

WOMEN BUILDING PEACE: THE SUDANESE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

BY ZAYNAB ELSAWI

FROM CHANGING THEIR WORLD 2ND EDITION
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Building
Feminist
Movements and
Organizations

This case study was produced by AWID's Building Feminist Movements and Organizations (BEFMO) Initiative

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ACRONYMS

CMP	Sudanese Mission for Peace
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
GOS	Government of Sudan
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NSCC	New Sudan Council of Churches
RNE	Royal Netherlands Embassy
SPLM/A	Sudanese People Liberation Movement / Army
SuWEP	Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace
SWAN	Sudanese Women's Association in Nairobi
SWVP	Sudanese Women Voice for Peace

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Designer: Storm. Diseño + Comunicación

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Published by Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town.

This publication is available online at www.awid.org
This publication is also available online in French and Spanish.
Original publication in English July 2011.

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AWID gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Cordaid, Hivos, Levi Strauss Foundation, MDG3 Fund (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Oxfam Novib, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and an anonymous contributor.



Women Building Peace: The Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP) in Sudan

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Introduction

The armed conflict between North and South Sudan has deeply affected the daily lives of Sudanese women for decades. Not only did the conflict thrust them into becoming heads of households and as internally displaced people (IDP) or refugees, they also found themselves faced with the challenge of promoting peace and a different future for Sudan. Their journey to envision a peaceful resolution to the North-South conflict in the Sudan has been rough and uncertain. Yet, Sudanese women's determination was informed by the necessity to act and their participation in past political struggles. During the 1990s, Sudanese women from both north and south, started coming together. This eventually led to the formation of the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP), an umbrella body bringing together women from the two regions, and also from different ethnic, socio-economic and political backgrounds. It was only in 2005 that the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) officially ended the 22-year long war between the northern-based Government of Sudan and the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

While providing some insights about the origins and the impacts of the conflict in Sudan, this article is mainly an attempt to tell the story of Sudanese women's involvement in the peace processes before and after the initiative of SuWEP. It will explore the roles SuWEP played as a feminist movement through the analysis of the tools and approaches developed by the women's groups to make their voices heard. Noting the importance of the contribution of a wide range of Sudanese women and men, the author also acknowledges that the full story of this journey for peace may never be fully told nor known.

Sudan at a glance: Genesis of a conflict and its impacts

Located at the crossroads of the African and the Arab worlds, Sudan is both rich and cursed by its diversity. As the largest African country, its climate ranges from a dry desert in the north to a lush, fertile south. Its population of 39 million is divided between Islam, Christianity and Animism with the latter two being mainly practiced in the South of the country. Despite the predominantly Arab-African dichotomy, Sudan is a very diverse society with a mix of more than 500 ethnic identities that include

Arab, Beja, Dinka, Fur, Nubian, Nuer and several others. Nomadic and sedentary cultures influence tribal organization, economic activities and the daily lives of both women and men. The gender relations in Sudan are diverse and dynamic. They reflect the diversity of cultures and social relations throughout the country.

Sudan achieved its independence from Great Britain in 1956. Already during that period, Sudan had one of the earliest and most vigorous women's movements in the Arab and African worlds. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the women's movement in Sudan was successful in securing and extending basic legal rights to women. Women's

participation in the October 1964 Revolution and the April 1985 Intifada was important to the success of democratic changes. However, their roles and abilities were never recognized and promoted by the authorities.

Yet, the colonial period had already sown the seed for future wrath and discontent. The divisions between northern and southern Sudan were exacerbated during the colonial period. It was illegal for people living in one region to move to the other. The mistrust between the southern and northern Sudanese could only grow with the exploitation of the southerners by North Sudan through unequal trade, political marginalization and lack of respect for Southerners' traditional values. Even though the South began to ask for its political autonomy before the country got its independence, the North has repeatedly ignored its demands. The most recent conflict between North and South Sudan started in 1983, although it was mainly a continuation of the first Sudanese civil war of 1955 to 1972.

It was the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement that secured a decade of relative peace between North and South Sudan. Yet, the discovery of oil in the late 1970s in South Sudan had the potential to reignite the fire. Then in 1983, the Numeiri regime in Khartoum called for the imposition of Sharia Laws across the country. In 1983, under the leadership of the late Dr. John Garang, Southern Sudanese channeled their frustration through the formation of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A), and a repetition of the first Sudanese civil war was on its way.

The conflict took place between 1983 and 2005, for most of the part in southern Sudan, and killed over 1.9 million civilians, while more than 4 million southerners were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in the north of the country or in neighboring countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda. A majority of the displaced people were women and children. Echoing what had been experienced some years before.

