

## Research Report

# Women in Transition: the role of Women and the Arab Springs 2.0 in Sudan and Algeria

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# **WOMEN IN TRANSITION: THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND THE ARAB SPRING 2.0 IN SUDAN AND ALGERIA**

## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This document was drafted in the framework of the project “Women in transition: the role of women and the Arab Spring 2.0 in Sudan and Algeria”, financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation under the call for proposals “Women, Peace and Security”.

The project aimed to analyze the recent evolution of women’s empowerment process, on a decision-making and cultural level, in the contexts of Sudan and Algeria, which, in 2019, experienced the beginning of a transitional government and the appointment of a new head of government, respectively. The recent waves of protest in both countries shared the common involvement and mobilization of women, which warrants close examination, considering, moreover, the countries’ long-standing tradition of female activism. Starting from this observation, and by means of a cross-sectional analysis containing the findings of the desk and field research conducted between Italy, Algeria and Sudan, the project aimed to examine forms and types of female action during the latest waves of protest, as well as its demands and the results achieved thus far as to the advancement of women’s rights, especially with reference to the decision-making sphere. Concurrently, the research provided an overview of Italy’s interventions for women empowerment in the target countries. The combination of these two different levels and perspectives allowed to put forth several policy recommendations concerning Italy, which could provide useful guidance for potential future actions and interventions relative to women’s empowerment in Sudan and Algeria.

The first section of the document, by CeSPI, provides an overview of the process leading up to the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 and Italy’s commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, with reference to the choice of Sudan and Algeria as case studies of the research. Concurrently, a first overview of the Italian initiatives (cooperation measures concerning both the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation and NGOs) is presented, as regards women empowerment/gender equality in the two countries. This section highlights the results of analyzing the information retrieved from the literature available online and by consulting the sector’s stakeholders.

The second section illustrates the case studies of Sudan and Algeria, which present information about the countries’ institutional framework regarding gender equality, the history of local female activism and the results of the field research.

The latter collected the voices of women of different cultural and political contexts, as regards their role in the transition process and in the protests, their integration into the political and social life of their countries, and their future prospects. The field research was carried out through qualitative interviews involving Sudanese and Algerian women in the two countries, as well as a limited group of Sudanese and Algerian women of the diaspora in Italy. Some of those interviews have been filmed and subtitled in Italian and will constitute a living archive of women’s voices available for the Italian audience.

The third section summarizes the principal research findings and contains policy recommendations to Italy to steer future interventions concerning women empowerment in the two target countries.

## SECTION 1. ITALY'S COMMITMENT TO THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

### 1.1. *Recognizing the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution*

Nowadays, women empowerment and gender equality are universally acknowledged among the fundamental conditions to maintain international peace and security. Especially in contexts of crisis and transition, to respect and acknowledge women's human rights, as well as their full and equal involvement in decision-making areas, represent key elements for achieving social and political stability.

The path which led to recognize with an *ad hoc* international instrument women's significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution as well as to international peacekeeping and security, is comprised of various phases.

The first references to women's role in ensuring peace date back to the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in June 1975, during the International Women's Year. The three main goals identified by the conference, effective for the following decade, aimed at achieving full gender equality and eliminating gender discrimination; women's integration and full involvement in development; a greater contribution of women in strengthening and promoting peace<sup>1</sup>. The conference proceedings led to the adoption of the "World Plan of Action"<sup>2</sup>, which mainly addressed national governments, for the purpose of defining guidelines, for the 1975-1985 period, to fulfill the objectives identified by the International Women's Year: equality, development, peace.

Five years later, in Copenhagen, during the second World Conference on Women, the priorities identified, in order to achieve gender equality, development and peace, were three: equal access to education, equal access to employment opportunities, equal access to adequate healthcare services. In fact, while the conference's final report recognized how, up to then, women's integration in development had been formally received by the majority of governments "as a desirable planning objective"<sup>3</sup>, several critical issues persisted, concerning the rights ensured to women and their ability to exercise them.

The third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985, marked the end of the Decade for Women begun in 1975. Data presented at the conference, in relation to improvements made in ensuring equal opportunities and gender equality, revealed that the road map outlined in City of Mexico had benefited only a limited number of women, and that the decade "had only partially attained its objectives"<sup>4</sup>. The Nairobi Conference was therefore mandated to seek new ways of overcoming obstacles for achieving the objectives of equality, development and peace. Three basic categories were established to measure the progress achieved: constitutional and legal measures; equality in social participation; equality in political participation and decision-making. Additionally, the Nairobi conference emphasized gender equality's cross-cutting nature, stressing that the issue encompassed all spheres of human activity.

In 1995, the fourth World Conference on Women, built on "political agreements that had been reached at the three previous global conferences on women"<sup>5</sup>, was convened in Beijing. The "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", adopted unanimously by 189 countries during the Conference, is still considered, to this day, the key global policy document on women's

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/mexico-city1975>

<sup>2</sup> For the document, see: <https://undocs.org/E/CONF.66/34>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/copenhagen1980>

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/nairobi1985>

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/beijing1995>

empowerment. The Declaration set strategic objectives for achieving gender equality, peace and development, in 12 areas of concern<sup>6</sup>. Among the main objectives established in the areas of “women and armed conflict” and “women in power and decision-making”, were those of increasing the participation of women in conflict resolution, promoting women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace<sup>7</sup>, ensuring gender equality and women’s full political participation in power structures and at all decision-making levels<sup>8</sup>.

Recalling all the commitments of the “Beijing Platform for Action”, the **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** marked a major milestone in the history of the protection of women’s rights, as well as a landmark for their role in conflict prevention and resolution. On October 31, 2000, for the first time, the United Nations adopted a measure which **specifically referenced the impact of war on women and the importance of women’s participation and inclusion in processes of conflict prevention and resolution**. The resolution is comprised of eighteen operative provisions, which can be broken down into three major objectives: a) to support and increase the participation of women in decision-making processes, in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; b) to protect women’s rights during armed conflicts, with special reference to sexual and gender-based violence; c) to incorporate a gender perspective into conflict prevention and resolution, as well as peacebuilding processes. To pursue the objectives set out by Resolution 1325, in the majority of cases, National Action Plans were developed, namely “instruments that allow the single governments to establish priorities and coordinate the different bodies responsible for security, foreign politics, development and gender issues”<sup>9</sup>. In other cases, Regional Action Plans were developed instead (11, to date), as in the case of the African Union Gender Policy adopted by the African Union in 2009. To date, 87 UN Member States have developed National Action Plans to implement Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

**Table 1. Countries that adopted National Action Plans to implement UNSCR 1325**

| ADOPTION OF NATIONAL ACTION PLANS ON RESOLUTION 1325/2000 <sup>10</sup> |   |
|---|---|
| YEAR  | COUNTRIES   |
| 2005  | Denmark   |
| 2006  | Norway, Sweden, UK  |
| 2007  | Austria, Spain, Switzerland   |
| 2008  | Finland, Iceland, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Netherlands  |
| 2009  | Chile, Guinea, Belgium, Portugal, Liberia, Rwanda   |
| 2010  | Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, DRC, Estonia, France, Italy, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Serbia, Guinea Bissau |
| 2011  | USA, Senegal, Croatia, Ireland, Lithuania, Nepal  |
| 2012  | Australia, Ghana, Mali, Burundi, Georgia, Togo, Burkina Faso, Gambia  |
| 2013  | Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Nigeria, Germany   |
| 2014  | Iraq, Republic of Korea, Kosovo, Indonesia, CAR   |
| 2015  | Afghanistan, Japan, New Zealand, Paraguay, Argentina, Tajikistan, South Sudan   |
| 2016  | Ukraine, Kenya, East Timor  |

<sup>6</sup> The 12 areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action are: Women and poverty, Education and training of women, Women and health, Violence against women, Women and armed conflict, Women and the economy, Women in power and decision-making, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, Human rights of women, Women and the media, Women and the environment, The girl-child. See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/beijing1995>

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/armed.htm#diagnosis>

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm>;

<sup>9</sup> For further information see “La risoluzione 1325 delle Nazioni Unite su "Donne, pace e sicurezza" a tredici anni dalla sua adozione>>, nota n° 36 - 4 novembre 2013, Camera dei Deputati, Servizio Studi, XVII Legislatura. <http://documenti.camera.it/leg17/dossier/Pdf/ES0129inf.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>CeSPI developed this table based on data from WILPF infographic (See <https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>). CeSPI added Sudan for 2020 as a result of the information contained in the sudanese case Study.

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2017 | Brazil, Montenegro, Czech Republic, Palestine, Solomon Islands, Cameroon, El Salvador, Guatemala, Angola, Jordan, Niger |
| 2018 | Mozambique, Moldova, Tunisia, Poland, Albania, Luxembourg   |
| 2019 | Armenia, Namibia, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Yemen  |
| 2020 | Latvia, Slovakia, Sudan*  |

The global political framework concerning Women, Peace and Security gradually expanded. To date, the Agenda is comprised of 10 resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council between 2000 and 2019: the aforementioned UNSCR 1325 (2000), and, subsequently, UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009), UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 1960 (2010), UNSCR 2106 (2013), UNSCR 2122 (2013), UNSCR 2242 (2015), UNSCR 2467 (2019) e UNSCR 2493 (2019).

**Table 2. Resolutions on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda after UNSCR 1325/2000**

| RESOLUTIONS              | KEY POINTS   |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>UNSCR 1820 (2008)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Considers rape and other forms of sexual violence a war crime and a crime against humanity; affirms that steps to prevent such acts can contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security</li> <li>- Demands that all parties to armed conflict take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence</li> </ul>   |
| <b>UNSCR 1888 (2009)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demands that all parties to armed conflict take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence</li> <li>- Requests that the United Nations Secretary-General appoint a Special Representative to address sexual violence in armed conflicts</li> </ul>   |
| <b>UNSCR 1889 (2009)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urges Member States, international and regional organizations, to take further measures to improve women's participation during all stages of peace processes</li> <li>- Urges Member States to ensure gender mainstreaming in all post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery processes and sectors</li> <li>- Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the SC a set of indicators to track implementation of its resolution 1325 (2000)</li> </ul>                      |
| <b>UNSCR 1960 (2010)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calls upon parties to armed conflict to adopt specific measures to combat sexual violence, including the issuance of clear orders through chains of command prohibiting sexual violence and the prohibition of sexual violence in Codes of Conduct and military field manuals</li> <li>- Requests the Secretary-General to establish monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements concerning sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations</li> </ul> |
| <b>UNSCR 2106 (2013)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizes that women can significantly influence parties to armed conflict in preventing acts of sexual violence</li> <li>- Encourages Member States to include the full range of crimes of sexual violence in national penal legislation</li> </ul>   |
| <b>UNSCR 2122 (2013)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- States the intention to focus more attention on women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding</li> <li>- Stresses the importance of those Member States in post-conflict situations to continue their efforts, with support from the United Nations, to ensure women's full and equal participation in all phases of electoral processes</li> </ul>  |
| <b>UNSCR 2242 (2015)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reiterates its call for Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels; calls upon donor countries to provide financial and technical assistance to women involved in peace processes</li> <li>- Encourages Member States to increase their funding on women, peace and security, including through programs that further gender equality and women empowerment, as well as through support to civil society</li> </ul>          |
| <b>UNSCR 2467 (2019)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calls upon Member States to strengthen legislation, investigation and prosecution of sexual violence, as well as access to justice for its victims in conflict and post-conflict situations</li> <li>- Recognizes the importance of supporting civil society, especially local, women-led organizations, religious organizations, girls- and youth-led organizations, for their efforts to prevent gender-based violence</li> </ul>                                       |

UNSCR 2493 (2019)

- Calls on Member States to promote all the rights of women, including civil, political and economic rights, urges them to increase their funding on women, peace and security, including through more aid in conflict and post-conflict situations for programs that further gender equality and women's economic empowerment, security and mainstreaming a gender perspective

## *1.2. Italy's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*

As previously mentioned, UN Member States are periodically invited to enhance their commitment to the implementation of Resolution 1325 through National Action Plans (NAPs), as established by the UN Security Council (UNSC), for the first time, in the Presidential Statement of October 2004<sup>11</sup>. Italy supported the Women, Peace and Security Agenda from the outset, on a national and international level, in accordance with the outcome of the relevant World Conferences.

During its two-year tenure on Security Council (2007-2008), Italy promoted a "practically-minded informal group on Resolution 1325", and worked to increase, along with other EU and UN Member States, women's participation in political and decision-making processes. Moreover, Italy was at the forefront of efforts aimed at acknowledging the link between international security and sexual violence, when the latter is used as a war tactic in armed conflicts. In this regard, it significantly contributed to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

After its two-year membership of the Security Council, Italy's ongoing interest for the issue led to the adoption of the first NAP on "Women, Peace and Security" 2010-2013<sup>12</sup>, aimed at strengthening and coordinating efforts concerning the protection of women's rights, children's rights and the population's most vulnerable groups in areas of conflict.

The second NAP<sup>13</sup>, adopted for the 2014-2016 period, sets broader objectives and commits to submitting an annual updated and revised report. The latest NAP, relative to the 2016-2019 period<sup>14</sup>, presents a further systematization of established actions and an increasing willingness to commit to the implementation of UNSC Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

In this regard, within the third NAP's operative framework, the Italian Government's ultimate aims are:

(1) to reduce the impact of conflict on women and girls, while promoting their meaningful and transformative participation in prevention, mitigation and resolution of conflict, as well as in decision-making processes, at all levels

(2) to raise awareness, educate and strengthen existing structures with reference to the Women Peace and Security Agenda and related issues.

Based on these objectives and the amendments made to the previous documents, the third and latest National Action Plan defined primary strategic interventions with regard to seven areas of action<sup>15</sup>, aimed at ensuring that a gender perspective will be incorporated in all areas of peace policy and in all the concrete measures concerned, first of which strengthening the role of women in peace

<sup>11</sup> See [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/s\\_prst\\_2004\\_40\\_oct\\_2004.pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/s_prst_2004_40_oct_2004.pdf) pag. 3

<sup>12</sup> For the full document, see:

[https://www.difesa.it/Content/Risoluzione1325\\_2000/Documents/Piano\\_di\\_Azione\\_Nazionale\\_dellItalia\\_Donne%20Pa ce\\_e\\_Sicurezza\\_2010.pdf](https://www.difesa.it/Content/Risoluzione1325_2000/Documents/Piano_di_Azione_Nazionale_dellItalia_Donne%20Pa ce_e_Sicurezza_2010.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> For the full document, see: [https://www.difesa.it/SGD-](https://www.difesa.it/SGD-DNA/Staff/DG/PERSOCIV/Documents/sviluppo_pari_opportunita/piano_azione_nazionale.pdf)

[DNA/Staff/DG/PERSOCIV/Documents/sviluppo\\_pari\\_opportunita/piano\\_azione\\_nazionale.pdf](https://www.difesa.it/SGD-DNA/Staff/DG/PERSOCIV/Documents/sviluppo_pari_opportunita/piano_azione_nazionale.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> See [https://cidu.esteri.it/resource/2016/12/49124\\_f\\_Piano132520162019.pdf](https://cidu.esteri.it/resource/2016/12/49124_f_Piano132520162019.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> For further information, see: [https://cidu.esteri.it/resource/2016/12/49124\\_f\\_Piano132520162019.pdf](https://cidu.esteri.it/resource/2016/12/49124_f_Piano132520162019.pdf)

processes and in all decision-making processes. Infact, the adoption of UNSCR 2122 (2013)<sup>16</sup> contributed to overcoming the concept of women as mere victims, acknowledging their crucial role in achieving a long-lasting peace: they are not just victims to protect, but protagonists and changemaking agents within their communities, engaging in the political field, in the various stages of socioeconomic reconstruction, as well as in the military and public administration. More specifically, Italy committed to increasing the presence of women in those areas where women are often disadvantaged in terms of competitiveness, namely justice and financial empowerment.

Moreover, promoting the presence of women in armed national forces serves the purpose of achieving the mission's objectives, especially with regard to peacekeeping operations, since certain activities unquestionably require the presence of a female representative for reasons of *force majeure*. Hence Italy's commitment to enhancing and ensuring an adequately trained and qualified female presence at a domestic level, but also within international teams deployed on peacekeeping missions, as well as supporting the engagement of men and boys in gender equality-related initiatives, which promote the principles concerning women, peace and security.

Furthermore, Italy took prompt steps to support gender-sensitive surveys and statistics to detect discriminatory factors, especially in crisis areas, in fragile states and in conflict and post- conflict contexts, through emergency or development actions, channels of cooperation, bilateral and multilateral funding, programs on women's empowerment, capacity building, reproductive health, violence against women and girls, and gender mainstreaming in the Balkan region, the MENA area, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, women empowerment has proved itself again to be a high-priority cross-cutting issue in all the key sectors identified by the Italian development cooperation guidelines and policy planning, which support:

- the implementation of specific programs focused on women's empowerment and national institutions capacity-building, to facilitate women's participation in reconstruction efforts in countries experiencing armed conflict;
- promoting programs to facilitate women's access to the job market and entrepreneurship, through microcredit, professional training and planning programs, that take into account the differential experiences of women and girls in the contexts described;
- enhancing women's role in all decision-making processes.

Other critical issues which prompted the Italian government and Italian cooperation to act jointly, include, additionally, promoting women's rights and combating gender-based violence, with special reference to the practice of female genital mutilation, considered from a medical perspective – for its serious psychological and physical consequences – as well as an abuse of power and control, embodied by the physical, sexual and mental oppression it implies. Due to the importance given to the sector, Italy adopted specific guidelines, addressing mostly healthcare professionals, aimed at developing projects (initially carried out in Afghan territories) and supporting all-women workgroups, by providing professional training courses in obstetrics, healthcare and psychological assistance in emergency contexts. Within this framework, furthermore, Italy acknowledges the worth of civil society's role and contribution, enhancing the dialogue with its actors, to support and monitor relevant actions and measures adopted.

In particular, one of the NAP's high-priority goals is strategic communication, in order for gender-related issues to reach stakeholders and wider audiences, especially young people. To this end, the Italian Government intends to identify, with the support of Civil Society Organizations, as well as the private and media sectors, the most adequate tools to spread information about all issues concerning the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

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<sup>16</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc11149.doc.htm>

### 1.3. *The choice of Sudan and Algeria*

In connection with the Italian commitment to promoting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, this research intends to provide an initial study of the recent evolution of women's empowerment in Sudan and Algeria. In 2019, the two contexts experienced the beginning of a transitional stage and the appointment of a new head of government, respectively, subsequent to the resurgence of popular protests staged by various segments of society. Among the movements' main driving forces, women's participation played a pivotal role in the struggle toward democratization and reconsideration of both countries' political, social, economic and cultural scenes.

