SDN Khartoum Conference: Bridging the Gap

21-22 December 2019 Report for USAID

SDN

SUDANESE DIASPORA NETWORK

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Post-Event Executive Summary

Founded on January 2019, SDN is a global youth and young professionals led network; aspiring to help unify, mobilize and empower the diaspora towards a sustainable Sudan. SDN is an evolving group of diaspora, endeavouring to bridge the gap between Sudan and SDN's transnational networks to catalyse positive changes in our homeland.

Like our fellow Sudanese people, we too have been inspired by our glorious December 2018 revolution and have worked globally with counterparts over the past year to play a part in supporting our shared cause from the outside, whilst looking forward to the development of Sudan during and beyond the critical transitional period. During the course of the year, SDN has worked to build a global network of both youth and young professionals in the diaspora, as well as within Sudan, actively helping by any means to support the #SudanUprising from abroad. This included standing in solidarity with our people in diaspora protests, as well as advocating for peaceful democratic transformation in Sudan through raising awareness, connecting with key figureheads in local constituencies and planning fundraising events to unify the diaspora and raise funds to aid in the revolution.

Sponsored by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the two-day conference (21-22 December 2019) focused on the central theme of 'Bridging the Gap', which aimed to provide a space that explores how entities in Sudan and the diaspora can work together on developmental initiatives for the betterment of Sudan and its people. The conference also highlighted key pilot projects the SDN teams have been working to develop with collaborative partners. The conference featured transformative leaders, scholars, thinkers, topic experts and innovators; all of whom presented ideas and discussed solutions on urgent challenges/opportunities facing the new Sudan.

The conference also provided a space for unity, mobilization and empowerment – the three key pillars of the Sudanese Diaspora Network's mission. It provided a platform that connected the diaspora with their counterparts in Sudan: the elder generation with the leaders of the future, the scholar experts with the students and youth-led initiatives.

1. Introduction

1.1 Conference Objectives

The overall key conference objectives were as follows:

- Introducing SDN and the Sudan Recovery Program (SRP).
- Creating a space that connects a diverse range of organizations and people who are operating both inside and outside of Sudan.
- Providing a platform to encourage knowledge-share, idea generation, collaboration and strategies for implementation.
- Sourcing support and potential funding for pilot projects and ideas being presented.
- Growing a local Sudan based SDN team

1.2 Budget

- Circa $33,000 was granted by USAID to cover the costs for the two-day conference.

2. Attendee Survey

2.1 General Information

Day 1: 120 Attendees

Day 2: 220 Attendees

Post the conference, an online survey was sent out to attendees in order to seek feedback on the two-day event. The survey contained 13 questions tailored towards understanding the attendee's origin, experience, pilot project feedback/engagement, suggestions for improvements and interest in joining SDN. Link to survey (set questions asked). Please note that general feedback was also communicated by attendees on the day but not captured within online survey.

General feedback given was as follows:

- Panel discussions were rated highly amongst respondents and audience.
- Attendees/participants were very engaged with Shark tank talks, social change simulations, and pilot project presentations.
- Attendees enjoyed the networking aspect of the conference very much.
- The bazaar (including art gallery showcase) and concert were highly commendable.

3. Program and Speakers

3.1 Call for Participation

In addition to the invited guest speakers, the conference called for active attendee participation, through a series of 'shark tank' talks. Through advertisement of the conference via social media and online resources, attendees were asked to fill out an online form during registration and submit a proposal for a presentation.

There was a total of 13 Shark Tank talk, split across the two days (8 on Day 1, 5 on day 2), and 6 guest speakers (4 on day 1, and 2 on Day 2).

In additions to the guest speakers and Shark tank talks the two-day conference was structured to introduce attendees to the work that SDN had been doing and is continuing to do.

The conference began on Day 1 (21/12/2019), by introducing SDN, the mission and vision statement and the overall goal of the conference. Following on from the introductions to the organizations, the team introduced, presented the Sudan Recovery Program (SRP), followed by a series of three pilot projects that have been developed and are being worked on by different members of the SDN team. Upon delivery of the presentations, there was time allocated for interaction and open discussions between the team members and the audience based upon the initiatives outlined.

3.2 General Program

The two-day program evolved around the 4 conference objectives, beginning with a general introduction to the Sudanese Diaspora Network and the Sudan Recovery Program on both days. Further details on the program are provided below.

SRP Pilot Projects

The three pilot projects presented were as follows:

- **SRP Pilot Project 1 – A&E center development** (Health)
  The development of a high quality, public Accidents and Emergency (A&E) center in Khartoum Hospital.

