



Conflict-related sexual violence is not inevitable

Survivors' views on prevention in Sudan

June 2026



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Strengthening rights and resilience for prevention

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Executive Summary

Survivors assert that CRSV is not an inevitable consequence of war, but a preventable crime rooted in impunity, gender inequality, ethnic targeting, and the collapse of protective institutions. Survivors demand urgent, coordinated action grounded in their lived experiences. As put by one participant: ***“Prevention must start before conflict, not after it begins.”***^[i]

This report presents a survivor-led analysis of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Sudan, based on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in late 2025 with survivors in Chad, South Sudan, and Darfur.

CRSV in Sudan is systematic, deliberate, and often ethnically motivated – used to terrorise, displace, and destroy communities. Survivors rejected the notion that CRSV is an inevitable consequence of war. They stressed that prevention is possible and urgent, requiring a combination of accountability, civilian protection, and a scaling of social interventions to promote attitude and behaviour change.

The impacts are profound and inter-generational, including trauma, acute stigma, family rejection, and the marginalisation of children born of rape. One survivor shared that: ***“A child born of rape is viewed as a criminal who will inherit his father’s genes in the future,”***^[ii] while another recounted how her father threatened to kill her sister’s child, forcing her to flee because the family viewed the child born of rape as a ***“child of the enemy.”***^[iii]

Survivors describe a culture of silence and

blame that protects perpetrators and deters reporting: ***“In my community, anything that happens to a woman is considered a disgrace and is tied to the family’s honour.”***^[iv] Another added: ***“Sometimes I keep silent because I fear harm or I fear the community’s reaction.”***^[v] As one participant powerfully stated: ***“silence protects the violence, not the survivor.”***^[vi]

Impunity is identified as a core driver: ***“There is no law, no accountability and no security.”***^[vii] Survivors link today’s violence to decades of neglect, suggesting that had there been justice for these atrocities twenty years ago, the current level of sexual violence would not be happening. They stress: ***“without strong laws and accountability, perpetrators will continue because they do not fear consequences,”***^[viii] and ***“when violence is not documented, it continues without consequences.”***^[ix]

CRSV is also tied to militarisation and the proliferation of weapons, with those who control military power considered to have control over civilians and their bodies. In Darfur, it has been reported that traditional leaders now fear retaliation from perpetrators of CRSV and no longer intervene.

Ethnic targeting is deliberate and can be genocidal in intent. Survivors recounted hearing RSF statements expressed during the El-Fasher siege: **"We have to empty El-Fasher of the Falangiyat; These are slaves. Kill them, destroy them, rape them"**.^[x]

Loss of education and livelihoods increases vulnerability: **"we have forgotten about school and education; we only think about securing our daily bread."**^[xi] Another linked survival risks to violence: **"I go to work in agriculture, and that is where I was raped,"**^[xii] and noted that **"dependency on the collection of firewood... was one of the key drivers of**

violence."^[xiii] Survivors call for a dual-track prevention strategy combining structural reforms with sustained, community-led action.

Prevention must begin before violence has happened and must be sustained over time. Survivors stress that justice, accountability, and gender transformation are not optional—they are essential to breaking cycles of violence and building lasting peace. The international community, Sudanese authorities, and local actors must act now to listen to survivors, fund their solutions and end the impunity that fuels CRSV in Sudan.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen accountability, justice, and the rule of law – **"Sexual violence increases where there is no rule of law and no accountability."**^[xiv]
2. Invest in women's empowerment and attitude changes – **"Training youth, women, and community leaders is essential to stop sexual violence."**^[xv]
3. Raise awareness, improve capacity and coordination of public services, civil society and humanitarian actors – **"Everyone has a role in prevention: the State, organisations, and the community."**^[xvi]
4. Target vulnerable youth with awareness-raising, education and opportunities – **"awareness must be continuous, not a one-time activity."**^[xvii]
5. Supporting families, community and religious leaders in prevention – **"families play a central role by raising boys and girls with the same values of respect"**,^[xviii] and **"religious and community leaders have a responsibility to guide people away from harmful practices."**^[xix]
6. Targeted livelihood opportunities are needed to mitigate risks – **"Women and girls need safe environments inside the camp, not just words about protection"**,^[xx] and **"There must be employment opportunities and training in livelihoods, as well as income-generating projects."**
7. Establish dedicated **support for children born of CRSV**, which includes psychosocial counselling, access to education, livelihood training, and community-based reintegration. To counter narratives that **"A child born of rape is viewed as a criminal who will inherit his father's genes"**.^[xxi]



