴

The need for women's rights activists to work collaboratively with women activist lawyers is essentially acknowledged by both groups, yet a number of professional and personal challenges stand in the way of this relationship.

- Firstly, people are unsure how the constitutional review process will pan out due to the POR.
- The summary trials are often too quick for lawyers to react on time.⁴⁵ Although lawyers are now drafting a constitutional appeal against the law, the absence of impartial judges, majority of whom are affiliated with the government, renders the appeal process much more uncertain.
- Secondly, while lawyers enjoy a good relationship with women activists and organisations and an increasing number are taking on public interest cases related to women, the main challenge to this relationship is that many lawyers set themselves apart as professionals and those that do so get involved in women's rights issues only at a personal level or out of a personal (not professional) interest in women's human rights.⁴⁶
- An additional hindrance is the somewhat superficial distinction made by lawyers that challenging laws set by government from a human rights perspective (seen as a political task) breaks away from the legal framework – and thus the need to sensitize lawyers to achieve a mix that supports activism and at the same time retains professionalism.⁴⁷ There is nonetheless, optimism on the part of lawyers, based on a number of ongoing initiatives, including sensitization regarding the need to retain the Bill of Rights in the constitution, and many advocacy programmes with NGOs aimed at raising public awareness of law and the legal system.⁴⁸

C. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHALLENGES

- Narrowing the perceived gap between defending human rights as a political task while still retaining professionalism as lawyers. This requires critical discussions and brainstorming sessions between women's rights activists and lawyers interested in public law or human rights perspectives of law. Both parties can organise regular non-hierarchical sessions at which anyone is free to ask question and answer in informal, relaxed environments. The aim is for both women's rights activists and lawyers to gain an understanding of one another's work, their limitations and also the potential areas for effective collaboration.
- At a more formal level, lawyers with no prior background in gender issues or women's rights issues should be offered trainings. These trainings should be facilitated by experts in the field, including academics, practitioners and activists working on women's human rights issues.
- Training paralegals within the women's rights movement to tackle various aspects of women's human rights is a critical outreach tool. Paralegals can work free of charge as volunteers (pro bono), or they can be facilitated in small ways to enable legal services to reach people in the most remote and volatile contexts. Moreover, women's organisations can come up with a formula through which they share the services of a pool of volunteer paralegals. This distributes the cost of training and administration between the organisations and can increase efficiency.

⁴⁴Interview held in Khartoum on 25/4/2012 with Khansa Ahmed Ali, lawyers and representative of the Legal Forum

⁴⁵Usually, unpublished local orders are issued by the enforcement authority (the Quarter Master or Governor), e.g. the prohibition in the White Nile of market women and street vendors from wearing earrings is unpublished yet used as a reason to continue harassing people (Ibid).

⁴⁶This is partly due to lack of time, remuneration and physical spaces for greater public involvement (interview with Khansa Ahmed Ali).

⁴⁷There is hope for this given the heavy reliance on the international conventions already ratified by Sudan – even if lawyers do not take this into consideration, at least they are reminded that the obligation to protect human rights is enshrined in the constitution.

⁴⁸Ibid.

3.5 STEP 5: Addressing Personal Status Laws

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

“If we want to change our communities we have to change the family and to change the family we have to change the family law.”

Personal status legislation is one of the most critical fronts from which women’s human rights are being fought. They epitomize the dictum of ‘the personal as being political,’ and are the primary sight through which women negotiate a balance between cultural conservatism and freedoms envisioned by the constitution. Conservative interpretations of personal status laws usually render them an assault on women’s rights rather than a contract that is meant to protect. There are many issues on which the Sudanese Personal Status Law contradicts human rights principles. In the beginning, Family Law was meant to be a contract between a woman and man, but the existence of a guardian means that it is now a contract between the guardian and the man and the woman has been pushed out of the equation⁴⁹. The law requires women to submit to their husbands so long as he is paying the bills, leaving little room for the woman to assert her rights. In addition, while the law sanctions polygamy and expects husbands to seek acceptance from the first wife, there is no way of ensuring that women are included in these decisions. Women can remedy many of the injustices related with divorce and inheritance through pre-nuptial agreements in writing recorded in court.⁵⁰ The main challenge for women’s rights activism in relation to personal status laws is the lack of awareness of progressive provisions in the laws or options for redress especially among illiterate women.

