IMAGINED FUTURES MAPPING

ANBARIYA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Future imaginations are a guiding beacon for individuals and nations alike. Articulating a vivid image of abstract hopes and dreams can be used to reverse engineer tangible steps for development. In a conflict-affected context like Sudan, which has wrestled numerous political tectonic shifts and historical social grievances, formulating a clear picture of a shared future is a key step in efforts hoping to build back better.

Within this vein, Andariya conducted the study, **"Imagined Futures Mapping"**, through support from PACT to **understand the future imaginations and hopes of Sudanese communities in a future post-war setting.** The findings reveal a healthy level of introspection among everyday Sudanese into the root causes of the ongoing conflict and offer visions which embody the **demands of the December 2018 revolution – "freedom, peace and justice".**

The study employed a mixed method approach; collecting **174 survey responses** from Sudanese displaced into neighbouring countries and within the nation. It engaged 9 sector insiders to understand the sector-specific challenges, opportunities and recommendations which could contribute to an improved and developed Sudan. **The study examined six main sectors: governance, private sector, health, education, social relations, civil society and everyday cultures, routines and traditions.** Thematic analysis and word frequency analysis was used to deduce concrete findings from the collected data.

As **76% of respondents were displaced by the ongoing conflict, many prioritized "Safety and security" at 64% for Sudan's future development: 85% of respondents expressed a clear or potential role to play in achieving Sudan's future development** through three main avenues: (1) political mobilization such as forming political parties or political pressure groups to resolve the crisis; (2) conducting awareness raising and advocacy efforts to spread counter-war speech which embodies participation in civil society; and a slight minority, (3) joining the Sudanese army.

Across sectors, respondents valued citizen-centred models which transcended divides along ethnic, regional and cultural lines. A unanimous agreement acknowledged the socially unjust reality of Sudan before the war as a driver of the ongoing conflict and demonstrated a clear desire to eradicate its impact in the future through free, accessible and citizen-centred governments, education and health systems as well as cultures.

Considering the traumatic experience of displacement, it is understandable that elements of communal living and customs common in Sudanese culture manifested in social gatherings such as weddings and funerals are highly cherished among respondents. **A clear yearning for community, solidarity and reciprocity is observed.** Within this demand, respondents wished to establish a culture of acceptance, belonging to the homeland and respect for each other.

Though the demands are clear and commendable, a closer inspection of which stakeholders ought to lead this change highlights conceptual disconnects between respondents' hopes and the catalyst actors who ought to achieve them. This was very evident in imaginations of the role of civil society and politicians in government structures. Despite this, it is clear that **individuals and stakeholders alike must find opportunities to collaborate, communicate and coordinate in order to build a shared vision of future Sudan** that preserves the interests of the nation and its citizens above all.

BACKGROUND

Sudan has been riddled with insecurity and instability for decades, but more intensely since the first protest launched the December 2018 revolution. A time marked by a significant deterioration in the economy and rising cost of living, Sudanese people found themselves thrust the centre of seeking to peace dividends at the nexus of democracy and development. After ruthless blood-shed and overwhelming pressure from public protests, Sudanese women and youth ushered a transitional period that ought to have realized the three demands of the revolution:

"Freedom, Peace and Justice"

What ensued was a transitional period filled with governance inconsistencies aiming to please armed groups, civic actors and revolutionaries with contrasting perspectives and interests. Policies, agreements and laws were signed but tangible results for people directly affected by decades-old conflict remained elusive.

A coup in October 2021 ripped the mask off of Sudan's volatile transition; international support and funding garnered through concentrated diplomatic efforts of the former cabinet came to a halt; severe insecurity and repressive state tactics returned as the country's economy continued to plummet. Outside of Khartoum, historical grievances and deeply rooted divides boiled to the surface as different international actors arranged consultations to quickly foster an agreement that would treat a then effectively state-less Sudan. Less than two years later, in the early hours of Saturday, April 15th 2023, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began open warfare in the capital Khartoum negating every political achievement and process thus far. The flames of violence spread to historically conflict-affected areas in the Darfur region, costing thousands of innocent lives.

As of April 2024, an estimated

8.7 million people
have been displaced within and outside Sudan.

The roots of the Sudan conflict date back to the country's colonial history, where political mobilization along ethnic and regional divides sowed the seeds for recurring violent conflict, issues of inequality, exclusion from state mechanisms and development opportunities, which have marginalized a large proportion of vulnerable groups across Sudan, and especially the West and South of the country. Moreover, the extractive colonial government frameworks remained intact decades after independence.

The ongoing crisis has raised several concerns for regional and international actors alike. Fears of regionalized conflict stoked in the background as Sudan's neighbouring countries grapple with armed conflict, economic crisis and political tensions in Ethiopia, Egypt and South Sudan

respectively.

The conflict has caused one of the largest displacement crises witnessed in the continent; applying economic pressure on neighbouring countries hosting thousands of Sudanese.

Multiple international attempts have sought a political resolution to the conflict but have been met with little success. The first such attempt by Saudi Arabia and the United States through the Jeddah negotiations sought to bridge between the warring generals; an attempt which ultimately failed. Other international efforts to end the war have been led by the African Union (AU), neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Kenya and Ethiopia and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). These efforts have largely focused on getting both warring parties to a negotiation table without prioritizing civilian voices although they stress the potential of civilian democratic rule as an root solution for Sudan's continued instability.

In the current context, future imaginations are a golden opportunity to reinvent the wheel if focus is given to root-cause solutions, seeds of positive peace, as opposed to short-sighted goals of ending the war. For such a formative vision, the opinions, ambitions and hopes of everyday Sudanese civilians are crucial. The current crisis has largely shifted public perception and attitudes around peace and security; a current paradigm where peace agreements are no longer viewed as sufficient and discourse about the need for peace is a priority for Sudan as a whole and not only historically aggrieved regions. **Understanding the general population's expectations of Sudan's future in the aftermath of the current conflict is a means of plotting a roadmap towards recovery.**

However, the ongoing conflict has passed its one-year mark. International and regional efforts to foster a political resolution remain evasive. On the ground, the RSF continue to advance to non-battle sites – spreading the conflict effectively throughout the nation. For Sudanese, this has resulted in a continued cycle of displacement, instability and anxiety regarding the future. In this sense, many respondents based their future imaginations on the current reality under the premise "the future relies on the present and the

past". The lines between future imaginations and scenario anticipation are often blurred, limiting an individual's capacity to dream big.

Moreover, the impact of the current context is a large constraint on the depth of individuals' current imagination of future Sudan. Battling displacement, unemployment and repressive state treatment under emergency laws, citizens have a very limited toolbox of intervening and impacting Sudan's future. Imaginations at the height of the revolution or transitional period were vivid, when everyday citizens could participate and impact those in power and disrupt power structures through protests, civil disobedience and other forms of non-violent resistance; today, they are left without any of these tools. As such, a reflection of Sudan's current power and ability to impact Sudan's future is largely skewed resulting in less audacious imaginations.

It must also be noted that the survey was disseminated between January and February 2024. This timeframe represented the second phase of the ongoing conflict wherein the RSF entered Al Gazeera state and a civilian political coalition had signed a deal with the RSF to resolve the conflict – both shocking developments. It represented a time when online discourse around political figures, Sudan and the end of the conflict extremely polarized Sudanese audiences. This polarization was reflected in the findings of the study which paint a picture of citizens who share an understanding of Sudan's root-causes of conflict, an appreciation that they must be addressed for sustainable peace but a gap in the tools and techniques to achieve this.

The study sought to capture this diversity of opinions and imaginations to sow together a vision of a shared, improved and futuristic Sudan to contribute to countering polarization, community building and contributing towards ending the conflict.

Through funding from PACT, Andariya undertook the Imagined Futures Mapping study to understand and share the ambitions, hopes and visions of a future Sudan through the eyes of everyday civilians.

WAWA ABA
"seed of the wawa tree"

symbol of hardiness,
toughness and perseverance

METHODOLOGY

Building on prior research conducted on the attitudes and perceptions of women and youth related to peace in Sudan by Carter Center[1] and SIHA Network[2], the design of this study acknowledges the impacts of Sudan's political context and reality in the months leading up to the outbreak of the conflict. Specifically, issues of poor engagement of youth and women, preexisting social inequalities as well as stagnated consultations on transitional justice and unconscious promotion of negative peace during the post-coup era after October 2021. This study integrated elements from a human-rights based approach to understand the hopes and expectations of diverse Sudanese voices after the war, while shedding light on the public's understanding of positive and negative peace as a precursor of future peace-building efforts.

A human-rights based approach has a double objective of educating and empowering people about their rights while increasing the capacity and accountability of relevant stakeholders to uphold those rights. It employs 5 major principles:

1. participation
2. accountability
3. non-discrimination and equality
4. empowerment and
5. legality

These principles informed the tools developed under the methodology which focused primarily on the following themes of expectations:

- Government – relationship between civilians and government; processes of the state
- Private sector – relationship and access of various groups, particularly women and youth, to the private sector through entrepreneurship and fair employment
- Civil society – relationship between civilians and civic actors as well as the role of civic actors in a futuristic Sudan
- Education – access and quality of education services and institutions in the future
- Health – access and quality of health services and institutions in the future
- Social relations – realization and safeguarding of gender equality, social justice and cultural plurality in a future Sudan.

The study employed a mixed method approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative means to triangulate findings supplemented by primary and secondary sources. To reduce any potential risk of self-selection bias in both data collection approaches, participation was entirely voluntary and without any monetary compensation.