In **Sudan**, the popular protests erupted in December 2018 - leading to the fall of Omar Al-Bashir's thirty-year regime - witnessed a high rate of female participation. It is no coincidence that the picture of Sudanese Activist Alaa Salah, taken while she was standing on a car addressing the crowd of protesters, gained world-wide media attention. On the other hand, the Sudanese women's movement has a long-standing history behind it.

Already in the early 50s, in fact, the Sudanese Women's Union was fighting to attain equal political rights with men. Sudanese women were at the forefront of demanding independence from British colonial rule. Subsequently, they took part in the 1964 protests against Ibrahim Abboud's<sup>17</sup> military regime, and in the 1985<sup>18</sup> protests against Jafar Numeiri, constantly striving for social change and greater rights.

During the latest demonstrations, the women's movement gradually increased its structures and popularity, contributing to the organization and success of the mass protests, calling for peace, freedom and justice. According to several surveys, notwithstanding the many cases of harassment and violence reported during the protests, 70% of participants in the recent demonstrations were women. The main demands put forward by this considerable part of the population concerned the change of laws that entailed the subjugation and humiliation of women, and an increased female participation at a political and decision-making level.

With the new transitional government, steps forwards have been taken as for the protection of women's rights, such as the repeal of the Public Order Law and the introduction of a law criminalizing female genital mutilation. However, critical aspects still persist as per the underrepresentation of women. In the transitional government, out of 22 members, the women holding a ministerial office are only 4, while only 2 women out of 18 have been appointed governors. It would seem that, although extremely involved in the mobilization, women have yet to be fully included as decision-makers in the transition process.

In **Algeria**, demonstrations began in 2019, after President Bouteflika -who hadn't spoken to his country since suffering a debilitating stroke in 2013- announced his willingness to seek a fifth term in office in the presidential elections, after being in power since 1999. For more than a year, every Friday, demonstrators in Algerian cities have taken to the streets, and protests have witnessed once again, as in the case of all historic moments, an extremely high percentage of women of all age, origin and social background. Algerian feminist and female movements have a well-established tradition, starting from the war of independence against France, when many women gave their life for the country's liberation. From that time onwards, their endeavors never ceased, despite having been targets of violence, in several occasions, as well as brutal and repressive campaigns. In the latest protests, the activism of Algerian women was dynamic and effective, also due to social media playing a key role with its immediacy and timeliness. While Bouteflika stepped down as Algeria's President on April 2 2019, after twenty years in power, protests are ongoing: massive crowds continue to take to the streets, where women are on the front lines, protesting not only against the

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<sup>17</sup>See: <https://nazra.org/en/2012/07/sudan-women-made-revolutions>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

regime, but especially against their perpetual subordination to men, be it a father, a brother or a husband. Algerian women are still subjected to the laws of an obsolete Family Code (enacted back in 1984) which serves to reinforce the domination of men over those who are called “the eternal minors”. Equal rights, gender equality and a greater inclusion have precisely become the mobilization’s recurring themes, since, in spite of gender equality being upheld by the Constitution on a number of fronts, the established practice appears to proceed in the opposite direction: women’s participation in the country’s political, economic and social life keeps being rather meager, with little to no improvement after the latest government formation, announced by President Tebboune in January 2020, where only 5 out of 39 members are women, all of whom destined to secondary ministries.

In the course of our study, it will be interesting to determine whether or not, and to what extent, the government transitions and women’s contribution to these changes might lead to new spaces for female representation, as well as actions aimed at increasing gender equality and women empowerment. Before delving into the analysis of the Sudanese and Algerian case studies, we provide an initial description of Italy’s intervention with regard to women empowerment and gender equality in the two target countries, considering the importance attached to these sectors in the third Italian NAP on Women, Peace and Security.

#### *1.4. Italy’s main interventions for enhancing women’s empowerment and gender equality in Sudan and Algeria*

As previously mentioned, Italy promoted and promotes, together with EU and UN Member States, measures to strengthen women’s participation in political and decision-making processes, with women empowerment proving itself again to be a high-priority cross-cutting issue in all the key sectors identified by the Italian development cooperation guidelines and policy planning.

From this perspective, it seems important to examine the nature of Italy’s interventions and its contribution to strengthening women’s role and capacity within the Sudanese and Algerian societies, considering, furthermore, the political and economic importance of the two countries for Italy.

Bilateral ties between Italy and **Sudan** are active and continuous, on a trading and political level as well as per culture and cooperation. Italy has particularly supported Sudan's process of institutional and economic reformation since the beginning of the transition process. This support was reinforced, among other things, by Minister Del Re’s official visit to several representatives of the transition government<sup>19</sup>, by Italy’s active participation in the Group of Friends of Sudan<sup>20</sup> and in the Sudan Partnership Conference<sup>21</sup>, convened in order for the Sudanese government and international partners to establish a common approach to sustain the country’s economic reforms. With regard to cooperation, Sudan is a priority country for Italy, as proven by the “Three-year programming and

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<sup>19</sup> For the details of the meeting, see: [https://ambkhartoum.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_khartoum/it/i\\_rapporti\\_bilaterali/cooperazione\\_politica/incontri/visita-del-re.html](https://ambkhartoum.esteri.it/ambasciata_khartoum/it/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione_politica/incontri/visita-del-re.html)

<sup>20</sup> The Group of Friends of Sudan was created to better coordinate the support of the International Community (including the EU, the UN and the WB) to the reform process undertaken by the country. See: [https://ambkhartoum.esteri.it/ambasaterali/cooperazione\\_politicaciata\\_khartoum/it/i\\_rapporti\\_bil](https://ambkhartoum.esteri.it/ambasaterali/cooperazione_politicaciata_khartoum/it/i_rapporti_bil)

<sup>21</sup> The Conference, held in June 2020, gathered around 50 states and international organizations (co-hosts: Sudan, Germany, EU, UN), which adopted a joint communiqué outlining the intended way to support Sudan in the transition phase. To sustain Sudan’s economic reforms and mitigate its social impact on the population, international partners pledged 1.8 million dollars. For further details, see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-partnership-conference-joint-press-release-co-hosts-federal-republic-germany>

policy planning document for Italian cooperation interventions 2019-2021”<sup>22</sup>. The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) has a field office in Khartoum, which manages interventions in the neighboring states of Eritrea, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic.

In Sudan, the main areas of AICS’s intervention are health, nutrition, the fight against poverty, the enhancement of cultural heritage, social protection, vulnerable groups, migration, development, gender equality and women empowerment. In this regard, it is worth stressing that gender inequality is a widespread factor, and one of the most debated issues in the newborn transition process, even within civil society. According to the 2019 Human Development Index, Sudan ranks 168 out of 189 countries in terms of Gender Development Index, confirming the existence of wide gaps as for the social inclusion of women in Sudan.

**Table 3. Sudan’s Gender Inequality Index Data**<sup>23</sup>

| Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) | Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19) | Share of seats in parliament (% held by women) | Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25 and older) |      | Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) |      |
|---|---|--|---|------|--|------|
|   |   |  | Female  | Male | Female   | Male |
| 311   | 64.0  | 31.0   | 15.3  | 19.6 | 24.5   | 70.3 |

Source: CeSPI projection based on UNHDR 2019 data<sup>24</sup>

We shall now focus on the most significant gender-related projects financed or implemented by AICS between 2018 and 2020<sup>25</sup>, in accordance with the categorization of DGCS/AICS guidelines for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment<sup>26</sup>: a) women’s economic empowerment and agricultural development; b) providing technical support to local institutions, by promoting a gender mainstreaming approach; c) combating gender-based violence; d) promoting rights to sexual and reproductive health.

With reference to women’s **economic empowerment**, especially as for the agricultural field, among the most significant interventions delivered in the period examined, in terms of funding, are two multilateral initiatives involving the collaboration of AICS and UN WOMEN.

The project “Sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Eastern Sudan: empowering women in agrobusiness and fishing value chains in Red Sea State” aims to increase the productivity of women involved in small agri-businesses, to facilitate women’s access to financial services, to boost their capacity to invest in the agricultural sector and promote opportunities to improve value chains in the different stages of processing food, especially fish, by strengthening women’s entrepreneurial competences and knowledge. Along the same lines, the core objectives of the project “Enhancement of women’s entrepreneurial capacity for effective engagement in fisheries and agribusiness in Red Sea State” is to promote income-generating activities, to improve women’s means of production - in terms of quantity and quality – to increase women’s income generation

<sup>22</sup> See: “INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION DEVELOPMENT THREE-YEAR PROGRAMMING AND POLICY PLANNING DOCUMENT 2019-2021” [https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Documento\\_triennale-2019-2021-REV.pdf](https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Documento_triennale-2019-2021-REV.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Data on gender inequality in Sudan will be further explained in Section II of the paper (Sudan case study).

<sup>24</sup> To download and see the report: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-report>

<sup>25</sup> The outline and brief description of the projects reference information from AICS’s 2019 Sudan Report (See: [https://khartoum.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relazione-annuale\\_25-febbraio-2020\\_compressed.pdf](https://khartoum.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relazione-annuale_25-febbraio-2020_compressed.pdf)), IADC’s online magazine “Oltremare” and desk analyses concerning websites of the projects’ partners.

<sup>26</sup> See AICS’s Khartoum Annual Report 2019, p. 31: [https://khartoum.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relazione-annuale\\_25-febbraio-2020\\_compressed.pdf](https://khartoum.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relazione-annuale_25-febbraio-2020_compressed.pdf)

capacity and their market competitiveness, to enhance the competences of women's cooperatives and associations by means of advocacy and awareness-raising activities. The project was launched in 2018 with an allocated budget of €810.000.

Even with reference to the areas of economic and agricultural development and poverty alleviation, two important initiatives both address women's economic empowerment.

The project "Fostering inclusive economic growth in Kassala State through agro-value chain development and access to financial services" implemented by UNIDO<sup>27</sup> in November 2018 with a budget of €2.470.00, aims, in fact, to create job opportunities and support an inclusive economic growth through agro-value chain development and access to financial services, especially with regard to women and young people<sup>28</sup>.

Furthermore, the five-year Poverty Alleviation Project (AID 10017) in the states of Red Sea and Kassala, implemented (in 2015) by AICS with the purpose of improving the socioeconomic conditions of the most vulnerable rural communities and enhancing food security, contributed to generating alternative production activities for women. In particular, it introduced home gardening practices for fruit tree and vegetable cultivation, and created value chains between beneficiaries of the two states, by increasing and improving the production of vegetables, marmalade, juice, tomatoes, and selling them at the local market<sup>29</sup>.

As for **combating gender-based violence** and **protecting sexual and reproductive rights**, Italy supported Sudan through the Italian Africa Fund, contributing €1,16 million to the UNFPA<sup>30</sup> (of which it was among the 20 main donors in 2019)<sup>31</sup> for a program aimed at enhancing healthcare systems in the States of Kassala, Gedarif, South Kordofan, White Nile and Nord Darfur, in order to improve migrants' sexual and reproductive health, considering that female and youth migrants, in particular, are at high-risk of suffering gender-based violence<sup>32</sup>.

With regard to sexual and reproductive health, EU- funded decentralized cooperation initiatives are also worth mentioning. The healthcare sector's delegated cooperation programs give particular importance to activities furthering sexual and reproductive health rights, with special reference to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the prevention of cervical cancer<sup>33</sup>.

The multisectoral program TADMEEN includes all the priority actions relative to women's empowerment and is the most considerable in terms of the budget provided (€4.150.000 euro with reference to bilateral channel funding<sup>34</sup>). The initiative is implemented by AICS in collaboration with the Sudanese Ministry of Security and Social Development. The project is comprised of three key elements: gender equality, the rights of people with disabilities and the protection of minors. The beneficiaries of the program are, in fact, the most vulnerable groups belonging to hosting and migrant communities and refugees, including minors at risk (i.e., non-accompanied children), vulnerable women (survivors of gender-based violence, FGM, divorced or abandoned women,

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<sup>27</sup> United Nation Industrial Development Organization

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.aics.gov.it/oltremare/sedi-estere/sudan-aics-e-unido-a-kassala-per-le-iniziativa-di-contrasto-alla-poverta/> and project report available on [https://khartoum.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relazione-annuale\\_25-febbraio-2020\\_compressed.pdf](https://khartoum.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Relazione-annuale_25-febbraio-2020_compressed.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> See: <https://www.aics.gov.it/oltremare/sedi-estere/sudan-la-cooperazione-italiana-lavora-perche-tutti-i-mesi-siano-il-mese-della-donna/>

<sup>30</sup> United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency

<sup>31</sup> See: <https://www.unfpa.org/updates/italian-assistance-helps-unfpa-protect-vulnerable-migrant-women-youth-sudan>

<sup>32</sup> See: <https://www.unfpa.org/updates/italian-assistance-helps-unfpa-protect-vulnerable-migrant-women-youth-sudan>

<sup>33</sup> See: <https://www.aics.gov.it/oltremare/sedi-estere/sudan-la-cooperazione-italiana-lavora-perche-tutti-i-mesi-siano-il-mese-della-donna/>

<sup>34</sup> As regards the EU delegated cooperation channel, the project budget is €12 million.

victims of trafficking) and persons with disabilities. The project's main objectives<sup>35</sup>, with reference to gender equality, are **to support the institutions for the development of national policies and programs aimed at promoting social inclusion and gender equality**; to promote the protection of women's rights in terms of sexual and reproductive health, combating gender-based violence, furthering socioeconomic rights and equal participation in public life in the States of Khartoum and Red Sea.

After this outline, and by making an initial analysis of the interventions, we can conclude that women's empowerment and gender equality are issues of utmost importance for the work of Italian cooperation in Khartoum, also considering the substantial budgetary resources allocated to the sector. With respect to the gender sector, AICS tend to adopt the so-called twin-track approach, where a sector-specific objective is combined with gender mainstreaming<sup>36</sup> in all the others. When gender-related issues are not specifically mentioned among the project targets, the tendency is to promote continuous gender mainstreaming actions into all the initiatives. Gender-related projects focus particularly on economic empowerment, mainly in the field of agriculture, particularly regarding access to microcredit services and entrepreneurship. As for the geographical distribution of gender-related projects, Italian cooperation mainly operates in the Khartoum area and in the east of the country, especially in Red Sea State.

The bilateral ties between **Italy and Algeria** are also close and continuous. The two countries are in fact bound by a Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation - signed in Algiers in 2003 – which is constantly renewed. The bilateral relationships and the cooperation agreements, which carry on with mutual support, reflect common intentions in areas considered strategic by both partners: agriculture, food security, youth and sports, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation, environmental protection and sustainable development. Moreover, the two partners hold periodic political consultations regarding migration, security, the fight against terrorism and regional prosperity, operating jointly and coordinately to promote peace and security in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Well-established and long-standing relationships abide also in the economic field. Specifically, the collaboration's pillars are: energy, training and research, public works and infrastructure. In the energy sector, numerous collaborations have been signed – ranging from infrastructures to production – between Sonatrach and the ENI group, previous to the partnership being later extended to include ABB Italia, Ansaldo Energia, ENEL and TERNA.

Moreover, the two countries have jointly carried out major infrastructure works, including newly-built bridges, dams and railway lines.

To date, however, despite of this close-knit collaboration, it must be noted that the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation has no field office in the country.

This absence is firstly due to the fact that Algeria, for the three-year period 2019-2021, was not included in the list of the 22 states the Italian Government considered priority countries with connection to cooperation<sup>37</sup>, countries that were reconfirmed after having been already identified in the “Three-year programming and policy planning document for Italian cooperation interventions

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<sup>35</sup> Among the objectives: to promote the development of human capital and to increase the resilience of groups of minors at risk, such as orphans, street-children, children in contact with the justice system and non-accompanied youth migrants; to contribute to the reduction of social marginality and discrimination of people with disabilities, through the promotion of school inclusion, vocational training and job placement.

<sup>36</sup> Gender mainstreaming involves a series of efforts to promote equality, mobilising all general policies and measures, actively taking into account, at the planning stage, their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women.

See: [https://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal\\_consolidated/data/document/gendermain\\_it.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/gendermain_it.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> See: “THREE-YEAR PROGRAMMING AND POLICY PLANNING DOCUMENT FOR ITALIAN COOPERATION INTERVENTIONS 2019-2021” [https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Documento\\_triennale-2019-2021-REV.pdf](https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Documento_triennale-2019-2021-REV.pdf)

2017-2019". The main reason for AICS's current absence in the Algerian territory – opposed to its presence, however limited, in the past - is precisely the level of development achieved by the country, due to hydrocarbon resources in the energy and agricultural sector.

In addition to this, though gender inequality and women's empowerment have been among the reasons driving Algerian women to take to the streets and demonstrate over the past year, in the 2019 Human Development Report<sup>38</sup>, as to the high human development category, Algeria ranked 82 out of the 189 countries evaluated. The report also contains a specific section on women's empowerment<sup>39</sup>. The 13 indicators selected to assess and compare women's empowerment cross three main dimensions: reproductive health and family planning, violence against girls and women, and, lastly, socioeconomic empowerment. The latter dimension will be further examined below.

**Table 4. Algeria's Gender Inequality Index Data**

| Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) | Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19) | Share of seats in parliament (% held by women) | Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25 and older) |      | Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) |      |
|---|---|--|---|------|--|------|
|   |   |  | Female  | Male | Female   | Male |
| 141   | 10.1  | 21.3   | 39.1  | 38.9 | 14.9   | 67.4 |

Source: CeSPI projection based on UNHDR 2019 data<sup>40</sup>

In the past years, while not having any office in the country, AICS has, however, financed a number of projects carried out by third parties, mostly destined to the population of the Sahrawi refugee camps.

With regard to women's empowerment, targeted interventions have not been observed, although other interventions include the matter as a cross-cutting issue and/or involve the participation of local women in the project activities.

It's worth mentioning, first of all, one of the latest projects completed in the country: "Work and food: self-production and dignity"<sup>41</sup>, financed by AICS (total amount €687.410), and carried out by one of the two (only) NGOs in Algeria, AFRICA70<sup>42</sup>, until its completion in January 2020. One of the project's objectives was gender equality, implemented through local institutions, with women's cooperatives involved at the front lines, though the sector of intervention was food crop production, while the key targets were participatory development and good governance. The project supported twenty informal associations of women involved in food production, who also received training in a number of areas, such as business management, production, marketing and hygiene.