- **SRP Pilot Project 2 – Unearthing Sudan's hidden gems through technology** *(Tourism)*
  Connecting to the world, unearthing our Gems.

- **SRP Pilot project 3 – Youth Centers Rehabilitation** (Youth Empowerment)

Guest Speakers

The conference featured a diverse range of transformative leaders; scholars, thinkers, topic experts and innovators who presented on behalf of their organizations and discussed solutions on urgent challenges/opportunities facing the new Sudan. Speakers engaged with the audience through holding Q&A sessions and/or interactive discussions. Speakers list is provided below:

1. **USG Speakers** *(Conference Sponsors)*
   USAID leads international development and humanitarian efforts to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance and help people progress beyond assistance. It remains the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to the people of Sudan and maintains a development portfolio focused on conflict mitigation and support for civil society, including women, youth, and people with disabilities.*

   Speakers:
   Dr. Abdalla Mohamed, USAID Sudan Coordinator
   *Ms. Ellen B. Thorburn, Deputy Chief of Mission (*acting U.S. Charge d'Affaires*) U.S. Embassy in Sudan.*

2. **Ms. Duaa Mohamed, Master Card Foundation**
   The Mastercard Foundation seeks a world where everyone "has the opportunity to learn and prosper". Duaa Mohamed is a strong social and youth advocate who aspires to help empower youth by creating opportunities and breaking barriers. She is currently based in Toronto, Canada working with the Youth Engagement Team at the MasterCard Foundation as a Program Analyst. Duaa presented the MasterCard's vision for Africa.

3. **Abir Ibrahim, UNICEF Sudan**
   Abir Ibrahim currently serves as UNICEF Sudan Partnerships Officer in Khartoum. She is a recognized practitioner, organizer and thought leader on social and economic development, African Affairs, gender mainstreaming and global health. Her mission-driven approach has helped promote national and global dialogue on gender, poverty alleviation plans and women in development.

   She presented on the pivotal role diaspora play in the social and economic development, and peace building agenda to transform Sudan; unleashing the power of the diaspora.

4. **Mr. Mohamed Suliman El Faki Al Shazly** , **Renowned Novelist and Poet**
   Mohamed Sulieman is a renowned novelist and poet. The Sudanese/British author has won several awards for his works, including the Tayeb Salih International Prize for Creative Writing, the Sudan Ministry of Youth Story Prize, and two University of Khartoum Story Prizes. He currently works for Aljazeera Human Rights Center (Doha, Qatar) as the Head of the English section.

He shared words to enlighten the up and coming Generation to support the social change in the New Sudan.

5. **Dr Naeema Al-Gasseer, WHO Sudan Representative & Head of Mission**
   WHO Representative and Head of Mission Dr Naeema Al-Gasser is directly responsible for the activities of the WHO in the Republic of Sudan and accountable directly to the Director General and to the Regional Director, of the of the World Health Organization, on behalf of the Governing Bodies of the WHO. She presented on the WHO's mission in Sudan.

6. **Dr. Abdelrahim Bilal, Civil Society Pioneer in Sudan**
   Dr. Bilal is a recognized pioneer in Sudan's NGO/Civil society space and holds a PhD is Economics and Social sciences. He presented an interactive talk on 'the role of the new generation in supporting the critical transitional period'.

7. **Mohy Omer, Youth and Civic Engagement**
   Mohy Omer is a program officer for the Middle East and North Africa team at the National Democratic Institute, with a particular focus on Tunisia. Previously Mr. Omer worked for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) where he focused on Sudan and South Sudan programs. Before joining USIP, Mr. Omer worked for US Senator Heidi Heitkamp, researching and writing on foreign affairs, national security and defense issues.

   He presented on the importance of Youth Civic engagement and Political activism in Sudan.



Figure 1: *Ms. Ellen B. Thorburn, Deputy Chief of Mission (*acting U.S. Charge d'Affaires*) U.S. Embassy in Sudan.*

Shark Tank Presenters

The shark tank talks aimed to provide attendees with a platform to showcase on-going projects and/or ideas from inside and outside of Sudan. They were expressed in various ways which included visual presentations, interactive talks and showcased 'think outside the box' solutions.

The shark tank talks also served as a great platform for knowledge exchange and highlighted a series of important initiatives and projects currently being worked on by members of the community throughout Sudan and the diaspora.

