CONFLICT
DYNAMICS®
INTERNATIONAL

<u>Program Note</u>

Supporting Young Women's Political Participation in Sudan

Summary of capacity building workshops during 2021

1. Overview

Even though Sudanese women played a critical role in the 2018-2019 revolution, their participation in shaping the subsequent transition has been constrained. Women political leaders and activists struggle to claim their places in political discourse, as well as in achieving leadership positions within their party or organization. Following the 25 October 2021 coup, political tensions have only intensified and made it even more challenging for women, and young women in particular, to claim their space for political participation, including in Transition Period governance arrangements.

During this time of crisis, as in 2019, women are actively seeking out opportunities for greater participation. Since 25 October, public rallies supporting civilian-led government have been held throughout the country with women playing prominent roles in the demonstrations. Young Sudanese women have expressed their needs for tools, skills and capacity building to enable them to play active roles in shaping Sudan's future.

In response to direct requests for capacity building support, Conflict Dynamics International organized several workshops during 2021 to support young women leaders towards more effective political participation. The series of workshops focused on developing a range of actionable options for effectively advancing women's participation in political processes. These workshops were conducted both before and after the October 2021 coup. Three workshops were supported by the Government of Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while two earlier workshops were supported by the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum.

2. Participants

Conflict Dynamics engaged women participants from across Sudan who are active in their local communities, and engaged in civic action in various capacities, such as involvement in political organizations, public councils, legal profession, arts, and sports.

These women brought a wide range of relevant experience as representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, and organizing committees. The five workshops totaled 75 participants from 14 states, with an age range of 20-45 years. The women were selected to reflect the diversity of Sudan while supporting those with relevant experience.

3. Capacity strengthening

The objectives of the workshops were to increase participants' understanding of the concepts and approaches of political participation and demonstrate how political dialogue processes and governance arrangements can accommodate different interests. Participants used the Political Accommodation Methodology, which offers a straightforward approach to building consensus, designing dialogue processes, and generating options for specific governance arrangements. Participants focused on the political context in Sudan and identified key challenges for generating political consensus, such as the exclusion of certain groups by political parties, the lack of public engagement and awareness around political processes, and the politicization of historical tribal and geographical conflicts. Additionally, the workshops were designed to strengthen participants' technical understanding of constitutional processes and mechanisms for participation in political processes in general.

Participants examined case studies and models from countries where gender-inclusive constitutional and legislative arrangements strengthen the fulfilment of women's rights and led to increased inclusion of women. This was complimented by sessions that evaluated the women's movement in Sudan, identifying strengths and opportunities, such as women's social influence through their positions as teachers, mothers, and housewives as well as their strong public relations networks developed through regular outreach with the population. Threats and weaknesses identified by participants included the mistrust between women's groups and the monopolization of the organizational decision-making process by a small, select group of women. A deeper understanding of the women's movement allowed participants to outline visions and ideas for actions to advance their active participation.

As a final exercise, participants identified key areas through which to advance women's political participation in the country, such as the need to address the conservative cultural beliefs around women's place in society, which have had significant effects on the economic, social, and political institutions in Sudan. Workshop participants discussed the need to strengthen women's capacities through trainings, awareness campaigns, and partnerships across civil society.

4. Outcomes

Evaluations of the workshops were overall positive, especially with regards to the materials presented, political consensus and accommodation, and how the workshop met its goals. Many participants reported feeling capable of sharing the approaches with others, while several others proposed coordinating and hosting the workshop in their home states to improve networking and coordination of women's initiatives across Sudan and expand knowledge of political participation. Additionally, participants identified potential topics for future workshops, including the definition of election laws and how to include gender-sensitive provisions and language from international conventions.

Participants have remained in close contact with Conflict Dynamics' training team and have reported initial successes in putting the Political Accommodation Methodology into practice in their own communities. Participants from Khartoum and Darfur both reported using content from the workshops when engaging with youth groups and women's groups. Young women in Khartoum, White Nile, Northern State, and Darfur have reported plans and activities to train other trainers in their home states. Conflict Dynamics has received continued demand in order to support further engagement with women advocates, political parties, and local organizing committees.