

The Impact of War on Nuba Women*

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Introduction:

Sudan is a large country with different climates, culture, ethnic and ideological diversity. According to 1998's census, the population of the Sudan is 28,890,000 and 13,880,000 (almost the half of the entire population) are women. This reflects the fact that women have great impact on the society. The Nuba Mountains region is in the heart of the Sudan and seventy percent of its population are Nuba who speak about 45 Nubian languages. Nuba Mountains region has borders with Northern Kordofan, Southern Darfur, White Nile state, Upper Nile and Bahar Alghazal. This makes the region open to attacks and conflicts. When the civil war intensified in years 1989 –1990, which spread to reach most of parts in the Nuba Mountains, the situation began to deteriorate rapidly, particularly the security situation. The region became a war zone and green light was given to Arab tribal militias to carry out barbaric attacks against unarmed Nuba civilians. Among those who suffered most are the Nuba women. They were the first victims of the war as many families were forcedly removed to harsh places in the Northern Kordofan.

Problems in the Nuba Mountains

The conflict came to the Nuba Mountains in 1985 because of many direct and indirect factors. This conflict has expanded and to cover about 80% of the land in the Nuba Mountains. Many reports reveal that the majority of the victims in this conflict are civilian, including women, elderly and children. The victims of this internal civil war were forced to leave their homes and villages and migrated to the Northern Sudan. They settled in outskirts of big cities in Northern Sudan and in the neighbouring African countries.

The effect of war on Nuba women

The forcibly relocation of Nuba which took place in early 1990s has created enormous may displaced Nuba women almost in every states in the Northern Sudan. Many Nuba women have been found displaced in many states in the Northern Sudan: in Red



Sea, Alshamaliya, Kasala, Atbara River, Algaziera, White Nile, Sennar, Algardarif and Northern Kordofan. Those displaced women have left their villages in state of shock, trauma and disbelief. Since that time they have been suffering culturally, psychologically and mentally. Many children became homeless and lost their welfare of their families as a result of split of the families. This of course put more burden and pressure on women, especially the young ones.

The psychological impact on these displaced women is so enormous, particularly feel that they are not acceptable in the new society as they consider themselves strangers and reject people in their own country. They also feel that they are inferior and down graded in these new societies.

Displacement

The war in the Nuba Mountains has driven most of the civilians in the Nuba Mountains to leave their homeland and this had a profound social, economic and psychological effects on the life of these displaced people, especially women who found themselves in a difficult situation and a hard choice to make whether to stay and face death or choose displacement which they did. There are two types of displacement:

A. Mass displacement: entire villages, like Nimir Shago, Tolishi, Abu Hashiem and Miri village, have been forcibly removed out of the region. They left behind all their possessions as they came under fire from the government army, the militia and the SPLA forces.

B. Small displacement: The region has witnessed this sort of displacement or migration due to tribal conflicts, the lack of basic services such as education, health and water supplies. Also there is no any sources of income to depend on apart from agriculture and the agricultural lands have now became battlefields or washed with landmine. In addition, there is lack of security. Many people especially the youth were detained and tortured and some of the detainees were eliminated. Even women were not excluded from these arbitrary arrests and eliminations, because the regime accused Nuba of being a fifth column.

The Situation of displaced women

The Nuba were forced to leave their rich homeland, hence losing their families and coming to live in a different environment, especially women who fled with their children and the elderly to the cities believing that the cities will welcome them with open hearts and that they will find security and stability. But they were shocked by the terrible situation they found themselves in – as they living either in the remote outskirts of the cities so-called displacement camps which are isolated.

In this horrible environment, a woman found herself as a father and a mother. She now



became the only guardian for the whole family. Being in that situation women have left with no choice except to go out and look for work. They work as servants in the houses of wealthy people who sometimes exploit them.

