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Unity in Adversity: How Communities are Bringing Resilience to the Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan

by Mazin Omer and Preeti Kaur P.



‘These gatherings remind us that even in the hardest times, we can still come together, support one another, and hold on to our humanity.’ Source: Mazin Alrasheed.

Since starting in 2023, the war in Sudan has left about half of the country’s population, **25 million people**, in need of food assistance, and **an estimated 12 million people displaced** from their homes. The war came as a shock to many citizens who were under the impression that the conflict would

only last for 2–3 days. Two years later, water facilities have been targeted with no access to basic supplies, markets have shut down, the Sudanese population has been displaced internally and externally, there have been extreme human rights violations, homes have been raided, and citizens have been **robbed of their belongings including very valuable ones like gold, furniture, and cars**. This blog brings attention to the humanitarian side of the war in Sudan, focusing on community efforts on the ground by neighbours, and the medium and long-term humanitarian impact of the war.

Community Efforts

Despite being a forgotten war in global media, Sudanese communities across the country have remained strong in their community efforts out of desperation for survival. This is particularly alarming since Sudan has **200 million acres of arable land**, and is one of the most fertile countries of Africa. Despite being a country where there was no starvation before and people grew their own food, its population is now at **risk of famine**. The Rapid Support Forces and allied **militias targeted water facilities in Khartoum and the resource rich region of Darfur**, leaving people without access to water for days even until now. Moreover, there are increasing numbers of deaths in refugee camps due to malnutrition, since water facilities were targeted, and food cannot be safely delivered by international organisations to those in need in areas that are controlled by the militia.

However, communities have mobilised in their respective towns and cities to set up community-based kitchens amidst the heightened risk of famine, also known as the *tekeya* – a Sudanese word for a kitchen made of local resources. One of the many examples of this is the Khartoum Aid Kitchen, which is one of the neighbourhood kitchens for people from all over can come and collect meals, ensuring as many people as possible are fed whilst there is extreme scarcity.

Communities also gathered to protect the health of the vulnerable and education of students. For example, insulin injections must be preserved in a cool place to be effective, so communities repurposed clay pots used for keeping water cool to keep insulin injections cool so that people with diabetes are still able to access their life saving treatments. Moreover, the conflict resulted in blackouts and displacement meant that students were no longer able to access their educational institutions. For those who needed to take their national high school exams, community members parked their cars and used the headlights to provide light for students to study, demonstrating remarkable determination in the face of crisis.

Medium to Long-term Impact

These examples show the strength of the community in Sudan amidst what has been described as the **largest and fastest displacement crisis in the world**, but there are imminent and significant impacts in the medium and long-term, with limited global support for Sudan.

Firstly, there is a significant psychological and mental health impact on Sudanese people, particularly in Khartoum which had not experienced war before, so people did not expect it. They were under the impression it would only last for 2–3 days, but now it has been almost two years. The psychological trauma of the sounds of bombing and shelling still triggers anxiety and flashbacks, even after people have found refuge in safer areas. Additionally, there is the psychological burden of losing entire livelihoods from the comfortable lives they had built in a situation they did not foresee coming. This psychological trauma and stress caused a rise in **cardiovascular disease**. Physical health has also been impacted in other ways, with an increase in deaths from **indirect means** of the conflict, including limited healthcare, nutrition, and infections. This is in addition to direct, intentional killings and war-related deaths.

Most healthcare providers are in the centre or Khartoum, with fewer in other states. When people became internally displaced and moved to other states in large numbers, the **hospitals there were overwhelmed**. People with chronic health conditions, such as atherosclerosis, diabetes, and asthma, and those needing urgent care, were particularly affected. The new generation of healthcare professionals were unable to practice medicine and allied health professions, since they were unable to advance their medical licence and careers in the city centre. This forced them to seek healthcare work abroad. This reduction in healthcare resources and increase in demand for healthcare services, increased the burden on regional hospitals.

There has also been an impact on the education of the future generation of students. Many current students have been stuck in their studies for 2 years since the conflict started, with fewer financial resources to pay for their education, the inability to complete their studies, or to practice the profession that they have studied for. This has implications not only on the future talent of Sudan, but also on the growth and development of the country post-war.

Concluding Remarks

Sudan's war has been neglected in global media in relation to other events, so local Sudanese communities relied mostly on themselves to survive. This is testament to the resilience of the Sudanese people, but it must be remembered that there are serious human rights violations and an ongoing humanitarian impact. Everything people worked their whole lives for has been taken in a matter of days, with the theft of health, belongings, gold, and the future. With greater understanding of the war's origins, the human plight, the medium and long-term implications, and with more intensive support from the rest of the world, the future of Sudan could still be preserved.

Despite the uncertainties, Sudanese who fled the war of April 2023 continue to navigate the delicate balance between longing for home and adapting to life in exile. While recreating the physical and cultural essence of home is challenging, many have found new forms of belonging through social networks and community-led initiatives. Yet, for others, the decision to return is driven not necessarily by a calculated assessment of safety or stability but by deep emotional needs – the

desire for familiarity, belonging, and legitimacy – essential elements that exile, despite its many opportunities, fails to offer.

This piece is part of a series that addresses the conflict as well as other subjects pertaining to Sudan, such as employment, forced displacement, gender, humanitarian needs, migration and political participation.

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