The other NGO active in the country, International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP), has been in Algeria since 2002 and in the Sahrawi refugee camps since 1984. Among the 8 field projects conducted by CISP, none of them specifically references women's empowerment as a core or priority target (save the project involving the women of the Sahrawi refugee camps), though there is an intense and constant collaboration with the women of Algeria's civil society, even those employed in the NGOs. Other initiatives supporting Algerian women, with CISP's participation, are worth mentioning. The first of these was a day of reflection, in 2015, which involved 120 Algerian women, together with representatives of the *Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de*

<sup>38</sup> See: <http://report.hdr.undp.org>

<sup>39</sup> The Human Development Report presents values and degrees of human development: the Human Development Index – HDI. See: <http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/content/dashboard-3-women's-empowerment-0>

<sup>40</sup> To download and see the report: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-report>

<sup>41</sup> <http://openaid.aics.gov.it/it/iati-activity/XM-DAC-6-4-010925-01-4>

<sup>42</sup> See: <https://www.africa70.org>

*l'Homme* (LADDH), and the *Fondation pour l'égalité* (CIDDEF). The meeting, which was held on the twentieth anniversary of Beijing's World Conference on Women, and in order to reflect on the first decade following the amendments to Algeria's Family Code, spurred a debate on the delicate issues hindering women's empowerment and their engagement in the political, economic and cultural life. The second initiative (2017) in support of women and their rights took place to celebrate international women's day, resulting in an opportunity to reflect on the vital role of Algerian women over time.

The limited presence of NGOs involved in cooperation is also due to what appear to be bureaucratic difficulties, since a clear and precise recognition of the legal status of NGOs operating in Algeria, to date, is seemingly non-existent.

Another important Italian – and more generally, Mediterranean - contribution to Algerian women comes from the Municipality of Palermo, which participated in the project “AMINA – Women Leaders in the Governance of Algerian Civil Society”<sup>43</sup>, aimed at strengthening the capacity of Civil Society Organizations as governance actors.

The project, co-funded by the European Commission within the framework of the “EuropeAid” program, in partnership with the NGO MEDITER and the *Association de volontariat Touiza de la Wilaya d'Alger*, was jointly carried out by the municipalities of Palermo and Algiers. The project (also) addresses Algerian women of the professional world, as well as those active in local institutions and civil society organizations, particularly in the most vulnerable areas of the Algiers province. The project and its activities are based on two pillars: improving management and planning capacities of local actors through training activities, with special regard to local, community and cross-border policies; extending and improving cooperation between local and international actors, through the creation and implementation of a network for women's leadership in the Euro-Mediterranean context.

The ultimate aim is also to establish constant and long-lasting ties between the various Civil Society Organizations, in support of the Algerian ones. The project's results, presented in October 2020, showed a high rate of female participation, culminating with the establishment of the Jasmine Network (2019), born to support female leadership in the region and to facilitate younger women's access to positions of power and influence.

Following this initial analysis, it can be concluded that, in spite of Italian cooperation's limited presence in the territory – with reference to AICS and NGOs – for the reasons mentioned above, the tendency in the various projects conducted, which focus especially on economic empowerment in the agricultural field and food security, is to consider women's empowerment and gender equality as cross-cutting issues. Moreover, the experience and success of the “Amina Project” and the “Jasmine Network” prove that gender-related issues and women's empowerment are increasingly perceived and addressed as a top priority, enhancing the awareness of the importance of women's participation in community life.

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<sup>43</sup> See <https://aminaproject.com>

## **SECTION 2. WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTIONARY LANDSCAPE IN SUDAN AND ALGERIA: VOICES FROM THE GROUND**

In 2019, Sudan and Algeria experienced governmental changes following protests and claims from various sectors of society. People of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, young and old, women and men, secular and religious came together in their demand for freedom and better living<sup>44</sup>. As we have already outlined, women participation during protests was massive and active.

As of the importance that women represented as part of the popular movements that rocked Sudan and Algeria for a *de facto*<sup>45</sup> and a still *façade*<sup>46</sup> transition, respectively, we decided to analyze claims and demands of women during and after the revolutionary period and their current standing. To develop a grassroot analysis, we asked to our partners in Sudan and Algeria to help us in opening a window into the local women activism and their involvement in both revolution and transition. We agreed to focus on the issues they considered crucial regarding the battle of women for empowerment and gender equality in their respective countries and to develop a case study according to their findings. To have a broader view of the role of the Sudanese and Algerian women revendications during revolutions, CeSPI developed a contestual research on Sudanese and Algerian women living in Italy and supporting the struggle for gender equality and women empowerment of their respective countries, from abroad.

The following case studies were developed by Al-Harisat<sup>47</sup> (for Sudan) Tinhinan El Kadi (for Algeria) and CeSPI (for Italy) as a result of the (fieldwork) interviews conducted by the three partner entities during the period between August and October 2020 to women activists of different social, cultural and political backgrounds in Sudan, Algeria and Italy.

### ***2.a. WOMEN'S STRUGGLE IN THE SUDANESE TRANSITION.***

Women activists have made important progress towards gender equality in the last two years in Sudan, but the inherent challenges created by 30 years of the rule of Islamic regime continue to hinder the swift progress in the gender file and consequently in the effective political participation of women during the transitional period. To better understand the evolution and the current state of play in terms of gender equality in Sudan this study looks at Sudanese women activism and

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<sup>44</sup> See <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/4/15/the-art-of-revolution-what-went-right-in-sudan-and-algeria/>

<sup>45</sup> In December 2018, rising bread and fuel prices triggered mass protests in Sudan that quickly widened to overthrowing the 30-year rule of Omar Al-Bashir. In April 2019 former regime was dismantled and a Transitional Military Council (TMC) was appointed. However, civil protests led by the Alliance for Freedom and Change Forces kept on, calling for the establishment of a civilian government and for ending internal conflicts. After months of negotiations which passed through the 3<sup>rd</sup> June tragic events, the transitional government was formed and Abdalla Hamdok was appointed Prime Minister. A Constitutional Charter was developed as a roadmap for the newly appointed transitional government to define the composition of the governmental bodies, the length of its appointment (39 months) and the roadmap for future interventions.

<sup>46</sup> In Algeria, after president Bouteflika announced to run for a fifth term, the mass movement of the Hirak started the so called "revolution of smiles" taking to the street and asking for a political renewal. After Tebboune's appointment at the head of the government, the mass movement did not stop its requests for regime change as the new president is considered as an emanation of previous power and unable to conceal his dependance on the army.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Harisat (The Female Guards) was founded by a group of women and young women activists in December 2018, at the beginning of the popular revolution to expand women's participation in the movement for freedom, peace and justice. After the revolution and during this transitional period Al-Harisat has dynamically organized itself through establishing a physical base for its members and has concretely developed its vision and mission to work towards the empowerment of women through capacity building with its absolute definition.

participation<sup>48</sup> in the revolution against the former regime in 2019 from social, political and historical perspective and it highlights their role and demands in the transitional period. The study has four sections exploring the Sudanese women movement and women activism in Sudan in the light of the 2018 revolution. To understand the status of women in the transitional period we must look into the subject from a broader gender perspective. The gender division and the perceived roles of women and men as assigned by the cultural or social norms play major part in shaping women activism movement in the country. The different components of women realities in Sudan had created different challenges and diverse approaches to tackle these challenges. The first section reviews gender inequalities in Sudan from the economic and social perspectives. The study also explores the different components of the Sudanese women activism that helped in making the change in the condition of women in the country. Lastly the study focuses on the participation of women in the recent revolution in Sudan and the role of women in the democratic transition.. The final section concludes.

### **2.a.1. Background context and state of play**

Gender inequality has many aspects including the gender gap in development and access to basic services such as education, healthcare and labor market participation. Inequality also appears in the highly dysfunctional political system that created conflicts and ethnic discrimination that mostly affected the condition of women in Sudan. Islamization of the state, laws and views, has led to discrimination against women on religious and ethnic basis in addition to gender discrimination. Systemic sexual and gender-based violence is another byproduct of the failed state, as well as conflicts and the Islamization of the political and the social life. This section reviews these aspects of gender inequality and the current state of play of women's role in the Sudanese society to understand the forces affecting women activism and the prospect of change to achieve gender equality in Sudan.

### **2.a.2. Women Role in Society in Sudan**

Sudanese women roles are defined by the traditional conditions of the society and the cultural environment. Despite the diversity of the Sudanese communities in terms of cultures, religions and languages, the roles played by males and females are divided based on the patriarchy systems ruling most of these communities. "In a traditional society like Sudan, it is the inherent social hierarchies and ideologies of male supremacy rather than any specific religion which effects women lives."(Ashraf, 1985). The traditional value system encourages early and universal marriage to fulfill women primary role which is reproduction. Child-care, cooking and family maintenance are the main assigned roles for Sudanese women in most cultural settings. Men roles evolve around the public sphere, while women are expected to remain in the domestic, personal sphere:

*"The Sudanese society has high degree of male domination and the social norms support male supremacy and cripple women from living freely and equally"*

Asmaa Mohamed Taha, political leader in the Republican Party

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<sup>48</sup> The researchers conducted interviews with women activists from different educational, ethnical and political backgrounds. Despite the challenges of covid-19, the floods and the continuous political and security unrest in Sudan, the study researchers were able to meet with 12 women activists and held discussions with women rights experts inside and outside Sudan. Al-Harisat has interviewed women activists and women researchers as primer sources of information. The group collected information and data from the government, women groups, international organizations and media to track the progress and challenges facing women movement in Sudan.

In rural communities, women are also responsible of provision of family food, this production could come from farming around the house or in the fields to produce the main needs of the family. The latest numbers estimate that 59 percent of Sudan population settled in rural areas. The nomad community represent 9 percent of the population in Sudan, while most of them have limited access to education and health care services. According to UNICEF child marriage and FGM<sup>49</sup> are widely spread practices in nomad communities in Sudan. The role of women in agricultural and nomad communities is restricted by the traditional perception of gender roles. Despite women contribution to the production processes in rural areas, and their work for long hours in the fields, their contributions are not impacting women's economic or social status. As men remained heads of households dominating the domestic rules and restricting women abilities to move or participate in the public space.

*“Men controls women lives in our areas. Women and girls education is very limited in Darfur because of the conflict and the economic conditions, which increase traditional practices that oppress women and girls.”*

Said Halima Sasa, a woman from Darfur

The situation in urban communities might look different from some aspects, especially regarding women access to education and their ability to gain their own income and economic freedom. But the inherent traditional norms hindered women in urban settings from enjoying their rights. Religious interpretation of women roles as wives and domestic creatures increased the restrictions imposed on women in urban areas. Male supremacy had been legitimized by the Muslim Personal Law of 1991 which gives guardianship<sup>50</sup> for male members of the family over women, including brothers, fathers and husbands. The concept of male guardianship has been used by the former regime to oppress and intimidate women in the public sphere. Security officers documented calling women protesters as “girls without guardians”, hinting to the idea that if a woman has a male guardian, she would never be allowed to get to streets to protest. Many members of the society do not accept powerful women, or women in decision-making positions. There is a tend to refuse to obey her orders or support her decisions.

*“I felt the pressure of the discriminating social norms after my appointment. I believe that some people purposely call me (girl) or (Daughter of Alboushi) to belittle me, or to remind me of my gender, which is something would never happen with a man in my position”*

Walaa Alboushi the minister of Youth Affair in the transitional government

### **2.a.3. The change in women roles in Sudan**

With the rising numbers of women access to education, the conditions of displacement created by the conflicts and climate change, and the mounting struggle of women activists, the role of Sudanese women is changing in many aspects. One of the remarkable changes is seen in the numbers of women heads of households. “Many women are becoming now heads of households in result of men migration or absence for wars. Women are expected to work and many men now expect financial contribution from female members of the family, some are demanding this contribution.” (Badri 1990). These findings had been supported by the results from the National

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<sup>49</sup> Female Genital Mutilation.

<sup>50</sup> The guardianship concept is coming from the Islamic idea of “Qwama”, which translate to the ability of men to take care of households including women, financially and provide protection from the outside world, including (other men). This concept has been used by Muslim communities in Sudan to control women freedoms to participate in the public space, either politically, socially or economically

Census of 2008, as 73% of Female Headed Households were headed by married women, while widowed women represented the 18% and single women the 3.5 percent.

*“I have noticed growing change in men views to women work in our rural areas in Darfur, men now accept the women work outside the house and understand that women have a role in the society outside the house.”*

Halima Sasa during the interview

The fact that married women represented the highest numbers among female headed households is important indicator to the change in women roles in the domestic and public spheres. These changes have been part of the explanation of the wide women participation in the Sudan revolution in 2018. As mentioned in the section about women roles and gender divisions, male guardianship in Islam is partially based on financial support of the women and the role of male as sole heads of households. The change in this role had an important impact on women gaining their economic independence and make their own decisions to join the protest. Women protesters used their work or school hours as an alibi for their families to join the protests.

**Figure 1. Female-headed households**

| %     | Divorced | Widowed | Married | Never married | Mode of living |
|-------|----------|---------|---------|---------------|----------------|
| 100.0 | 5.4      | 18.1    | 73.0    | 3.5           | Total          |
| 100.0 | 6.4      | 19.3    | 69.2    | 5.0           | Urban          |
| 100.0 | 5.0      | 17.5    | 74.5    | 3.0           | Rural          |
| 100.0 | 5.5      | 21.9    | 69.7    | 2.9           | Nomad          |

Source: National Population Census [24].

**Table 1:** Female-headed households.

Women political and social activism is building a resilient movement and making legal and political reforms. For example, women political participation including women quotas for representation in the parliament or the government institutions has increased in the least 15 years from 25% in 2005 to 40% in 2019. But these changes in the role of women in Sudanese society is far from closing the gabs created by gender inequality in the personal and public spheres.

#### **2.a.4. The Gender Gap in development and fundamental rights**

The Human Development Index produced by the UNDP in 2019 ranked Sudan as number 168 out of 189 countries. The report also measures gender inequality through its Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index. Sudan position is among the lowest countries, as it has been ranked number 139 out of 162 countries measured by the Gender Inequality Index for 2019. The Gender Inequality Index measures women participation in parliament, the percentage of adult women reached secondary education in comparison with men and reproductive health measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates and women share in the labor market. The index reported the percentage of women participation in the last parliament which was 31%, but the current constitutional document created after the revolution gave women 40 percent of the future transitional parliament. The index reflected the gender gab in education as 15.3 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 19.6 percent of their male counterparts. A least 311 women die from pregnancy related causes for every 100 thousand live birth, while female participation in the labour market is 24.5 percent compared to 70.3 for men. The

table below shows these figures in comparison with Yemen and the Arab countries performance in the index.

## Figure 2. Sudan's Gender Inequality Index

In comparison, Yemen is ranked at 162 on this index.

**Table E: Sudan's GII for 2018 relative to selected countries and groups**

|                    | GII value | GII Rank | Maternal mortality ratio | Adolescent birth rate | Female seats in parliament (%) | Population with at least some secondary education (%) |      | Labour force participation rate (%) |      |
|--------------------|-----------|----------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---|------|-------------------------------------|------|
|                    |           |          |                          |                       |                                | Female  | Male | Female                              | Male |
| <b>Sudan</b>       | 0.560     | 139      | 311.0                    | 64.0                  | 31.0                           | 15.3  | 19.6 | 24.5                                | 70.3 |
| <b>Yemen</b>       | 0.834     | 162      | 385.0                    | 60.4                  | 0.5                            | 19.9  | 35.5 | 6.0                                 | 70.8 |
| <b>Arab States</b> | 0.531     | —        | 148.0                    | 46.6                  | 18.3                           | 45.9  | 54.9 | 20.4                                | 73.8 |
| <b>Low HDI</b>     | 0.590     | —        | 557.0                    | 101.1                 | 21.3                           | 17.8  | 30.3 | 58.2                                | 73.1 |

Maternal mortality ratio is expressed in number of deaths per 100,000 live births and adolescent birth rate is expressed in number of births per 1,000 women ages 15-19.

The gender gap in education and the labor market is reflecting the status of inherent gender inequalities that require structural sociopolitical reforms in the Sudanese state and society. This dark picture of the reality of women and girls in Sudan was created by combination of factors. Political systems that governed Sudan since its independence have failed in moving the country towards democracy, development and modernity. The traditional social norms and patriarchal systems, including the gender divisions of roles in society remained largely unchanged since Sudan became an independent state in 1956.

### 2.a.5. Sexual and gender-based violence

Although Sudanese women had an important role in the change recently achieved on the political aspect, but socially, culturally, legally and economically, Sudanese women are still facing growing marginalization, discrimination, sexual violence and abuse. Access to information, services, and preventive measures relating to SGBV in Sudan remain poor and limited to those in the elite sectors of society. Even well-educated working women lack proper information on referrals when encountered with any form of SGBV such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, children sexual abuse, rape, the right to abortion, and many more issues remains highly restricted in public discussions which makes awareness raising and advocacy efforts challenging. Unknown numbers of women and girls are facing sexual violence every day in Sudan, while the stigma is preventing them from finding help or accessing protection or support. Due to the conservative and closed women communities in addition to the restrictions related to education levels, most Sudanese women and girls do not have the access for information on protection and prevention from SGBV. In addition to the fact that the state itself is the main source of SGBV in Sudan, through conflicts, discriminating laws and lack of protection and prevention systems.

### 2.a.6. Inequality and gender politics in Sudan and the effect of political Islam

Sudan has long been considered a failed state due to its poor economic performance, weak institutions and fragile political system. The country witnessed the longest civil war in the century in the south which started in 1955 and ended in 2005. The state lived through 54 years of its 66 years of independence under military dictatorships governments. The political discourse has been dividing the country more than uniting its people to work for prosperity and development. Since the independence, Sudanese political and social forces engaged in an ongoing conflict to determine the

identity of the State. The conflicted narratives of Sudan state identity and values have been guided by two versions. The first one calls for an Islamic Arabic Sudan, leaning towards the middle eastern countries. The other calls for a Sudanic identity that recognize the African origins of Sudanese peoples and their diverse cultural values beyond Islamic/Arabic culture. The domination of one view of Sudan identity has created racial and ethnic discrimination against African ethnicities in Sudan.