Presentations:

1. Nubian Health Center project in Wadi Halfa – **Dr. Majdi Osman (Harvard University)**.

2. Importance of environmental approaches from a human rights perspective – **Altahra Mahjoub (Human rights and Legal aid network).**

3. Uniting people through Art and Music – **Hussam Eltayeb & Co (Sudanese Peace Music Festival)**.

4. Rehabilitating Maygoma Orphange – **Mohamed Mustafa, Founder (Fill-A-Heart Campaign)**.

5. Role of youth in Building and Development – **Mohammed Anwar Mohammed Ibrahem (Hanabnieho Youth Initiative)**.

6. Enabling community empowerment through the use of technology - **Mohamed Gaafar (DiaSynora).**

7. Projects for the Martyrs - **Ahmed ElWalid & Co (Blue Foundation/SASA).**

8. Healthcare projects that supports Sudanese patients - **Isar Elkahir (SUDANYC)**.

9. Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Education – **Hind Elseed (Nile Swimmers)**.

10. SAMA Mission in Sudan - **Sahar Ibrahim (Sudanese American Medical Association)**.

11. Developing a Co Working space in Khartoum - **Yousif Yahya (Savannah).**

12. Environmentally sustainable alternatives to gold mining in Sudan – **Rasha Badawi (Independent).**

13. Sudanese Financial Empowerment – **Amr and Mohamed (Independent)**.

Panel Discussions.

The panel discussions invited key guests within the field of media and art, from inside of Sudan and within the diaspora. The panelists played a key role within the revolution, helping to spread awareness on what was happening in Sudan through social media, journalism, art and music.

The panel discussions proved to be a key highlight of the conference, with excellent dialogue and discussion about the future of journalism and art in Sudan. It was also highly interactive, providing an exciting exchange of Q&A amongst attendees and panelists.

Panel Discussion 1: The Role of Media in the New Sudan

Panelist: Yousra Elbagir (Independent reporter), Seena Khalil (AlJazeera social media reporter), Mona Elbashir (Independent activist) and Mustafa Jory (Comedian and Activist).

Moderators: Bashir Idris and Nafisa Mohamed (SDN)

The discussion highlighted the importance of citizen journalism in supporting and distributing important information to the public, particularly during the revolution when it was difficult to convey what was happening in Sudan to the international community.

A notable mention was the importance of journalism post-revolution and the need to continue shedding light on the issues facing Sudan, specifically to those who access the news primarily through the means of Social media. Another important point was the authenticity of news received and the importance of questioning the credibility before being distributed to the wider community.

Overall, the discussion was a huge success which engaged participants to brainstorm the future of journalism and the role of the media in Sudan; the role of the youth, the diaspora and those within Sudan can play to ensure that it grows as the country heads towards a democratic and socially just governance.



Figure 1: The Role of Media in the New Sudan; (From left to right) *Bashir Idris, Mostafa Jorry, Mona Elbashir, Yousra Elbagir, Seena Khalil, Nafisa Mohamed*

Panel Discussion 2: Art and Activism

Panelist: Hussam Eltayeb (Sudanese Peace Music Festival), Assil Diab (Independent artist), Swar jr. (249 writers), Osman Salih (Independent artist) and Sammany Hajo (Independent musician).

Moderators: Bayadir Mohamed (SDN).

Art was a major theme in the revolution. It was used as a political message of resistance but is has become an important tool in unifying and empowering both the diaspora and those in Sudan to express the type of country we all want and hope to see. The discussion was based around how art can be used as a source of political activism and highlighted the challenges faced by the panelist in getting their messages across during the revolution.



Figure 2: Art and Activism; (from left to right) *Bayadir Mohamed, Swar jr, Sammany Hajo, Hussam Eltayeb, Assil Diab, Osman Salih*

Social Change Stimulation

The concluding activity presented at the conference was a Social Change Stimulation exercise. The idea was to re-engage participants in their individual and communal role in transforming Sudan in a small-scale capacity. The Social change stimulation is a glimpse of how a pilot project can begin and allow participants to engage in that process, working in teams and charette ideas with the means of potentially starting their own project.

Participants were rearranged into groups, where discussions/idea generation took place toward the following areas that are in need of significant development in Sudan:

- Education
- Health
- Youth empowerment
- Tourism



Figure 3: Social Change Stimulation



Figure 4: Social Change Stimulation

4. Location and Venue: Friendship Hall, Khartoum

- Easy access, particularly for those coming from within the cities and from the diaspora.
- Brilliant outdoor advertising highlighting what was happening inside the conference space.
- Outdoor space was great for the intimate concert/ entertainment portion of the conference
- All necessary equipment for a successful conference was provided. The inclusion of the AV system and a translation system made it accessible to many.
- Great parking and access for attendees.
- Aesthetics of the conference hall was beautiful, and well laid out.
- Break rooms, catering provided, and the staff were excellent.