B. CHALLENGES

- Women should be challenged to question and understand the implications of the various provisions of personal status law and how these laws affect their rights. In many cases women accept their situation due to ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding the various options that are open to them.
- Women should be enlightened regarding the various options available to them with regards to the laws. For example, women should be aware of their right to sign pre-nuptial agreements before entering a marriage. Such an agreement, however, will only be useful in cases where women have broad consciousness regarding what is acceptable or unacceptable as far as human rights go.
- Adult literacy classes and regular discussion forums like tea sessions are necessary spaces in which women can freely share and interrogate their own individual experiences with personal status laws. Such forums should be mediated by an expert, such as a female lawyer, who can share information as well as facilitate discussions between the women.
- One of the challenges regarding personal status laws is that women living in remote, rural areas often have no access to courts and may lack information regarding the options available to them. Outreach programs should be prioritized in such cases, and women’s organisations can work with volunteer paralegals to reach women in remote settings.
- Reaching conservative and traditional sections of society is not an easy challenge to overcome. It might require women’s rights activists to work with the traditional authorities and to base arguments women’s oppression under these laws upon empirical evidence.

⁴⁹Gender Index Sudan <http://genderindex.org/country/sudan>

⁵⁰Interview held on 26/04/12 with Dr. Asma Mahmoud Mohamed Taha in Omdurman, Khartoum.

3.6 STEP 6: Combating SGBV and Zina

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

In some cases like in Darfur, women living in refugee camps face particularly high risk of sexual violence and exploitation, given the fact that they are often the ones put at risk when they venture out of the camps in search of water, firewood, and food. In addition, the political environment in which human rights NGOs and CBOs are operating in Darfur, under suppression by the state, compels activists devise strategies which will not criminalize them but at the same time allow them to effectively undertake human rights activism.

Case study: **The Story of Intisar Sharif Abdalla**

On 22 April 2012, Sudanese judge Sami Ibrahim Shabo sentenced to death by stoning a young woman accused of Zina (adultery). The woman in question, Intisar Sharif Abdalla, was married and a mother of three little children. The judgment itself is ruthless under any Islamic Sharia and Fiqh interpretation; stoning hasn't been applied to a woman for adultery in Sudan despite the country's fundamentalist religious legal system.⁵¹ The Islamic Fiqh Hudud (corporal punishment) in crimes such as cutting of limbs, the punishment for theft, and stoning to death, the punishment of Zina are silently suspended, yet not lifted from the criminal code and remain present in Sudan's legal system. Intisar was accused of having a relationship and being impregnated by a man that was not her husband. After being reported by her brother, initially she and her co-accused both denied the charges. Later the case was reopened again by the brother and Intisar confessed to committing adultery. The most disturbing aspect of this case is that the admission of guilt and judicial sentencing comes following a period of sustained beatings by her brother who brought forward the case. The absence of legal representation and clarification of the procedures for the woman in question, whose first language is not Arabic, is equally troublesome. She was taken to court where Judge Sami Ibrahim Shabo of Ombada General Criminal Court in Omdurman city of greater Khartoum state, sentenced her to stoning to death after one court session. Lawyers only gained access to her after the judgment was made. The man co-accused with Intisar was released based on his mere denial of the charges of Zina. Politically, Intisar's sentencing is significant. She is originally from South Kordofan, the most recent region where civil conflict has erupted in Sudan. Following the independence of South Sudan, gender and racial profiling and discrimination is dominating the current political scene in the country. In addition, the fluidity of Sudan's current legal system poses a serious threat to thousands of women currently living in the country, enduring and suffering under the violence generated by Sudan's unjust legal system and its brutal enforcement.⁵²

Intisar's case highlights the fickle application of international human rights conventions and legislation that Sudan has voluntarily become party to, such as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and the African Charter and its protocol on the rights of women. This case demonstrates the difficulty of reconciling Sudan's current legal jurisdiction and its regional and international obligations as a member of international and regional communities. This contradiction is as well reflected in the massive polarization taking place in Sudan at the moment as well as challenges to peaceful coexistence between the different nations inside the country. Furthermore, the stoning judgment stands against all the values, traditions and heritage of the Sudanese. Given the fact that the application of Zina has so far been dormant in Sudan, this case ought to be read within the broader political and cultural dynamics at work in Sudan currently, and in particular the religious discourses out of which justification for Zina is derived.⁵³

⁵¹ Alkarib, Hala (2012), On Intisar's Zina charges and stoning sentence: What is behind religion? Pambazuka News article, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/82717>, (accessed 01/09/2012).