[i] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 Dec. 2025).

[ii] FGD Location 2 (20 November 2025).

[iii] *ibid.*

[iv] FGD Location 3 (8 January 2026).

[v] *ibid.*

[vi] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 Dec. 2025).

[vii] Written participant contribution, Location 2 (29 Nov. 2025).

[viii] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 Nov. 2025).

[ix] *ibid.*

[x] Human Rights Council, 'Sudan: Hallmarks of Genocide in El-Fasher, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan' (17 February 2026) [84-85]

<www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session61/advance-version/a-hrc-61-77-auv-en.pdf> accessed 23 February 2026.

[xi] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

[xii] *ibid.*

[xiii] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

[xiv] *ibid.*

[xv] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 Dec. 2025).

[xvi] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

[xvii] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 Dec. 2025).

[xviii] *ibid.*

[xix] *ibid.*

[xx] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

[xxi] FGD Location 2 (20 November 2025).

1. The Context of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Sudan

1.1 A History of CRSV in Sudan

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is at the forefront of the brutal conflict in Sudan, which has now escalated into the world's largest humanitarian crisis. More than 12 million people are displaced, and an estimated 6.7 million women and girls are at risk of gender-based violence.^[1]

Sudan has a long history of impunity and lack of accountability when it comes to CRSV, coupled with significant gender inequality, creating a permissive environment for the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.^[2]

Reports of widespread and systematic sexual violence have historically accompanied the patterns of violence which have engulfed Sudan since an initial series of civil wars between the North and South in the 1950s.

For decades, exemplified by the Darfur Genocide of 2003–04, the intersection of sexual violence with broader ethnic targeting has been widely documented. UN bodies such as the 2005 UN Commission of Inquiry,^[3] the

current UN Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan and the International Criminal Court (ICC) have found patterns of rape used as a weapon of war in the targeting of non-ethnic Arab communities. These bodies have confirmed evidence of systematic patterns of rape, gang-rape, abductions and sexual slavery that were committed during attacks on villages and internally displaced people (IDP) camps.^[4]

These acts were reported not as isolated, private or opportunistic crimes, but as part of a pattern of violence that accompanied mass killings, forced displacement and the destruction of property. Sexual violence has a racialised and political dimension in Sudan.

Despite documented instances of sexual violence throughout this period, the destruction of domestic institutions and impunity for CRSV has further solidified the use of CRSV as a weapon of war in Sudan. The ICC's recent sentencing of former Janjaweed commander Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (Ali Kushayb)

^[1] United Nations Population Fund, 'Sexual violence and conflict in Sudan: A war on the bodies of women and girls' (18 June 2024) <www.unfpa.org/news/sexual-violence-and-conflict-sudan-war-bodies-women-and-girls> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[2] United Nations in Sudan, 'Entrenched impunity fueling gross human rights violations and abuses' (18 February 2025) <<https://sudan.un.org/en/289505-entrenched-impunity-fuelling-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses>> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[3] United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council, 'Update on the report of the independent expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, Mohammed Othman' (A/HRC/15/57, 2 September 2010) <<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g10/158/20/pdf/g1015820.pdf?OpenElement>> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[4] Human Rights Watch, 'Five Years On: No Justice for Sexual Violence in Darfur' (April 2008) <<https://www.hrw.org/reports/darfur0408.pdf>> accessed 9 April 2026.

demonstrates that convictions for sexual violence-related counts are possible when evidence is secured and those at large are transferred to the ICC.^[5] Yet, he is the only individual thus far to be prosecuted for the mass atrocities committed in Darfur, and only two of the 27 counts he was sentenced for relate to rape: impunity continues.