Apart from changing traditional gender roles in the south, the war also increased women's workload, the number of single parent/women-headed

households and the breakdown of traditional support systems. A baseline survey funded by USAID in 2004 revealed that one-fifth of the families in three southern Sudan provinces were headed by women. New social norms thus emerged under which men would no longer take up their traditional roles even when they were available. Extraordinary demands and workloads have therefore negatively affected women's health and reduced the chance of girls getting educated. Women who remained inside Sudan during the war were sometimes forced to provide food for the warring factions and often become the sole caretakers of children, the sick and elderly. Prolonged conflicts have also impoverished many families since they were unable to engage in gainful development activities. When they escape from fighting, women become internally displaced and live as refugees away from their homes.

While in the refugee camps, displaced women without financial resources often resort to prostitution - trading sex for money. Studies have shown that women who were widowed during the war were particularly vulnerable to prostitution, which became one of their means of survival. Sexual abuse at the hands of humanitarian agency staff is common among the women when they are in refugee camps. Women and girls were also subject to sexual assault when they left camps to fetch firewood or water, or were abducted and disappeared. Abduction of women and children is said to be a common tactic in inter-tribal conflicts in the south. Soldiers and militia members were encouraged to commit offences like rape given the culture of silence and lack of mechanisms for dealing with rape allegations. Rape has brought with it a high risk of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS infection among the women. In the south Sudan, HIV/AIDS infection rates are reported to have already reached epidemic levels.

There are many stories told of the suffering of women during this war time. Phoebe Yona,* *involved with the Sudanese Women in Nairobi (SWAN), was providing guidance and counseling to other refugees like her. Phoebe recalled a tragic story: "I was counseling a woman who came through Uganda. She had three children and her*

husband died in Kenya. During the war, she had been raped and physically abused by the soldiers several times. When she arrived at the camp, she was psychologically broken because she had experienced numerous rapes by the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. The recollection of this experience would make her tremble as soon as she would see a man wearing a military uniform. We worked together to rehabilitate her mentally so that she could forget the tragedy and accept the boy she had bore as a result of one of her rapes. I helped her understanding that it was not the child's fault. I also helped her overcoming her fear of people wearing military uniforms so that she could go on with her life and never make the child bear other people's mistakes".

In addition to the massive number of deaths, the country was also going through major social ruptures and challenges. Basic infrastructure and services such as hospitals, schools, roads and markets were devastated or destroyed. As Mary Nyaulang recalled: *"We were on the run for more than 14 days when the war broke out. I delivered my baby while on the run. Just imagine me, a pregnant woman waiting for the baby to come as I was fleeing from war. I had no energy and no food. This is why some women died when giving birth under such circumstances."*

The ongoing lack of confidence between North and South Sudan was also due to the atrocities committed during the war. This is recalled by Beatrice Aber Samson** who tells her story about the war with some pain and pride: *"When the military operations in the South began to be more intensive and aggressive, my mother was sick and she could not escape from the bombing like the other civilians. She fell into the hands of the government's soldiers who beat her and broke her legs and arrested my father who was later killed. Our tragic situation continued for a week until my sisters and I managed to move our mother away with the help of some vehicles leaving out of Juba."*

The economy was not spared either. Till today, Sudan ranks among the poorest countries in the region. Many years of civil war has left southern Sudan impoverished as the development of the

country came to a standstill, with a serious reduction of cultivable areas and water sources. Huge numbers of cattle were lost during the war, thus undermining the lifestyle of pastoralist tribes like the Nuer and Dinka. In the north, women had also been living in extreme poverty and were denied essential subsistence services due to an economy weakened by large military expenditure and a huge foreign debt that had to be serviced. In 2002, it was reported that widespread forced servitude imposed by Murahleen militia affected mostly women and children. Refugees and displaced women in the north have few economic opportunities. A UNDP study found out that 80% of women in Omdurman women's prison in Khartoum were there for prostitution or brewing illicit alcohol, both strategies for basic survival. Another serious impact has been the spread of small firearms in the region - the millions of small weapons in the hands of the civilian population, militias and soldiers are believed to contribute to the spread and sustaining of a culture of conflict and violence in Sudan and the region.

The struggle for peace: Sudanese women's involvement in peace processes

Over the years, efforts to restore peace - particularly between the government in Khartoum and the SPLM/A- have been an uphill task. In 1993, a ray of hope came with the establishment of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional conflict resolution and development body that was to sponsor efforts to end the civil war in Sudan through a series of peace talks between the government forces in Khartoum and the SPLM/A. In 1994, IGAD drafted a Declaration of Principles (DOP) that included separation of state and religion and the recognition of the right of self-determination for the south. From 1994 onwards, peace talks continued at different times. For example, on October 29th, 1997, peace talks opened

*. Phoebe Yona, Women and political activist, one of the women who ran for the last elections in the South, from an interview conducted with her in Juba, Feb. 2010 within the framework of documenting for SuWEP.

