



Gender-Sensitive Conflict Analysis in South and East Darfur States, Sudan

Unfortunately, violence and conflict are on the rise again in Darfur, with eight times more people killed and displaced in 2021 than in 2020. Inflation rose by 359% in 2021. Climate change—marked by devastating floods and prolonged droughts—combined with food insecurity and a lack of services leaves people feeling violence is their only choice.

A profoundly unequal and harmful set of social norms that do not value women, and even refer to them as vessels of the devil, coupled with laws that do not protect women and their rights, are pushing many burdens of this crisis onto women. A common saying is, “Almara mamlouka ela malak Almut” or “A woman is owned to death.” As the situation gets more extreme and livelihoods and service get scarcer, women are more likely to be working outside the home to help meet family needs. Men have not increased their involvement in household chores and childcare to compensate for these shifts—leaving women with even higher burdens than before. The shifts in women having to work outside the home have not translated into corresponding improvements in women’s rights, engagement in politics, or access to public life.

This research draws from 20 focus groups and 20 Key Informant Interviews that represent the views of 193 people (45% of whom were women) in eight villages in July of 2022. It also looks at 44 secondary sources.

Key Findings

- **Land use is the highest driver of conflict.** While there are a complex set of laws around land use and access—including that women cannot own land, despite providing 80% of the agricultural labor—the biggest conflicts are about land use rather than ownership. **Conflicts rise 10 times during the agricultural season** as the pressures of agriculture, pastoralism, and water needs converge in the same areas.
- **Food insecurity is high.** 4 in 10 farmers faced lower crop yields because of drought or flooding. 63% of people are food insecure and forced into negative coping strategies. Women are only allowed to eat after men have finished.

Historically, it was considered shameful for a man to rob, kill, or even to harm a woman. Now, community members feel that it is viewed as common to kill others and to rape, beat, and sexually harass women.

“The speaking of the woman must come at the end”

- Common Proverb

- **Gender Based Violence is pervasive, rising, and has little recourse.** All forms of violence rise during conflict, and women face special risks, particularly when traveling to do basic household chores like fetching water. 1 in 3 women and children experiences violence. 1 in 10 faces rape, sexual harassment, or verbal violence. As risks rise, women’s mobility restricts, since the highest points of danger are outside their communities. It is socially unacceptable for women to seek justice for GBV in the formal system. When women and girls do violate social norms, the consequences

are much more severe for them than for men, including torture and death.

- **Policy frameworks and implementation put women at risk.** Sudan has the highest rate of laws that limit a woman’s ability to participate publicly of anywhere in the world. If women dare to speak in public, they must wait until after men. While the constitution protects equality, in practice, equal rights for women are not enforced. Sudan ratified the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women except for the clauses that guarantee a woman equality in marriage and parenting.
- **Women are taking a stand, which does not always translate to representation.** Women made up 70% of the protestors who toppled former president El-Bashir. They rose up to become more visible in public as pro-democracy activists. Nevertheless, they made up less than 25% of the provisional cabinet, despite a 40% quote for women’s political participation. 30.5% of men and only 18.5% of women participated in peacebuilding.
- **Community-based structures are the fairest option for women.** Women cite Community-Based Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (CBCRM)—which are primarily set up with NGOs—as one of the most diverse and best options for them to pursue justice. These structures are more likely to include women, and all community members are highly satisfied with them. For other structures, women say they often perpetrate more violence than they resolve. Religious leaders are a powerful force for influence, and with more commitment to supporting women, they can be critical actors in peacebuilding.
- **Savings groups provide an important path to peace.** Many respondents pointed to savings groups as a key peacebuilding tool. The groups bring women from different backgrounds together with social and economic interdependence, which helps them to interact and learn to accept each other. These associations create safe platforms for women to get involved in decision-making and gain life skills and economic empowerment gives women more confidence and more ability to influence public decisions.

Recommendations

- **Integrate positive shifts in gender norms and relations at household and community levels** within the wider ecosystem of interventions, being mindful of potential negative externalities. Build on positive social norms about women, work with young women to counter their perceptions about “normal” and “acceptable” levels of violence and raise awareness about the existence and consequences of GBV amongst men.
- **Strengthen the capacities of diverse actors in the community.** Engage community-based governance structures, government, women, and youth, Hakamas, and savings groups in capacity strengthening.
- **Influence community-based governance structures** to foster more inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to conflict mitigation and resolution. Push for more inclusive structures and form new ones where needed, look for and leverage allies, and set up conflict early warning systems.
- **Engage in meaningful, strategic lobbying and advocacy** with decision-makers and powerholders from the village to the national level on topics including harmful marital laws against women, land ownership and inheritance laws that prevent women from having land, land registration policies, and gender and youth quotas, amongst others.
- **Develop sustaining women’s collective protection mechanisms and practices** such as encouraging women to travel in groups, engaging in temporary income stabilization activities, creating kitchen garden nutrition programs, leading awareness-raising efforts on topics such as GBV and alcohol abuse, and providing sexual and reproductive health and family planning services to women.
- **Take actions to mitigate the potential for land and resource conflict** to occur through agricultural, migratory, and water-based solutions such as demarcating livestock migratory routes and farms, providing services for livestock and farms (e.g., water), and raising awareness about climate change and its impact on the land and migration.