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

A short survey was disseminated online using voluntary response sampling targeting **323 respondents through various social media platforms including WhatsApp.** The ideal sample size was calculated using an online sample size calculator and assumed a confidence level of 95%, 5% margin of error and population

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[1] Carter Center, "Sudan's Youth and the Transition: Priorities, Perceptions and Attitudes", August 2021
[2] SIHA Network, "PEACE TALKS. Who listens?", January 2023

proportion of 30%. This population ratio was selected to mirror **the percentage of Sudanese with internet access as per the latest report from Datareportal[3].**

The survey garnered **174 responses. Within a 95% confidence level and 30% population proportion, this corresponds to a 6.81% margin of error.** This is within industry standards to credit findings of the study. The survey itself employed a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions. This was to ensure that participants were not spoon-fed answers or imaginations and given full freedom to dream vividly about Sudan's future. In addition, the survey included basic **demographic questions to understand if respondents were displaced by the war, their previous occupations and current locations.**

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

To supplement findings of the survey, a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted using purposive sampling to engage active actors and experts in the study themes using the principles of the human rights-based approach described above. While quantitative data illustrated **the demands and expectations of a future Sudan from a civilian's perspective,** the qualitative in-depth interviews sought to eke out potential recommendations, actionable steps and suggestions to realize this future.

The study engaged a total of 9 informants, **5 females and 4 males**, to provide additional insights relevant to their specific sector. To this end, only one informant from each sector was engaged. Thus, the solutions, actions and recommendations presented cannot be assumed as reflective of an entire sector. Instead these informants are referred to as "insiders" rather than "experts". Data analysis sought to find common imaginations between insiders and survey respondents; much overlap was observed to support findings and presented recommendations.

The following insiders were engaged:

- A former journalist, activist and mobilizer who works with grassroot civic groups in Sudan, female
- An established entrepreneur and business man who has worked in Sudan's private sector for 15 years, male
- A veteran feminist and director of a prominent women-focused non-profit organization, female
- A Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) advocate and activist, male
- A veteran journalist affiliated with the Sudanese Journalists Network (SJN), female
- An art practioner and manager who has been involved in the cultural scene for 17 years, male
- A medical doctor, PhD candidate and teaching assistant at a prominent Canadian university, female
- A veteran lecturer affiliated with the University of Khartoum, Higher Studies department, female
- A veteran lecturer and social anthropologist, affiliated with the Center for Peace and Development Studies of the University of Khartoum, male

LIMITATIONS

As elaborated previously, the context in which the survey was disseminated was highly volatile. This presented the following limitations to the findings of the study:

- **76% of respondents experienced displacement as a result of the ongoing conflict in Sudan;** as a result, majority of responses pertaining to imagination of the government and governance structures were comparatively short-sighted or undefined, referring to the dependence of future Sudan on how the current war ends.

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[3] Datareportal, Digital 2022: Sudan, February 2022, accessed 16/11/2023

- To ensure that respondents were not predisposed to any bias or particular imagination, the survey was majorly open-ended questions. This meant it required more time and effort to complete. This contributed to the survey only being completed by 174 out of 323 target responses. However, the margin of error remains within reasonable bounds, less than 10%, and findings have been validated by responses of sectoral insiders.
- Mass displacement and the rapidly changing political context meant that **respondents were experiencing extreme fatigue and over-stimulation over Sudan's ongoing conflict.** This resulted in some responses lacking depth or elaboration.

FINDINGS

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The survey sample represents **174 responses** who all consented to participate in the survey anonymously. The age groups of participants are predominantly young adults, at the peak of their economic productivity **age starting from 25 to 34 years** as seen in figure 1.

Majority of respondents were **male representing 63% of the sample in comparison to 36% female** respondents.

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Prefer not to say (1.1%)

Female (36%)

Male (63%)
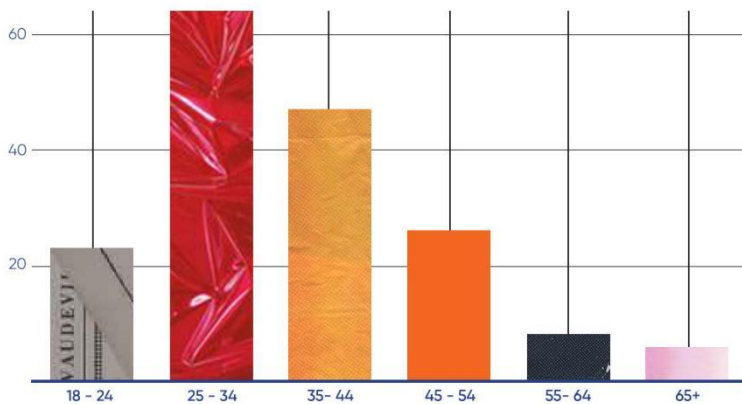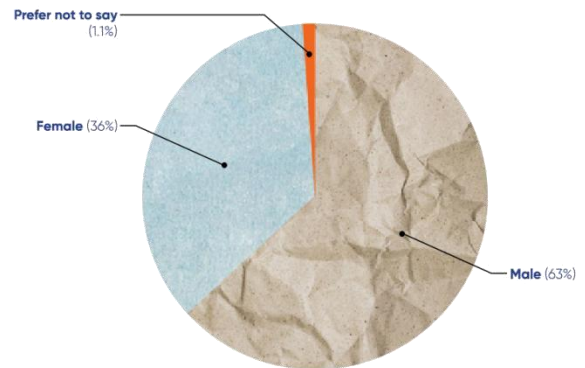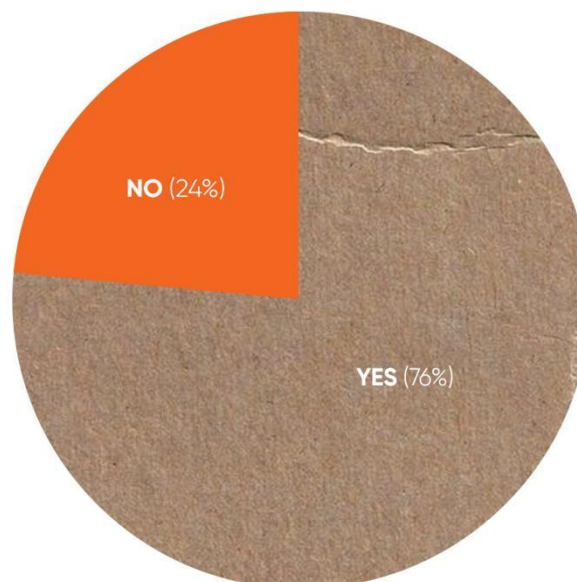
As mentioned previously, 76% of respondents reported being displaced by the ongoing conflict. The impact of this is demonstrated in the highest rated priority for Sudan's future development among respondents.
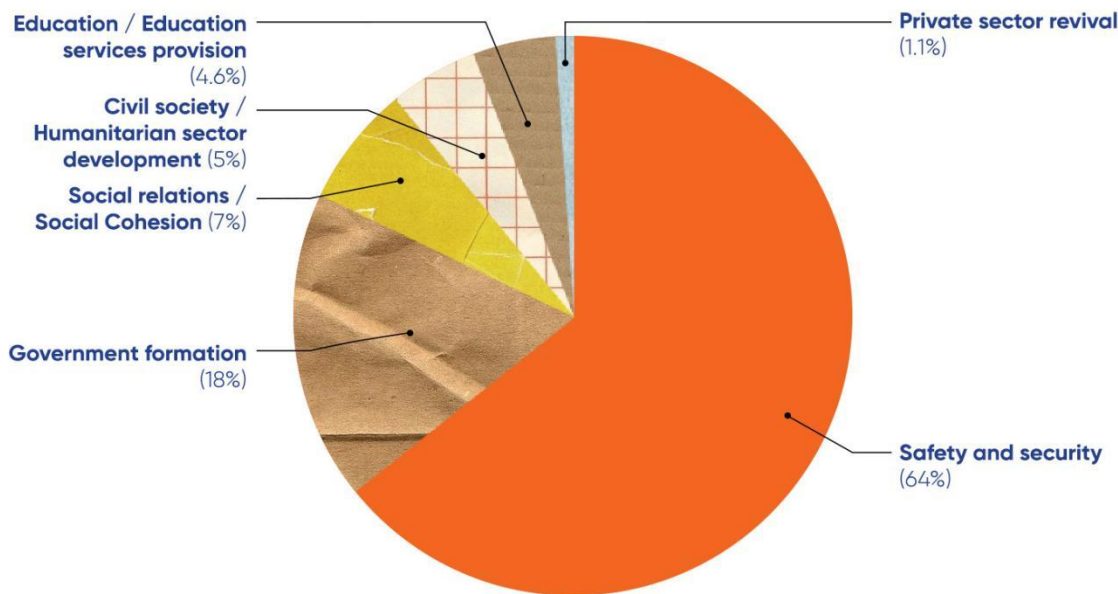
WERE YOU DISPLACED BY THE APRIL 15TH WAR?

NO (24%)

YES (76%)

PERSONAL PRIORITIES

Before exploring sector-based ambitions for Sudan's future, respondents were asked to select which sector they believed represented a top priority for Sudan's future development. Majority of respondents prioritized **"Safety and security"** followed by "Government formation" and **"Social relations/Social cohesion"**.

HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR SUDAN'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Education / Education services provision (4.6%)

Civil society / Humanitarian sector development (5%)

Social relations / Social Cohesion (7%)

Government formation (18%)

Private sector revival (1.1%)

Safety and security (64%)

As 76% of survey respondents experienced displacement because of the April 15th conflict, it is understandable that 64% of respondents considered "Safety and Security" as a priority for the future. Elaboration on this selection illustrate a unanimous understanding that nothing can be achieved in a state without safety and security. One recurring response was, *"Without security nothing can be done"*. Some respondents elaborated that the priority stems from the ongoing war and its subsequent mass displacement and suffering of Sudanese. Others elaborate at length that Sudan has previously survived repressive governments, poor infrastructure and service delivery but remained a hub for refugees in the region due to its safety and security – indicting the critical nature of safety and security. This voice presents a strong argument to supplement the foundational nature of safety and security. A reverse form of the statement was also consistently presented by respondents who selected "Safety and Security", noting that once safety and security are achieved, the remaining priorities can be attained. To this end, a strong correlation between "Safety and Security" and "Government formation" was naturally observed.