Racial discrimination in Sudan is deeply rooted in the country's complicated sociopolitical history, and ethnic and religious power relations, that define the power and wealth distribution in the community. Women and other vulnerable groups are the most affected by this discriminative perception and consequential practice. The long history of slavery in Sudan created a natural division in the community (masters and followers) These boundaries were drawn based on color and religion, as the Arab/ Islamic culture dominated power and wealth and exercised a different patterns of marginalization towards areas populated with a majority of those perceived to be Abeed (a term means slaves and used to describe those of pure African origins and features) African ethnic groups in Sudan. This ethnic/religious discrimination among the Sudanese people is manifested today not just in the civil wars and major human rights atrocities committed in the war zones, but it also demonstrates the reality of Sudanese women daily lives, their development prospects and the challenges they face socially, economically, politically, and legally. Access to education, jobs plus the preidentified beauty standards are all deeply connected to the social, racial, cultural and ethnical hierarchy supported by the patriarchy system ruling the country for decades. Shifting the social norms in regard to race and ethnicity and promoting equal rights is one of the revolution goals and important part of gender equality struggle in Sudan. "The magnitude of this political battle was most obvious when the male chair of the Higher Council for Peace used the word "khadam" (enslaved women) in reference to women's participation, in response to a question asked by a female staffer while he was introducing her to his team. This incident was condemned by women activists; MANSAM, a coalition of political and civil society women's groups, issued a public statement addressed to government councils, and petitioned for the chairman's removal from office." (Kadoda and Hale, 2020)

These conflicting views of the social and political forces has led the country to enter in continuous civil wars in its different parts; starting from the South, up to the the east, and finally to the most horrific conflict in Darfur in western Sudan in 2002. The Darfur conflict took the country's political dilemma into another level,when the government of the Islamic fundamentalists committed a genocide according to the International Criminal Court investigations. The Islamic regime which ruled the country for 30 years starting in 1989, has led vicious wars in support for its visions for an Islamic Arabized state in Sudan. The regime discourse has led Southern Sudanese to vote for separation from Sudan in 2011, after the peace agreement of 2005. The war in Darfur resembled the systemic discrimination against women, as the Sudanese government used rape and sexual violence as a weapon in the war in the region. Some international organizations estimate that at least 200 thousand women were raped in Darfur in the period from 2002 to 2008.

Conflicts in three regions of Sudan since 2002 including Darfur, Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile- started in 2011- has resulted in the displacement of at least 5 million internally. Most of the displaced people are women and children, either in Darfur or the two areas. The displacement and conflicts conditions increased the gender inequality in Sudan in general, but in conflicts and rural areas in particular. Women were forced to become head of their families and provide for them in the absence of men, but they face these new roles with limited skills and lack of support. Education and access to health care remain a major challenge as HRW reported in 2017 the hike in women mortality during pregnancy in the conflict area of Nuba mountains in result of the poor access to reproductive health care.

The amendments of the Personal Muslims laws in 1991, has brought the concepts of guardianship and wive obedience into the law. The law also legalized child marriage by making the acceptable

age for marriage at 10 years old. On the other hand, the infamous Public Order Laws, had almost closed the public space for women. The so called “Civilization Project”, which means the Islamization project of Sudanese people, adopted by the former regime legitimized women oppression through the media and the political and social discussions.

The Muslim brotherhood leader in Sudan Hasan Alturabi had conflicting views about women rights, he promoted women political participation and even women religious leadership, but he wanted these Islamic women freedoms to remain under the guardianship of men or “Qwama”. Women affiliated with the former regime supported what they called the concept of “Gender or women Equity” versus gender “Equality”. The concept of equity is defining women roles to be complementary of men roles but not equal. “While complementarity historically domesticated women to rearing and caring for children, it is now employed to rally women into politics based on the claim that there is a need for both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ elements in politics to make sound decisions.” (Liv Tønnessen, 2018)<sup>51</sup>.

According to Tønnessen this new interpretation of complementarity is used to claim political gains and to “specifically the responsibility put on Sudanese women’s shoulders to represent a ‘modern face of Islam’, not religious doctrine per se.” This new role of women in Sudan politics has been reflected in the former regime increase of women political participation which reached 31 percent seats in the parliament by 2018. But this women presence did not translate in support to any gender equality agenda or legal reforms. For example, women members of the former parliament stood against the proposed reforms for the child rights laws in 2008 to criminalize FGM.

*“Women participation in the former regime parliament was just a sham and a face, those women did not actually represent gender equality or women rights agendas at any level.”*

Asmaa Mohamed Taha, In the interview

Another aspect of women participation in the former regime political process was the presence of women in the last elections held 2015. During these last elections of the former regime 1763 women were running for national parliament seats. In 2010 elections, more than 60% of the public voters were women, this numbers increased in the 2015 elections to around 70%. (source) But this participation is not a reflection of women political choices in Sudan, it is rather a reflection of the state oppression and dominating patriarchy system, especially in the rural areas. Nazik Kabalo stated in a study about women quota and the 2015 elections that “women working in the public sector were intimidated to participate in the elections or they will lose their jobs, baring in mind that women represented 56% of the civil service force”. (Kabalo, 2015).

These complicated factors increased gender inequality at all levels. The Sudanese political and social debates has marginalized gender perspective in the political and social systems reforms. Women has been used and abused by the male power holders in the state and non-state institutions. The discriminating views against women has created restrictions for women participate in the decisions making processes in the government or the political parties or other academic and private institutions. “There is no woman president in any political party in Sudan so far. Women leadership inside political remain very small compared to men.” Said Samirin Alkahir, woman Activist and researcher duriing the interview for this paper. The very few privileged women who reached some positions of leadership continue to struggle from the male supremacy mentality. The political system that is built on the male leadership that is connected to the tribal and religious traditions is far from being dismantled. The change of this inherent ideas and stereotyping of women has been for decades the main goal of the Sudanese women rights movement.

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<sup>51</sup> Liv Tønnessen, *An increasing number of Muslim women in politics: A step towards complementarity, not equality*, CMI brief, 2018.

<https://www.cmi.no/publications/6534-increasing-number-of-muslim-women-in-politics>

### **2.a.7. History, structure and progress of women activism in Sudan**

The conditions of gender inequality in Sudan have shaped the priorities of women movement and dictated its historical and structural progress. In the next paragraphs we will explore the structure and progress of women activism in Sudan to help in understanding the women movement activism to achieve gender equality.

### **2.a.8. Brief historical overview of women activism in Sudan**

Sudanese women activism history goes back to the colonial era. Women joined protests the British rulers in 1924 revolution. But the strongest and more organized movement started in 1940s. Women education campaigns in 1920s led by the late Babikir Badri, one of the rare women rights male advocates in Sudan, contributed in creation of women schools like Alahfad which later became the first women university in Sudan. Mr. Badri led social debates with local religious and tribal leaders to change their views about sending girls to schools. He succeeded in creating the first girls schools in Rufaa and Omdurman in 1920s. Women education was the first step towards emancipation of women in Sudan, which was encouraged by the colonial government. Educated women started to work as teachers and nurses and middle wives in the 1930-40s. By 1956 the year of the independence, women registered in universities were only 4 percent, where the data from the Human Development Report of 2019 showed female graduates from science and technology shares is up to 47 percent.

The long way Sudanese women took towards equality has been paved by the resilience of women rights groups like the Sudanese Women Union. The Sudanese Women Union (SWU) was established in 1952. It focused on women's rights to education and work, and to combat superstitious and harmful inherited beliefs and traditions. In 1953, women's political rights were added to the union's agenda. The SWU organized protests and silent marches against dictator governments, fought to change discriminative laws against women, demanded equal political, labor and economic rights for women, and fought harmful and reactionary traditions against women such as; Female Genitals Mutilation (FGM). Women activists in Sudan have a very long history of resistance fighting for their rights. Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim was the first president of the Women Union, Fatima was the first woman to be a member of the parliament in Sudan, the Middle East and Africa, after she was elected in 1965. Most of the basic women rights achieved by Sudanese women including the rights to equal pay for equal work, and the paid maternity leaves among other political rights was achieved after the success of the 1964 revolution, which ousted the first military regime in Sudan from power. Women participated actively in the resistance movement against the first military regime. Their strong presence under the Sudanese Women Union and through women membership in students and professional unions, in addition to political parties, had raised gender issues to the top agendas. This experience had been echoed in the 1985 revolution and the recent revolution in 2018.

### **2.a.9. Structure and progress of women activism in Sudan**

To be able to analyse the role of Sudanese women in the revolution of 2018, we must review the progress and the structure of the Sudanese women groups across the activism spectrum<sup>52</sup>. In Sudan,

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<sup>52</sup> The types of women groups and structures described in this section was driven from Al-Harisat interviews with women activists and leaders, in addition to our group discussions with women researchers and scholars. We interviewed

women movement is not a homogeneous organ, its a collective of views, affiliations and experiences that reflect the shattered reality of the Sudanese political and social setting.. Women rights movement structure and progress is not separate from the general political and social change movement in Sudan. Women have created or joined students and professional unions, civil society groups and created women rights association and organization at the local and national levels for the last 60 years. Women also joined political parties and armed groups fighting against the government of Sudan in the peripheries, some of those women in armed groups took arms and became fighters and leaders of troops. Other sorts of women organizations include small cooperative groups in neighborhoods, as women collect money or share resources to provide solidarity to each other in times of crisis, like loss of family members. In rural areas women also join sufi and religious sects . In the last 10 years women entrepreneurs or small businesses owners started also to organize using social media groups to promote their goods and create solidarity groups. The growing use of social media and the margin of freedom of expression has encouraged young women to organize feminist groups with more radical views than the old generation women rights movement in Sudan. This young generation feminists discuss issues considered tabooed subjects like the right to abortion and LGBTQ rights.

Women rights movement in Sudan is not identified by one form of activism or feminist discourse. The movement is largely diverse and shaped by personal experiences and views, rather collective shared values. The fractured structure of the Sudanese social and political setting had been reflected into Sudanese women movement. Different political and ideological believes had been one of the main obstacles for Sudanese women in forming a strong united rights movement. As mentioned earlier, women affiliated with the Islamic regime opposed gender equality reform agenda based on their political and ideological orientation. Elite women groups do not have enough connections with women less educated at the grassroots level. Political affiliations, economic status and education level play as major facto in shaping the divisions in the women activism movement in Sudan.

The women activists groups can be classified into three main categories based on their mandates and type of membership: **The first category:** could be labeled as Women Movement Building groups, these are groups that focused more on advocating for general issues of gender equality, mobilization and lobbying. Members of these of these groups are highly educated women, female students and professionals or women members in political parties. These groups sometimes appear in forms of coalitions consisted of smaller groups to defend a specific cause or to participate in wider movement of change. These groups try to draw the attention to some gender equality issues and rally women from all walks of life to join their campaigns. The most recent representation of this category is the two groups *MANSAM* and *No for Women Oppression Initiative*. The first was formed after the revolution which is a form of coalition of women groups opened for membership of groups and individuals. The group is coordinating efforts to ensure women political participation in the transitional government institutions. *No for Women Oppression Initiative* is one of the most active groups since 2008 in lobbying and campaigning to for legal reforms and social change, it has been the first groups to organize public protests against the public order laws in 2008, and continues to date to advocate in the different right for gender related topics. The group membership is open for groups and individuals including men supporters of women rights. The oldest group in this category is Sudanese Women Union, although it can also be part of the second category.

**The second category:** can be labeled as women political groups. These groups are more likely to include women members of political parties or armed movements. The members of these groups work together inside their political party or outside it to raise gender issues. The Sudanese Women Union which is the oldest women rights group established in 1952 is described by many to affiliate to the communist party due to patterns of its membership. In the early stages the union was more open to women from all over Sudan, but under the rule of the second military regime in the 1970s

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10 women and conducted in depth discussions with 8 women scholars and researchers to categorize women groups into main three groups

the union was dissolved and labeled as communist organization. For 15 years the union members had to work in the hide which finally resulted for the union to lose most of its non-committed communist members. Similar attack on the union took place under the Islamic regime, as the work of the union was banned for two decades. The former regime created its own women body and called it Women Union as well, but all the members were affiliated to the ruling party. The other women political groups include women in political parties and armed groups. For example, there is the Marginalized Women Association which represent women members in some armed groups and other women from the conflict areas. There is also the group of Women of the Consensus Forces, and the Women of The Revolutionary Front Forces among others. As it appears from the names of these groups they are mainly consisted of members of political groups.

**The third category** of women activism groups is more identified as civil society groups including women rights organizations or NGOs, associations of professionals, entrepreneurs or female students. These groups might have women only membership or sometimes women members in unions or associations work to raise gender issues. These groups work in diverse issues from leading campaigns to advocate for certain rights or certain groups like street food vendors, to groups conducting studies and advocacy in issues like violence against women. There is dozens of groups like these working on the national and local levels. These groups include women members as well in professional and trade unions and student unions.

Women rights groups have worked through their different objectives and various working mechanisms to mobilize women and Sudanese people for democratic change for the last 30 years. Women from professional unions, student unions, NGOs, political parties and large coalitions of women groups build the resistance against the former regime for decades small steps at a time. Different motivations and narratives of women groups agreed on one goal which is the need to end the rule of the Islamic government of Al-Bashir as the first step toward structural changes towards gender equality. The protests in December 2018 was the momentum for their collective movement building efforts that lasted for years.

#### **2.a.10. Women's role during and after revolution**

The experience of Sudanese women groups and activists as organizers and protesters has been shaped by the violent crackdown from the former regime during the protests. Women protesters also struggled with social norms and restrictions of cultural norms that hindered their presence in the public space, however and despite these challenges, fears and restrictions; women and girls represented 60 to 70 percent of the protesters in the revolution. This section analyses the role of women during and after revolution, their achievements with regard to gender equality and current challenges.

#### **2.a.11. Women's role in revolution**

During the 8 months of the Sudanese revolution, women protesters faced unprecedented amount of violence and human rights violations amounts to serious atrocities that are sought to be investigated urgently and independently. Hundreds of women protesters were injured, detained, sexually abused and tortured. At least 13 women were killed during the protests among them a young child of 7 years old. Most of the deaths were caused by gun shots in the head and chest, which means direct targeting of the victims with orders to shoot to kill. Hundreds of women professionals were subjected to intimidation, detention, unfair trials and reprisals because of their leadership of workers unions and local communities during the revolution. Women lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, banker, university professors and others were detained and harassed for weeks without charges or

access to medical care. Sudanese women from all walks of life led the protests on streets calling for end of the 30 years rule of Omer Al-bashir and his militarized Islamic regime. The popular movement began on December 13, 2018, where female students in Aldmazien city in the conflict area of Blue Nile took the streets with their counterparts protesting bread shortage in the city. The student protesters were beaten by police and security forces. On December 16th, 2018, student protests took place in Alfashir in Northern Darfur, as the protesters faced the tear gas and beating by police and security.

On April 6, 2019, Sudanese people made history, when millions of protesters marched toward the military headquarters in Khartoum demanding the military leaders to take the side of the people's, and force the regime of Omer Al-Bashir to step down. By the end of the day of April 6, protesters decided to make an open sit-in beside the military headquarters until the regime falls. In this sit-in, women took the main leadership role. They organized the people, arranged for food and water to help the hundreds of thousands of people to remain in place. In short, Sudanese women were making history and redefining the power of the people, where women are not followers anymore, they are becoming leaders of the change in progress. On April 11, 2019 the regime has fallen, and the president was ousted from office. The experience of the Khartoum sit-in before the violent crackdown was another breakthrough for women participation in the public space. Young women and other women of all ages, professions and walks of life were living in the streets together for weeks. Some women protesters who joined the sit in said they have slept outside their homes without family members for the first time during the sit-in sexual harassment was not reported during the sit-in, only few cases that were quickly stopped through campaigns from young women protesters. During the sit-in crackdown on June 3rd, 2019, hundreds of women protesters were subjected to sexual violence including, verbal and physical harassment, rape, beating and intimidation. The main perpetrators are NISS officers, NCP militias, and riot police, before the regime fall on April 11, 2019. After the regime fall, the main forces responsible of most of the violence are claimed to be the RSF officers and under the direct responsibility of their leader the famous General Hamiditi as they are widely perceived to use rape as a weapon in Darfur and other war areas.

Women from civil society groups, women members in trade and professional unions, women students, women working in the informal sector, women entrepreneurs, women in diaspora, women in political parties, mothers, grandmothers and even young girls in primary and middle school have been present in the streets. The rising numbers of users of social media, especially women and girls had an important role in spreading information and mobilizing communities. Young women who have never participated in protests before, decided to join the movement. Nusaiba Rahom, Christian young woman from the conflict area of Nuba Mountains described her participation in the protests saying: *“My family was completely against my participation in the protests, but I insisted to join the protests against their wishes.”* Women rights activists documented dozens of domestic violence, mainly by brothers and fathers against young women protesters.

*“Young women protesters were facing beating and violence from the police and security on streets and from their male family members at home,”*

Samreen Alkhair, woman rights activist

But the violence at home or in the streets wasn't successful in stopping young Sudanese women from joining the protests. Women groups like Al-Harisat started to create small groups of five women in neighborhoods to act as focal point for networking and organizing. These small groups built the trust and focused on their safety to make cluster networks by inviting small groups of 5 to join them in separate circles. This method was very effective after the increase of security crackdown and arrest of women leaders. Young women students and workers used their small circles to spread information about the protests and share safety plans. Some women professionals like doctors or women political activists had to go in hiding to remain safe to organize people.

Many women closed groups in Facebook was turned into mobilization hubs for thousands of women. These groups that used to discuss make-up or track good looking young men turned into intelligence centers to collect information about members of the former regime and expose their corruption and their leadership. The group of *Munbarshat* was an important example of this women groups that worked as a mechanism of exposure of the former regime security members.

The role of women groups as organizers went beyond the mobilization of women and other protesters, to play an important role in strengthening the political and social fronts that leading the revolution. Many of these women groups mentioned before became signatories of the largest social and political coalition in Sudan modern history, the coalition that created the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). The announcement of Freedom and Change was signed by dozens of women groups in the period from December 30, 2018 and January 2019. This document was the source of the demands and aspiration of the sudanese people protesting on the street at that moment, especially women. Women groups decision to sign the document was an important statement under the rising oppression of the former regime in the first days of the protests. Few weeks following the signing of the documents dozens of women organizers, leaders, political parties members professional union members and students were arrested.

#### **2.a.12. Women's Role in the Democratic Transition Process**

Sudanese women have taken the challenges related to building democratic, non-discriminatory and inclusive institutions for achieving gender equality and promoting women's rights by making use of the Transitional Constitutional Document (TCD) which was signed by the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) and the Transitional Military Council (TMC) in August 2019.

