

Voices of the Margins



KURVE
Wustrow
Centre for Training and Networking
in Nonviolent Action

Realising “Freedom—Peace—Justice”
and Structural Empowerment for
Multi-Marginalised Women in Sudan

Policy Brief



Graffiti at the Sit-In in front of the Military Headquarter in Khartoum, April – June 2019. The banners say: Freedom, Peace, Justice. Photo: J. Kramer, Graffiti: artist unknown

From Revolution to Structural Empowerment

Over 50 years of dictatorships and war, following many decades of colonialism, established a system of discrimination in Sudanese society that led to multi-marginalisation of different groups of people. The multitudinous forms of discrimination and marginalisation do not only run along the regional divides between the centre and the margins, and between so-called “African” and “Arab” ethnic groups. Many women in particular face multiple intersecting forms of marginalisation and discrimination, most often along the lines of gender, ethnicity and racist categories, class, as well as war-related dynamics.

The Revolution of 2019 created potentials for lasting change. This change was brought about by the Sudanese people, including people from the margins. Despite the achievements of the Revolution and the great potentials of the current transition phase, there is a risk that the Transition Government and the resulting structures will to some extent reproduce the existing system of marginalisation and discrimination. This has to be prevented. There must be sustainable change in Sudan, benefiting those who are most disadvantaged.

Together with marginalised women from different parts of Sudan, Bana Group for Peace and Development analysed marginalising intersections and came up with specific recommendations how they can be overcome.

Bana Group for Peace and Development demands ...

1. ... that true *Freedom—Peace—Justice* must include the empowerment and participation of all sectors of society, including the most marginalised in terms of racism, gender and class.
2. ... that the end of all forms of marginalisation and discrimination and their intersections be the priority of Sudanese and international efforts for a future political and economic system in Sudan and therefore reflected and mainstreamed at all levels and in all contexts of society.
3. ... that empowerment and self-organising of multi-marginalised women be considered central for the transition and the future system of Sudan, and thus have to be given space by all means.
4. ... that all segments of society (genders, regions, ethnic groups, social classes ...) have fair access to and are represented in decision-making structures.
5. ... that all national and international efforts in support of Sudan be centred around the self-determination and needs of the Sudanese people—with a focus on the multi-marginalised—rather than the political and economic interests of other countries.

“*If the Transitional Government doesn't involve multi-marginalised people, they will get lost once again. Often people access the wrong people, for example by focusing only on political parties. Our focus is to look beyond the city, to the invisible places, and to hear the demands of the people. Change should not only come from the city and from people who are in peace. Change needs to be inclusive. Therefore, those people at the margins should be involved in the change. And this is our duty. If the people in power don't reach them or think about them, we should try to bring these kind of voices to let them be heard and be visible.*”

Multi-Marginalisation of Women in Sudan

Sudanese women face different intersecting sets of discrimination and marginalisation, mainly along the lines of gender, race, class and war-related dynamics, with each combination facing different dynamics and challenges.

Gender-based discrimination and violence against women in Sudan happen at all levels of society in the public and private sphere—with multi-marginalised women most at risk. Women are doing a lot of the care-work of society for free in dependency on men—which is also why they are doubly hit by class-related access to items of basic needs (like healthcare, water ...). Women have less access to positions of power and socio-political participation. This again is increased through limited access to education in comparison to men. The educational path of women often ends when they get married—sometimes under-age or against their will. Sexualised and gender-based violence occurs widely, also through traditional harmful practices like FGM (female genital mutilation), and as a weapon of war.

Ethnic and cultural diversity in Sudanese society is not seen as a wealth, but as a system of privilege and marginalisation. Racism based on **colour and ethnicity** is deeply entrenched in Sudanese society, learnt and internalised, both on the side of so-called “Arab” as well as “African” groups, leading to a deep level of mistrust. The results are

daily frustrations in subtly and blatantly racist interactions, severe limitations of access to services, jobs, positions of power, whole regions being disregarded with regards to basic services etc., and sometimes also direct violence and even war. For women of so-called “African” ethnic groups, racist and gender-based dynamics intersect into even more disadvantages and social pressures.

With regards to **class**, discrimination along the lines of gender and ethnicity in turn leads to increased poverty among women and among so-called “African” ethnic groups. This entails higher vulnerability to rising prices, water shortages and other economic and humanitarian challenges as well as climate change, particularly in marginalised areas.