Even among respondents who selected the former, their responses would point to the formation of a government and state after the achievement of safety and security. One respondent shared,

> "If security and security are established, it means that the war stops and a government is formed, after which services come in the form of education, health, attention to social relations, and the development of the governmental and private sectors."

However, the debate becomes which ought to come first – the formation of a government or the provision of safety and security to citizens. Many respondents who selected other sectors as a personal priority

related the ongoing conflict to different root causes. Among the 18% of respondents who selected **"Government formation"**, popular sentiment was summarized as,

> **"The government brings safety, security, health development, education, etc"**

The assumption is that a successful government would by default provide safety and security and that forming a government is the tangible first step in obtaining safety and security.

Seven percent (7%) of respondents who selected "Social Relations" demonstrated an acknowledgment of Sudan's root-causes of conflict such as poor management of cultural diversity and differences, noting that if such grievances are addressed, Sudan's future would be secured. One respondent shared,

> **"We have always ignored conversations about how divided we are…No peace or prosperity will ever come to Sudan if we as a people are divided across tribal, ethnic lines."**
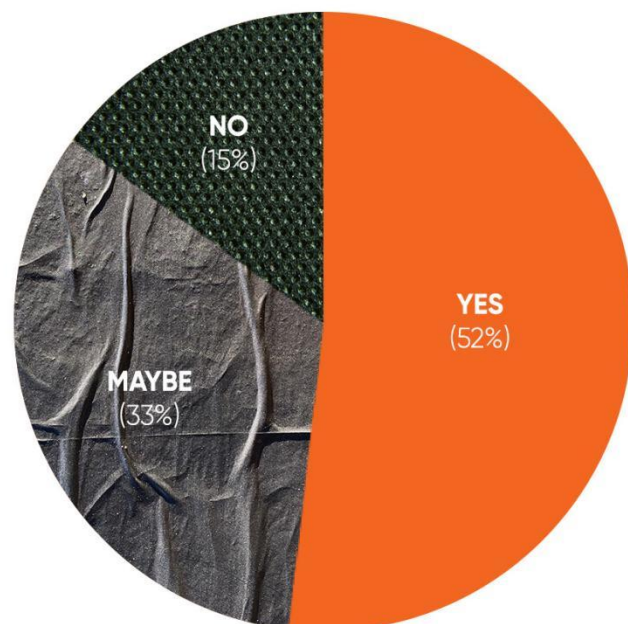
Five percent (5%) of respondents who selected "Civil society/humanitarian sector" often described the need for development following the mass destruction caused by the war, but also the role of civil society as a tool of development; be it through promotion of social cohesion, human rights or capacity building.

Nearly five percent (4.6%) of other respondents who selected "Education" often expressed that Sudan's vicious cycles of violence stem from ignorance which perceives wars and arms as the only means to solve disputes. By prioritizing education, a pacifist culture would reign over Sudan as a key priority for its future.

PERSONAL ROLE IN THE FUTURE

Respondents were then asked if they believed they had a role to play within their selected priority sector, which was "Safety and security". Fifty two percent (52%) of respondents answered "Yes" and 33% answered "Maybe".

Before analysing how individuals believe they could contribute to Sudan's future, it is important to note that by June 2023, two months into the conflict, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) launched calls urging civilians to pick up arms and join the battle[4]. The survey was disseminated between January and February 2024 – after the RSF entered Al Gazeera state. Seventy six percent (76%) of respondents were displaced by the ongoing conflict and 64% of them

DO YOU BELIEVE YOU HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN SUDAN'S FUTURE?

NO (15%)

MAYBE (33%)

YES (52%)

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[4] Aljazeera News, Sudan's civilians pick up arms, as RSF gains and army stumbles, December 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/24/sudans-civilians-pick-up-arms-as-rsf-gains-and-army-stumbles accessed 03/05/2024
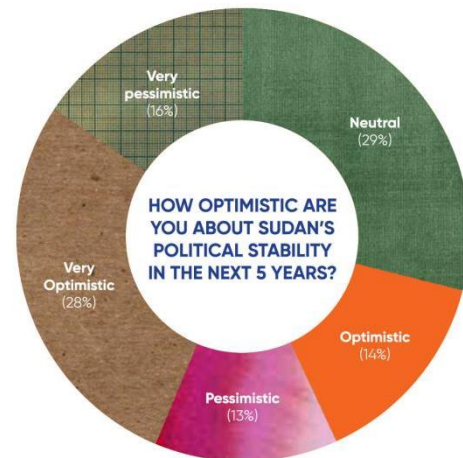
believed "Safety and security" were the top priority for Sudan's future.

When exploring the responses, three main avenues of participating in Sudan's future emerge. (1) by participating politically in efforts to stop the war; (2) by raising awareness, spreading anti-war speech on media, documenting violations and advocating to stop the war in Sudan; (3) by joining SAF.

These following sections demonstrate the views and perceptions of survey participants based on intense thematic analysis using a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative data. The decision to harvest people's expectations about Sudan by sectors comes from a developmental point of view that aims to amplify the participants' expectations of a post-war Sudan while preserving attention to nuances and futuristic hopes in different social, economic or political arenas.
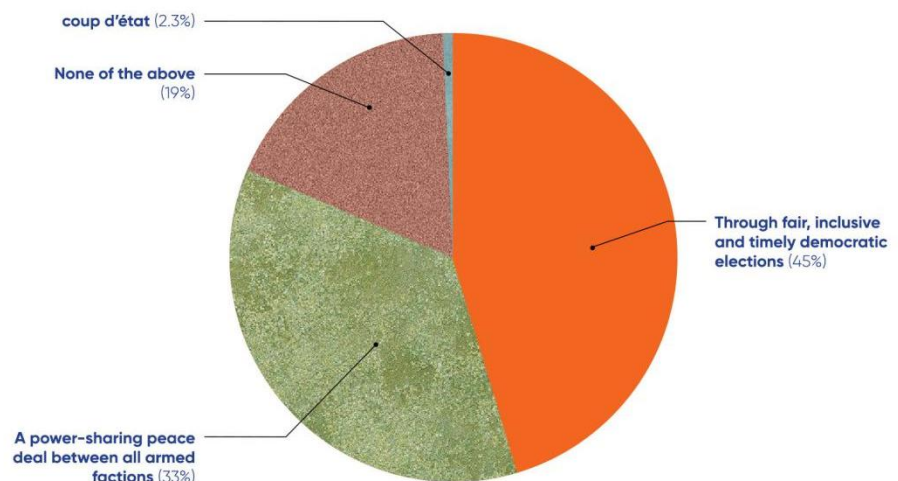
GOVERNMENT

When asked about how optimistic respondents were about the future of Sudan's governance, 28% reported being "very optimistic" and 14% as "optimistic" – resulting in a total of 42% positive responses and 29% neutral responses.

HOW OPTIMISTIC ARE YOU ABOUT SUDAN'S POLITICAL STABILITY IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

Very pessimistic (16%)
Neutral (29%)
Very Optimistic (28%)
Optimistic (14%)
Pessimistic (13%)

Negative or Positive Peace?

When asked how Sudan's future government would have reached power, a proxy indicator of positive or negative peace, 45% of respondents hoped this would be "through fair, inclusive and timely elections" while 33% anticipated "a power-sharing peace deal between all armed factions" and 19% anticipated "None of the above". The sombre and contrasting responses are reflective of a public sentiment that traditional routes to power such as peace deals, coup d'etats and elections have been observed in the Sudanese context. Respondents who indicated "none of the above" shared additional insight into their selection.

HOW WOULD SUDAN'S FUTURE GOVERNMENT HAVE REACHED POWER?

coup d'état (2.3%)
None of the above (19%)
Through fair, inclusive and timely democratic elections (45%)
A power-sharing peace deal between all armed factions (33%)

An analysis of these responses reflects a portion of respondents who are engrossed in the current reality of the war unable to fathom a future imagination; with a bulk indicating the future of Sudan's governance will be directly determined by *how* the current conflict ends. One respondent explained,

"All of the mentioned scenarios will be possible if we know what this war is and the path it will take."

This is worsened by the continued escalation of the conflict and subsequent polarization of Sudanese communities in its aftermath. Thus, there is also a sense of fatigue and discouragement when imagining future governments for Sudan as one respondent shared:

> "All the mentioned options [elections, military coup and peace deals] have been tried and all failed."

When cross-referenced with respondents' top priority for Sudan's future development, "Safety and security", it is valid to question if populations would fall into previous traps of negative peace which offer a semblance of stability without addressing root-causes of the conflict. Retrospectively, Sudan's capital, Khartoum, remained a bustling business hub and haven running the entire country as underdevelopment and conflict ravaged other states in the west, south, and east.

Detailed below are the key areas of respondents' hopes towards Sudan's future government to shed light on this.

Interests of Sudan and Citizens First

When asked about their hopes for Sudan's future government, majority of respondents imagined a civilian, democratically elected government which prioritized the *interests of Sudan and its citizens* beyond all else. As one respondent put it,

> "[A] Government always working for the civilians not the other way around."

This sentiment is echoed by an insider anthropologist affiliated with the University of Khartoum, who pointed to a need for a radically decolonized government for Sudan's future. Decolonial power structures ensure that civilians and civilian interests are consistently prioritized by the state and its actors. Most importantly, responses collectively referred to "citizens" as a blanket descriptor of all Sudanese across cultural, ethnic and other dividing lines. This was largely missing in Sudan, where governance structures received no revision after independence. Instead, colonial policies of divide and conquer ran along, while ethnic and cultural divides persisted.