In the preamble and the general provisions of the Constitutional Declaration, the document that is currently governing post-revolutionary Sudan, the role of women in the revolution is clearly highlighted and emphasized upon making clear promises that the nature of the new state is non-discriminatory based on culture, sex, gender, disability, social and economic status and that the state respects human dignity and is "founded on justice, equality and diversity and guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms". Sudanese women achieved remarkable progress in putting gender equality in the top agenda of the transitional process. The constitutional document granted 40% participation for women in the Transitional Legislative Council (TLC).

Women activists from different groups such as No for Women Oppression, Sudanese Women Union, and Women of Sudanese Civic and Political Groups (MAMSAM) worked together to nominate women to hold positions of state governor. The transitional government promised to adopt the nominations, but the actual appointments of governors included women nominated by the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the political coalition supporting the government. Out of 18 state governors, only two women were appointed in Northern and River Nile States. The two state governors are the first women to take this position in Sudan history. Both women faced challenges in taking the position, including protests by tribal leaders who saw the appointment as insult to their masculinity and inherited patriarchy power. Some traditional leaders were open about their refusal of the appointment of a woman as governor, others refused it on basis of their right to participate in choosing their governor. The governor of the River Nile state Amna Ahmed spoke publicly about the refusal of the army leaders to cooperate with her after her appointment. She told journalists in August, 2020 "the leader of the army refused to attend the meetings and pulled out guards from some government buildings which led to theft incidents in Barbar city." The transitional government cabinet has four women ministers, which is less than 20% of the council of ministers. Women activists groups are organizing themselves to push for equal participation in the Transitional Legislative Council (TLC).

Women role in the democratic transition includes women participation in political efforts and the peace making process. One of the unique community mobilization and democratic and citizenship participation experiences are the community-based groups called “resistance committees”. These committees are responsible of mobilizing local neighborhoods and acted as the cells of organization of protesters all over Sudan during the revolution. After the revolution these committees are turning to become small local active citizenship groups. Where youth, women and community leaders work together to continue to mobilize people and represent their demands. These civil action groups have an important role in shaping political actions and opinions in Sudan today. Women in these committees have been playing important roles in mobilization, building awareness and leading public opinion as well as coaching young actors to be part of social and political changes.

*“Our committee is led by women, but we still face issues of acceptance from the neighborhood men. I think that women participation in many resistance committees is limited to fewer in comparison with men members. But I still think that our participation is important in shifting the social roles of women at the local levels of community leadership.”*

Waad AbduAllah, member of the resistance committees.

In addition, sudanese women participated in the peace process through track one. Women rights groups created a delegation of 19 women representing variety of women from displaced camps and NGOs to participate in track two of the peace negotiations. This participation resulted in an important impact on the provisions of the peace agreements. The Peace agreement in Juba was a real step forward for sudanese women participation in peace making and decision making. Women rights groups inside Sudan led successful campaigns to ensure women inclusion in the peace process. The support from UN Women in Sudan and IGAD mechanism was also important to facilitate this participation in track 1 and track 2 of the negotiations. The actual ability of women to include important changes and make these agreements gender sensitive and include the gender perspective is very clear throughout the texts of the signed agreements. But the issues of security arrangements, which are the most sensitive in the peace process remained out of gender influence to some extent. The inclusion of the 1325 resolution in many provisions of the agreements was clear, in some was less obvious. The only agreement that clearly mentioned the resolution was the eastern region agreement.

Women have been able to push gender agenda to become part of the national demands for change. These agenda included equal women participation at level of decision making positions during the revolution and after the fall of the regime. Women also inserted sections in the document of the declaration of the revolution forces to ensure that abolishing all laws that discriminate against women will be a propriety of the revolution government. These demands among others have been reflected in the Freedom and Change Forces Declaration in December 30, 2018. We will explain in the following section the details of women demands and gender agenda during and after the fall of the regime.

### **2.a.13. Women’s demands during revolution, their achievements and current challenges**

The main demands of the sudanese women activists during revolution, as stated by women activists interviewed by Al-Harisat included, fist of all, the **recognition of women’s role in the change making process in Sudan** in both state and non-state institution narratives and discussions about the present and future of the sudanese people. Women role in leading the protests should be well documented and presented to the public as part of the forces made the change in Sudan. This step is highly important to end long history of gender blind narratives of Sudan change making movements and revolutions.

*“Women have been leading resistance movements for long time, now it is the time to shift from building resistance to building gender sensitive systems and institutions.”*

Aisha Alkarib, Woman activist, said to Al-Harisat.

Another core aspect of the women activists demands was the **inclusion of gender agenda and gender perspective in the process of democratic transition**. Gender inclusion goes beyond women participation to include the important changes in the principles of the power holding centers to include gender perspective. The debates about the new political system in Sudan should include women and must be gender sensitive. The closure of gender gaps in high positions in politics or including political parties should start from serious reforms inside the systems of these parties. Also **dismantling the former regime oppressive institutions and fundamental groups was at the basis of women protests**. Women and girls has been the main victims of the former regime institutions such the as the security forces, the ruling party militias known as popular security and students militias. The former regime also created religious organizations that support radical views of Islam that suppress women rights and discriminate against. Women put their demands to abolishing all these oppression institutions upon the fall of the regime. Women activists also asked for **structural reforms of the justice system and law enforcement forces**. Sudanese suffered the most from the so called ‘Sharia laws’ imposed by the former regime. These laws was targeting women and their participation in the pubic space. Therefore, abolishing the infamous Public Order Laws was top priority for women protesters. The law has a complete legal system to enforce it including especial courts, especial police force and prosecutors. Articles 79 of the 1991act, punish anyone dealing or manufacturing alcohol with “one year” in prison, in article 146 punishment of adultery is lashing and stoning, but the most used articles in undermining women and humiliate them during the former Islamic regime in Sudan are articles 151 & 152, which are “gross indecency and indecent and immoral acts”. Both articles punished women for “indecent clothing” by 40-80 lashes”. These two acts had been aggressively adopted in the state of Khartoum the capital of Sudan by the Public order law of 1998. This law interpreted the articles 151-152 of the 1991 criminal act and implemented them on the ground through massive attacks on women in public spaces. Women demanded full dismantling of this oppression system. Women also demanded reforms of the Personal Muslims Law of 1991. This law was designed by he former regime to oppress women. For example the “Sections 25(c), 33, 34, 40(3), 51, 52, 91 and 92 of the Muslim Personal Law Act of Sudan, 1991 provide that the contract of marriage for a woman shall be concluded by a male guardian, confer different rights in marriage for men and women, and mandate wife obedience.” The same law considers the acceptable age of marriage is 10 years old. The combination of the guardianship powers and the marriage age had contributed in wide spread of child marriage in the rural communities in Sudan.

Women activists also demanded **equal participation in decision making positions** in the transitional government institutions. The equal participation should include the bodies that supported the protesters before the regime fall. After the revolution, women demanded equal share in all transitional government bodies. Women claimed for **economic reforms and gendered economic policies**. Most of the women protesting on streets, were calling for change because of the high living costs and the rising corruption which increased poverty. Women felt the heat of the rising prices as the numbers of women heads of households increased dramatically in the last 20 years. Therefore, women had been suffering to provide for their families. These demands included structural reforms in the economic policies to work to end inequalities in income and access to the labor market, in addition to creating social welfare and protection network for poor women. Another core demand was **the ending of conflicts and demilitarization of the state**. Women demanded that peace and ending conflicts should a priority for the new government after the revolution. They also demanded the new political system to adopt a policy of that ensure civilians control of the government and end the militarization of the state. The demands for peace included the calls for women participation in peace process at all levels. Lastly, activists called for **gender**

**justice and accountability for sexual violence crimes.** Women demanded that the former regime members must be held accountable for their crimes against Sudanese people, especially for their sexual violence crimes. In 2016 Human Rights Watch published a report documenting the oppression against Sudanese women activists, the report documented at least 6 cases of rape inside detentions between 2011 to 2015, where 5 of the activists raped were from conflict areas. The former regime leader is accused of planning mass rapes in Darfur conflict as part of International Criminal Court indictments of war crimes in the region. Therefore, justice for sexual violence crimes is one of the main demands for Sudanese women activists.

Women demands during the revolution were the hopes held high by women protesters and taken by women groups to the negotiation tables of the revolution coalition to shape the agenda of the democratic change. Most of women demands were represented in the declaration of freedom and change and later in the constitutional document governing the transitional period. In the table that follow, the main achievements reached after the appointment of the transitional government.

#### BOX 1. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS REACHED BY WOMEN AFTER REVOLUTION

- ✓ **Ensuring women participation in the transitional government institutions by 40 percent** as mentioned in the constitutional document of 2019, chapter (7). The document was amended in October 2020 to include the peace agreements which asserted the same percentage in all government bodies and the affiliated commissions that should be formed according to the peace agreement. Chapter 12 in the document stipulated that the government must establish the commission for women and gender equality. Unfortunately, the commission was not formed until to date, despite calls from women activists to the government.
- ✓ **The texts of the peace agreements was highly gender sensitive in mentioning the rights for men and women as equal, including women participation in the peace keeping and reform of the military and security.** The national peace agreement granted women the right to join the military in high command positions, although in the security arrangement this positions were restricted to the technical positions. The peace agreement of eastern Sudan has mentioned 1325 declaration as part of the guiding principles to implement the peace in the region. **The government adopted a national plan to implement 1325 UN declaration in March 2020.** Women members in the armed groups signed some of the agreements, which considered an important step forward for gender inclusion at decision making level. At least 19 women participated in the negotiations as track two delegates to facilitate the process. There was 16 women from the Revolutionary Front who joined the negotiation table, and also helped in making the timetables of implementation.
- ✓ **The transitional government has appointed 4 women ministers out of 22 ministers and 2 women state governors out of 18 governors as well.** These numbers came highly disappointing for women. But it is worth mentioning that **for the first time in Sudan history women were appointed ministers in the foreign and the financial ministries.** The first woman was also appointed as the chief of Justices. The sovereignty council has two women members out of the 11 members, both women are part of the civilians share of the sovereignty council which is shared with the military.
- ✓ **The transitional government has canceled the Public Order Laws,** including the articles number 151-152, 154 since November 2019. The chief of Justices canceled the work of the public order courts and reappointed the prosecutors and justices working in these especial courts in October 2020. **The justice minister announced in October 2020, the formation of a committee, headed by women lawyers, to reform the Muslims Personal Law of 1991.** In July 2020 the justice minister made new amendments in the 1991 criminal act, which repealed the apostasy, allowed non-Muslims to drink alcohol and granting the woman the right to travel abroad and to take her children with her without needing to produce the consent of the husband, a matter that had been forbidden under the law.

Despite all the achievements, women still face challenges to translate the written commitment into reality. Women demands after the revolution has focused on ensuring women participation in all decision-making levels. The demands for justice and accountability for the crimes of the former regime remained on the agenda of women rights groups, but the government did not take enough

steps to implement them. Different groups of women worked together to ensure gender inclusion in the formation of the transitional government. Women rights groups and activists led campaigns to demand 50% participation in the transitional government. Young women activists launched the “50% campaign” to advocate for the right of women to have equal share of power. “we wanted women in leadership positions equally as men” said samrin alkahir, co-founder of the campaign. The four ministries held by women within the transitional government are the ministry of finance, the ministry of labor and social welfare, the ministry of higher education and scientific research and the ministry of youth and sports. The participation of women in the council of ministers is lower than the commitment of the constitutional document of 40% of women participation. Therefore, Al-Harisat, MANSAM, and No for Women Oppression Initiative among other groups started campaigns to demand the transitional government and the Forces of Freedom and Change to commit to women participation quota of 40%. Sudanese women activists are working to ensure that women representation in the Transitional Legislative Council (TLC) is respecting the provisions of the constitutional document. Women activists are hopeful that the space of freedom of expression and association created by the revolution will open the doors for structural changes towards gender equality in Sudan.

In addition to the political representation, gender demands for economic reforms, demilitarization of the state and dismantling of the former regime radical Islamic organizations has not been fully addressed by the transitional government. The power sharing deal with the military had an important impact on holding back the civilians government efforts to achieve democratic transition and gender justice. The process of accountability for sexual and gender based crimes during the former regime have not been discussed at the government level. Women protection from sexual violence in conflict areas remains an issue of concern, as the peace agreement gave the responsibility of peace keeping to the sudanese army which have been accused of committing mass rape in Darfur and other regions.

In addition, fundamental Islam and the militarization of the state continue to shape the life of women in Sudan after the revolution.

*“Fundamental Islam rule for 30 years had impacted the whole society and created negative attitudes towards women adopted by wide range of the society, therefore we need structural reforms in the political and social sphere to reverse the impact of the former regime on the view of women rights in Sudan.”*

Hadia Hasaballah, women activist and leader in Al-Harisat

The 10 women activists interviewed by Al-Harisat agreed on the fact that the Islamization of the state and social norms in Sudan are the main obstacles for women rights movement progress. These challenges are carried out from the former regime era and continue to restrict women participation in the public space.

Thus, one year after the revolutions, the situation on the ground for women activists remain unchanged in many perspectives despite notable amendments in laws and policies. The power sharing deal that replaced the former regime has given the military and militias like the Rapid Response Forces “RSF”-formerly known as Jnajweed- a strong position to continue their policies of oppression and militarization of the state. These policies remain the most significant threat to the process of democratic transition in Sudan. The single-handed control of economic resources, the ongoing manipulation of the legal system and the continuous use of violence against civilians in conflict and non-conflict areas has weakened the power of the civilian-led government. The continuous reported incidents of violence against women protesters and crackdown of peaceful protests in conflict areas, in addition to the army and police use of lethal weapons is an alarming sign of the deteriorating situation of freedom of assembly and expression in these areas. Freedom of expression has also been under attack by the new actions of the military and its militias to threaten online activists, especially women in attempt to silence them.

Women activists and journalists working on uncovering the army or its militias corruption and control of massive economic sectors in gold mining and other sectors, reported to us threats on social media and fears of lawsuits in results of their work. Although that some of these women activists and journalists live outside Sudan, but they still receive threats especially after the military announcement of taking legal actions against all activists criticizing them inside or outside the country. Women activists, journalists, artists and protesters remain at the fore front of continuous struggle against the militarization of the state in Sudan. The control of the state resources by the military and its militias imposed growing obstacles for women rights movement in Sudan. According to the constitutional document governing the country since August 2019, the defense and the interior ministers are appointed by the sovereignty council which is under the leadership of the military now. The law enforcement forces are responding to the orders from military and militias which has been reflected in continuous use of violence in crackdown of protests in the last year all over Sudan, but most deadly in conflict areas.

The freedom of expression has been also under the attack by the military and its militias using the newly amended Cybercrimes Act. The leader of the RSF militia and the vice president of the military council known as Hamiditi announced the intensified punishments of the law weeks before it was published, threatening to use it against all critiques of his militia and its crimes. Hamiditi militia are known of their use rape as weapon in Darfur and in the crackdown of the Khartoum sit in last year. The control of the military over state resources and the economic has been part of the main obstacles for the civilian government to end corruption and impose security and military reforms. Unfortunately, the military has controlled most of the former regime companies which gave it growing economic force to oppose structural changes in the state. The fragile power sharing agreement governing Sudan now has potential for falling into instability and new conflicts. The existence of the formerly known Janjweed militias as part of the government through the membership of the militia leader in the sovereignty council is considered serious threat to the process of justice and accountability.

#### **2.a.14. Conclusion and recommendations**

The fall of Al-Bashir regime and the events led to an agreement formed the transitional government on August 21, 2019, has created a space for freedom of expression and association for the first time in decades. This condition in political and social arena has created unprecedented opportunity for women to make their voices heard without fear for the first time in 30 years.

*“After the fall of the regime women feel safe to protests and to speak out and call for their rights.”*

Amal Alawi, woman activist

The country entered a transitional period that yet to be shaped to realize the people demands of freedom and justice. People in Sudan, especially women are leading a tough fight to ensure the transitional period will bring democracy and peace. The months to come are going to be the hardest to ensure that Sudan will move forward into the right path. The change that Sudan people deserve is yet to come. Accountability, justice and freedom are the most important foundations for sustainable peace and stability in Sudan. Women were leaders of this change, and empowering their views and opinions must be a priority for the transitional state institutions.

From the very beginning, Sudanese women became convinced that political change is a prerequisite to societal and structural changes that can improve their situation. This accumulated awareness, lived experiences and commitment to the necessity of change were reflected in all the active and conscious participation of Sudanese women in the December Revolution. Their persistence and commitment to real change meant that once again they found themselves threatened with being

sidelined from the political sphere, the efforts had to be doubled to abort any attempts to isolate them from their rights. This is why the quest for women's political participation is nothing short of a responsibility to continue embarking on efforts to cement the position of women in decision-making positions and most importantly, build the capacity of women leaders to advance women's issues and champion their agenda through these platforms.

Sudanese women advocated for structural reforms to achieve gender equality and inclusion during the transition process. The collective experience of resistance building and leading the revolution has helped Sudanese women activists to shape their demands and agenda of change. Al-Harisat interviews and discussions with Sudanese women activists have found the main demands of Sudanese women during the revolution focused on calling for dismantling the Islamic regime control of the state and reform laws and regulations that systemically contributed to women and Sudanese people oppression for the last 30 years. Women also called for ending of conflicts and demanded peace to become one of the priorities of post revolution government. Justice, accountability and end of all forms of impunity of leaders of the former regime, especially in crimes related to GBV, has been leading principle for Sudanese women activism and demands for change. Women participation in decision making during the building of the revolution coalition was also part of the demands during the protests. Sudanese women activists pushed hard for gender agenda to become part of the mainstream political and social debates in Sudan.

Sudan has a historical opportunity to make progress toward democratic change and gender equality, but the international community must stand behind the civilian government agenda for change and reforms and its wars against the deep state. Sudanese women movement can only be effective under a democratic civilian-led government with open space for women participation. The former government corrupted military, security and religious groups continue impose real threats to the transition in Sudan. The international actors need to step in and provide urgent support to the civilian government and the Sudanese civil society. Women rights groups in Sudan are in need for capacity building and comprehensive support to rise to the challenges of enhancing women conditions in Sudan. Political participation is part of the important steps towards gender equality, but Sudanese women needs economic empowerment as well. Women entrepreneurs, owners of small businesses and women working in agricultural sector needs to be the focus of development projects of the international community in Sudan. Gender justice and ending sexual violence needs serious actions in supporting the government to reform the justice and the security systems in Sudan. The international community has an important role to play in pushing Sudan to ratify international covenants like CEDAW, and provide the needed support to help Sudan meet its obligations to the international human rights commitments.