5. Marketing, Media and Promotions

Summary of Marketing Activities

5.1 Prior to Conference

- The bulk of the marketing was carried out via Social Media; Instagram, Twitter and Facebook
- Online registration tool used to enable attendees to sign-up.as guests and/or request to participate via an RSVP link.
- Marketing videos created to showcase #SDNCON19
- Posters/Flyers created and distributed online and offline.
- SDN team reaching out to Social Media Influencers, Business, NGO's and Members of Government.
- Invitation Letters to Guest speakers and organizations.

5.2 During Conference

- Provided attendees with an SDN conference folder pack that included information about SDN, USAID and the objectives of the conferences.
- SDN Notebooks and pens.
- Outdoor and indoor banners.
- Name tags to ease networking at conference.
- Nile Blue TV coverage.
- Social Media Live feed coverage.

6. Future Recommendations

Below are some key recommendations regarding how we aim to improve on the conference in order to better bridge the gap and unify, mobilise and empower the youth, inside and outside of Sudan. This was discussed amongst the team members post conference, and Dr Abdalla, USAID Sudan co-ordinator. In addition feedback was given from participants and observational data was used to highlight key areas of improvements.

Program and Speakers Key Recommendations

- Future SDN conferences should involve more interactive workshops that would enable attendees to further engage in activities.
- Making a conscious effort to invite attendees from places that are usually misrepresented in Sudan; to create a diverse environment that is more representative of the country.
- Reach out to more civil associations from a diverse range of sectors.
- Invite more Sudan-based influencers so that there is more representation and that participants in and out of the country can relate and learn from their experiences.
- Encourage attendees to fill out an exit questionnaire at conference to gain further insight.

Program and speakers Key Recommendations

- Half the time was given to conduct the social change stimulation due to time management issues – so only half of the stimulation was conducted. It was intended for participants by the end of the conference to develop a project proposal, design a poster and create a team of likeminded individuals. Due to time constraints, this was re-developed to engage large groups in critically thinking about attainable ideas, and solutions to current issues within the economic development of Sudan.
    - This created more opportunities that allowed participants to engage with one another, and uniting attendees through engaging people. This was something different to what occurs during typical conferences and gave people the time to talk to others and express their ideas.
    - An exciting way to engage and connect with participants to a greater purpose that connects back to Sudan
    - Diverse participants from different age groups, backgrounds – outside and inside of Sudan. Which was a good reflection of the Sudan thee people anticipate and hope for; one that is free in thought and expression and that is open to discussion from all people for the betterment of the New Sudan

Location and Venue Key Recommendations

- Technical issues that should be resolved prior to conference (I.e. laptop connectivity issues, sound issues, use of own laptops etc.)
- The Bazaar setting on the ground floor was out of the way and could have been linked better with the conference upstairs
- Conference hall space seating – could be advertised so we could work out/plan out layout of the conference space in advance
- Having additional display space where people could display their work through posters and give attendees the opportunity to network with presenters and organizations.

Marketing, Media and Promotions Key recommendations

Prior to Conference

- Utilizing Facebook as a key social media marketing strategy
- Looking at active Sudanese Facebook groups and engaging with them
- Creating an independent event page for the conference
- TV/Radio Advertisement
- Poster boards across the city
- Advertising both Day 1 and Day 2 as a joint event

During Conference

- More media coverage from Sudan TV and Radio stations during the event
- Media training for members of the SDN team who were interviewed

Conclusion

All in all, the conference proved to be a great success in inspiring collaboration between different stakeholders, mobilising the youth and elders outside and inside Sudan to identify their own potential, especially within the youth, and to empower one another to break past the stereotypes, and recognise the importance of being actively involved and connected. This conference was very unique, in that the majority of the planning and execution was conducted mostly outside of Sudan, through Microsoft teams (an online collaboration platform) with only a few team members within Sudan . Given the circumstances that most members are youth from

the diaspora, most of the key recommendations for improvement align with engaging the Sudanese youth within Sudan, and specifically within the peripheries, as well as Khartoum and the other major cities. The following lists key methods SDN have been working on to improve this:

- Growing the Sudan Team base
- Attending and connecting with other organisation that are youth led within Sudan

Often times youth led organisation have bright and powerful ideas, but have limited resources to execute their ideas to the fullest extent. Without USAIDS generous donation, and belief in this conference and SDN's mission, this would not have been possible. We would like to thank them for the opportunity to carry such a meaningful project, and bring together those within the diaspora and within Sudan, opening a platform for the youth to hope and work towards a better, more unified, mobilised and empowered Sudan.