

PROPOSAL: ENSURING INCLUSION IN SUDAN'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE
TASKFORCE ON THE ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN
NOVEMBER 2014

PREAMBLE

The Sudan National Dialogue (SND) must have a clearly defined mandate and purpose. Clarity will help to manage expectations of the citizenry, ensure focus for the implementers, and increase the chance of actual peace for the country. The mandate, as well as the process that follows, should reflect the principles of Sudanese ownership, inclusivity of diverse populations, transparency and openness, and accountability. The SND must yield solutions that begin to address the longer term structural challenges in Sudan which have enabled conflict for many years. A legitimate national dialogue process will lay the foundation for the reforms needed in governance, rule of law, and issues of social cohesion.

Ensuring a truly inclusive national dialogue is the only way for the process to gain legitimacy. Operationalizing inclusion will introduce complexity and challenge, to be sure. However, without structuring mechanisms to ensure the representation and participation of Sudan's diverse populations and to raise myriad issues, the Sudan National Dialogue will be seen by most Sudanese as a hollow gesture by the elite to prevent real change, which will only drive more social conflict. To be truly inclusive, a reciprocal loop of information between citizens and the SND process must exist. Access to information as an essential principle in the process should be a commitment of the Coordinating Committee and all related official bodies.

In that vein, this paper introduces options for inclusion with a specific focus on the need to ensure women are central contributors to the dialog. Historically, women have played a leadership role in Sudan. Their equal and effective participation in the SND will be a recognition and continuation of the influential and active roles of women. Additionally, the voices of women are critical to an effective SND. Women will ensure social issues are on the table, will help seed community buy in, will often act as interlocutors between groups, and will work across the many divisions in Sudanese society currently.

Prior to the process getting underway, and in order for the process to be legitimate, preconditions must be met to create the enabling environment necessary for the dialogue to take place in. These preconditions include but are not limited to:

- Increased freedom of expression, press, movement, organization, and
- Ceasefire agreements
- Release of political detainees
- A positive, objective, and educative media
- Outreach to armed groups about joining the Sudan National Dialogue
- Outreach to political parties that are not yet part of the Sudan National Dialogue

INCLUSION: THE KEY PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE

A key principle of the SND must be inclusivity. In line with this principle, each and every committee and mechanism must include 50 percent women to ensure the Sudan National Dialogue will be a true reflection of Sudanese society. There are ample women capable and available from throughout Sudan – as committee chairs and members, as technical experts, as advisors, as representatives, etc. The following constituencies should also have direct representation, *determined through a process and structured proposed later in this paper*, in the SND (each constituency composed of 50% women):

- Youth groups
- Professionals
- Sectors such as trade unions
- Civil Society Organizations

Acknowledging the need to ensure inclusivity as a means of legitimate national dialogue, the Taskforce also notes the dire need for a clearly outlined preparatory process and sequencing map in order to properly operationalize inclusion. The SND is currently an elite-driven process rather than a process for the people. A true dialogue along national lines must be well thought out, communicated, and structured. Therefore, below we will provide a critique of and offer solutions to fill the inclusion gaps in the current structure, as well as propose additional structures, processes, and actors.

CURRENT STRUCTURE: INCLUSIVITY GAPS

Coordination Committee: Contains only 14 members – seven from NCP and allied parties, and seven from other political parties.

- *Recommendation:* This central, decision-making body should **expand to reflect members of key constituencies** to lay the foundation for the SND, including civil society and armed groups.
- *Recommendation:* All parties of the Coordination Committee, current and proposed, **must include women as 50 percent of their delegation.**

National Dialogue Committees: Contain six thematic committees, some of which have been appointed chairs. To the Taskforce’s knowledge, there is yet to be a clear mandate, timeline, and composition guidelines for the NDC.

- *Recommendation:* **A mandate and roadmap for the committees must be drafted and disseminated** as a first step towards transparency and to build trust in the process.
- *Recommendation:* As well, the composition of each committee **should include 50 percent women – as chairs, deputy chairs, members, and advisors.**

National Dialogue Conference: The current format for this conference notes a very limited participant list of 120 political party members and 50 public figures, a regrettably exclusive

process. The bulk of decision-making will happen at this forum, so a more inclusive composition is vital.

- *Recommendation:* The participation in this conference **must be expanded** to include NCP non-aligned political parties, armed groups, and civil society.
- *Recommendation:* **Women must compose 50 percent** of all groups participating in the conference.
- *Recommendation:* The nationally representative **Taskforce on the Engagement of Women** should be named **official observers**.

ADDITIONAL STRUCTURES FOR INCLUSION

University of Khartoum: Technical and Substantive Advisory Body

We proposed that in order to ensure inclusivity, the University of Khartoum (an institution with great social ‘approval’ and capacity) should take the lead in mapping and subsequently organizing civil society organizations, women groups, youth groups, and others. The purpose would be to map groups, identify and select viable participants, and consistently convene gatherings at the state, local, and administrative levels of society to facilitate information gathering. The University of Khartoum would act as the central funnel of information – both substance and technical input – to the National Dialogue Committee six working groups. This information will then be fed to the Coordination Committee to inform the actual National Dialogue Conference. The addition of the University of Khartoum as a formal part of the SND structure would ensure that the voices of myriad constituencies were able to feed into the process and reach the National Dialogue Conference.

Formation of Community Engagement Plan

It is vital that the SND forms a community outreach plan that includes a mechanism of continued reciprocity to share and gather information about the process on an ongoing basis. These should be formed to include consultations at the levels of administrative unit, locality, and state. Each level would form sub committees to lead consultations at that level to feed into University of Khartoum’s Technical Advisory Body process that then feeds into the high-level National Dialogue Committee process to inform the content of the National Dialogue Conference. Each subcommittee (administrative, local, state) must be composed of at least 50 percent women representatives.