## **2.b. WOMEN'S ROLE IN ALGERIA'S PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT**<sup>53</sup>

On February 22, 2019, an unprecedented popular movement swept through Algeria, forcing then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign. Protesters have kept up their calls for a meaningful change in the political system for over a year, rallying across several cities every week until the Coronavirus brought public protests to a halt. Women have played a significant role throughout. Several women have displayed placards reminding that there is no democracy without half the population, making their revolution as citizens not demanding specific rights but equal citizenship in all fields, policies, economic, legal and family. They demanded democracy and the right to dignity for all, men and women.

The large presence of women is undoubtedly an essential indicator of the nature of the change that has taken place in recent years in the country, and their political participation will be crucial in determining the outcome of any democratic transition. Indeed, it is impossible to discuss democratisation, human development and human rights anywhere in the world without including the role of women. Before evaluating women's role in the Algerian context, it is essential to point out that female representation in public life (governments, parliaments, civil society, economic enterprises, etc.) and gender-based inequality is a universal issue. Except for some Scandinavian countries, almost all countries lack significant female representation at most levels of society, and all countries still suffer from gender-based violence.

This paper assesses the role of Algerian women in the country's democratic construction<sup>54</sup>. The first section historicises the role of women in different periods of Algeria's contemporary history, stretching from the war for independence to recent times. Section two focuses on Algerian women's engagement in the February 22 movement. Section three discusses the regime's new constitution, portrayed by the government as the ultimate response to the popular movements' demands, with a particular focus on women's rights. The final section concludes.

### **2.b.1. Brief History of the Evolution of Women's Struggles**

Algerian women have throughout history played a significant role in shaping change in their country. From the 1954-1962 war for independence to the current uprising for democracy and freedoms, Algerian women have been at the frontline of these struggles. Below is a brief description of women's role in contemporary Algeria.

### **2.b.2. 1954-1980: the War for independence and the aftermath of independence**

In Algeria, the role of women in politics is not new. During the 132-year long occupation of Algeria, French colonialists weaponised Algerian women's bodies as part of a political battlefield. The rape of Algerian women by French soldiers was used to demoralise Algerian men and win the psychological war<sup>55</sup>. However, Algerian women fought back. Women contributed to the preparation of the war for independence and joined it after the war had started in 1954. There were 10,949

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<sup>53</sup> This paper has been developed by Tin Hinane el Kadi.

<sup>54</sup> This paper is based on a series of interviews conducted between August and October 2020. It is also based on the scholarship on the topic and journalist articles.

<sup>55</sup> Zahia Smail Salhi, 'The Algerian Feminist Movement between Nationalism, Patriarchy and Islamism', *Women's Studies International Forum* 33, no. 2 (March 1 2010): 113–24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2009.11.001>.

fighting women, 3.1% of all those taking part in active combat<sup>56</sup>. This percentage may seem negligible, but it is approximately the same as the percentage of European women who took part in World War Two. Algerian women who joined the struggle consisted, not merely of sympathisers or militants on a short-term basis, but actual fighters who joined the National Liberation Army or the Civil Organization of the National Liberation Front<sup>57</sup>.

During this period, Algerian women bravely waged a double battle against colonialism and patriarchy. Women who joined the *maquis* lived side by side with male *maquisards*, having completely broken away from the traditional way of life. They were almost all very young: 74% were less than 25 years old and 50% less than 20<sup>58</sup>. They attracted the attention of the media and fired the people's imagination. But most importantly, they pushed the boundaries of women's freedoms.

The role played by women during this period contributed to ensuring the legal recognition of gender equality after independence in 1962. The principle of equality between genders was recognised by the first Constitution of 1963, which stated that: "*All citizens of both sexes have the same rights and the same duties.*" (article 12)<sup>59</sup>. During the two decades following independence, women's role flourished in society with schooling made mandatory for girls and university teaching made accessible to all graduates.

Moreover, women had legal access to all the professions, and with equal rights to work, and equal right to the same pay for the same job done. The police and army corps were open to women, some women became pilots, drivers of taxis and even of heavy goods vehicles drivers. Others rose to positions of power occupying jobs such as company managers, deans of universities, doctors, and heads of university hospital services, etc<sup>60</sup>. This was all part of President Boumedién's rapid modernisation plan, which ambioned to transform Algeria into an industrial country within a few decades. This being said, the number of women in universities and in the labour market represented only a small fraction of the overall population during this period.

### **2.b.3. The 1980s-1990s: The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the Civil War**

This period represents a setback for women's rights. In September 1981, a project on the Family Code was prepared by the government at the Popular National Assembly<sup>61</sup>. Copies of the project were distributed, and there were many protesters against this backward code. For the first time women, who had taken part in the war of national liberation, protested publicly, most notably Mrs Zohra Drif, a former *Mudjahida* who played a significant role in the battle of Algiers. About a hundred activists, intellectuals and *Mudjahidat* demonstrated in front of the Parliament (*Maison du Peuple*), with the agreement and protection of the UGTA (Union générale des Travailleurs Algériens).

Nonetheless, with mounting pressures from the Islamists, the authoritarian regime decided to concede on women's rights for its political survival. In 1984, the backward Family Code, which lowers the status of women, was adopted<sup>62</sup>. The family Code includes regressive elements of Islamic law which brought women to be eternal minors. Algerian women through this code put at a

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<sup>56</sup> Djamila Amrane and Farida Abu-Haidar, 'Women and Politics in Algeria from the War of Independence to Our Day', *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 3 (1 October 1999): 62–77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.1999.0003>.

<sup>57</sup> Amrane and Abu-Haidar.

<sup>58</sup> Amrane and Abu-Haidar. op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> Algerian Constitution of 1963, <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/dz1963.htm>

<sup>60</sup> Amrane and Abu-Haidar, op.cit

<sup>61</sup> Cherifa Bouatta, 'Evolution of the Women's Movement in Contemporary Algeria: Organization, Objectives and Prospects', n.d., 33.

<sup>62</sup> Boutheina Cheriet, 'Gender, Civil Society and Citizenship in Algeria', *Middle East Report*, no. 198 (1996): 22–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3012871>.

disadvantage in marriage, divorce, and custody rights. As of 2020, albeit some slight amendments, the 1984 law is still in place.

The background to the planning of this code sheds light on the agonising struggle of Algerian society, divided between a desire for modernity and an obscurantist vision of Islam. For the Islamic fundamentalists, the emancipated woman no doubt represents modernity. Fundamentalists strive, therefore to reinforce the patriarchal order through laws, which would stop Algerian society from resembling the ‘west’, and ideally send the country back to the much-fantasied golden age of Islam.

As a reaction to the deliberate attack on women’s rights, this period saw the establishment of several feminist associations. For example, in 1985, just a year after the adoption of the Family Code, three women: Khalida Messaoudi, Louisa Hanoun, Aïcha Benabdelmoumen, established the *Association for Equality* intended to react against the arbitrary and “misogynistic” measures taken by the authorities<sup>63</sup>.

The uprising of October 1988 shook those in power and forced reforms for multiparty politics and democracy. Thousands of associations flourished right after the adoption of the 1989 constitution, including several feminist associations. Some of the most notorious ones include ‘Voix de femmes’ (voice of women), ‘Cris de femmes’ (Cries of women), manifestations, political gatherings, feminist writings boomed during this short window.

Sadly, the 1990s civil war significantly undermined the burgeoning feminist scene of the 1980s<sup>64</sup>. This decade was marked by the killing of an estimated 150.000 Algerians and over 6000 victims of forced disappearances<sup>65</sup>. Violence against women peaked with the assassination of feminist activists such as Nabila Djahnine<sup>66</sup>, or Katia Bengana who was killed for refusing to wear a veil<sup>67</sup>. The climate of fear served to silence much of the existing vanguard feminist movements.

#### **2.b.4. 2000-2019: Socio-economic improvement for women and political instrumentalisation of women's rights by the regime**

This period was characterised by some notable socio-economic progress for Algerian Women, as well as the introduction of some legal reforms aimed to improve women’s rights, albeit without abolishing the unequal Family Code. With oil prices rising in the turn of the century, Algeria was able to increase its spending on human capital. Women’s educational attainment increased sharply. According to World Bank Data, female university enrolment rate rose from a bit less than 20 per cent in 2004 to more than 64 per cent by 2018<sup>68</sup>. The gap between educated girls and boys decreased significantly, with women representing the majority of university graduates.

However, increased access to education does not necessarily lead to greater access to the market, nor does it lead to greater access to positions of power. Algerian women remain underrepresented in the labour market, comprising a small 17.7 per cent of overall workers in the formal economy as of

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<sup>63</sup> Amrane and Abu-Haidar, ‘Women and Politics in Algeria from the War of Independence to Our Day’.

<sup>64</sup> Zahia Smail Salhi, ‘Gender and Violence in Algeria: Women’s Resistance against the Islamist Feminicide’, in *Gender and Diversity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Luis Martinez, ‘Algeria: Is an Authoritarian Regime More Effective in Combating Terrorist Movements?’, in *Democracies at War against Terrorism: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Samy Cohen, The Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 233–49, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230614727\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230614727_12).

<sup>66</sup> Djemaa Maazouzi, ‘« Néant et lumière », l’Algérie possible de Habiba Djahnine’, *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada*, no. 6 (7 November 2013), <https://doi.org/10.21083/nrsc.v0i6.2870>.

<sup>67</sup> Amnesty International, ‘ALGERIA APPEAL CASE’, n.d., <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/172000/act770041995en.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> World Bank, School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross) – Algeria, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE?locations=DZ>

2020<sup>69</sup>. Women tend to be more represented in the public sector, with an estimated 45 per cent participation overall, and 80 per cent in traditionally female-dominated jobs in education and medicine. Algerian women participate more significantly in the informal economy, often conducting low-paid jobs in the care sector. The informal nature of these activities means that it is hard to measure the exact numbers.

In 2005, the government passed legislation that created a special provision to protect women in the workforce<sup>70</sup>. The goal was to increase their representation in the workplace. This action also mandated equality in wages and salary by specifying that men and women shall receive equal pay for equal levels of qualification and performance. However, the law did not entail any form of protection for informal female workers who represent the bulk of the female workforce.

Most notably, in 2012, Algeria passed a new law, with the support of the United Nations Development Program, to introduce a 30 per cent quota in parliament<sup>71</sup>. In the next parliamentary elections, women occupied 31 per cent of the seats, placing the country 26th worldwide and 1st in the Arab world<sup>72</sup>. This period saw an increase in the number of women occupying high profile positions such as ministers, judges, and CEOs, but female ratios remained small.

Many have described the 2012 quota as an attempt by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to introduce cosmetic reforms in a time during which the region was going through a wave of popular uprisings, which came to be known as the Arab Spring. Some scholars have described Bouteflika's law as an apparent attempt to instrumentalise women's rights to signal change and reform to Western partners, without this having much domestic motivations<sup>73</sup>.

Similarly, in 2015, Algeria's parliament passed a law criminalising domestic violence against women in a parliamentary vote. The law also safeguards the financial interests of married women and introduces the concept of harassment. This law was harshly criticised by conservatives and Islamist parties who argued that the law would intrude on the intimacy of couples and families and that it was contrary to Islamic values. For progressive parties and feminist activists, the law has several positive features. Still, it does not go as far enough as abolishing the Family Code, which is perceived to be the source of women's legal subordination in Algeria.

### **2.b.5. The February 22 Movement and Women's Rights**

Algeria witnessed in February 2019, the largest demonstrations in its history, as millions of citizens protested against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika who was seeking to remain in power after 20 years of continuous rule. The protest movement soon demanded more than the resignation of Bouteflika, but it also asked for meaningful regime change. The phrase 'Yetnahaw gaa' (all of them will be removed) became widespread among protesters and on social media, reinvigorating a wave of mass emancipatory politics in the country.

People have been protesting throughout the country from all walks of life, all political persuasions and ages, although the dominance of young people and women was evident. The presence of women is widely believed to have helped ensure that the protests remained peaceful, as protestors chanted *silmiya* (peaceful). Previously, the October 1988 protests counted very few women and

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<sup>69</sup> World Bank, Labor force, female (% of the total labour force) – Algeria, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=DZ>

<sup>70</sup> Louisa Dris-Aït-Hamadouche, 'Women in The Maghreb: Civil Society's Actors or Political Instruments?', *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 4 (2007): 115–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00328.x>.

<sup>71</sup> Marwa Shalabay and Laila Elimam, 'Arab Women in the Legislative Process', 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68780>.

<sup>72</sup> Shalabay and Elimam.

<sup>73</sup> Jenny Holmsen, 'Regime Legitimation in Algeria after the Arab Spring.', in *Oil States in the New Middle East: Uprisings and Stability* (Routledge, 2015).

quickly turned into riots, in which over 500 protestors were killed, and about 1,000 were wounded<sup>74</sup>. The large participation of women from different ages, social groups, regions and political orientations, as well as children has arguably forced both male protesters and the security forces to remain peaceful.

Just two weeks after the beginning of the popular uprising, on March 8 2019, which concurred with the celebration of international women's day, the mass participation of women in the movement became apparent<sup>75</sup>. The demands for regime change and democracy were combined with demands for gender equality, as protesters marched with feminist banners. The Feminist Square, a gathering of feminist activists and women organisations, made its appearance during that march<sup>76</sup>. Women within this square argued that they took to the streets for a double rupture: a rupture with the authoritarian political system, and a rupture with Islamic fundamentalism. Slogans chanted in the square were in favour of "gender equality" amid other Hirak slogans to throw "generals in the trash" or to send "thieves" of power behind bars<sup>77</sup>.

However, the feminist participation in the Hirak created a vivid debate within the movement. Some activists favoured respecting the union of the Hirak and avoiding any ideological divisions in order to keep the momentum and the movement united around one central aim: regime change. This position came to be known as 'Ce n'est pas le moment' (it is not the right time yet). On the other hand, feminists and members of progressive associations and parties saw that it was during these times of large-scale popular revolt, that women should put the question of equality on the table. Many complained that the argument of 'it is not the right time yet' was used in the past to prevent women from voicing their legitimate demands for equality<sup>78</sup>. Fatma Oussedik, a lawyer and a feminist activist in the feminist, stated that: "Women have been involved in all movements and all wars in Algeria," stating that it was about time they demanded their rights as equal citizens without concessions.

In fact, there is a clear continuity between those women who took part in the armed struggle for independence and the women who now demonstrate in the streets for the right to live in a free and democratic country. The most iconic illustration of this continuity is to be found in Djamilia Bouhired, who was just 20 when she led the women activists' section of the FLN. She played a central role in the battle of Algiers. Bouhired also participated in the Hirak and demonstrated her full support of the young's generation demand for democracy, stating that: "It is up to you all to draw your future and shape your dreams. Do not let them ruin your noble fights. Do not let them steal your triumph."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> James D. Le Sueur, *Algeria since 1989: Between Terror and Democracy* (Zed Books Ltd., 2013).

<sup>75</sup> All women who participated in the Hirak were not feminists. Several women taking part in the Hirak were from conservative backgrounds and did not perceive the fight for greater gender equality as one of their goals. Women from Islamist political parties were demonstrating for regime change that would lead to a closer application of religious texts in governing public life.

<sup>76</sup> 'Carré féministe', in *Wikipédia*, November 7 2020, [https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Carr%C3%A9\\_f%C3%A9ministe&oldid=176330757](https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Carr%C3%A9_f%C3%A9ministe&oldid=176330757).

<sup>77</sup> Frederic Bobin, 'A Alger, les féministes donnent de la voix dans le Hirak', *Le Monde.fr*, March 7 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/03/07/a-alger-les-feministes-donnent-de-la-voix-au-sein-du-hirak\\_6032180\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/03/07/a-alger-les-feministes-donnent-de-la-voix-au-sein-du-hirak_6032180_3212.html).

<sup>78</sup> Selma Kesmi, '« Notre révolution, c'est maintenant ou jamais ! » : pour les Algériennes, il n'y aura pas de démocratie sans égalité des droits', *Middle East Eye* édition française, accessed November 12 2020, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/reportages/notre-revolution-cest-maintenant-ou-jamais-pour-les-algeriennes-il-ny-aura-pas-de>.

<sup>79</sup> Rym Bendimerad, 'Algerian Women Embrace a Spirit of Resilience and Revolution', *Al Jazeera*, March 12 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/3/12/algerian-women-embrace-a-spirit-of-resilience-and-revolution>.

## 2.b.6. The 2020 Constitution and Women's Rights

More than a year after the Hirak, Algeria still faces a severe political stalemate. The movement has so far faced a stubborn army, unwilling to devolve any meaningful powers to the people. Despite much fanfare about the importance of the amended constitution – described by the regime as a text that would usher a ‘new Algeria’ - citizens have forcefully expressed their rejection of the tweaked constitution by a massive boycott of the referendum, deemed to be a mere manoeuvre to extend the life of an authoritarian and corrupt system. Indeed, Algeria registered on November 1<sup>st</sup> the lowest poll turnout in its history with no more than 23.7% of Algerians voting according to official figures<sup>80</sup>. With no minimum turnout required, the constitutional changes were approved, yet, the regime's legitimacy crisis remains intact.

While the new constitution suffers from a significant lack of legitimacy, it is arguably the most ‘women-friendly’ constitution since the country's independence. Several recent constitutional articles came in the 2020 amendment to protect women's rights, highlighting that the state is committed to promoting women's role in the public and private spheres.

Below are the most significant articles concerning women's rights:

*Art. 40. — L'État protège la femme contre toutes formes de violence en tous lieux et en toute circonstance dans l'espace public, dans la sphère professionnelle et dans la sphère privée. La loi garantit l'accès des victimes à des structures d'accueil, à des dispositifs de prise en charge, et à une assistance judiciaire.* (Art. 40. - The State protects women against all forms of violence in all places and all circumstances in public space, in the professional sphere and the private sphere. The law guarantees victims' access to reception facilities, support systems, and legal assistance)<sup>81</sup>

*Art. 59. — L'Etat œuvre à la promotion des droits politiques de la femme en encourageant ses chances d'accès à la représentation dans les assemblées élues.* (Art. 59:- The State works to promote the political rights of women by encouraging their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies.

The constitution's first chapter on fundamental rights and public freedoms also states that the state encourages the promotion of women to responsibilities in institutions and public administrations as well as at the enterprise level.