Displaced women also have to work in marginal jobs in market place to provide food for their families. They could not afford to pay for their children education or health. The children below the age of five years are left at home without anybody to look after them, as their mothers have to go to work or look for a work. Their older children also have to go and look for work in the markets or selling bags or polishing shoes. Some of these children might end up vagabonding in the streets, with nobody to protect their rights and they have nothing to eat or a place to sleep and sometimes they sleep in dumping areas. Some of them became addicted to drugs and formed gangs of organized crimes. Some of these children are rounded up by police in what so-called public order campaign and taken to prisons. These youths are taken to military training camps and sent to fight in the front lines in the South or in the Nuba Mountains.

The young girls aged between 6 – 16 years usually leave the camps in the outskirts of the cities to go and work as servants or nannies or sell tea and fried beans in the streets. In this situation, the young girls become vulnerable for sexual exploitation. This leads to early illegitimate pregnancies as a result some of these young girls lose their lives in abortion attempts or flee their homes and indulge in life of drugs, prostitution and gambling in which prison is their inevitable end. Some of the women who lost hope in finding any jobs become involved in making and selling liquor, believing that this might bring income to them and their families. However, these women always end up facing police who usually raid the camps, looking for liquor's sellers and their customers, who are usually men. They are sometimes beaten by police and their liquor and the equipments are confiscated. These women are usually taken away to prison. The police raids, the rounding up of those poor women normally take place in inhuman ways where the children see their mother beaten up and taken away to be whipped in public and then put in prison for 3 to 9 months.

Widespread of Literacy

The educational system in the region has become worse after the war and that led to closure of many schools and with no educational services at all. Many teachers left the profession. Students were forced to leave their schools either to look for work to feed themselves and their families. This of course has widened the educational gap among the Nuba and the people in the North.

Eradication of Nuba culture and identity

Many displaced Nuba women and men found themselves in front of a new culture and way of life, which is different from the one they used to have. It was difficult for them to adapt themselves to this new social environment. As we know the Nuba people, especially the women always stick to their culture and the social norms traditions that



rule the Nuba society. They are forced to abandon their culture and traditional and their mother tongue. This is quite a problem for the coming generations and that Nuba culture is facing a program of a systematic eradication.

The effect of displacement on the region:

- The fertile agricultural land has turned into thick forests during the past fifteen years.
- The region has been depopulated from its indigenous people.
- The land had been used by the warring parties to plant landmines
- The Nuba lands have been confiscated and distributed to individuals who have no connection with the region.
- The closure of old roads and cattle tracks.
- Water sources, like wells and water halls have dried out.
- The flee of wild animals to other areas outside the region.
- The misuse and illegal cutting down of forests.
- The collapse of education and health care infrastructure in the region.

There is widespread illiteracy among the youth and men and women, due to the ongoing displacement. There is poverty, which makes situation among Nuba people looks awful. This has affected Nuba social life and the social bond has become loose, there is a widespread of drug abuses among the youth and an increase in crime rates. The educational gap has increased because of lack of schools.

Conclusion:

The displaced women and children are civilians who should have the right to enjoy all aspects of basic life including education, health care and suitable environment for living.

They have encountered many problems, including social, economic and development. This is because of shortage of resources and lack of opportunities open to them. There is also lack of training and capacity building which as a result, women have to do marginal work such as servants, which are usually low paid jobs, and some times they are exposed to sexual exploitations in these kind of jobs.

Recommendations

1. Provision of basic services such as primary health care, schools for young women and children and the welfare of mothers and children.
2. Supporting women by improving the economic situation of women through provision of agricultural input and introduction of necessary technology to improve the local industry. There should be provision for grants to support production and improvement of standard of living of the displaced women.



3. Provision of roads and transport to facilitate trade exchange.
4. Provision of markets to buy the product.
5. Building capacity for women: provision for vocational training. The need for effective participation in the social and political activities and opportunities for women graduates to get jobs in government establishments and they should not be discriminated. .

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