This demand came in tandem with calls for the complete removal of the military from political affairs – a phenomenon that Sudan has grappled with for many years of consecutive military coups leading up to the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Despite the clear need of political parties to facilitate such imagined elections, respondents across the board were wary of political figures often referred to as "elites" and "unpatriotic". One respondent shared hope for,

> "Politicians [who] agree to put the public interest and the interest of Sudan before their private or parties' interest"

In this aspect, respondents suggested the complete dissolution of parties or their clustering into two or three main forces that could then participate in elections. The highly critical view of Sudanese political figures is contingent with the short-lived experience of the transitional period in 2019-2021 wherein politicians affiliated with the Freedom Forces of Change (FFC) coalition, which signed the milestone power-sharing deal of the December 2018 revolution, were seen as extremely comprising with military counterparts to preserve positions in government. One respondent suggested,

> "dissolving current parties and criminalizing membership in them due to their unpatriotic roles since independence."

However, these same respondents demonstrated an acknowledgement of the role of political activity and governments in contributing towards their top priorities of "Safety and security" and "Government formation". It is thus clear that political actors and frameworks are acknowledged as necessary though the current roster of political actors are largely rejected by respondents.

Youth and Diversity in Governance

In response to cries refuting existing political parties, a bulk of participants called for the inclusion of youth, women and diverse voices in the political process as a means of injecting new, unbiased and patriotic individuals into Sudan's governance systems through political parties and public agencies. One respondent hoped for

"new political structures emerging, may be a youth- centred political party."

Another example of this was offered by a respondent who suggested a hard age threshold to cement youth participation through,

"the prohibition of anyone over 45 from running for a ministerial position."

Youth and women played a large role in the December 2018 revolution that ultimately led to the transitional period - Sudan's closest attempt to securing civilian democratic rule. However, these same actors were given little-to-no roles in the effective transitional government, which led to cries for the meaningful participation of youth and women in political activity. An insider civil society actor who works on youth issues shared,

"Youth are used as a mechanism to win but not actually partnered with."

When asked about hopes for Sudan's future related to youth, the insider shared,

> "[I hope] For people to understand the identity of youth; to establish youth issues and [for] Sudan as a state to be governed in a youth-centred way and that they [young people] enter political and social systems."

Beyond participation in governance structures, many respondents hoped for a constitution and government system that reflect the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of Sudan

> "considered a mirror for all Sudanese"

and boost social cohesion amongst populations. One respondent shared hopes of Sudan's government,

> "To be unified and not divided."

Alternative voices, uncertain of the possibility of managing the diversity of Sudan's multiple populations called for referendums, self-determination or the enactment of a federalist government system. While these voices are few, they reflect a portion of society that is conscious of the root causes of Sudan's continued political instability and insecurity in social biases but uncertain of how best to manage this diversity in a post-war setting. As one respondent shared,

> "power and wealth must be distributed fairly and objectively so that we don't return to the same previous episode [the ongoing war]"

Unity and Security

Contingent with calls for a governance system which prioritizes national and citizens' interests, many respondents demonstrated a high level of cognizance towards historical grievances which led to the ongoing crisis, including the existence of multiple armed groups. In this vein, majority of respondents called for the unification of armed groups and the formation of a single national army – a demand which aligns with **63.8%** of respondents prioritizing **"Safety and Security"** as the highest priority for Sudan's future development. One respondent summarized,

> "[Future] Sudan has no warring movements and a single army."

PRIVATE SECTOR

Before the conflict erupted on 15th April 2023, the private sector in Sudan wrestled against unique challenges such as lack of bank finance, governance and rising cost of living. The most prominent challenge was the competition of fully independent businesses with government-affiliated private companies. Such companies would be owned by the military or armed groups and enjoy legal privileges which facilitated their trade. This advantage was worsened after the October 2021 coup. An established business insider shared,

> "But after the coup, the RSF and SAF companies, they had a pronounced advantage. The funding available in banks became pressured to the security companies; they took all the loans from the banks and the private sector could no longer access loans."

In contrast, independent businesses struggled with bureaucratic policies which refused to recognize businesses of different capital sizes. These narrowed entry points to the private sector propagated a

culture of corruption amongst private businesses. From licence registration to the collection of tax, government laws and structures were grossly inconducive to the private sector. The business insider shared,

> "There is corruption in the private sector – why? Because the government creates complex procedures where you must pay bribes to get yourself out."

Despite these challenges, the sector made positive strides during the short-lived transitional period of 2019 -2021, demonstrating the potential for positive impact when the private sector and government cooperate. The business insider shared,

> "During the transitional period, the companies registered in the state because there was trust and they paid their taxes with extra to support the government but after the coup, they returned to the shadows."

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN THE FUTURE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN SUDAN?

Not confident (8%)
Not confident at all (15%)
Very confident (37%)
Neutral (19%)
Confident (21%)

When asked about how confident respondents were in Sudan's future job opportunities and economic growth, 37% replied "very confident" and 21% shared they felt "confident" – giving a total of 58% hopeful responses. In contrast, respondents anticipated a continuation of challenges from before the April 2023 war impacting the sector's future.

WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGES WILL FACE THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN FUTURE SUDAN?

Other (10%)
Shortage of qualified job seekers due to unstable economic and security issues (18%)
Difficulty in establishing business because of bureaucratic policies (22%)
High capital requirements and weak market (16%)
Low invstment support from banks and weak market (17%)
Difficulty in establishing supply chains and operational mechanism (16%)

To this end, 22% of respondents anticipated "difficulty in establishing businesses due to bureaucratic policies" closely followed by 18% who anticipated "shortage of qualified job seekers due to unstable economic and security issues" and thirdly, "low investment support from banks and weak market" at 17%. Other areas of futuristic challenges centred around continued political instability and insecurity which has led to investors losing the will to invest in Sudan, and widespread corruption. While some respondents were unable to detail exactly how they envisioned the private sector contributing to Sudan's sustainable development, a nearly unanimous view was that the sector had the potential to play a positive role nonetheless.

Detailed below are key interventions which respondents believed the private sector could employ to contribute to Sudan's sustainable development.
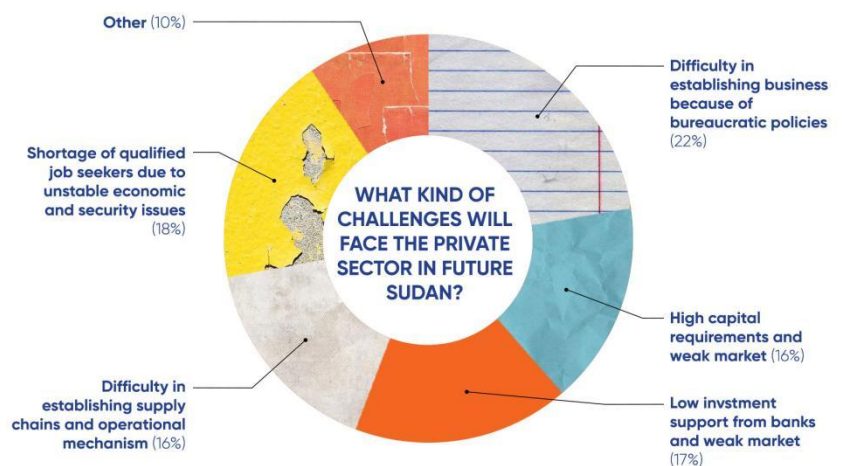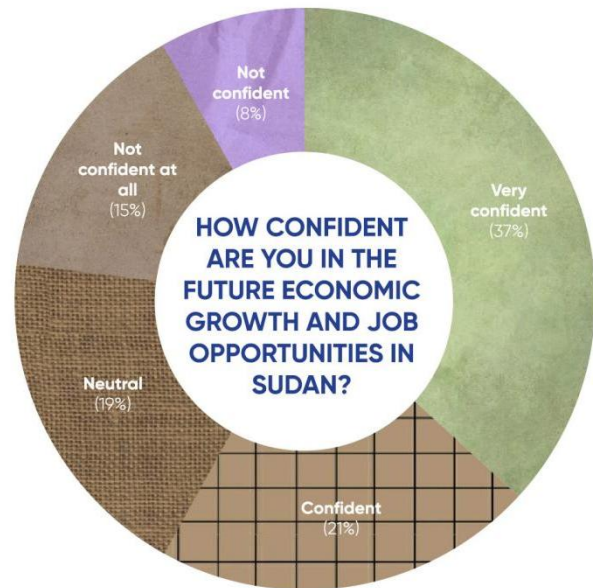
Corporate Social responsibility

Many respondents pointed to the active and systematic use of corporate social responsibility to develop local communities, particularly in rural periphery areas which are sources of raw materials and production sites for many companies. Similarly, some respondents hoped the private sector would invest in large-scale development projects in periphery areas to jump start the areas' growth. A significant portion of respondents aligned with these hopes by suggesting increased investment in smart technologies and agriculture – the latter is a main source of livelihood in periphery areas.

Contributing to a national vision

Calls of corporate social responsibility where in tandem with demands for increased partnership and strategic coordination between the private and public sector to adhere to a national development plan. Through such coordination, respondents believed the private sector possessed the capacity to actively boost the country's economy, national treasury and per capita income given its flexibility to impact more than one sector such as education, health or infrastructure. One respondent summarized,

> **"[Private sector can contribute to Sudan's sustainable development] Through social responsibility, it must be managed by the government in accordance with its development vision and interim priorities."**

Another respondent suggested introducing a *"BOOT (Build- own- operate-transfer) contracting system"* which would allow the private sector to finance, design, construct, own and operate a large-scale project such as a local sewage system for a specified number of years instead of the national government.