Even though this new fundamental law is probably the most feminist-friendly constitution in the country, it does not signal any significant change for Algerian women. The fact that this constitution emanated from the top, in a repressive context, means these new constitutional rights will have little impact<sup>82</sup>. Rights and freedoms in Algerian constitutions are often violated by the regime. These freedoms and rights tend to figure in the constitution as part of the regime's democratic ‘façade’. For instance, freedom of the press is a constitutional right in Algeria since 1989. Yet, several newspapers have been censored, and many journalists have face harassment or imprisonment due to their journalistic work<sup>83</sup>. Therefore, it is likely that the new women's rights will not be effectively implemented.

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<sup>80</sup> Maghrebemergent, ‘Algérie-Référendum : la présidence estime que les résultats témoignent de “la transparence et la probité” du scrutin’, *Maghreb Émergent*, November 3 2020, sec. Brèves, <https://maghrebemergent.info/algerie-referendum-la-presidence-estime-que-les-resultats-temoignent-de-la-transparence-et-la-probite-du-scrutin/>.

<sup>81</sup> Le Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire, September 16 2020, <http://www.mae.gov.dz/FR2020054.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> Hassan Guenfi, ‘Pourquoi l'actuelle Constitution ne peut pas être la base d'une transition politique en Algérie ?’, *Casbah Tribune* (blog), March 26 2019, <http://casbah-tribune.com/pourquoi-lactuelle-constitution-ne-peut-pas-etre-la-base-dune-transition-politique-en-algerie/>.

<sup>83</sup> Simon Speakman Cordall, ‘Algeria Cracks down on Press as Protest Movement Persists’, *Al-Monitor*, October 5 2020, sec. Editorial, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/10/algeria-protest-movement-hirak-press-crackdown-information.html>.

Opponents have argued that having several rights and protecting women in particular in legal texts was a classic way through which authoritarian regimes in the region attempt to mimic reforms and signal change to primary foreign, but also domestic audiences. Nonetheless, more often than not, these rights remain pure ornament in autocratic constitutions. Moreover, while the new constitution provides new protections to women, the regressive family code is still in place, reducing women's social status to the one of minors. This is a common feature of the jurisdiction in Algeria. The constitution comes with considerable rights and freedoms, contradicting repressive and regressive existing common laws. Since 1989, constitutions have always been more progressive than common laws, with significant contradictions arising between the two, but with common laws winning the applicability battle.

### **2.b.7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The recent wave of pro-democracy protests in Algeria brought to the forefront the fight of Algerian women for gender equality. Betrayed in the aftermath of independence with regressive laws subordinating them to men, Algerian women continue to battle for their fundamental rights. Since the establishment of the first feminist square in early March 2019, several initiatives have been put in place to link the struggle of democratisation to the one of gender equality. With the Hirak providing a formidable antidote to resignation and hopelessness, women interviewed for this study have expressed a strong sense of determination for changing the current status quo in the country.

As stated above, however, the democratic demands of the Algerian people have not yet resulted in institutional change, and the Hirak has not impacted women's social position. To translate aspiration of women in Algeria into practice both women organizations and the Algerian policy makers can have a key role. Women organizations in the country needs to deconstruct the stereotype that promoting women's rights in Algeria is for the elites, trying to actively involve women from different ideological and social backgrounds in joint action and diversifying target audiences (ex. by producing content in Arabic, French and Berber) for public awareness campaigns on issues around women's rights abuses. Broader inclusion shows that women's rights transcend differences and allow for more impact. In addition, in a context of closed media and lack of freedom of press, women organizations can leverage social media, to spread a culture of acceptance, tolerance, and citizen engagement, as well as to encourage youth participation. Developing constructive relationships with existing non-feminist associations from within the Hirak and political party representatives can also help in advocating for legislative change in favor of women's rights and other shared concerns. It is important to try to mobilize men as allies to ensure activities are not confined to a female-only actions and audiences.

Algerian policy makers<sup>84</sup> can also play a fundamental role for the enhancement of gender equality in the country a) by reinforcing the rule of law that respects all citizens' rights and upholds gender equality ensuring that young Algerian women and men, as well as other marginalized groups, have the space and means to participate in political and social life. For instance, champion women as key figures in facilitating dialogue during the democratic transition period; b) by improving freedom of speech to allow women to voice their problems and concerns and raise awareness about the issues facing Algerian women. This will promote a constructive dialogue that could lead to a better understanding of gender-based inequality and violence c) by developing gender sensitive school and university programs that work to eliminate gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, and launch programmes that introduce citizens from an early age to the concepts of gender equality and women's rights; d) by introducing measures to guarantee women's participation in public life, including in governmental bodies, state's institutions and public and private enterprises. Similarly

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<sup>84</sup> These policy recommendations are unlikely to be implemented without a genuine democratic transition.

to the current parliamentary quota system, quotas should be introduced at different levels to promote women's participation.

While the fight for gender equality in Algeria will need to emanate from internal actors, domestic women's organisations and civil society groups, the international community can support the fight for feminist struggles, as well as other struggles for public freedoms on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. International agencies need to build direct links with women's organizations moving beyond state's-controlled agencies. State's controlled women agencies in Algeria have long worked for keeping the status quo which puts both Algerian women and men at disadvantage. Providing long-term assistance to women's organizations, and further advancing and sustaining dialogues could help promote women's rights in the country. In addition, by supporting cross-country exchanges, training programmes, networking, and advocacy initiatives that enable women in Algeria to support and inspire each other, women's dialogue initiatives can be promoted within and across the region.

Beyond training workshops on gender equality, and scholarships for women, the international community role in enhancing gender equality principally involves denouncing the hypocrisy of support from European Union governments to authoritarian regimes in southern countries which are notorious for depriving people of fundamental freedoms and reproducing the conditions leading to gender-based inequality.

What is important to remember, apart from the question of whether or not women's rights contradict religious beliefs, is the fact that gender equality has been legally granted in Algeria for over two decades (1962-1984), and that the existence of regressive forces is shaped primarily on political and economic grounds. This means that women's rights are often instrumentalised as a tool of bargain between power holders and Islamist groups for access to or survival in power.

## ***2.c. REVOLUTION FROM ABROAD: THE MOBILIZATION OF ALGERIAN AND SUDANESE WOMEN IN ITALY<sup>85</sup>***

In the span of just a few days, April 2019 saw the downfall of Omar Al-Bashir and Abdelaziz Bouteflika's regimes. Under protracted public pressure, in Sudan as in Algeria, the regime sacrificed its leader, initiating a transition process with an open-ended and still developing outcome.

As in their homeland, the women of the diaspora play a key role in the protest movements and in the demonstrations in support of revolutions leading to the regimes' downfall. Through real-time connection and social media, Algerian and Sudanese women worldwide are supporting and sharing the reasons behind the protests even abroad, fueling the uprising by means of economic and logistical resources, and contributing to the validation of choices and planning directives adopted by demonstrators in their native countries.

Following the example set by their co-nationals in Europe and in the US, the Algerian and Sudanese women in Italy are also taking action to support the revolutions, hoping that the ongoing social changes in their countries might lead to re-negotiating women's role in society.

This paper, based on a limited number of in-depth interviews with Algerian and Sudanese<sup>86</sup> women in Italy, aims to shed an initial light on the reasons and manners of their mobilization, their position in relation to their countries' political processes, and the priorities set forth to promote and support the process of women's empowerment in their countries of origin.

### **2.c.1. Algerian and Sudanese women's presence in Italy: an overview**

The Algerian presence in Italy amounts to about 20,000 persons, a very limited number if compared to other North African nationals in our country and compared to other European countries, such as France, but also Spain and Germany. Up to the late 80s, the few Algerians in Italy mainly concentrated in the Neapolitan area, due to trading opportunities, namely the purchase and resale of products along the shipping route connecting the port of Annaba, Algeria, to the ones in Naples, Marseille, Barcelona. During Algeria's "black decade", in the 90s, more considerable migration flows towards Italy were observed, along the same trading routes previously employed for the *trabendo* (*informal trading*). Italy, and particularly Naples, where a limited number of Algerians now mediate between Italian wholesalers and co-nationals, has become a point of reference for those fleeing persecutions and compulsory military service, but also for numerous Islamic Salvation Front militants. In addition to Naples, which remains the city with the most relevant Algerian presence (around 2,200 persons in 2020), Algerians seeking employment opportunities move towards the Northern regions – Lombardy, Emilia, Veneto, Piedmont – and the Capital.

These years, in the context of the global feminization of migration flows, the Algerian case has also revealed an increase in the number of women moving due to an autonomous life plan and beyond the traditional mechanisms of family reunification. This flow, whose underlying motivation is also a desire for freedom from a legal and cultural context considered patriarchal and oppressive, intensified during the "black decade", when women – particularly those highly educated and qualified – became specific targets of intimidation, sexual violence, terrorist and state-sponsored targeted killings<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> This section was developed by CeSPI.

<sup>86</sup> A total of 3 Sudanese and 5 Algerians women were interviewed.

<sup>87</sup> Latif Abid Guemar 'The Feminization of Forced Migration during Conflict: The Complex Experiences of Algerian Women Who Fled in the 'Black Decade', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 32, (2018).

The Sudanese presence became notable in Europe, and marginally even in Italy, starting from the 90s, after Al-Bashir's coup. The majority of Sudanese migration in Italy, however, was fueled by the civil war in the Sudanese region of Darfur, and the central government's subsequent violations of human rights to the detriment of the local population. This means that, unlike the Algerian presence, which appeared diversified from the beginning, from a linguistic and geographical standpoint (persons coming from predominantly Berber-speaking or Arabic-speaking areas), and in terms of their educational and professional profile, the Sudanese presence is characterized by a certain homogeneity, and presents similar traits with regard to origin (the conflict-ridden areas of Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan), gender – predominantly men - and age (usually young adults between 25 and 40 years of age).

In this context, the presence of women remains extremely limited, amounting to about 20% of the total, and chiefly moving within family-related migration paths. In addition to these few women, an extremely small number of female students come to Italy to pursue their studies, through scholarship support or private resources.

### **2.c.2. The mobilization of Algerian and Sudanese women in Italy**

As in Algeria and Sudan, the women of the diaspora are at the front lines of the many initiatives carried out to support the protests in their homeland, not only through a large presence in the demonstrations organized in the biggest European and North American cities, but also through the activism and protagonism of feminist associations, involved in organizing the demonstrations, as well as in-person and online meetings and debates<sup>88</sup>.

In Italy, the profile of the Algerian activists interviewed is similar to the one outlined in several studies on women's mobilization in support of the Arab revolutions<sup>89</sup>. In the majority of cases, they are emancipated, secular and educated women, often married to Italians, and already involved in advancing women's rights before emigrating. Some of them arrived in Italy during the 90s, fleeing the Black Decade's climate of fear and widespread violence, after having experienced first-hand the violence of terrorism and fundamentalism. Others, while moving within the framework of family-related migration paths, come from politically active contexts and have experienced activism within feminist associations or political parties. These include sociologists, artists, cultural mediators and interpreters. They are women who, in the context of a united and secular national plan, recognize and uphold the value of the ethnic, linguistic and religious differences characterizing Algeria, and who would consider the revolutionary process incomplete, in the event of it not including, from the beginning, women's demands in terms of gender equality and equal opportunities.

In addition to these, other women are taking action within the initiatives promoted by religious and small associative entities, whose initial participation allowed to increase the number of participants in demonstrations and repeat the initiatives in other cities as well<sup>90</sup>. The other activists believe the

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<sup>88</sup> For an overview of the role of the Sudanese diaspora during the revolution see "The Mechanisms of the revolutionary Movement among the Sudanese of the Diaspora Interview with Alice Franck" <https://www.noria-research.com/the-mechanisms-of-the-revolutionary-movement-among-the-sudanese-of-the-diaspora/>

With regard to women's participation, see: Arman, Y. (2019) In The Zambakari Advisory Blog. Phoenix, AZ: The Zambakari Advisory, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3336334>. For a first insight into the participation of the Algerian diaspora, see: Hayette Rouibah 'Le rôle du HIRAK à l'étranger: une renaissance de la diaspora algérienne?' *Confluences Méditerranée* 2020/3 n° 114 (2020):163-175; For the origin of Algerians' participation in France and especially Paris, see: Didier Le Saout, 'Making HIRAK in Paris: the staging of a revolution against the « Algerian system »'. *L'année du Maghreb*, 21 (2019): 131-146

<sup>89</sup> See for example: Lea Müller-Funk, L. Transnational politics, women & the Egyptian revolution: examples from Paris. *Mashriq and Mahjar journal of Middle East migration studies*, vol.2, n.1, (2014): 29-55

<sup>90</sup> Such is the case of the first demonstration staged by the Algerian association in Rome in March 2019, spurred by the Algerians of Milan, with their participation (interview by the author with a representative of the Algerian Association in Rome, November 2020)

participation of these women is connected more with a generalized rejection of the Algerian patronage and neopatrimonial system, rather than with putting forth secular feminist demands.

The Hirak and the role of the Algerian women within it, particularly on the occasion of the large demonstration of March 8<sup>th</sup> and the formation of the “carré féministe”<sup>91</sup>, initially served to trigger a liberating sense of closeness to their native country - now looked at with renewed hopefulness - but also to other Algerian men and women in Italy and in Europe. By means of the internet, and particularly Facebook, the interviewees attempted to reach out to their community, for the purpose of collecting information, exchanging opinions and organizing activities in support of the protests in their homeland. Especially when involved in individual migration trajectories and paths, Algerian women report, in fact, limited contacts and relationships with other Algerians in Italy, not only for a generalized diffidence towards their co-nationals, but also for the lack of places and occasions to meet.

The Algerian community struggles, in fact, to establish a formal associative structure, due to the negative effects of geographic dispersion in Italy and the diversified nature of the community, in terms of the differing periods of the migratory experience, socioeconomic background and religious practice. The persistence of a mostly male immigration and the prolonged absence of family units has slowed the emergence of associative structures, whose creation often serves to preserve the native country’s history, culture and language.

Other factors weighing on the situation, according to the women interviewed, are the commitment and time dedicated to their family and children, or to job-seeking, but first and foremost the dividing line marked by the trauma of the “Black Decade”, bringing these women to limit relationships with male or female co-nationals. Some of the interviewees, for example, with a past of activism in feminist associations, report having launched and subsequently abandoned associative experiences supporting Algerian women in Italy after having observed the large number of women considered “conservative” within their community.

Through the internet, Algerian activists coordinate their actions with other Algerians in Italy and managed to organize their first demonstrations in support of the Hirak in different Italian cities. Through social media, they receive information from Algeria, but they are also urged and invited to join the protests of other diasporic women in Europe or North America. Activists use Facebook as the key channel to meet, share information, debate and participate, creating Facebook pages that serve both as a driving force for the organization of informal discussion groups and as tools to coordinate and convey the activism of Algerians in Italy. Such is the case, for example, of the CALD page<sup>92</sup>, managed by a small group of Algerian intellectuals and professionals, including a woman, created with the aim to build a place to gather, inform and take action in support of the Hirak.

Nonetheless, online activism is considered a prelude to a concrete presence in the physical public space. The Algerian women in Milan, for example, are involved first-hand in obtaining permits from the competent police headquarters to stage sit-ins and demonstrations. The desire to regain the public space goes beyond the Italian borders. Several women report having employed their summer holidays in Algeria attending the demonstrations in their homeland.

The evolution of Algeria’s internal politics and the differences emerging within the Hirak – with the heated confrontation between traditional political forces, old and new associations, civil society organizations, and the most conservative and progressive groups - have, by extension, produced a certain amount of dissonance also among the Algerians in Italy.

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<sup>91</sup> The “Carré Féministe”, within the demonstrations, was born following a meeting held in Algiers on March 16th and the creation of a document shared among numerous Algerian feminist associations. The document establishes the manners of women’s participation in the Hirak’s weekly demonstrations.

<https://www.elwatan.com/edition/actualite/femmes-algeriennes-pour-un-changement-vers-legalite-21-03-2019>  
[downloaded 24th November 2020]

<sup>92</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/766714243723083/>

While managing to stand unitedly during the street demonstrations, the different positions with regard to the rejection or acceptance of Algeria's regime change subsequent to Tebboune's election, appear to cause divisiveness.

More specifically, three main political tendencies appear to be emerging: a political trend aligned with the position of certain political parties in the country, such as the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP), a secular and progressive political orientation, gathered around the CALD experiment; a third political perspective seemingly aligned with the Islamist-inspired transnational political movement Rachad<sup>93</sup>.

The following months, with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, and the Hirak choosing to relocate the protest to the web's virtual space, the interviewees have continued to support the occasions of debate and dissension promoted by the movement, directly participating in the discussions through the ever-multiplying initiatives held on web platforms or online radio and television stations<sup>94</sup>. The Tebboune Government's repressive turn, with hundreds of demonstrators apprehended, led the female Algerian activists in Italy to side with the demands of the Algerian diaspora in Europe, particularly the release of political prisoners. At the same time, the resilience demonstrated by the "Power" has reignited a feeling of insecurity within the diaspora and its women, who have become targets of direct and indirect threats once again<sup>95</sup>. This, together with the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the disillusionment with the results achieved as regards gender equality, has contributed to abate the impetus of the Algerian diaspora in Italy. Moreover, some diasporic women in Europe are concerned about the presence of the Islamist transnational movement Rachad within the Hirak. For some of these women, to continue to support the Movement could mean risking to indirectly endorse a conservative and obscurantist force.

In spite of these reservations, when the health situation made it possible again, the diaspora – and the women within it – took to the streets again, especially in order to protest against the constitutional process endorsed by the Government and the proposed amendments to the constitution, which were approved in a referendum on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, with a record low turnout. Currently, the interviewees are attentively following the discussions developing within the Hirak in Algeria, including the attempt to federate Hirak forces, endorsed by part of the civil society, converged around the "22 February Appeal"<sup>96</sup>, and the efforts to develop a political response made by political and union forces converging around the PAD's<sup>97</sup> political project.

The protest movements which led to Al-Bashir's downfall have produced a renewed interest and civic engagement in all the social groups of the Sudanese diaspora in Italy, including students, youth groups and women, enhancing and diversifying a long-standing tradition of activism which used to be exclusively composed by political refugees and those belonging to Sudan's main active rebel groups<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> The Rachad movement was formed by conservative intellectuals, among whom important representatives of the disbanded ISF and of the Algerian diaspora in France, England and the US.

<sup>94</sup> Such is the case of the web radio Radio Corona, which kept the Hirak's voice alive online, also with the contribution of representatives of the Algerian diaspora. <https://www.facebook.com/Radiocoronadz/> See: Sara Zanotta, 'La trasformazione del movimento di protesta algerino di fronte al COVID-19. Dalle manifestazioni per le strade all'Hirak "a porte chiuse"' *Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie: Diritto, Istituzioni, Società*, Vol 2, n.1 (2020).