Various internationally supported agreements have, over the years, unsuccessfully attempted to end violence in Sudan. After the revolution of 2019, which overthrew former president Omar al-Bashir, there was hope for reform during Sudan's fragile political transition, especially in gender justice since women's movements had played a prominent role in the uprising.

The 2020 Juba Peace Agreement sought to address the root causes of conflict through power-sharing, development and security sector reforms, with special attention to conflict-affected regions, including Darfur. Some transitional arrangements included commitments to gender equality and protection. Several limited reforms were made to laws relating to sexual violence in this period, most notably that the definition of rape under Section 149 of the Criminal Act (1991) was amended in 2015 so that rape was separated from adultery (zina).^[6]



In 2020, amendments to the Criminal Act criminalised Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) for the first time.^[7]

However, the transitional period failed to address the systemic vulnerabilities that facilitate CRSV: militarised local power persisted and armed actors retained control in parts of Sudan.^[8]

Indicted leaders such as former President Omar-al-Bashir may have been tried domestically, but for political crimes rather than individual criminal responsibility for genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, or their command responsibility for sexual violence. A lack of justice sector reform enabled impunity for high-level suspects, who remained beyond the reach of arrest and domestic accountability mechanisms. Neither a durable peace nor redress for survivors was achieved.

^[5] Prosecutor v Abd-Al-Rahman (Ali Kushayb), Trial Judgement (ICC Trial Chamber I, Case No ICC-02/05-01/20-1240, 6 October 2025) <www.icc-cpi.int/court-record/icc-02/05-01/20-1240> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[6] Sudanese Criminal Act (1991), available at <<https://redress.org/storage/2021/09/Criminal-Act-1991-English.pdf>> accessed 1 Apr 2026.

^[7] *ibid.*

^[8] UN Women, 'Women, Peace and Security in Action' (2020)

<www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Women-peace-and-security-annual-report-2019-2020-en.pdf> accessed 9 April 2026.

Since April 2023

The conflict that broke out in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has been accompanied by widespread and well-documented reports of sexual violence across Sudan.

Between 2023 and 2025, one African-based organisation documented 1,294 confirmed cases of CRSV across 14 of Sudan's 18 states.^[9] The government's Combating Violence Against Women and Children Unit (CVAW) in the Ministry of Social Welfare documented 216 cases in the first 18 months of conflict, estimating these constituted a mere 2% of cases.^[10] CRSV in Sudan is being facilitated by the militarisation of society, which has come to characterise the conflict.^[11] Survivors of CRSV are usually victims of many other violations, including the pillage of their homes and communities. CRSV has been documented throughout the country, including in Khartoum, Darfur and the Kordofans: it is an endemic characteristic of war in Sudan.

Sexual violence has been used as a weapon of

war by all parties in Sudan with the aim of humiliating, punishing, terrorising and displacing communities, often with an underlying ethnic motivation. The SAF have used CRSV as a means of suppressing political, pro-democracy and human rights activists opposed to their regime. The RSF, as part of their ethnic cleansing campaign, have targeted non-Arab women, including women from the Masalit, Fur, Zaghawa and Nuba groups.^[12]

During the recent siege of El-Fasher, 'women were specifically targeted based on their gender intersecting with ethnicity'.^[13] There, 'systematic and coordinated' CRSV took place: women and girls between the ages of 7 and 70 years old were raped, sexually harassed, whipped and had their belongings looted, often simultaneously.^[14] The primary targets of this violence included women from non-Arab communities, particularly the Zaghawa, as well as perceived supporters of the SAF or Joint Forces.^[15] Rape also occurred in front of women's relatives, both dead and alive: reportedly, the RSF 'violently and publicly' gang-raped at least 19 women in rooms filled with the corpses of their own husbands and infant children.^[16] CRSV was committed in a