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

B. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHALLENGES

- Seeking women and girls for sensitization in spaces which they occupy on a daily basis, and thus do not necessitate formal gatherings. For example, activists can reach young girls through conducting literacy and numeracy classes for them, in which girls can be taught protection strategies; basic self-defence skills; reporting of crimes; and other mechanisms through which girls can respond to sexual violence.
- Community-level awareness raising which can be conducted from village to village among small mixed groups of men, women and community leaders. The aim is sensitize communities regarding the circumstances of women and the factors that cause certain forms of insecurity for women and girls. Involving the local community in the solution can increase effectiveness of programmes, deter perpetrators and indirectly engage communities on human rights discourses.
- Another indirect method of working within politically repressive environments has been through traditional birth attendants (TBAs). In addition to skills in reproductive health, TBAs can also be trained to deal with SGBV sensitization. During their routine rounds attending to women and girls, TBAs could speak to small groups of women, teaching them about protection mechanisms, responses to rape, and other useful life skills. In this way, they play the role of social workers. This is a useful strategy especially in conflict zones where TBAs are not considered contentious and are often above the suspicion of the law.
- Other responses could include encouraging communities, especially women and girls, to file a report with the local police whenever they are violated or threatened with violence. Organisations working on these issues should also maintain proper records of any reports filed by women and responses offered to victims. Records are very important for tracking the progress of organisation with regards to SGBV responses, and for possibly measuring the impact and effectiveness of various forms of activism being conducted.
- Providing psychosocial support to victims of sexual violence, their families and their caregivers. Such support can include counselling, home visits, material support and donations of clothes and foodstuffs, and reintegration back into society. Although this is a palliative measure, it is important for activists to engage in acknowledging victims of sexual abuse as being more than just statistics, to humanize them and in this way, to create visibility about this problem within the communities.

Zina laws are the product of the intersection between religion, culture, and law in the regulation of sexuality in Islamic legal tradition, and the shifting politics of relations between religion, law and gender.⁵⁴ Therefore women's rights organisations campaigning against zina laws must take account of the following:

- Activists must be fully informed about the legal, social and political justifications of these laws and the link between them and other laws and customs that sanction men's control over women's sexuality;⁵⁵
- Zina laws should not be treated in isolation; they are part of a complex system for regulating women's behaviour, which is informed by a patriarchal reading of Islam's sacred texts and sustained by a set of outdated assumptions and juristic constructs about female sexuality, which are at the root of violence against women;⁵⁶
- While international human rights law gives secular activists a conceptual framework and a language in which to criticize the laws of zina as gender-based violence, such an argument nonetheless, meets powerful opposition in countries where religious discourse is paramount, where religious identity has become politicized, and where the Islamists set the terms of sexual and moral discourse. To be effective in such contexts, human rights norms and values must be articulated in a language that can engage with local cultures and practices and religious tradition.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵Ibid

⁵⁶Ibid

⁵⁷Ibid , p. 27

- One of the main strategies adopted by human rights advocates is to name and shame offending governments into respecting and protecting rights. States that invoke religious misinterpretations to justify discrimination and violence against women, who have signed up to international human rights conventions and their lack of accountability in enacting the latter must be exposed.⁵⁸

3.7 STEP 7: Attaining Financial Autonomy for Women’s Rights Movements

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Women’s rights organisations are limited by their state with regards to funding. In a deliberate strategy aimed at curtailing the effectiveness of human rights and women’s rights activism, the current laws in Sudan prohibit Sudanese organisations from receiving aid from foreign parties unless it is within regulations approved by authorities.⁵⁹ NGOs accepting foreign funding from non-approved sources face serious penalties, and women’s rights organisations are the most affected.⁶⁰ These new policies are linked to official accusations that foreign entities ‘are meddling in Sudan’s internal affairs.’ Back in 2008, Sudan expelled 13 foreign aid groups and suspended a few local NGOs accusing them of cooperating with the International Criminal Court (ICC) after it issued an arrest warrant for President Omer Al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in the western region of Darfur. The charge of genocide was later added to the charges.⁶¹ Such directives from the government not only threaten to halt women’s rights activism, but also ‘force the hand’ of women’s organisations to seek funding from donors that are closely aligned to or are approved by the state. Caught in such situations, women are left with very little leeway for manoeuvre or urgent action.

B. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHALLENGES

Financial autonomy for women’s rights movements is both a political and practical challenge for women’s rights organisations. A number of strategies may be adapted by women’s organisations that could enable them to work outside of the direct influence of the state (funding). Mainly women’s organisations can adopt various fundraising strategies that increase their level of autonomy, both with regards to the state and state-backed funders. Whichever fundraising activities the organisation decides to pursue, it is important to remember that raising money involves building relationships with others and that this takes time and perseverance.