A cautious balance between relying on the private sector to spearhead development and controlling its operations through government policies was observed. The private sector in Sudan is infamous for crisis traders, who in the ongoing conflict, have been both a lifeline and source of suffering for many Sudanese. With 76% of respondents experiencing displacement as a result of the war and ultimately interacting with such crisis merchants, many respondents hoped for the preservation of a moral compass within the private sector be it through the sector's willing adherence to policies and laws including taxation or the strict enforcement of such legislation by the government.

However, this leads to a similar debate as observed in "Government formation" preceding "Safety and security". The private sector cannot independently form national development policies and adhere to them. It also cannot self-enforce taxation regulations. As such, the private sector is closely tied to the nation's government and governance structure which ultimately enforce the former.

Creating employment opportunities

Majority of respondents identified creating job opportunities and building employee capacities as a key means of the private sector's contribution to future Sudan's sustainable development. As a majorly young population, battling a 17.43%[5] unemployment rate in 2011, businesses and companies present a viable solution to this crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The hopes detailed by respondents starkly contrast with the negative perceptions of the private sector because of crisis traders. The business insider shared,

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[5] World Bank, Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (national estimate) – Sudan, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.NE.ZS?locations=SD accessed 13/04/2024

> **"There is no trust between the public and private sector."**

Despite this lack of trust, it is clear citizens acknowledge the potential of the private sector in cooperation with the government. The following recommendations were presented as tangible imaginations of Sudan's future private sector:

- True segmentation of business types to enable access to funding, markets and customers
- Exporting final products rather than raw materials such as meat, livestock and gold
- Establishing local gold refineries
- Instating positive bias and less taxes for local businesses to reach international markets.
- Establishing Crop exchanges for farmers to trade at a competitive price

Immediate actions to support the sector after the war would require:

- A revival of the banking system through international support due to loss of assets under loans and mortgages
- A government strategy to alleviate post-war poverty through investing in small businesses

HEALTH SECTOR

Health service delivery has always been a clear expression of uneven development across Sudan. Hospitals and qualified staff were centralized in the capital, Khartoum, while periphery areas had little-to-no access to either. In this sense, medical facilities in the capital were rated 7 out of 10 by an insider and facilities in other geographies were ranked as low as 2 out of 10. A medical doctor and insider engaged by the study explained,

> **"It wasn't that money wasn't available – from multilateral donors and INGOs. It was at the top, it didn't reach the bottom. States are supposed to have their own funding but it was very centralized."**

As a result of poor management and governance, health services varied starkly across Sudan's different states depending on which state ministers could fight hardest for resources from the centre. As a tax-based health system, poor governance also meant that taxes and fines were collected in an unsystematic manner which hampered the available resources for the sector. The medical insider concluded that at a service provision level, *"hospitals are under-funded and mismanaged."*

Beyond governance, privatization and capacity of health service providers were a major challenge in Sudan's health sector before the war. She explained,

HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THE ACCESS AND EQUALITY OF HEALTH SERVICES, INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTITIONERS IN SUDAN BEFORE THE WAR?

Satisfied (6%)
Very satisfied (1.1%)
Neutral (16%)
Very unsatisfied (57%)
Unsatisfied (20%)

> **"People in Sudan, everyone wants their child to be a doctor and not a nurse. But all these things [medical service delivery] require people who are mid-level."**

When asked about how satisfied respondents were with the "access and quality of health services, institutions and practitioners in Sudan before the war", 57% responded that they were "very unsatisfied"
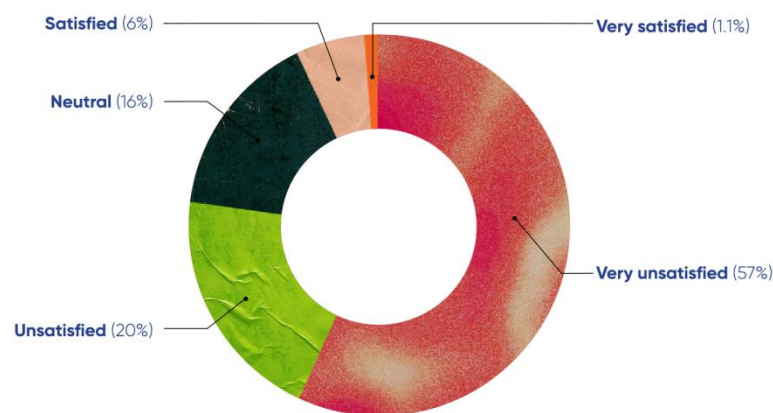
and 20% responded "unsatisfied" – giving a total of 77% negative responses. This is reflective of the pre-war reality of the health sector, which was only satisfactory to residents in Khartoum.

Detailed below are key areas of change that respondents hope for in Sudan's future health sector.

Free, Accessible and Quality Health Care

Majority of respondents hoped for free health care inclusive of treatment, medication and medical appointments. As one respondent hoped,

> "It is available to every Sudanese man and woman"

Conscious that this may be a tall order, some respondents hoped for these services to be with minimal fees or covered by mandatory national insurance. Beyond affordability, the centralization of the health care systems was decried by respondents who hoped for,

> "Providing hospitals and health centres in villages and cities, ensuring equitable geographical distribution."

Another respondent shared,

> "I hope that the health institutions in each state are in sufficient quantity and that they are equipped and the road to them is easy, because before the war, if you want any medical services, you go to Khartoum and you will be under high pressure."

Such local health clinics and centers would be public health facilities which were poorly maintained, equipped and staffed before the war. A main reason for the poor upkeep of public health facilities was the privatization of the health sector. An insider explained this as systematic negligence to present private health institutions as more appealing. To this end, many respondents shared hopes of increased national budgets dedicated to the health sector *"30%"*, increased investment in public health facilities to modernize and equip them and improved cleanliness. One respondent shared,

> "The health sector in Sudan before the war was in its worst condition. Therefore, the government must pay attention to this sector."

Better managed and accountable health system

Beyond equally distributed health centers, some respondents demonstrated an advanced understanding of the challenges facing Sudan's health sector and hoped for improved management and accountability of medical personnel. Improved management was proposed to take the form of improved referral systems such that local communities would consult

the nearest health clinic or centre before escalating their case to a major hospital and the activation of medical error laws to hold practitioners accountable. The lack of such widespread health centers and referral system led to the overcrowding and poor service of hospitals in Khartoum before the conflict. As such, more accessible health services would lead to less pressure on hospitals.

These demands were equally highlighted by the medical insider who shared hopes of equitable health care,

> "even a 300 person village should have a health care service."

Qualified, compassionate and compensated health care workers

Respondents expressed conflicting perceptions of Sudanese medical cadres as being highly qualified and forced to migrate due to poor remuneration in Sudan and others who are grossly unqualified. As such, respondents hoped for improved financial compensation of medical doctors while others hoped for robust qualification examinations and training of medical staff. The medical insider echoed these hopes by sharing,

> "[I wish] The health sector to make use of every health worker from nurses and midwives; efficiently and effectively; properly trained and compensated staff won't find it necessary to migrate or move to the private sector to put food on the table."

Respondents repeatedly referred to the medical practice as a "humanitarian profession"; a key distinction which practitioners must bear in mind as they engage patients and communities. One respondent proposed,

> "Work to make doctors feel that it [medicine] is a human-centred [I'nsaniya] profession and not just a financial benefit."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HEALTH SECTOR

- The governing body, Ministry of Health, should adopt a core vision which puts the dignity and well-being of the individual as a priority and not profit.
- Salvage what remains of the health sector, including information, to avoid re-inventing the wheel and wasting time in the process.
- Investing in infrastructure in a post-war setting through transparent and vision-oriented governance which can resist the anticipated NGO rush and hijacking after the conflict ends.

CIVIL SOCIETY

With a focus on the relation between civic actors and civilians, this section focuses on the role that civil society should play from the perspective of civilians as well as understanding the factors that can strengthen civil society to play this expected role.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN THE CAPACITY, TRANSPARENCY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUDAN?
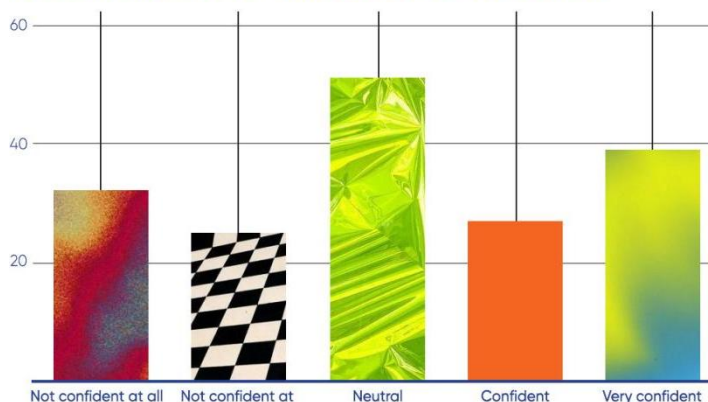
CONFIDENCE IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Survey respondents were asked to rank their confidence in the capacity, influence and transparency of civil society in Sudan. The data shows that confidence is highly variable with majority 29.3% on the margin between trusting/distrusting the performance of civil society. The second largest group of responses, however, showed a high confidence in civic actors' reliability followed by 18.4% who have minimal trust in civil society's performance. The high variation can be referred, as explained below, to the distinctively varying expectations of the roles and responsibilities of civic actors.

ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The data shows that the roles of civil society are highly debatable. The variation of views stems from the fact that there is no common definition for what civil society is in Sudan, a survey participant who shared the same enquiry responded,

> "The answer to this question first requires defining the term [civil society] ...the problem with civil society in Sudan is the overlapping of roles."