<sup>95</sup> In particular, a recurring threat is to be forbidden from reentering Algeria during the summer holidays. For the ability of Arab authoritarian states to exert pressure on co-nationals abroad, see: Dana M. Moss, 'Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of The Arab Spring' *Social Problems*, Volume 63, Issue 4, (November 2016):480–498.

<sup>96</sup> The "22 February Appeal" is a manifesto and an appeal endorsed by several actors of the civil society, aimed at sharing a common platform to include the Hirak's different core elements and jointly draft a road map containing the Hirak's demands.

<sup>97</sup> The PAD, or FPAD, the Pact for the Democratic Alternative, is an alliance of several Algerian political parties aimed at converting the Hirak's demands in political proposals.

<sup>98</sup> The following paragraphs relative to the organization of the Sudanese diaspora in Italy are a summary of Jacopo Resti's report "Diaspora e rivoluzione". See: <https://www.cespi.it/it/ricerche/diaspora-rivoluzione>

The Sudanese activists in Italy have shelved their divergences and have merged into the “Association of Sudanese Abroad in Support of the Uprising in Sudan” (ASASU), an umbrella organization active in various European countries, whose main objective is to provide financial support for the ongoing revolution in Sudan, as well as enhancing its visibility in western countries. The ASASU represents the diasporic backup for Sudan’s opposition movement, led in the country by the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA)<sup>99</sup> and subsequently the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)<sup>100</sup>.

Through ASASU and its European and North American transnational bodies, the Sudanese diaspora in Italy managed to coordinate its actions and have recourse to a wider range of competences and resources than our country alone could provide, directly contributing to the revolutionary process’s political, economic and social accomplishments. Through social media, the diaspora was able to convey opinions and preferences with regard to the political debate in Sudan, identifying potential conflicts of interest, indicating credible and worthy candidates, drawing up proposals and engaging in advocacy activities in the countries of residence. From an economic and social standpoint, the Sudanese in Italy took action by engaging in crowdfunding and technical assistance initiatives endorsed by the new transition government<sup>101</sup> or launched by those countries where the Sudanese diaspora is more structured and organized (UK and France in Europe, the US and Canada overseas)<sup>102</sup>.

In the past months, the Sudanese diaspora in Italy has continued to mobilize in the attempt to capitalize the united and proactive forces unleashed by the revolution and involve the Sudanese of various Italian cities in a common project. The Sudanese in Italy have kept monitoring the transitional process, identifying priorities and future challenges with regard to the three key areas of peace and security, the economy, politics and society. Within these three dimensions, reaching peace agreements and conflict resolution in the states of Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan are considered particularly urgent matters, as well as combating poverty and corruption, launching the necessary economic reforms, reforming the justice system, overcoming ethnic discriminations and divisions, achieving gender equality and equal opportunities.

Reforms along these lines could entail a greater engagement and involvement of the Sudanese diaspora, spurred by the prospect of being able to act and contribute to the country’s socioeconomic and political development in a consistent, safe and appeased context.

Within this general framework, women’s participation is seemingly limited and residual, in that it appears mostly connected with processes endorsed by the community’s men. The small number of Sudanese women met in Rome lack experiences of activism within feminist or opposition movements. Having arrived in Italy only recently, through mechanisms of family reunification, they experience financial insecurity and poor housing conditions, often living in squatter settlements. The presence of young children and the traditional division of gender roles in the family means that these women spend most of their time within the private family space.

However, the outbreak of the revolution and the mobilization in Sudan and Italy have led the women to come out of the private space and occupy the public one. Two of the interviewees were in Sudan at the beginning of the uprising and took actively part in it. The third woman participated from Italy, sharing information and pictures collected by family members demonstrating in Sudan

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<sup>99</sup> The Sudanese Professional Association started forming in 2010, following the struggles of various professional bodies: doctors, journalists, lawyers, vets, engineers, teachers and professors. Despite its formalization in 2016, it has yet to be officially registered by the Government.

<sup>100</sup> The Forces of Freedom and Change is a wide coalition of opposition parties and movements which negotiated and signed the transition agreements with the military regime in August 2019.

<sup>101</sup> The diaspora financial contribution is also expected within PM Hamdok's "Stand Up for Sudan" recent initiative, a collective national contribution from Sudanese people to help Sudan overcome the economic difficulties.

<sup>102</sup> We are particularly referring to the crowdfunding initiatives endorsed by well-known and influential Sudanese activists, such as Bakri Ali, and the worldwide movement “Sudan Next Generation”. Financial assistance from the diaspora is also contributing to the short-term emergency response for the economic, health and education sector.

and by participating in the demonstrations staged in Rome. All these women share the same enthusiasm for the revolution which, having swept an Islamist and conservative regime away, will be able to open up new areas of freedom for the Sudanese people, and in particular for its women, supported by the role of the main women's organizations during the revolution<sup>103</sup>.

The time and space of the revolutionary experience, and particularly the sit-in organized outside Khartoum's army headquarters, have marked a dividing line for its participants, with regard to traditional gender roles and relationships. In that occasion, men and women shared the same space and action plans; women occupied the public space, managed logistical aspects, the food supply, hygiene, cleanliness and the organizational dimension overall. The revolution allowed the most experienced activists to raise awareness among a wider female audience, including those generally foreign to political mobilization and activism. Although the revolution, according to the interviewees, has involved mostly urban areas and women who were already emancipated and empowered, it allowed to collect and gather issues and demands put forth by women coming from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **2.c.3. Demands and proposals to promote gender equality and women's empowerment processes**

The claims and demands of Algerian women in Italy converge with the ones put forth by the Hirak and the diaspora in other countries: a state ruled by law, respectful of the fundamental freedoms; a civilian, not military state; independent judiciary; full equality of rights between men and women; freedom for political prisoners. Other than these, however, their demands also include issues and problems directly concerning the diaspora, first and foremost the removal of barriers to Algerians abroad fully participating in the political life<sup>104</sup>. Aware of its potential, in terms of human and economic capital, the diaspora provides support for the country's process of growth and development, demanding, however, a new political framework, capable of overcoming the traditional securitarian frame of mind – or uninterested at best – with which the home country has looked upon its emigrants. The women of the diaspora feel they can actively partake in this struggle, supporting the Hirak by participating in supranational organizations and federations, exerting pressure on consular authorities, guarding polling sites and publishing data on the actual voter turnout levels involving Algerian citizens abroad, as in the case of the 2019 presidential elections and 1th November Referendum. At the same time, driving forward the cultural battle is also crucial, starting from the schools and the educational programs. Within this shared context, Algerian activists continue their struggle towards a full recognition of women's rights and gender equality. An essential precondition for this step forward would be the abolition of the Family Code, while the constitutional reforms are considered insufficient and as merely reiterating women's subordination.

To achieve full equality in terms of political representation and the removal of all legal barriers limiting their active participation in all spheres of public and private life are considered priority issues by the Sudanese women interviewed. In this sense, they welcome the course of their female co-nationals in Sudan, who managed to bring gender equality at the top of the transitional government's agenda, which increased the gender quota for women's parliamentary representation from 15% to 40% and repealed the "morality laws" which arbitrarily allowed the police to try and convict women for what was considered immoral conduct. According to the interviewees, this

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<sup>103</sup> Among which, with regard to the street protests, the "Sudanese Women Union", the "No to Oppression Against Women Initiative", and the "Sudanese Women's Civil and Political Groups".

<sup>104</sup> Criticism is particularly directed at Article 62, repealed by the new constitutional reform project, and Article 67, still effective, which introduces discretion with regard to access to government employment in the sectors of security and sovereignty.

process will be able to catalyze, in the medium and long-term, a social and cultural change. The diaspora will be able to participate by monitoring the transition and supporting the civil society, which, while abounding in competences, is lacking in infrastructures and resources. The recent simplification of the bureaucratic procedures for registering associations in Sudan will make it easier to support, even from abroad, projects and interventions endorsed by Sudanese women's associations and organizations.

#### **2.c.4. Conclusions**

The Sudanese and Algerian diaspora in Italy is unrepresentative, weak, geographically dispersed, often - especially in the Sudanese case - forced into precarious living and working conditions. For different reasons, Sudanese and Algerians cannot count on a strong and structured associative and organizational network. In the case of Algerian women, the different socio-cultural background and the trauma of the Black Decade seem to have a negative impact on the possibility of creating cross-cutting and inclusive organizational and associative forms. Among the Sudanese, women represent a small minority and their migratory trajectories are included in family migratory projects that engage them mainly in the private space of childcare and family

These elements obviously limit the capacity for action and intervention of the Sudanese and Algerian diaspora in Italy, that cannot have a weight and impact on the political, cultural and economic life of their countries comparable to that exercised by the diasporas in other national contexts, such as France or England or the United States, where the presence of these two communities is longstanding, strong, and structured. This is particularly true in the case of women.

Having said this, both communities - and women within them - have spoken of breakdowns prompted by the revolutionary processes at home as an opportunity to rekindle interest in their contexts of origin, to reactivate previous connections and create new transnational networks and relationships that may be functional to support women's empowerment processes in the countries of origin.

They can do so by combining their efforts with those of other fellow countrymen abroad, by amplifying the rationale of the protests, by monitoring the transition processes underway in the countries of origin. They can do so also, especially in the case of Sudan, via a transfer of know-how, as also making synergic their own initiatives with those promoted by the Italian Development Cooperation both in Italy - suffice it to mention as an example the "National Summit of Diaspora" - and in Sudan. They can do so, in the case of Algeria, through forms of cultural cooperation, by creating and supporting projects for the exchange and comparison of women's networks, promoting a different narrative of the image of women in Arab and Muslim countries and promoting a culture of female leadership.

Finally, they can do so by helping to define a policy proposal specifically aimed at acknowledging the role of the diaspora. The two revolutionary processes provide in this sense a great opportunity, offering an arena for exchange and engagement that allows to reconnect the contradictory visions with which the diaspora is often seen from the countries of origin, with a mixture of gratitude and impatience for those who from the outside ask to have a voice on the fate of those who are inside.

Resolving this ambiguity can pave the way to shared proposals able to orient decision-makers of the countries of origin towards the development of policies and measures capable of attracting and acknowledging the skills, resources and instances of their communities abroad.

## **SECTION 3. MAIN FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITALY**

The research project "Women in transition: The role of women and the Arab Spring 2.0 in Sudan and Algeria" carried out by CeSPI and local partners in Sudan and Algeria, aimed at following, on the one hand, the genesis, forms of participation and the evolution of the Sudanese and Algerian women activism during and after the revolutionary processes that led to the fall of the regimes of Al-Bashir and Bouteflika in 2019. On the other hand, the research has helped identifying the break points and the continuity regarding the situation of women empowerment in Sudan and Algeria after the revolutions. Local partners, active in reporting and supporting women demands, helped this research in being authentically linked to the reality of Sudan and Algeria.

The research methodology aimed at putting the local perspective at the core of the project, to better identify the involvement of women in revolutions, their claims, their demands for gender equality and their current standing after revolution. The project used an innovative approach which combined desk research as well as qualitative and quantitative interviews developed through traditional channels (i.e. questionnaires) with an artistic component. Thus, beside the development of a final written report collecting research results in Italy, Sudan and Algeria, some of the interviews have been edited in the form of videos and podcasts, with the aim of creating an archive that collects and preserves real women voices and experiences, their needs and expectations. The local perspective was completed by that of the Sudanese and Algerian women living in Italy, to give a broader understanding of women activism and its role in the enhancement of gender equality and women empowerment from abroad. Based on the evidence collected and considering the relevance that both the Women Peace and Security Agenda and the two targeted countries have for Italy, the paper offers recommendation to Italy for supporting the process of women empowerment in Sudan and Algeria.

Both in Algeria and Sudan, women's mobilization has a long and complex history.

In Algeria, for a long time, women's issues were ignored. The priorities were others, according to the different historical moments and social needs: national liberation first, then radical Islam and, in between, the difficult socio-economic situation of the country. After being at the forefront of the struggle for independence, women were driven out of the political arena. In the 1980s, with mounting pressures from the Islamists, the authoritarian regime decided to concede on women's rights for its political survival. Later on, during the "black decade", women became targets of intimidation, sexual violence and murders from both the state apparatus and the forces linked to terrorism. Nevertheless, in the last 20 years women's empowerment marked significant steps forward, even if in a framework of a top-down approach prompted by the regime out of opportunism.

In Sudan, the condition of women's subordination is the product of patriarchal cultural and social norms and of the process of Arabization and Islamization from above suffered by the country over the last decade. This has led to the widespread spread of racial, religious and gender discrimination and the succession of armed conflicts of which women were the first victims, not only in terms of displaced persons, sexual violence, abductions, but also in terms of access to primary services and education, health. The Islamist regime further conditioned and occupied the space of women, promoting their participation in political life only within a framework of subordination under the "men guardianship" and built on the primacy of "equity" over that of "equality".

Even in this unfavourable context, women have historically managed to organize themselves to make their voices heard and to push forward their demands. The outbreak of protests that led to the fall of the regimes of Al-Bashir and Bouteflika offered an extraordinary opportunity for women to

demand a role in the public scene and to link the struggle for democratisation to that for gender equality.

In Sudan, different motivations and narratives of women groups agreed on one goal during the revolution: to end the rule of the Islamic government as the first step toward structural changes and gender equality. Women took to the streets and a leadership role during the Khartoum sit-in, by guaranteeing organizational and logistical support, organizing meal sharing and cleaning the square, experimenting innovative forms of self-defense and intelligence. The rising numbers of users of social media, especially women and girls, had an important role in spreading information and mobilizing communities.

In Algeria, the presence of women became visible on the occasion of the anniversary of March 8. With the creation of the “Carré féministe” within the demonstrations, the Algerian feminists have reclaimed a space precluded to them for a long time, strongly reiterating their belief that the revolutionary process would be incomplete if not inclusive, from the outset, of women demands in terms of gender equality and equal opportunities.

Both in Sudan and Algeria, women payed a high price for their protagonism. In Sudan, they were intimidated and abused by security forces as well as subjected to domestic violence. In both countries, women and feminists had to defend the legitimacy of their claims against those who considered premature and counterproductive to combine the demands for regime change and democracy with demands for gender equality. Internally, feminist movements have had to confront the different interpretations of gender justice and equality between the different women’s and feminist organization.

Almost two years after the Sudanese and Algerian protests started, some achievements in the field of gender equality have been reached in both countries, particularly at the legislative level, but challenges remain.

In the case of Sudan, women were able to oversee the transition process and to prompt the inclusion of gender agenda and gender perspective in the process of democratic transition. The transitional government has canceled the Public Order Laws, ensured quotas - 40 percent - for women participation in the government institutions and appointed, for the first time in Sudan’s history, women in the foreign and financial ministries. The whole process of the peace agreements involved also women from the Sudanese Revolutionary Front who joined the negotiation table and helped in making the timetables of implementation. The texts of the peace agreements contain important provisions relating to gender equality. In addition, the new government has also developed a National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security Resolution 1325. Despite all of that, women participation in the Council of Ministers is lower than the 40 percent contained in the constitutional document. In addition, fundamental Islam and the militarization of the state continue to shape the life of women in Sudan, holding back the civilian government efforts to achieve democratic transition and gender justice. Besides, the transitional government has not yet ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In Algeria, the new constitution approved in November 2020 contains a number of articles aimed at protecting women and promoting their role in both the private and public spheres. Specifically, art. 40 guarantees woman protection against all forms of violence in all places and all circumstances in public space and assures victims’ access to reception facilities, support systems, and legal assistance. In addition, art. 59 establishes that the State works to promote the political rights of women by encouraging their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies. Notwithstanding, the project of Constitution revision has been emanated from the top, in a repressive context that lack popular legitimacy, the “newly elected” government includes only 5 women out of 39 members, and above all, the regressive Family Code -which reduces women to the role of eternal minors- is still in place

The path to gender justice is long and largely dependent on the ability and commitment of internal actors to build a true rule of law that fully respects fundamental rights, and that is committed to move towards the necessary political, economic, legal and socio-cultural reforms and transformations that can promote gender equality and women empowerment. This can only be achieved within a shared vision that involves the whole population, regardless of their gender.

The efforts from inside can also be supported by international actors. Italy maintains strong and close relations at the political, cultural and economic level with both Sudan and Algeria and can play a leading role in promoting women empowerment. Nevertheless, the diversity of the two contexts in terms of the evolution of the transition process suggests a country-based approach.

In Sudan, Italy plays a role in supporting democratic transition thanks to its membership of the Group of Friends of Sudan and its participation into the Sudanese Partnership Conference. In addition, Sudan is considered a “priority country” for the Italian cooperation. Italian support to women empowerment and gender equality in Sudan is conveyed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation interventions that address mostly the economic empowerment of women but also involve actions against gender-based violence, for reproductive health and support to institutions in promoting social inclusion and gender equality. In this framework, Italy should continue to support civil government institutions in developing policies and plans for promoting gender equality, including the ratification of international covenants like CEDAW, as well as in enhancing women economic empowerment and supporting actions against GBV.

As for Algeria, Italy should use its networks and relations to strengthen dialogue and support women’s role in decision-making. Common measures for both countries need to be taken for supporting women right groups and organizations with capacity building interventions, by enhancing cross-country exchanges, implementing training programmes, networking, and advocacy initiatives that enable women of different social, cultural and political background to support and inspire each other. Cultural cooperation can be involved in co-developing gender sensitive school and university programs aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes and gender-based violence.

Within this framework, the diaspora can represent an added value. The revolution’s outbreak prompted Sudanese and Algerians abroad to rekindle interest in their contexts of origin and to create new transnational networks and relationships that may be functional to support women’s empowerment processes in the countries of origin. As stated above, they can do so by combining their efforts with those of other fellow countrymen abroad, by amplifying the rationale of the protests, by monitoring the transition processes underway in the countries of origin. They can do so also, especially in the case of Sudan, via a transfer of know-how, also in the framework of the opportunities offered by the Italian Development Cooperation both in Italy and Sudan. They can do so, in the case of Algeria, through forms of cultural cooperation, by creating and supporting projects for the exchange and comparison of women’s networks, promoting a different narrative of the image of women in Arab and Muslim countries and promoting a culture of female leadership. Finally, they can do so by helping national policy makers and public opinion to define a policy proposal specifically aimed at fully acknowledging the role of the diaspora.

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