Situations of **war and crises** like the COVID-19 pandemic bring about additional marginalisation effects through experiences of direct violence and displacement, as well as the collapse of the already insufficient health-care system, hitting the people at the margins to an extreme extent.

“*Personally speaking, I've been through gender discrimination, being a woman who has no right whatsoever to decide for my own, I also consider FGM as a type of violence that was practiced upon us, in addition to colour-based discrimination and racism both locally and regionally, and marginalisation in all its shapes.*”

Woman from Mornei IDP Camp, West Darfur

Distribution of main experiences of discrimination mentioned by the interviewees

Type of discrimination experienced	Number of times mentioned as experience	Number of times mentioned as needs or demands	Examples of demands
Racist/ethnic	85	34	ending discrimination in direct interactions, job market, etc.
Gender-based	40	16	ending gender-based violence & underage marriage, IDs for children born from rape, socio-political participation, more education for women and girls, fairer work distribution, etc.
Class-related	28	103	health-care, water, employment, livelihood etc.
War-related	18	86	safety, peace & security, transitional justice
Education-related	11	70	(affordable) access to education for all, including girls and women
Violations of political human rights	4	34	political power and participation, freedom, human rights

Other discrimination factors mentioned: Religion, age, ability



The information in this document is based on *“Voices of the Margins—A Participatory Study on and by Sudanese Multi-Marginalised Women and how “Freedom—Peace—Justice”, the Demands of the Sudanese Revolution of 2018/2019, Can be Turned into their Structural Empowerment.”*

This exploratory inductive study of participatory action research is based on interviews by Bana with 129 persons from 7 Sudanese States, 117 of which are women facing multi-marginalisation.

The study is available at:
<https://www.kurviewustrow.org/en/publication/voices-of-the-margins>



Upcycling workshop with women in Mornei IDP Camp, West Darfur. Photo: N. Busse

From Revolution to Representation to Empowerment

The future system of governance needs to address the needs and demands of multi-marginalised women. It needs to be an inclusive system of civilian instead of military representation, with all segments of society (genders, regions, ethnic groups, social classes) having access to and being represented in participatory decision-making structures. An end to armed conflict, and guaranteed political human rights are basic preconditions for this to happen.

The Revolution and the current transition phase have already brought about changes into the right direction e.g. with regards to the freedom of speech, peace talks, addressing gender-based discrimination or first efforts towards better representation of women and ethnic groups in political processes. These are great victories of the Revolution and thus, for the people by the people!

However, the composition of the new government does not represent marginalised women as yet, and especially in the marginalised areas, the old structures are still in place. Many interviewed marginalised women claim that they wish for the new government to talk to them directly, as they do not feel informed or involved—even though most of them do feel part of the Revolution. Feedback loops and participation spaces are key, if peace, justice and freedom are to be designed for and by those who suffered and still suffer most. The Niertiti protests of July 2020 in Central Darfur reflect this urgent need.

In short—besides the risk of yet another coup—there is the high risk of the new system to replicate the old one in terms of discrimination, marginalisation, and militarism.

The spirit of the Revolution is still strong and has planted a strong vision into the minds of people. There are structures such as the resistance committees that are trusted by the people on the ground and should be built upon to ensure representation of multi-marginalised women.

Simultaneously to representation, self-empowerment of multi-marginalised women is key for their needs and demands being heard and met. Interviewed multi-marginalised women reflect that they want to have the power of providing their livelihood and affecting changes in their community. They are calling for unity and cooperation, for access to decision-making regarding their needs and demands. They want to raise their voice by themselves. They want to take the change into their own hands. Other actors can be allies but should not speak on behalf of them.

It is this process of self-empowerment of the multi-marginalised women, which is the future of a free, peaceful and just Sudan.

This is how empowerment works:

“It is a chain of things to be done—but the beginning is the awareness. The marginalised women shall be aware of their important role, and then build social bodies and organisations that take their voice further. We have to set a minimum level of demands and campaign for them, so that we can achieve some of our goals in the beginning.”

Woman from Khartoum-Kalagla

“As marginalised women, we need to be working together much harder, in unity. [We must] reach the people in power and the decision makers, [and] we should [...] get our voices to be heard worldwide.”