Thus, while some views identify civic actors as gap fillers between government and civilians, others consider them an alternative actor that should run the state on behalf of a failing government. Due to this disconnected conceptualization, the data showed a varying range of responses debating the positionality of civic actors as well as their anticipated roles in the future.

Contested positionality

When enquiring about the roles that civil society should play, respondents focused on the positionality of civic actors; in other words, where should civic actors be located among other societal structures. Some responses focused on more exclusionary positions mentioning that civil society should be neutral and equidistant from any political entity with a devoted focus on humanitarian work and in isolation from politics. A participant described this neutrality calling it

> "True patriotism (Wataniya) apart from every other belonging".

On the other hand, a more mainstream voice suggested that civil society should play a more active political role. A participant who supported this view shared,

> "[civil society] should be symbols and representatives of the citizens and use their influence to educate the people about their rights & also advocate strongly for the people when necessary"

Similar responses went on emphasizing that civil society should act as a guardian to civic rule and democracy, monitor and criticize government performance, advocate for peoples' rights , leading the re-building phase of post-war Sudan and redirect resources toward better investment in safety, health and education while ensuring a wider participation of women and youth.

Alternative responses stressed that civil society should instead act as a political pressure group. A participant explained,

> "They need to play the role of judge and clearly call out those who are not good for the country. They need to have a moral compass and code of conduct".

Another participant used the expression of *"guarantee"* explaining that civil society should not just fight corruption or put pressure on government for the welfare of citizens but rather become a guarantor for the government's performance.

Although such responses that support this direction called for more active positionality instead of one with further withdrawal from political life, some responses emphasized the importance of political independence from political parties internally and also from international donors' agendas. Such responses explain that the contested positionality of civil society actors comes from their involvement in politics; while advocative political roles are imagined to be taken, a cautious non-partisan position must equally be acknowledged.

These findings reflect priority sectors for Sudan's future elaborated on at the start of the report. While majority of respondents agree that "Safety and security" are a must, the means of obtaining this safety through civilian-led governments and groups embodied by civil society are equally expressed. This further iterates the conceptual disconnect of the roles and responsibilities of civil society by Sudanese civilians.

Being long-term change makers

Out of 174 responses more than 56 responses focused on long term change that civil actors should play a vital role in. This includes investing in social cohesion and building a national identity on one side and also fighting racism, tribalism and hate speech on the other, in addition to investing in education and health sectors, constitution building, preparing the country for elections that sustain democratic rule, contributing to research, capacity building and accountability among others.

An overwhelming voice within these responses devoted the roles of civil society toward investing in building a "culture of peace" and combating violence in all forms. Responses focused on stressing that civic actors should contribute to a national reconciliation process; strengthening peace, accepting and embracing diverse cultures as well as adopting a more tolerant discourse that can help in reuniting the Sudanese. Civic actors are anticipated to be active peace implementors by supporting war victims and disadvantaged families. One respondent shared,

> *"Civic actors must lead the prospective peace and political processes to ensure they are people oriented."*

Despite these high ambitions and expectations of civil society, an insider civic actor with a longstanding experience in grassroot advocacy explained how the short-term nature of international funding programs makes it hard for local civic actors to create a long-term change in Sudan. She explained,

> *"These [short-term civil society projects] are all projects which do not address the root causes but the symptoms. So once the project ends, the problem is back as though we have not done anything".*

Few individual responses highlighted that civic actors should not be scattered by taking major roles but rather focus on specific areas of intervention. Some aspired specific areas are supporting the formation of national institutions and documenting violations, establishing cooperatives (Taa'wniyat) and unions and supporting economic empowerment of youth as well as countering disinformation and enforcing accountability.

HOW TO STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY?

As shown in the section above, enormous potential roles for civil society are highly aspired. However, additional lines of questioning explored the factors that could strengthen civil society. Responses centred around three main themes.

House Keeping

An overwhelming part of responses showed that participants are looking forward for civic actors to play pivotal roles in rebuilding the post-war Sudan. However, these voices also suggest that these roles cannot be performed without a serious review of the capacity, organization and working culture of civic entities.

Responses which stressed this reveal that civic actors need capacity building not just equipment with advocacy and organizational tools but also with more contextual sensitivity to the contexts of Sudan. Some participants refer to "awareness raising", explaining that civic actors themselves need more awareness of history and socio-cultural diplomacy of the local contexts they are operating in. A civil society practitioner who worked for decades with women groups stressed on the challenges they face to create contextually sensitive, inclusive and grassroot oriented interventions. She shared,

> **"It has been proven that we need to work on the grassroot...Another challenge until now is that we do not have work tools that are tested and tried comprehensively to reach all women."**

Housekeeping also involves building a better organizational structure with clear regulations that enhance transparency. In addition to policies, participants stressed that civil society should commit to principles of accountability themselves before attempting to hold the government -or any other party- accountable. A survey participant shared,

> **"They need to significantly improve in terms of transparency, relevance, and the quality of the work they do."**

An insider explains why rigid organizational structure is challenging for national organizations operating in extremely volatile contexts as such explaining,

> **"Factors around us – political – shrinking spaces but also instability [make our work difficult]. We couldn't find the strategies to work around the coup and then the war erupted. So now we're working from scratch."**

Preserving the past or recreating the future?

One of the factors raised within survey responses revealed that the 15th of April has created a sense of loss, not only material loss but one of collective values and beliefs. While some respondents stressed that it is important for civil society to preserve these values instead of antagonizing them, opposing responses believe that civil society needs to innovate and adopt new beliefs and work on articulating them, such as combating corruption and discrimination, encouraging equal participation from grassroot levels, raising awareness and working to create a political space free of mercenaries. One respondent explained that the only way to strengthen civil society in the future is by

> "Renouncing disagreement and treason and moving towards serving the nation and not the party, tribe or region."

Long-term communication and collaboration

The third group of voices referred to the fragmentation of civic actors, and their inability to communicate and collaborate on a long-term basis. Thus, those responses called for better networking and connection among civil society organizations to avoid repeated efforts, especially in long term procedures such as carrying national civic education programs.

An interview with a civic actor who worked for advocacy on women's rights stressed that the lack of shared vision among civil society organizations is one of their main challenges sharing,

> "I am sure there are hundreds of women groups in Sudan. We don't document, and we don't publish so we don't learn from each other."

EDUCATION

More than 47.7% of survey respondents are dissatisfied with the accessibility and quality of public education services and institutions in Sudan before the war. The rating shows that even before the onset of April 15th conflict, the sector suffered numerous constraints. An insider affiliated with the University of Khartoum explained education has been always tied up with political stability, thus it has always been difficult to function and provide quality services in an unstable political context.

HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THE ACCESS AND QUALITY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION SERVICES AND INSTITUTIONS IN SUDAN BEFORE THE WAR?
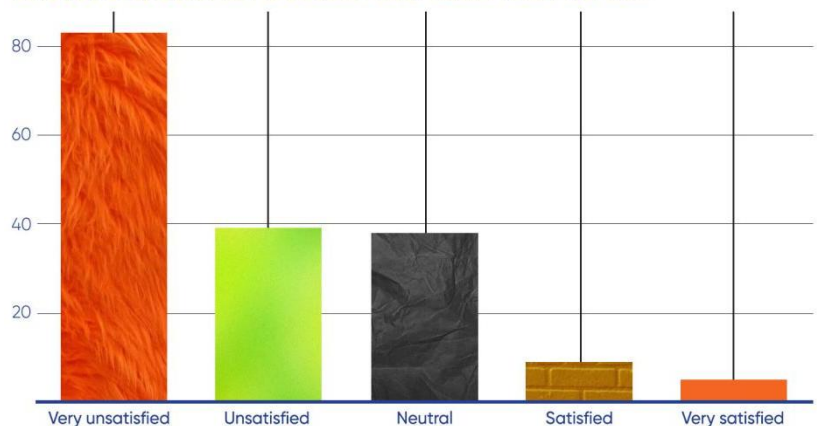
Accessible and inclusive education for all

Focus on the accessibility to fair and free education for all is noticeable among survey responses. Accessibility as perceived by participants includes accessibility of schools in marginalized areas, whether being rural or urban, marginal or centre, conflict-affected or not, in addition to access to qualified staff especially in remote schools, education of pastoralists, gender-inclusive education and education of persons with disabilities. One respondent elaborated,

> **"They should take into account students who have learning disability, students with poor social status and students with health issues as well as other things."**

Responses also revealed that *inclusive* education should be considered not just in equal and free access but also in inclusive design and preparation of school curriculums by diverse Sudanese experts across states, ethnicities and local languages. Technology was highlighted as a potential tool to enhance the inclusivity of education institutes.

Investing in quality education equals investing in a nation

An overwhelming view links between peace building in Sudan and investment in a better quality of education. This was first observed in the priority areas of Sudan's future development which highlighted respondents' view of education as a tool of pacifism against a culture of war. Education is perceived as a gateway towards future social cohesion and national unity; responses stressed the importance of redesigning education curriculum that embrace social, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Emphasizing on curricula that are well-thought out, away from ideological and military centred perspectives. It is also perceived that one of the important factors to build a future Sudan is by teaching the thorough history of the country including human rights, preserving the local environment and democracy.

Furthermore, respondents also emphasized the importance of preserving local languages and traditional heritage in education curricula, supporting the emotional and psychological interactive skills of young students as well as encouraging innovation and focus on critical thinking-based education instead of spoon feeding. The latter is a disdained perception of the Sudanese National Curriculum which greatly relies on memorization demonstrated by one recommendation to

> **"review existing structures of examination especially from secondary to higher education institutions."**

In addition, respondents hoped curriculums would be responsive to the standards and needs of local and international labour markets including the introduction of the English language together with other international languages as tools of instruction. One recurring change to the Education sector was to

> **"create a balance between the needs of the labour market and the ratio and disciplinary proportions of enrolment in higher education"**.