- **Mobilize volunteers** – members of your board of directors and your staff should participate in the planning and implementation of your fundraising efforts. Raising money takes time, creativity, persistence and collaboration, and should not be a task assigned to just one person. Make sure that all fundraising team members are as prepared and excited as you are about the fundraising project. You can expand your fundraising team and maximize your gains by requesting the support of volunteers from your community. Volunteer candidates will not necessarily come to you. Actively seek out and train individuals who support your cause and can contribute their time.⁶²
- **Collecting membership dues** – your organisation may decide that it is important for all members to support the vision and activities of the group in some way. While membership dues will likely be just one part of your fundraising activities, they can represent a regular and secure source of income. Remember that members will be more likely to contribute dues if they are aware of the benefits that membership provides them and if they believe the organisation

⁵⁸ However, these strategies must be combined with a process of engagement, dialogue and debate, in which all sides have the opportunity to articulate principles and defend practices. This has worked for example in Morocco with the reform of Family Law following years of women’s activism and engagement with clerics; and in Pakistan, with the amendment of zina laws following the intervention of the Ideology Council (Ibid, p. 27).

⁵⁹ Sudan Tribune, “Sudan to take actions against local NGOs over US funding”, 23 August 2012, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article43682> (accessed on 19/09/2012).

⁶⁰ Most recently, a “high ranking” Sudanese official is quoted as having said that they intend to take steps against the civil society groups named as recipients of nearly US\$700 million in funds from the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED). This warning follows the appearance on NED’s website of a list detailing the names and amounts of fund it gave to 15 Sudanese NGOs to implement projects focusing on human rights, peaceful co-existence and gender equality among others (Ibid.)

⁶¹ Sudan Tribune, “Sudan to take actions against local NGOs over US funding”, 23 August 2012, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article43682> (accessed on 19/09/2012).

⁶² Global Fund for Women, *Fundraising for Change: A Practical Guide for Women’s Rights Organisations*, p. 6, <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/storage/images/stories/downloads/Handbook2007.pdf> (accessed 11/09/2012)

to be well managed.⁶³

- **Solicit money from individuals** – before approaching individual donors, reflect on their interests and ability to give. People you can request money from include: *yourself, friends, community members and leaders, family members, business people, people you have served, people who have given in the past, Diaspora or expatriate populations, and visitors to your country who come to see your project.* Focus on those individuals most likely to be interested in your work. Devote sufficient time toward meeting these people and learning about their interests. Follow-up and share more information about the impact of your work, even with those who may initially seem reluctant to respond to your requests.⁶⁴

Tips for fundraising from individuals:⁶⁵

- List all of your friends, family members and acquaintances who may be interested in your project.
- Ask for a specific amount of money from each prospective donor.
- Determine whether you should schedule a meeting, place a phone call or write to each person.
- Describe the project and stress the importance of the activity and their contribution.
- Ask for their support.
- Remember that gifts of all sizes are important.
- Thank them for their support.
- Follow up with those who have not responded.

- **Involve donors** by educating them about your cause and informing them about the progress of your work. Depending on your environment and your resources, make a phone call, send an email, send a written report, share pictures of the project, organize a visit to the project location, have donors meet the people who are involved in the project or invite them to a tea party or reception to socialize and meet other donors. Remember to treat your donors with respect and honour by using their donations appropriately and by acknowledging their contribution. For instance, you may want to announce new donors on your website, or in reports or newsletters.⁶⁶
- **Organizing Events** – Events can be used to raise funds, but are often most successful at connecting donors and other individuals in the community to your organization. Events can take many different forms and are great opportunities to present your organization and programs, publicize your cause and mobilize your community. Fundraising events may be associated with local needs, driven by your organization’s mission or built around creative initiatives, but they should incorporate an issue or activity that is particularly compelling to your target audience.⁶⁷
- **Income Generating Activities (IGAs)** - Are there goods and services you could sell to generate income for your organization or a project? Selling goods and services is a creative way to mobilize resources. You might also make selling goods part of an event, for example, selling baked goods or other homemade food at a community event that your organization hosts. Your organization might also be able to charge fees for a training workshop or consulting service that it provides. For example, if your organization provides HIV/AIDS education to the community for free, you might offer to provide HIV/AIDS education to the employees of a large company for a fee paid by the company.⁶⁸

⁶³Ibid, p. 7

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 7

⁶⁵Ibid, p. 8

⁶⁶Ibid, p. 7

⁶⁷Ibid, p. 8

⁶⁸Ibid, pp. 8-9

Examples of Events:

- Community dinner event/Tea Party
- Celebration/festival incorporating cultural activities and traditions
- Auction/raffle
- Dance performance/dance party
- Music performance
- Sponsored walk, marathon or other sports activity
- Speaking engagement featuring celebrities or community leaders
- Gathering in someone's home featuring a discussion of your group's activities and the challenges that women face in your community.⁶⁹

- **Approaching businesses** – In some countries, businesses and corporations are increasing their support for community initiatives. By conducting thorough research in your own community, you may find local businesses and international corporations that make financial grants or offer in-kind gifts (noncash items of value) to non-profit organizations. Researching companies you plan to approach is a must. You may want to maintain a file with their contact information, names of managers, and any other publicly available information. Businesses sometimes give in-kind gifts instead of financial gifts.⁷⁰

Tips for approaching businesses: ⁷¹

- Business managers will ask several questions before granting their support, both about your work and about how you might enhance the company's image. Reflect on what kinds of partnerships your organization feels comfortable establishing with businesses before you meet with company representatives. Come prepared to articulate how the company will benefit from its association with your organization.
- Choose companies that you believe have good practices. Ask yourself: Is the company a good neighbour in your community? Do they pay fair wages? Are they environmentally responsible? Do they treat women employees equally? These are all questions you may want explore before establishing a partnership.
- Through their foundations, many international companies provide grants and in-kind support in the countries where they operate. Make a list of international corporations in your country, and visit their websites to see if they make grants locally.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 8

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9

⁷¹ *Ibid*

Improving Pastoralist Livelihoods for Women:

- Understand the basic needs of Pastoral women: the need to understand how we can help these women and what we can do for them while respecting their culture, habits, and traditions.
- To understand and know of the roles that women have in pastoral societies and how these roles are changing.
- Individualize the threats for pastoral women and make an effort to face them.
- Safeguard women's access to productive resources
- Reduce the amount of time women spend on domestic work and household care and increase the time for income-generating opportunities.
- Provide water points for domestic use. This would mean a considerable saving of women's time and energy.
- Facilitate access to the market.
- Smooth the access to resources; water, land and other natural resources.
- Provide technical support to increase work.
- Focus on women's access to education and training.
- Enhance women's' involvement in decision-making.
- Develop new opportunities for Pastoral women in different fields.
- Encourage the formulation of professional associations for women that would advocate for their need. ⁷²

⁷²PENHA (2009), p. 58

IV. Wider Recommendations



- Alternative means to advance women's rights are often seen as a direct threat to the economic and political priorities of the government. However, one of the reasons the women's movement in Sudan is grinding to a halt is because little has changed in the way of strategies, tactics and methods since the movement gained prominence in 1956. In fact, there have been many roll-backs to the progress made by women back then. Adopting new ideas and ways of thinking can renew energy for activism into the movement. It is critical for the women's movement to re-politicize its agenda, and to once again embrace a politics of inclusion and collective activism in resisting violations against the rights of women.
- It is of critical value for women's movements everywhere to preserve the histories and narratives of women's struggles, and to reconstruct these histories to reflect the contribution of women themselves as activists, care givers, wives, mothers, sisters, politicians, teachers, daughters, community counsellors, community elders, midwives, religious leaders, etc. The importance of preserving records both on-site and in remote locations is critical for women's rights organizations and their activism work. This is pertinent for the sake of future reference, dissemination and information sharing, and reflection and evaluation. Women's organisations can also refer to past project materials as building-blocks for new projects and activities, and can use them as examples of best practices especially with reference to successfully implemented programs and projects. Archives can be preserved using a number of methods, including document/paper storage, oral, audio-visual, and electronic storage. Especially in contexts where women are illiterate and cannot keep diaries or journals, as is the case among impoverished women, then it becomes imperative to develop tools and mechanisms for recording the oral interpretation of women's work and lives. Such oral archiving is critical for future referencing by younger generations of women's rights activists.

ANNEX: List of research participants

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS/ NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (KHARTOUM)

	NAME OF ORGANISATION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
01.	Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies(BBSAWS)	2
02.	Sudan Development Association	2
03.	Sudan Organisation for Research and Development (SORD)	2
04.	Diar for Rehabilitation and Development Association (DRDA)	4
05.	Hawa Organisation for Women and Children	5
06.	Al-Khatim Adlan Center for Enlightenment and Human Development (KACE)	3
07.	National Sudanese Women Association	1
08.	Asmaa Society for Development	1
09.	Legal Forum	1
10.	Mahmoud Mohamed Taha Foundation	2
11.	University of Khartoum – Prof. Khalid Salim	1
12.	Souk al Shabi Women Cooperative for Tea and Food Sellers	6
13.	Focus Group Discussion: Hawa Organisation for Women and Children (tea session)	13

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