** . Beatrice Aber Samson, a member of the peace movement in Southern Sudan, is a war refugee who became a peace activist.

in Nairobi. They resumed in February 2000 but ended after five days when the rebels accused the Sudan government of indiscriminate attacks on civilians. On July 20, 2002 when the government and SPLM/A signed the Machakos Protocol, the need to hold a referendum on South Sudan's self-determination was acknowledged. Seven days later, Sudanese president Bashir met with the rebel chief, John Garang for the first time. On October 15th, the government and SPLM/A signed a ceasefire, the first such truce. On September 25th of the same year, the government and SPLM/A signed a security deal, clearing a major stumbling block in peace talks. In January 2004, the government and the rebels signed an accord on how to share wealth in the Sudan. The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 marked the formal conclusion of the 22-year long civil war between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM/A.

These factors reversed the trend which had seen Sudanese women gaining some influence over political decisions with some democratic advancement in the 1960s. Politics continued to be seen as men's domain - especially in the Islamic regions of the country, where it is culturally unacceptable for women of childbearing age to appear in front of an audience. Thus the number of women's political organizations remained low. And even though the conflicts challenged and transformed various gender roles, the traditional perception of women's quiet and invisible role continued. Exclusion of women from peace forums has been common since most of the women affected by war are illiterate and tend to remain on the periphery of decision-making processes. Moreover, women in the rural areas are far less educated compared to those in the urban areas, or lack awareness of what is really happening in the country, exacerbated by the men's attitude, which regards peace talks as "men's talks". Thus women could only play an indirect role in conflict resolution. Exceptions were made for elderly women, who were allowed to speak in public and have men listen to them. But women had other opportunities to influence peace processes - for example, men would consult their women as wives, mothers or sisters on important decisions to be made. From such consultations,

men would reach compromises that were actually influenced by the women's expectations, even if women's public involvement was greatly restricted and culturally prohibited.

It was women's exhaustion from the impact of continuing conflict that eventually made them unite their voices to speak out about their suffering and concerns. In the words of Dr. Pauline Riack, who is now the head of the Anti-Corruption Commission with the South Sudan Government: "*It was a matter of Sudanese women coming together in a foreign land [Kenya], or sinking and dying.*" It is from this premise that Sudanese women decided to become active in conflict resolution.

Even before the United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security came into being¹, Sudanese women decided to organize to bring forward their demands as their discontent over their systemic and systematic exclusion from peace processes grew. They did so acknowledging that:

1. It is first and foremost women who suffer during wars or conflicts. Because of this, they are best placed to act as agents for in a conclusive peace process, and to spread of a culture of peace in the country.
2. Despite the suffering that Sudanese women have endured, their problems are rarely discussed. Instead, they are excluded from decision-making processes relating to conflict prevention, resolution and management.
3. Women have always played an important role in peace mediation and conflict transformation in the Sudan by influencing their spouses and relatives; therefore women could have a positive impact on the peace and reconciliation dialogues in Sudan.
4. Women's commitment to achieving recognition and respect of their fundamental rights must be regarded as an integral part of the pursuit of peace.
5. Women are the nurturers of values like forgiveness, tolerance, cooperation, respect and acceptance of others, all of which are conducive to peace amongst and between groups.

6. Women's attempts at peace building often go undocumented and unrecognized by organizations involved in conflict resolution.
7. There is a need to involve women as major stakeholders in mechanisms for conflict management and resolution because their active participation in peacemaking is known to modify and influence the vision of conflicting parties.
8. Finally, women in Sudan represent more than 50% of the population; therefore their input into peacemaking will add value to the ongoing peace process.

Women's peace building efforts in the Sudan before SuWEP

Before the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) officially started providing support for the SuWEP initiative, Sudanese women were already aware of their social, economic and political marginalization. They were equally aware that they were the most oppressed in their society. They were not allowed to engage in any decision-making processes and had been subordinated by a culture that did not recognize their rights. Women were often stereotyped as weak and without power or influence in the community and in inter-community affairs. To liberate themselves from all these stereotypes and constraints, Sudanese women realized that they had to break from the traditional yoke and recognize their rights as human rights. Thus, before SuWEP was established, women's groups - some now representing current political parties- were already actively involved with grassroots communities in efforts to sensitize them on their marginalized status.

In the Northern sector, a group like the *Women Empowerment for Peace and Development Network* had been busy sensitizing women about their democratic rights in order to encourage them to take part in decision-making. They had also begun to be involved in analyzing laws that were discriminatory against women. For the *Nuba Women for Peace*, the proximity with some of the rebels who had returned into the area motivated them to focus on awareness-raising about peace in an effort to reconcile the rebels and the government.