This again reflects the high unemployment rates among Sudanese youth despite gaining tertiary education.

Institutionalization

There is a clear visualization of the aspired institutionalization of the public education sector through varying forms.

To improve the education sector comprehensively, several key initiatives must be undertaken. These include increasing teachers' salaries and providing them with dignifying social services like tax reductions and health insurance, all while ensuring that public education remains free for all. Additionally, efforts should be made to resist the external migration of teachers and counteract brain drain. A significant portion of the national budget should be allocated to education, signalling a strong political will to invest in rebuilding the sector. This investment should prioritize continuous training for teachers and equipping schools with necessary educational tools. Implementing regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess teachers' performance is essential, alongside initiatives to revive public libraries and foster an encouraging school environment. Furthermore, revitalizing vocational education and reviewing regulations on private education to combat privatization, particularly at the primary level, are crucial steps forward.

In conclusion, the responses on the education sector, and also on the health sector seem to have a common perspective where a policy-oriented intervention of the state is needed for the welfare of the public. More importantly, a common demand arose for fighting against the privatization of health and education sectors. There seem to be an implicit call towards erasing the grounded socio-economic inequalities that prevented access and articulated itself in access to these services, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Based on reflections of an insider and analysis of survey respondents, the following recommendations were seen are pivotal to future Sudan's education sector:

- Civilians -including teachers- should pressure for a rational government that respects its constitution which considers free and fair education as an inevitable commitment where every Sudanese child is able to enter school without any costs.
- In the higher education sector, curriculums should create an effective bridge to global and international academic circles which may be through a return to English language instruction.
- Governments and international actors should contribute to long-term investment in education as the only way to build positive peace and reduce social injustice.
- INGOs should contribute, together with local experts, to train teachers in the post war phase and providing scholarships for higher education staff.
- Higher education research institutes should invest seriously in filling the gap of information during and after the war and contribute to assessing needs, building the social fabric and consolidating peace.
- Education experts should be given the chance to redesign an education system that is built on the principles of socio-cultural diversity, social acceptance and a citizenship centred state.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Unlike education, health, or government sectors that include clear demand-oriented visions, this section discusses people-oriented visions regarding how they perceive socially constructed situations such as social cohesion, gender equality and status of women as well as cultural norms. An imagined future of a socially cohesive nation depends more on shared responsibilities and collective actions, the responses hold higher varying visions and the extent to which they perceive they have roles to play in achieving these visions.

Social cohesion and social justice

The survey asked participants to rank their satisfaction with the current state of scoial cohesion in Sudan. Peaking responses are equally divided between complete dissatisfaction, 27.6% and moderate standing between neutral at 27.6%. The sharp division explains the confusion reflected below in the qualitative responses that rebuilding a socially cohesive Sudanese society from the ashes of the conflict is an uneasy question to answer.

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE CURRENT STATE OF SOCIAL COHESION IN SUDAN?
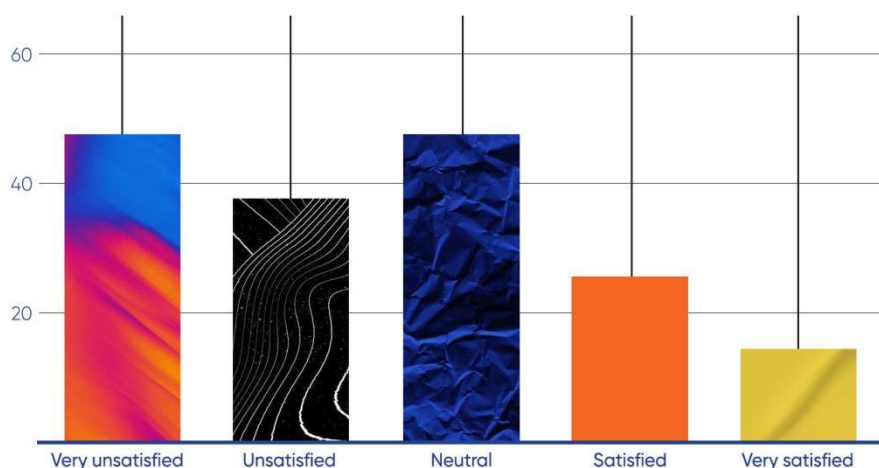
Looking at the qualitative responses visualizing social cohesion in the future, a common feature across all responses is the anticipation that achieving social justice and creating cohesion is going to be a long-standing and uneasy process. Visualization on how this process would look like is enrichening to unpack. While some participants defined what they should fight **for** to achieve social justice and ultimately social cohesion, others identified what they should fight **against** to achieve the same vision.

Fair representation

A vital fight for fair representation of all Sudanese regardless of ethnicities, races, geographies, genders, or languages is among the top priorities. In addition to equal opportunities and access to services (especially education and health), fair distribution of resources and wealth with balanced decentralized development polices. Others highlighted the importance of building a sustainable constitution that considers the diversity of cultures, customs, traditions, and norms of all Sudanese and accountable rule of law. Among other legal procedures, reparation of war victims was considered as a first gate to achieve justice[6].
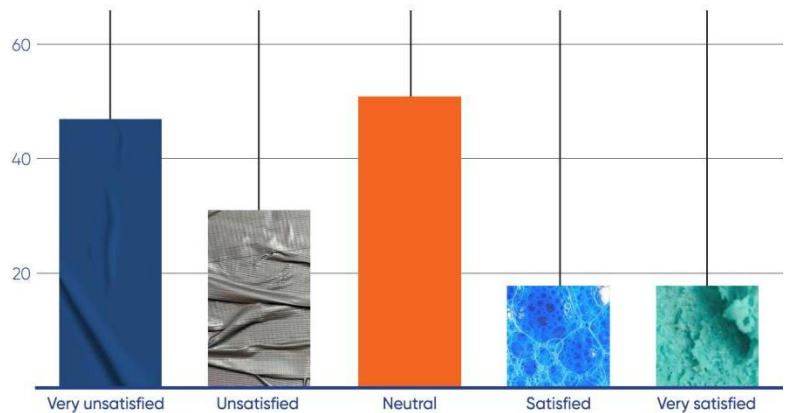
On the other hand, achieving social justice is also imagined to be a struggle against racial and ethnic discrimination, sexism, homophobia and hate speech. It is also a classist and generational struggle against corruption in order to find fair opportunities for younger people, regardless of their socio-economic status or historical advantages but mainly through their efficiency and competence. Respondents shared that achieving social cohesion is also a fight against Sudan's long history of judicial immunity where perpetuators are finally held accountable and human rights violations are eventually recognized and acknowledged.

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[6] It worth mentioning here that some responses consider legal justice as a way forward to achieving social justice. Thus, social justice, within this view, is considered also a transitional justice process.

GENDER EQUALITY AND STATUS OF WOMEN

With a similar pattern to the state of social cohesion, respondents were distributed between being unsatisfied, 28.5% or being neutral. An interview with a civic actor and women's rights defender explained this dilemma between partial and complete dissatisfaction. She ranked the sector of women's civil society organizations before the 15th April conflict as no more than 5 out of 10 - meaning that the reality was already comparably unsatisfactory to women's situation in regional neighbours in Africa and the Middle East. She justified this by looking at the highly repressive and volatile political context women's groups operated in.

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE CURRENT STATE OF EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHT IN SUDAN?

Bar chart showing satisfaction levels: Very unsatisfied, Unsatisfied, Neutral, Satisfied, Very satisfied. Y-axis marked at 20, 40, 60.

> **"Even before the war…women-led organization are always scrutinized as radical and trying to radicalize women…. We were especially targeted because we worked on women's rights in domestic settings and the social status law."**

Given these long-standing political and societal barriers, survey responses aspired that the situation of women would improve in future Sudan; while some considered that sustainable rule of law and positive peace processes would implicitly reduce gender gaps and improve the situation of women. The majority of responses went on visualizing specific paths to achieve a better status for women:

- The first path is essentially **legal and policy oriented**; starting by constitution building that should protect provisions for women and pave the road for women's rights to be protected by law. This must also include changing personal status laws that have been problematic to divorced, married and single mothers. Laws should also be abided by international decrees and be more radical in criminalizing violations against women and effectively accountable in their favour.
- The second path is more **socially constructed**; emphasizing that women should receive roles due to the great responsibilities they bear. Gender equality should be mainstreamed in civic education programs to articulate the values of respect to women's roles. Other responses highlighted that achieving gender equality necessitates a better representation of women in power structures and policymaking and with an intersectional approach which demands the participation of all. One respondent elaborated,

> **"The ideal state to achieve gender equality requires concerted efforts from governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals to challenge gender stereotypes, address systemic barriers to gender equality, and promote the empowerment of all individuals, regardless of gender."**

Change from within; behavioural and conceptual change

Whether to improve the status of women and fill gender inequalities, or to work on building social cohesion and heal wider historical socio-economic inequalities, an inevitable change in behaviours and concepts is repeatedly stressed across survey respondents. Such change principally includes establishing and deepening the idea that differences are justifiable among plural states of Sudan, taking this principle as a step towards understanding socio-cultural plurality and eventually accepting diversity.

Additionally, respondents emphasized that equality in rights and responsibilities should be based on citizenship only not gender, race or colour in addition to collectively learning to uphold the principle of belonging to a homeland over belonging to a party, ethnicity, or a region. This is contingent with findings of imaginations of future governance which are citizen centred. By doing so, Sudanese would collectively contribute to consolidating the principles of accepting each other, reciprocal respect and solidarity especially towards women. One female respondent shared an aspiration,

> "To mainstream the understanding that Gender rights are human rights and that they do not take away from others' rights!"