^[9] Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa Network, 'More than Numbers: Report on the State of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sudan 2023-2025' (December 2025) <<https://sihanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/SIHA-More-Than-Numbers-Report-Final.pdf>> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[10] UN Women, 'Navigating War, Birth and Hope' (25 November 2024) <<https://sudan.un.org/en/284382-navigating-war-birth-and-hope-sudan>> accessed 13 April 2026.

^[11] UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Sudan: UN Fact-Finding Mission documents large-scale sexual violence and other human rights violations in newly issued report' (OHCHR, 29 October 2024) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/sudan-un-fact-finding-mission-documents-large-scale-sexual-violence-and>> accessed 11 May 2026.

^[12] Amnesty International, 'Sudan: "They Raped All of Us": Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Sudan' (10 April 2025) <www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/9201/2025/en/> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[13] Human Rights Council, 'Sudan: Hallmarks of Genocide in El-Fasher, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan' (17 February 2026) [34] <www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session61/advance-version/a-hrc-61-77-auv-en.pdf> accessed 23 February 2026.

^[14] *ibid* [72]. ^[15] *ibid* [73]. ^[16] *ibid* [80].



deliberate and public way by perpetrators in El-Fasher, indicating the normalisation and commonality of sexual violence as a weapon of war in Sudan.

CRSV survivors across all locations emphasise that the culture of impunity, as well as the

impunity of specific leaders, has paved the way for the violence we witness today. In their view, the lack of accountability and neglect of justice institutions over the past twenty years has not just emboldened systematic targeting, but also cemented discriminatory power structures that underpin dehumanising narratives and patterns of conduct that show 'hallmarks of genocide'.^[17] From the outset, CRSV has been an integral feature of the conflict which broke out on 15th April 2023 between the RSF and SAF. CRSV in Sudan is neither incidental nor isolated; it is widespread, targeted, deliberate and systematic.

1.2 The legal framework on CRSV in Sudan

CRSV is not an inevitable consequence of war. It constitutes a preventable and punishable crime under international law. Article 7(1)(g) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population.^[18] These acts also violate Article 8(2)(e)(vi) of the Rome Statute, which prohibits rape and sexual violence in armed conflicts.

^[17] Human Rights Council, 'Sudan: Hallmarks of Genocide in El-Fasher, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan' (17 February 2026) [34] <www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session61/advance-version/a-hrc-61-77-auv-en.pdf> accessed 23 February 2026.

^[18] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) 2187 UNTS 90, Article 7(1)(g).



Sudan's national legal framework for sexual offences, including rape, has been historically inadequate. Although three international crimes – genocide,^[19] crimes against humanity,^[20] and war crimes^[21] – have been integrated into Sudan's domestic legal framework through the 2007 Armed Forces Act and 1991 Criminal Act, conditional immunity clauses exist to protect members of security agencies and armed forces, the main perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict situations.^[22] These individuals can be prosecuted only if the head of the relevant security agency or armed force lifts this immunity. This has allowed perpetrators of CRSV to evade justice, moving between positions of power within militias and armed forces. In addition, these domestic definitions are not harmonised with international law: for instance, domestic

legislation uses different terminology from that agreed upon in the Rome Statute.^[23]

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains an underreported and taboo crime. Survivors are often faced with deep social stigma, psychological and physical trauma within a culture that discourages disclosure.

These systemic barriers severely hinder effective investigations and the implementation of SGBV-related laws. After being victimised, a survivor is required to obtain "Form 8" to receive medical treatment, support services, or to initiate legal proceedings.^[24] This form is issued by police stations or approved clinics and must be completed by a medical practitioner. Victims has revealed that they are often not aware of the existence of Form 8, and that in conflict-

^[19] Armed Forces Act (2007) Article 153(1) <<https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/The%20Armed%20Forces%20Act%20of%202007%20%28EN%29.pdf>> accessed 23 February 2026.