Woman from Khartoum-Hajj Yousif

“We just need them to provide the basics, and we will do the rest.”

Woman from Mornei IDP-Camp, West Darfur

“I have nothing to ask [the government] for. We can only do that [develop ourselves] through agriculture and education, we have nothing else but that.”

Woman from Mornei IDP-Camp, West Darfur

Key Recommendations for (potential) Allies of Multi-Marginalised Women in Sudan

Allies of multi-marginalised women in Sudan should use approaches like intersectional sensitivity and Do No Harm, and focus on creating spaces for them to make their needs and demands heard and met, by themselves. Furthermore:

To the Sudanese Transitional Government

1. We want peace and stability, with an end of greed, corruption, and political self-interest, but based on a participatory constitutional process including all people, meaning that the country and all the citizens and their basic needs should come first and be a top priority.
3. There should be further changes in rules and laws according to the demands of the Revolution, particularly including deterrent laws placed and reinforced, for everyone who commits violence and discrimination against women or on the basis of ethnicity.
4. International agreements regarding women's rights, like CEDAW, should be signed and ratified, and put to work both on the legislative and executive level.
5. The Transitional Government should, involving marginalised women, think of and work on improving possibilities of the livelihood of women, and suggest ways and implement projects to empower them economically.
6. The chances and accesses of women—especially from the margins—to training and education should be increased.
7. We strongly recommend creating consultative mechanisms with the local communities, and to continue to strengthen the role of local councils and of multi-marginalised women at all levels of decision-making.

“*Our most famous slogan during the days of the revolution is 'Freedom, Peace and Justice'. The freedom that we want is freedom of slavery from the ex-regime, freedom of injustice and oppression, we've kept our mouths shut for 30 years.*”

Woman from Nyala, South Darfur

“ *We hope for so many things like social justice, fair employment, and for everyone to feel like they belong, and to feel like they are all right in the place where they wish to be, we hope for Sudan to move forward with moderation and balance.* ”

Woman from Sunut region, West Kordofan

To International Actors

1. We welcome and call for the support of the international community, however in an impartial manner to all parties and without interfering with internal policies of the country, and with a focus on basic needs, especially of those facing multiple marginalisation.
2. We call for the international community to provide technical and logistic support for the Transitional Government to achieve peace, including international expertise.
3. We also call for the international community to lobby the government to sign CEDAW agreement, and to support the implementation of all necessary measures.
4. Furthermore, we call for support for IDPs and refugees who want to voluntarily return, to ensure their safe reintegration into the society, so that each and everyone of them could find their role and place within the society.
5. We greatly welcome any support with continued awareness raising efforts, conducted by Sudanese for Sudanese, about issues related to discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and class. Also, we welcome the conducting of global feminist conferences to support the democratic transformation and women's participation.
6. Support is needed in responding to the ongoing economic crisis, which is connected with the health & pandemic and climate-/extractivism-related crises. Measures should include financial aid, counter-inflation strategies, and humanitarian aid for those most affected, including improved education and health provisions. They should further include capacity-building and support with regards to vocational training, household economy, and sustainable and conflict-sensitive adaptations of agricultural systems, and generally by measures towards sustainable development and self sufficiency/livelihood.



Circle of hands (Bana).
Photo: Bana Group

Bana Group for Peace And Development is a group of Women Human Rights Defenders from all over Sudan, who have been working together beyond ethnic and regional divides since 2017. They supported each other and collectively took part in the Revolution of 2019. In December 2019, they met in Sudan's marginalised West Darfur region to kick off the above mentioned study and further work for the empowerment of multi-marginalised women, in cooperation with the German NGO KURVE Wustrow—Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action, supported by the “Civil Peace Service” programme.

Bana is a network that works on a consensus basis, beyond political affiliations and with an activist rather than an NGO approach. Current other foci are emergency solidarity work in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, and linking sustainable agricultural approaches like permaculture to the Sudanese contexts.



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KURVE Wustrow was founded in 1980 with the aim of turning concerns about violent conflict into conscious nonviolent action. They conduct trainings, workshops and events in the field of civil, nonviolent conflict transformation in Germany and abroad. They send International Peace Workers as part of the “Civil Peace Service” to selected crisis regions. For this purpose, KURVE Wustrow is closely cooperating with partner organisations in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East and in South Asia and Africa.



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