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

When exploring tangible recommendations which would enable civil society to reach its future potential, multiple insiders who lead grassroot movements, women-focused and youth-focused organizations presented the following courses of action:

- Civil society should pressure for the forthcoming government to have laws, legislation and policies that are not biased to race, ethnicity, geography, political ideology, generation, or gender. As well as pushing for such safeguarding laws to be practiced on the ground and across varying sectors: civic service, national budgeting, agriculture and industry, and resources ownership.
- Civil society should be vibrant and well-informed, paying attention to knowledge contribution and conceptual contribution to social mobility.
- Civil society should learn how to work collectively and rely on the power within more than the scattering and competition on resources and disrespecting the contribution of peers.
- Civil society should use social media as a powerful tool to send effective messages and create a counter narrative to extreme violence and social fragmentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH-FOCUSED CIVIL SOCIETY

- International and local civil society organizations need to engage with youth in different capacities; representation among youth themselves that goes beyond a geo-centred approach such as engaging those who succeeded to flee across international borders and others who remain inside Sudan.
- Supporting youth initiatives should be long term interventions that go beyond food aid and transcend it to protect the young generation from slipping into violent extremism and hate speech. Youth based interventions should also balance between soft and hard components especially after the 15th of April war.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN-FOCUSED CIVIL SOCIETY

- Despite the bitterness of urgent war needs, women's organizations should have the courage to adopt a nature of interventions that look beyond the day-to-day basic needs; considering long term innovative interventions that are gender responsive with a visualization of the post war reality changing women's needs, laws and policies.

- Women's organizations should prioritize working among feminist movements and women who are forgotten, by creating horizontal linkages that encourage reciprocal learning and filling the generational gap between women groups internally and the regional gap between Sudanese and regional women groups.

- Adopting the first track of proposed social behavioural change through legislation and laws, a recommendation to create a gender committee within the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) is proposed. HAC have infamously played the role of the regulator and repressor of civil society and non-profit development actors alike with the former suffering the heavier hand. With such a committee, gender sensitive operations within civil society will be advanced and contribute to a gradual representation of women in decision-making circles.

- The international community should recognize the role of women especially after the war; how international institutions will respond to the needs of women in finance, agriculture, education and health sectors would be critical to Sudan's future.

CULTURE AND ROUTINE

Looking at the customs, traditions and routines that survey respondents cherish most about their lives in Sudan, a qualitatively driven analysis using the frequency of word usage across survey respondents revealed that the most frequent word that participants cherish as a cultural practice in Sudan was *reciprocity (Takaful)*. In general, the majority of practices mentioned by respondents were focused on

collective values such as solidarity, tolerance, communication, mutual caring and support, peaceful coexistence, communalism and willingness to continue supporting resilience, attempting for freedom (exemplified among respondents by the December revolution) and community aid.

Other responses focused on the manifestations of these values and principles in the Sudanese context, such as the phenomenon of Nafeer which is community based collective action in emergency situations, in addition to civic voluntary work such as initiatives of emergency response rooms, central kitchens traditionally known as *(Takaya)*. Other manifestations of communalism were community gatherings in the month of Ramadan and the articulation of hospitality values in private and public settings, solid neighbourhood ties articulated in daily visits and neighbourhood gatherings, hospitality with visitors especially with strangers, collective bearing of children among extended family and neighbourhood community members, gatherings in weddings and funerals and collecting reciprocal funds, daily socialization especially among youth in tea corners (tea ladies) and among women in domestic coffee gatherings (*Gabana),* neighbourhood based football training (*Dafuri)* and other sports, rural life and especially agriculture and collaboration during harvesting season (*Darat),* and local conflict resolution customs (*Joudiya).*

Moving from practiced values to cultural heritage, some responses focused on the traditions and norms that they missed practicing in Sudan before the conflict, among the first was traditional wedding customs (such as *Jertig*, bridal dancing and Henna), traditional dances and rich folklore of music, varying gatherings of music hearing, traditional medicine, traditions of visiting religious and spiritual healers such as Sufi branches. The culture of shaking hands in greetings, and the culture of respecting women by giving a hand to carry heavy things on the street or leaving an empty seat in public transportation were also mentioned.

No difference between what customs and traditions the respondents missed from Sudan and what they are most eager to continue upon returning to their areas was observed. The focus however, was distinctively visible on assuring solidarity and reciprocity as well as hospitality customs and embracing the culture of giving and receiving in addition to community gatherings especially in weddings. As 76% of respondents were displaced by the conflict and are currently experiencing life as a

refugee/migrant/foreigner, it is understandable why many respondents long for a sense of community and traditions of solidarity.

The Sudan we no longer want to see

While aspired customs and practices clustered around the resourcefulness of Sudanese people as communities and the positive values rooted in their cultures, responses on the negative values were thoughtfully reflective on the undesirable sides of the same practices. Among others, the word *racism* (*U'nsoriya*) was the most frequently repeated word when enquiring about which customs, traditions or routines respondents wish to not continue in future Sudan. Together with racism, tribalism, discrimination, racial identification, violence (especially normalised violence), hate speech and any form of bullying, joking about or abusing each other's cultural practices, traditions, geographies, race, languages, colors or genders were also found. These are all varied expressions of subliminal or overt racism and discrimination.

The word racism additionally manifested in varying practices that respondents specified such as arranging marriages on racial basis, ethnic based identification (e.g. frequently asking about tribe as a way of stereotyping or discrimination) and prejudice to ethnicity or race through violence[7]. The second most frequent response was the **overspending on wedding ceremonies** as well as on funerals and other feasts which makes it difficult for young people to complete such ceremonies. Thirdly ranked was *lack of respect* to minorities, vulnerable groups, children and women; the word *FGM* (Female Genital mutilation) was redundantly mentioned as a manifestation of lack of respect and also violence against women and girls. Following the same order, responses mentioned at the forth place *exploitation of crisis*, looting and greediness as vicious practices that arose within the war context such as taking high commissions (*Samsara*) or high interest rate (*Riba*) and abusing the communal support system without contributing to it. These findings are consistent with recurring experiences of a majority of respondents who were displaced by the ongoing conflict.

Other customs respondents wished to discontinue were, *leaving corruption behind* in its diverse forms such as abusing personal or familial power, paying bribes, using intermediaries and informal channels, impunity and escaping penalty, unfair competition and dishonesty especially towards public assets.

FOUNDING NEW ROUTINES

The new routines that responses hope for are engrossed in three main thematic words; the first and foremost word mentioned was **acceptance;** this also included celebrating diversities, tolerating differences, peaceful coexistence, communication and bonding in public and family domains. Following the aspiration for mutual acceptance, the word **belonging** came in second place together with phrases such as love towards Sudan/homeland and having a national sense of belonging while embracing and celebrating a common identity of "Sudaneseness". Responses linked such belonging also to being abided by law and respecting equity in front of the law and under equal citizenship basis. Following the same order, the word **respect** came as a third priority; it include respecting time, respecting work ethics and building a sense of commitment, in addition to respecting privacy and boundaries and also respecting responsibilities at the cost of demanded rights.

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[7] What's traditionally known as (Faza') meaning that biased support to one's own ethnic group including using violence

CONCLUSIONS

All strata of Sudanese society have been grossly impacted by the April 2023 conflict. Mass displacement, loss of livelihood and mass insecurity have struck the very core of the Sudanese identity and prompted an introspective reflection on the causes of the conflict. Amongst these causes, fragile social cohesion and social divides are unanimously observed as drivers of conflict which need to be resolved for future Sudan in order to provide a sense of safety and security as the basis of sustainable development. This is validated by the highest frequency word being "racism" and pronounced need for inclusivity and diversity in education, health and governance.

The ideal modality of addressing these social divides remains largely contested across the board. Individuals believe that civil society and citizen-centred government structures are the stakeholders who ought to lead this change – engaging youth and women across intersecting lines. In this regard, a conceptual disconnect is observed. Individuals wish for civil society to play a gatekeeping role to ensure demands for democracy by citizens are met; yet overlap their roles with the government. Similarly, individuals believe a democratically elected government would safeguard Sudan's future; yet categorically refute the existing political actors.

This highlights a need for new, innovative and responsive civil society and political actors which demonstrate true nationalism; actors and stakeholders who truly prioritize the needs, demands and voices of citizens. Emphasis was on the blanket term "citizen"; another means to safeguard the equal rights of Sudanese across different sociocultural and ethnic dividing lines.

With such a civilian-centred government and civil society, free, equitable and high-quality service delivery is assumed as a natural bi-product. This is a stark difference to uneven development and privatized service delivery in health and education which widened social gaps and reinforced unspoken, racist social hierarchies in Sudan before the war. Although these development discrepancies were never successfully addressed by civil society or development actors in Sudan before the war, nearly all responses demonstrated an acknowledgement of the gap in education and health services between the capital and peripheries.

The current experience of mass displacement has had severe impact on the Sudanese experience; creating an unmatched yearning for communalism and reciprocity. Traditional and social gatherings alike are a sorely missed component of everyday Sudanese culture. This highlights a desire for displaced Sudanese communities to recreate a sense of community through fostering safe, shared communal spaces for communication.

Beyond social support, the communal culture of Sudan presents the largest potential for its future development. As one medical insider noted,

> **"There is a Nafeer culture where the community supports itself and we have a huge untapped resource; not just funding but volunteers."**

These sentiments are echoed by majority of respondents who believed they had a role to play in contributing to Sudan's future through actions supporting civil society or political mobilisation. To this end, it is clear that Sudanese youth, across intersecting identity lines, are willing to support Sudan's future and must be given the opportunities to participate in decision-making circles beginning with efforts to end the war.

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