

SUDAN

Sudanese women's role in peacemaking

by Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda and Grace Okonji

As news of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) reached Sudan, women's ululations filled the air in celebration as war-weary communities breathed in the sweet scent of peace and renewed hope. However, much needs to be done to ensure women are the heart of the post-conflict reconstruction agenda.

For years Sudanese women have been involved in community peace building and advocacy for inclusion in the formal peace negotiations. Yet despite Sudan's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, policy recommendations of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the clause in the SPLM's constitution promoting affirmative action, women were not admitted to the main peace negotiating table.

The Joint Assessment Mission for Sudan (JAM) offered the opportunity for greater participation. Consultations took place with Sudanese women, policy makers, NGOs and donors to bring the voices of women to planning and resource allocation processes. The JAM consultations sought to identify those structures, policies and practices which help perpetuate patterns of disadvantages and inequalities for women and men. UNIFEM provided the lead in mainstreaming gender issues into the JAM process. Gender analysis, as a methodology for the JAM, began at the level of the household by considering the ways in which women and men participate differently in the household economy and society. It also sought to identify structures (institutional, political and social), policies and practices which act to perpetuate patterns of women's and men's disadvantages and inequalities.

"The ability of women from all segments of society in the Sudan to access systems of justice is central."

Sarah Nugdalla, UMMA party

"The development of gender-aware police forces, with the involvement of women in the forces, is a critical

aspect of establishing law and order and ensuring adequate protection of women in the country. Violence against women and other forms of abuse must be recognised as matters for public policy and judicial systems. Training of police on how to address these issues sensitively is paramount."

Amal Kunna Khairy, Gender Centre for Research and Studies

Gender equality in funding

Sudanese women have voiced the need for opportunities, empowerment, participation and inclusion of women in the establishment of legislative and constitutional systems

The gender symposium held on the eve of the Oslo Donors Conference in April 2005 brought together some 50 Sudanese women from North, South and Darfur to evolve a common set of priorities and recommendations for peace, reconstruction and healing.¹ Following meetings with international donors, the Sudanese women made a number of specific recommendations aimed at mainstreaming gender equality principles in all funding and programme mechanisms. The Sudanese women set a new global threshold, with criteria for gender-responsive budgeting to ensure an 80% accountability to women, young people and poor war-affected and marginalised communities. The best way to measure commitment to women is to follow the money and to make sure that the money works. Gender-responsive budgeting can be put in place to guide Sudan's reconstruction.

In Oslo Sudanese women also called for:

- a minimum representation of 30% for women in decision-making positions at all levels, including transitional institutions, review processes and commissions established under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)
- establishing a Ministry of Women and Gender Equality – as provided for in the CPA – and gender divisions in all other ministries
- establishing a women's fund within the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for women-specific programmes and ensuring a formal role for women's organisations in the management and disbursement of funds
- setting up women's resource centres for refugees, internally displaced women and returnees at state, provincial and district levels
- formulating pro-poor economic policies and poverty eradication and wealth creation strategies that adequately address the needs and rights of women and girls
- reducing gender disparities in education enrolment and drop-out rates for primary, secondary, tertiary and post-graduate levels, with priority given to war-affected and marginalised areas
- recognising the importance of HIV/AIDS in relation to human security and the need for adequate education and awareness raising, prevention and treatment
- enforcement and/or enactment of laws to eradicate all harmful traditional practices that have an impact on the health of women and girls
- provision of free comprehensive reproductive health services.

Gender training and capacity building are of vital importance. Gender-responsive and pro-poor budgeting principles and approaches must be integrated in both principle and practice. Training and skills building programmes must have a conscious focus on women's inclusion as well as integration of gender content. This must be supplemented by a strong investment in supporting

community and women's groups, networks and associations.

The tragic death of John Garang de Mabior must not darken Sudan's march towards a gender-equitable peace. As his widow, Rebecca, told mourners: *"Dr John wanted you to be united. I will not miss my husband as long as you, the people of Sudan, are the watchdogs of the CPA. ... The legacy of Dr Garang was to fight for the rights of women and the children. If they are mistreated, I will be a lioness."*

Women know the cost of war and destruction. Many women and their families are displaced, living in extreme poverty without access to clean water, energy, sanitation, a means of livelihood and education. After 40 years of suffering, peace brings new hope. But this peace is fragile. It has to be carefully nurtured and invested in. A new Sudan, a Sudan without war, needs women as leaders and as full and equal citizens. Women are central to the enormous tasks ahead and can accelerate the building of peace, security and prosperity. It is through women's leadership and gender equality promotion that progress towards achieving the Millennium

commitments will become a reality in communities.

Only five of the 74 members of the Government of National Unity announced in September 2005 are women. The odds remain stacked against them but Sudanese women continue to organise, to advocate and to initiate action. They demand our continued technical and financial support. They need our solidarity and our commitment to making progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals for all sectors of Sudanese society. Their courage and persistence deserve our support, just as Sudan deserves its peace.

"This has been a culmination of many years of challenges for us, in mobilising for peace, many years of our voices rising, pushing to be heard. We are getting there, my sisters. Let us organise ourselves even more now and pull together." Rebecca Okwachi, Sudan Radio journalist

"The Oslo priorities and recommendations are for all women of Sudan. ... We shall continue to disseminate them to all the women of Sudan to know our reconstruction priorities."

Abuk Payiti, Director, Gender Peace Desk, SPLM

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1. www.sudansupport.no/genderconf_05_oslo/doc_index.html

Participants at the Sudanese Women and the Peace Process conference, Oslo, January 2005, including representatives of Bahr al Ghazal, Equatoria, Nuba Mountains and Upper Nile; NGO representatives; the SPLM/A Commissioner of the Women, Gender and Child Welfare secretariat; and the Director of the SPLM/A Gender Peace Desk.