^[20] *ibid*, Article 153(2).

^[21] *ibid*, Articles 154–163.

^[22] *ibid*, Article 42.

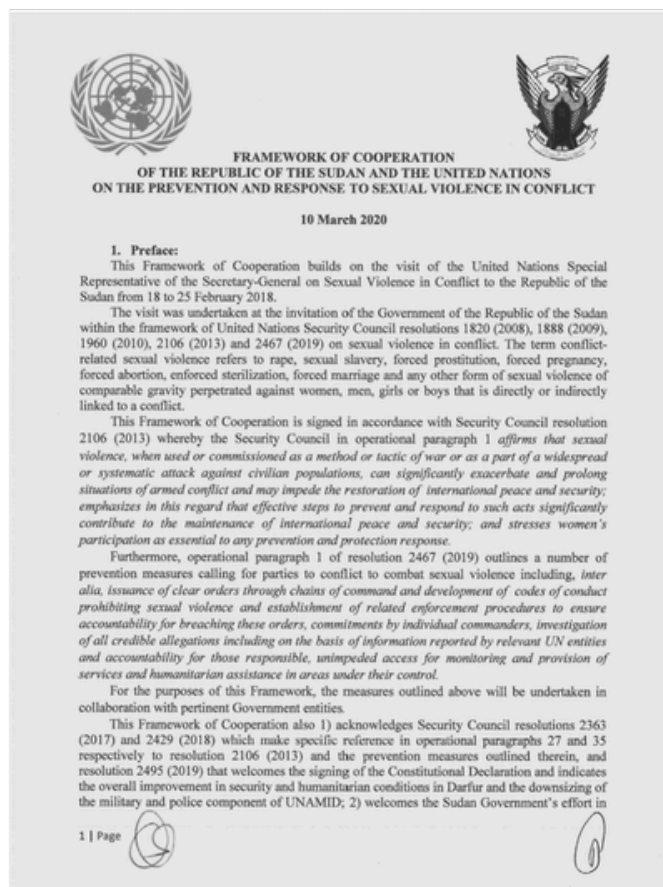
^[23] WAYAMO Foundation, 'Background on the Domestication of International Crimes in Sudan' <<https://sudan-justice-hub.wayamo.com/information-sheet/domestication-of-international-crimes-in-sudan/>> accessed 23 February 2026.

^[24] Legal Action Worldwide, 'Beyond the Headlines: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Sudan' (19 June 2025) <<https://legalactionworldwide.org/gender-equality-gbv/beyond-the-headlines-conflict-related-sexual-violence-in-sudan/>> accessed 9 April 2026.

affected areas, may be difficult for CRSV victims to obtain the form, further compounding the barriers to support.

After two years of conflict, in April 2025, the existing Framework of Cooperation between Sudan and the United Nations was renewed to coordinate the prevention of CRSV. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict stressed the need for accountability in sustaining peace in Sudan, urging an end to the cycles of impunity which have been at the core of decades of violations.^[25]

As systemic as CRSV is in Sudan, so too is impunity for such violations. CRSV is widely under-reported by survivors due to shame and life-changing social consequences that include stigma as well as limited access to protection or support. This is all compounded by a lack of accountability for perpetrators. There is insufficient consolidated evidence of the scale, scope and impact of sexual violence, as well as inadequate policy responses, including inclusive programmes for the full rehabilitation of victims.



Documentation efforts must be strengthened to ensure urgent and future access to justice and reparation measures. CRSV is preventable through justice, accountability, and gender transformation.