Initially, members of the *Nuba Women for Peace* worked on peace issues and advocacy, with most of their work being carried out through the church and church networks. Besides, the group was also involved in community mobilization to enhance women's role in governance and economic empowerment.

The *National Democratic Alliance* (NDA) concentrated more on women's rights. As a result, their efforts, like those of *Women Empowerment for Peace Group*, went towards developing analysis of national laws and to denounce those that infringed women's active participation in decision-making. Their aim was to bring about a more democratic regime in Sudan where women could be equal to men. Members of the NDA were also concerned about the war in the country, especially in the Nuba Mountains region. This concern led them to promote a culture of peace through awareness building on the negative impacts of war on society. Similar scenarios occurred with groups from the Southern Sector, with several Sudanese organizations giving greater focus to peace activities. Groups like SWAN and SPLM had also been actively involved with peace issues with women at the grassroots.

Though many women in Sudan were already involved in peacemaking before the formation of SuWEP, they were faced with a number of obstacles mainly relating to lack of funding, lack of international recognition and their capacity to deal with peace processes and security issues - during those years, talking about peace was considered a security issue. Therefore, women who wanted to be active on peace issues faced harassment, were followed by security agents, and even constrained from travelling. As the Dutch embassies in Khartoum and Nairobi were aware of these constraints, they provided assistance to facilitate those peacemaking activities. These two embassies provided a number of training workshops to increase the women's skills in lobbying, conflict resolution, diplomacy, and trauma counseling.

Furthermore, family and traditional peace mechanisms had been eroded. Systems of kinship had been replaced by civic organizations that lacked female representation and a relation to the homeland, especially when they were based outside the war-affected areas. The role of intermarriage, inter-cultural assimilation and traditional conflict resolution had changed because of interventions from

1. See www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf

outside. Finally, mobility was limited, especially for women, due to the military and political situation. Therefore, travel could only take place under extremely hostile circumstances between the Northern and Southern Sudan and within the Southern Sudan. Difficulties were encountered when crossing lines of conflict or operating from neighboring countries.

The birth of SuWEP as a feminist movement

As mentioned earlier, the women's movement in Sudan emerged from the anti-colonial and nationalist movements that were at the heart of social changes during the 1950s and 1960s in Sudan. It was through this liberation struggle that Sudanese women were able to secure their political and economic rights and some of their social rights. Throughout these two decades, the Sudan Women Union (SWU) was the only body that consistently called for the respect of women's rights. Their successes were high jacked by the Nimeiry regime when his government decided to create its own "Sudan Women Union" in 1971. This "new" SWU would no longer challenge the government policies and could no longer be considered as a neutral actor in the promotion of women's rights. The old SWU was forced to work underground. There was no longer a Sudanese platform for women with progressive ideas to come together.

The war between North and South started again in 1983, and after the 1989 coup d'état, the war became more of an Islamic jihad, or holy war. This shift was also marked by the acceleration of a culture of war promoted by the state and in which women were instrumental. For example, the newly established Sudanese Women General Union, formed under the Bashir regime in 1991, promoted a culture of war and mobilized women into its jihadist propaganda and vision. The SWGU members would gather to sing songs in support of the soldiers, spontaneously give their gold to support the war with a campaign named the "mountain of gold", organized food for the *mujaheddeen*, the soldiers of the holy war. Women were also encouraged to send their sons to war and the death of young men would be celebrated in the "wedding of martyrs" ceremony.

Within this context, SuWEP has emerged as a social movement based on pursuing a common political agenda for change through collective action. SuWEP gathered women from all parts of the Sudan under one umbrella, creating peace among them and resolving grudges and pain. The strength women gained from SuWEP encouraged them to seek peace and demand their inclusion in peace negotiations and representation in decision-making positions so as to guarantee sustainable peace.

The idea behind the formation of SuWEP goes as far back as 1994 when Southern Sudanese Women in Nairobi (SWAN) came together to brainstorm on ways and means of ending the longest and most dehumanizing conflict in the world and to foster sustainable peace in the Sudan. At the time, many Sudanese Civil Society Organizations such as Sudanese Women Voice for Peace (SWVP), New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), and New Sudan Women Federation (NSWA), Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi (SWAN) and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Women Movement and Sudanese Mission for Peace (CMP) were involved. However, the initial attempts at forging a unified intervention in the peace process had gravitated around the Sudanese Women's Association in Nairobi (SWAN) who had been seen as a pressure group away from home to call for peace in a foreign land. SWAN was established in 1992 by a group of displaced Sudanese women and some women in the Army (SPLA) who met in Nairobi and decided that despite their different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds, strength could be established because of their common fate. They had a mission of uniting the Sudanese women in Kenya and those in the warring zones in a participatory manner. They were hoping to enable these groups to identify their priorities and formulate strategies so that solutions could be found in a dignified, collaborative and culturally appropriate manner. Even though the initial focus of SWAN was mainly groups from South Sudan, after 1998, they initiated links with Northern groups and became more inclusive.

At the end of 1997, the government of the Netherlands through the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) in Sudan and Kenya initiated a facilitation process in support of Sudanese women engendering ongoing peace-building efforts. The Netherlands Government, working through their embassies, was

interested in replicating with Sudanese women their past experience in bringing together Israeli and Palestinian women. There was already *ad hoc* peace building work occurring among women's groups in the North and South of the country as well as in Nairobi. With the RNE's involvement, it became known as the "Dutch Initiative for Peace." With the involvement of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), it was then renamed "Engendering the Peace Process." Finally, in 2001, women decided to adopt the name of Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace – or SuWEP – as a way of establishing their ownership of the initiative. In the framework of this initiative, nine working committees were identified in Khartoum and Nairobi representing the different communities or political parties in Sudan. Through these committees, Sudanese women received training in conflict resolution and mediation skills. The Initiative also facilitated several joint meetings and visits for Sudanese women of the Northern and Southern sectors aiming to look for ways to support women's participation in the peace processes and to lobby with international participants for support.

An organized constituency of Sudanese women's groups was created in order to make this initiative a success. Five groups in Khartoum and four groups based in Nairobi were formed.

- The Southern sector based in Nairobi were:
 1. Sudanese people democratic front (SPDF) women group
 2. Sudanese people liberation movement (SPLM) united women group
 3. Nonpartisan women group
 4. Sudanese women voice for peace group
- The five groups in the Northern sector based in Khartoum were:
 1. Sudanese women civil society network for peace
 2. National democratic alliance groups (mainly of political parties women sectors)
 3. National working committee for peace (mainly government representatives)
 4. Nuba women group for peace
 5. Southern women group for peace

Under the auspices of IGAD, during their International Conference in April 2000, Sudanese women developed the Minimum Agenda for Peace, followed

by the Maastricht Declaration. The Minimum Agenda for Peace was the first official document developed by SuWEP. In the words of one participant, Mary Nyaulang: "*Coming together as the women of Sudan was not an easy thing. First, we could not agree on the issues we were going to address. We could not agree on a common agenda.*" Nevertheless, through their determination and ability to build trust and respect among each other, women who once belonged to opposite factions were able to come together. According to Naeema Agabna from the North sector "*Through SuWEP, Sudanese women managed to work together and develop their minimum agenda even before the government of Sudan and SPLM started negotiating.*"

After its emergence, SuWEP decided to launch the following actions:

- Develop a broad culture of peace at all levels: in the refugee camps, among political parties, with community leaders, and others;
- Empower women to contribute to just, sustainable and peaceful resolution to the conflict;
- Educate women in mediation and negotiation skills to enable effective participation of women in non-violent conflict resolution.
- Establish links and networks with relevant international organizations and the media, to support and advocate for a just and sustainable peace.
- Value and respect for cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity as an empowering resource for the Sudanese society as a whole.

Structure of the Movement

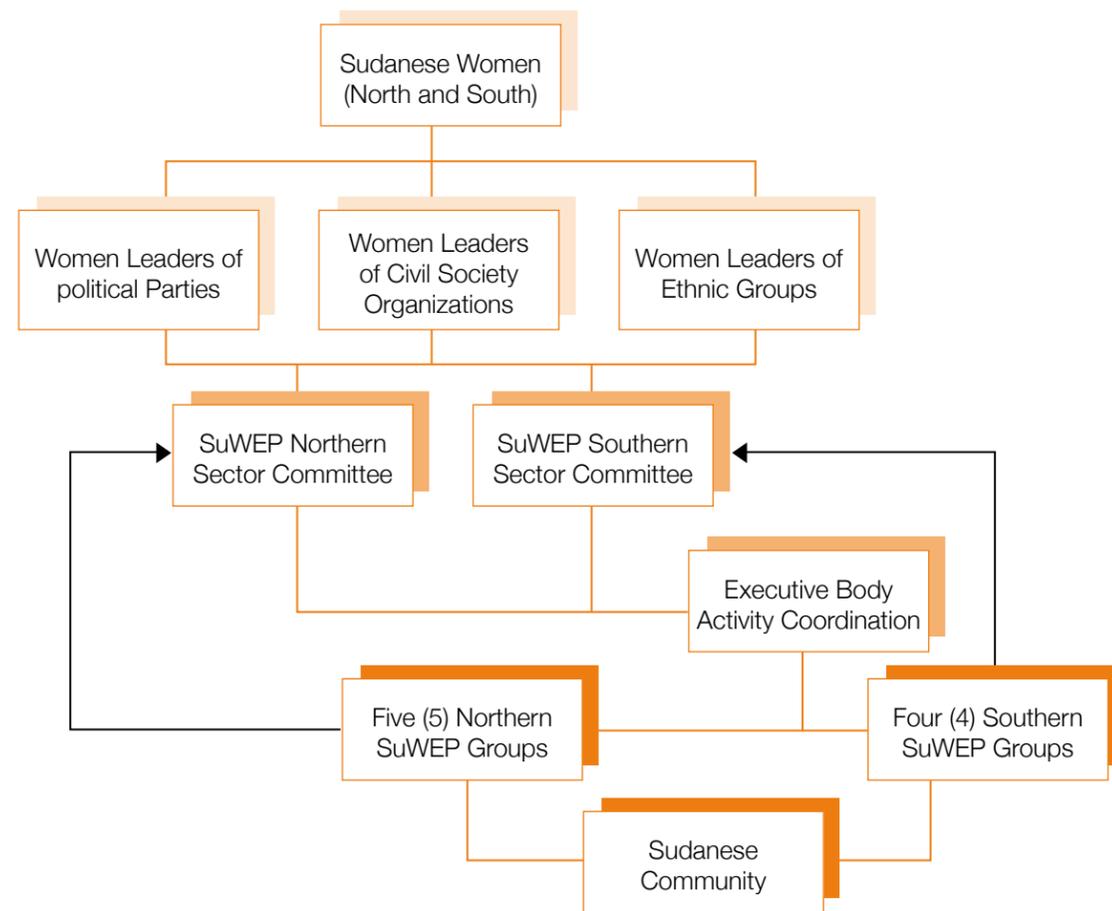
SuWEP has all the characteristics of a movement: it comprises an organized constituency of women coming together to achieve the very gendered political goal of a democratic Sudan that enjoys sustainable peace and development, based on principles of gender equality and justice. The women believe in one vision and mission in spite of the fact of their different geographical locations, political affiliations, and religious beliefs. SuWEP has its roots within the history of the Sudanese women's movement from the late 1940s, which was led by women who advocated for women's issues that paved the way for women's formal involvement in

political and social change. Due to women's suffering from the war and its consequences, SuWEP provided women leaders from the communities a good cause – viz., conflict resolution and sustainable peace building – around which they could rally. SuWEP's constituency base cuts across different strata of women from different paths of life, and is producing women leaders from political parties, civil society organizations, and ethnic groups.

SuWEP has a formal membership that consists of nine women's groups; (five in the northern sector and four in the southern sector, mentioned above); membership of each group varies in terms of nature and number. SuWEP's community base in both north and south consists of 85 member organizations (NGOs, CBOs, and GNGOs) and each member organization has its own community base of women members. The political groups consist of women leaders from nine different political parties. The ethnic groups consist of Nuba and

southern tribes living in the north. Through all these entities, the number of women that are directly involved and active within SuWEP exceeds 1000, not including beneficiaries.

SuWEP's north and south committees are not only its key strategy and policy making bodies, but also the highest governance body of SuWEP. Both committees meet annually at their sector level, and jointly every three years at the national level. All SuWEP's formal member groups are governed by democratically elected committees - however the groups differ with regard to the duration of office, which may vary from one to four years. Each group nominates their representatives to the SuWEP Committee, (SuWEP North or SuWEP South), each of which have ten nominated members; the nomination process to both committees takes place every three years at the joint SuWEP meeting. The diagram below shows the leadership structure and levels of governance of SuWEP:



The first joint meeting between representatives of all nine Working Committees took place in Karen, Kenya, in January 2000. It was also the first time that the Government of Sudan's official representatives participated in the deliberations. The most recent joint meeting of SuWEP was held in Khartoum in February 2010.

Goals and strategies

SuWEP started with a common aim to stop the war, and the initial strategy was to defuse the hostility between the northern and southern communities by promoting negotiations as the only viable tool to conflict resolution. Towards this, SuWEP lobbied the political parties in the north and south to talk and listen to each other, and pressed for the inclusion of the women agenda in all of the negotiations that took place prior to the signing of the CPA including at the Machakos, Naivasha, and Abuja talks. In the post-peace interim period, SuWEP's focus shifted towards the proper and just implementation of the CPA, by empowering women to participate in all peace building and development processes to ensure the recognition and realization of women's rights. And today, SuWEP's goal is to raise community awareness and build the capacity of a second generation of younger SuWEP women to safeguard the achievements made thus far, promote a culture of peace, and move forward the women agenda.

Over the years the movement has developed a support base through building up alliances and solidarity with many institutions, organizations, and individuals including feminist writers, journalists, and artists - locally, regionally, and internationally. These relationships are maintained and managed through their active participation in meetings, forums, conferences, and communication through websites and internet forums.

SuWEP's strategies are built on women's own strategies and capacities, and involve their women members at every stage of the process. Some key strategies are:

- Building links and solidarity among all Sudanese women and to act as a common front for women's intervention in meaningful peace and sustainable development.

- Building alliances with and lobbying for support for Sudanese women and men in achieving just and lasting peace in New Sudan.
- Serving as a forum for sharing information between various groups involved in the reconstruction process and women of the Sudanese Diaspora, as well as the CPA implementation phase.
- Lobbying for the international community's attention and support to the community at regional and international forums, including negotiation meetings and conferences.
- Capacity building of Sudanese women in various sectors in order to empower them socially, economically and politically.
- Advocating for, facilitating and/or implementing programs in the following critical areas of concern: research, analysis and documentation, equal representation of women in health, education, economic and political spheres, and in the division of labor, communications and development.
- Liaising with local and international women's groups that are concerned with the advancement of women.

SuWEP has used the following tools, elements and approaches in its movement building work:

1. **Hearings to promote inclusion of women from all layers of society:** The movement offers opportunities for ordinary women from all walks of life to voice their concerns and ideas on war and peace in Sudan through public hearings. Hearings are meetings where women are invited to discuss the impact of the war on their lives, and at the same time offer an opportunity to inform women about what is going on in the peace process and at the policy level. This knowledge enables women to make important contributions to the peace process by understanding it more clearly. The hearings were organized by moderators who worked in close co-operation with their Working Committee; together they developed a working plan. The moderators then visited women's groups in different areas of the country, the groups are those somehow related to the working Committee. Even though the number of women's groups actually approached by SuWEP's moderators

and Working Committees is quite low when compared to the time and resources invested, the hearings played a key role in sharing examples of women's solutions to local problems. They also revealed that many women, when given this space to voice their views, were very outspoken about the war.

2. **Training in conflict resolution and mediation, and other areas:** this was one of the first priorities in the SuWEP process, and consisted of inputs on mediation, lobbying and preventive diplomacy, as well as a series of meetings with individuals, organizations, and parliamentarians on peace building. One of the SuWEP members recalled how a training offered in South Africa was a turning point for her: *"I remember learning how to deal with conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy. But I also learned how to deal with the anger that I had carried from the conflict and that was inside me. I needed to first know myself and understand my own experience from the conflict."* Working Committees also met with experienced political leaders. This was necessary because the majority of women were not well informed about the political processes that had taken place in their country since independence. Women were **also provided inputs on** information and communication technologies like the Internet. A number of women, especially in the Northern Sector, were also supported to learn the English language.
3. **Awareness raising and information sharing:** this is one of the main objectives of SuWEP, and Information Centers have been established in all its regions, The Centers coordinate information sharing among its members, build the capacity of member organizations and other peace actors, carry out advocacy work on peace, gender equity and women's empowerment, and to build alliances between women's organizations. SuWEP members have produced and circulated a number of their publications through the Centers as well, including newsletters, different forms of educational materials, and disseminating information to the mass media.
4. **Preparation of position papers:** SuWEP women, through the course of their movement,

have prepared many position papers and stand-point documents, such as the Hague appeal 1999, the minimum agenda for peace (Maastricht Declaration 2000), and plans of action in solidarity with different women regional and international groups. After The Hague Appeal for Peace, different groups of women met in Khartoum and Nairobi to discuss further an agenda for peace. This culminated in the Sudanese Women's Minimum Agenda for Peace developed at a workshop in Karen, Kenya, in January 2000, where women listed ten conditions that had to be fulfilled to facilitate their participation in the peace process.

5. **Advocacy and publicity strategies:** these were focused on:
 - **Awareness of SuWEP, both amongst** the Sudanese public and in the international community.
 - Since March 1999, a quarterly newsletter on the Initiative is being published. It contains updates on activities taking place, and contains increasing contributions by Sudanese women and men. At the moment SuWEP prints 1000 copies of each issue, some of which are sent around the world to organizations and individuals with an interest in Sudan and to the diplomatic community in Khartoum and Nairobi. Most of the newsletters are handed to the Working Committees, who distribute them amongst their constituency.
 - A website² that contains information on SuWEP and that offers an interactive discussion board for people to post comments. All the key documents produced on the history of Sudanese women in various peace initiatives are posted on the website, in Arabic as well as English. The newsletter is included as well.
 - Lately, the SuWEP movement has started to receive a lot more attention from the media. In interviews with the press, Sudanese women have shown great clarity about the meaning of their work for peace, and their capability to influence the process positively. They were also very astute in not displaying their internal disagreements in front of the media.

2. <http://www.suwepmovement.org>

Challenges

Women's participation in the SuWEP movement has been affected by a number of obstacles. Key among them was – and remains – grassroots women's acute poverty and struggle for survival – the movement was not in a position to subsidize poor women's participation by covering the income lost through participation in movement activities. The size of the country and the many contradictions between women from the urban and rural areas posed another challenge. Efforts to thwart women's involvement in peace processes by various vested interests has continued in different forms at different stages. The Machakos (2002) and Naivasha (2005) peace talks are a good example of this: In Machakos, despite the women's efforts to send ten people (two from each SuWEP group), to represent them in the talks, and having come up with their own position papers, they were denied participation in the negotiations. The men were adamant that this was a men's affair. In Naivasha, although the women's position papers were accepted, their concerns were not included among the recommendations. As a result of these barriers, the women were often forced to take their views to the negotiation table via the men. Fortunately, this has worked well for them.

Achievements

Transforming people from a culture of war and violence to the level where they could discuss peace, social justice and development is SuWEP's greatest achievement. SuWEP women overlooked their cultural, religious, racial and political differences and came together in search of peace. They sacrificed their time, energy and money to attain this one goal. This commitment came through SuWEP's awareness building and training efforts.

The fruits of women's efforts to promote a peace culture are visible in the establishment of Peace Centers³ in Nairobi, Southern Kordufan and Blue Nile. It was also evident in the increased desire by women to participate in peace negotiations nationally, regionally and internationally; in the focused training of community leaders on peace issues, in concerted efforts towards building a peace culture among children and youth, and in the way women demanded that warring parties allow the safe passage of food aid to women in the war zones. SuWEP's successes over the years have also resulted in women's increased participation in the democratic transformation process, which has in turn resulted in the attainment of 25% quota for women in the 2010 elections.

But the movement's transformative role is best summed up in the words of SuWEP's members themselves. Sandra Bona, one of the founders of SuWEP, and secretary of women in the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement for Democratic Change says: *"SuWEP is an umbrella for many groups working together to achieve peace, and we have adopted this position due to our long suffering that lasted two decades, aiming to come out of the predicament of war, and then, we as women saw that it was necessary to play our role and take part in achieving peace by ending a war that was caused by men. All of our activities were aimed at women. Women, either as mothers, sisters or others are peaceful by nature and they are most capable of achieving peace. We have been able to achieve peace between the two sides and the overriding proof is that we are now working from Khartoum after we have been working for a long time in Nairobi"*. Abouk Paitti, one of the founders of SuWEP in Southern Sudan, and Deputy Chairperson of the Women and Social Welfare Committee from 1994 to 2005 says: *"Most of the women who took up positions in South Sudan had been trained by SuWEP"*.

3. These centers were established to help SuWEP with the coordination of information sharing among its members, building the capacities of member organizations and other peace actors, carrying out advocacy work on peace issues, gender equity and women's empowerment and to building alliances /liaison between women's organizations.

Conclusion and future directions

Looking ahead, several challenges confront the movement. As the socio-political context of Sudan will change continuously, it is important for Sudanese women continue to develop strategies that respond effectively to the opportunities, dynamics and threats of the country's turbulent environment. This means that SuWEP's approach will have to be based on flexible planning and optimizing the participation of women's organizations, taking into account their changing needs and priorities.

SuWEP is currently running activities organized and implemented by the partner organizations themselves, it will have to continue to assist partners to assess their internal organizational capacities, identify weaknesses, and provide support in overcoming these. Finally, SuWEP must continue to strengthen cooperation between its partner organizations, and facilitate and help manage partners' national and international relationships in peace building.

The SuWEP movement emerged and matured within the context of the prolonged civil war in Sudan. This war lasted for two decades and wrought unimaginable human suffering on succeeding generations of southern Sudan people, especially women. It has been estimated that women widowed by the war head 60% of Sudanese households. Women can only play effective roles in peace processes if they are sensitized through awareness creation about the benefits of peace for all concerned and the importance of spreading a culture of peace in

the community. Raising women's awareness of the need for gender equality is an integral part of these processes. Although women were earlier almost entirely absent, the attitude in Sudan towards their involvement in peace processes has become more positive in recent years. Most of all, SuWEP has enabled Sudanese women to demonstrate their capacity to inform and transform the peace process in fundamental ways.

Editor's Post Script

After more than two decades of conflict, a referendum was held in Southern Sudan in January 2011, to determine whether the people of the South wished to remain part of larger Sudan, or become an independent nation. The referendum was part of the 2005 Naivasha Agreement referenced in this case study, between the Khartoum central government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). The Referendum Commission published the results of the vote on 7 February 2011: 99% of Southern Sudanese had voted in favor of secession, and the independent state is slated to become a reality in July 2011. This has profound implications for peace in the region, as it is still unclear whether the North will allow the resource-rich South to secede peacefully. The challenges facing the SuWEP movement will therefore multiply, and the results of their efforts to build a culture of peace will be tested in new ways, as they struggle to ensure a peaceful transition into the new configuration of North and South Sudan.

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