^[25] United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, 'After two years of deadly conflict, the Government of the Sudan renews its commitment to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence' (16 April 2025) <www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/after-two-years-of-deadly-conflict-the-government-of-the-sudan-renews-its-commitment-to-prevent-and-address-conflict-related-sexual-violence/> accessed 9 April 2026.

1.3 Methodology

The findings of this report focus on survivors' views, which were gathered in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Sudanese survivors of CRSV. Each FGD was conducted as a two-day workshop, which aimed to support survivors' dignity and agency through acknowledgement, capacity strengthening and empowerment. They took place in three locations (the precise locations are not disclosed to protect their identity):

- a refugee camp in Chad (Location 1)
- a refugee camp in South Sudan (Location 2)
- an IDP camp in Darfur (Location 3).

The FGDs provided survivors with a safe space to unpack the root causes and drivers of CRSV and identify localised prevention strategies.

Where necessary, the FGDs took place in very small groups due to a combination of stigma and security concerns. Participants were able to map high-risk situations, the most at-risk groups, socio-cultural norms, and power dynamics. The format varied by location to ensure safety and cultural appropriateness. The approach was survivor-centred and designed to support healing, empowerment and collective advocacy.

Groups of survivors in two of the locations also benefited from support in implementing their own small prevention initiatives during the 16 Days of Activism in December 2025. A collective reflection on the role that survivors can safely play in advocating for these measures, alongside men, boys and community leaders, further shaped their own small prevention initiatives.





1.4 Defining CRSV

Conflict-related sexual violence refers to:

‘rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict’.

[26]

The link to conflict may be established through the perpetrator’s or victim’s profile or through the coercive environment created by conflict.

Rape in international law:

No need to show lack of consent

Under the ICC Rome Statute, lack of consent is not a required element to determine rape in conflict settings.^[27] Instead, the crime is established by proving that the perpetrator committed the act by force, threat of force, coercion, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment or the victim’s incapacity to give genuine consent. Detention, captivity, fear of violence, duress, psychological oppression, abuse of power, or being outnumbered—inherently remove a person’s ability to freely and genuinely consent to sexual acts.

Rape as defined in Sudanese law

Sudanese law, rape is defined in Article 149 of the 1991 Criminal Act as sexual intercourse outside marriage without the woman’s consent, requiring proof of lack of consent as an essential element of the crime, and consent is not presumed absent even in coercive circumstances such as armed conflict or detention, unlike the ICC’s approach where lack of consent is not required to be proven and a coercive environment can negate the possibility of genuine consent.

[26] Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, ‘Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’ (2020)[4] <www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf> accessed 23 February 2026.

[27] International Criminal Court, ‘Elements of Crimes’ (2013), Article 7(1)(g)-1.

According to the Kinshasa Declaration – a declaration by survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence from Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Uganda – sexual violence is to be understood as:

'not only rape but also sexual slavery, forced sterilisation, forced marriage, trafficking, imposed motherhood, forced pregnancy, sexual mutilations, among others ... Victims can be any person, including men and women of any age, young and old, as well as their children, families and communities [...] Children born to survivors [of sexual violence] are entitled to reparations in their own right. Reparations programs should acknowledge that sexual and gender-based violence can cause trans-generational harm.'^[28]

Survivor-centred prevention prioritises safety, dignity, agency and participation, recognising survivors as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of aid.^[29]

This enables survivor-led advocacy through trauma-informed and co-created approaches and fosters long-term transformation by challenging socio-cultural norms, power structures and impunity.

Survivor participation also contributes to individual healing, rebuilding self-worth and reducing stigma, while strengthening collective prevention efforts.

1.5 The need for survivor-led prevention

Survivors of CRSV have clear views on how to prevent CRSV when given the time and space to articulate them. Survivors possess critical expertise on the realities, risks, and root causes of CRSV. Their perspectives provide essential guidance for designing effective and context-specific prevention strategies.

^[28] Survivors' Hearing for reparations for conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, 'It's Time: Survivors' Hearing on Reparations' (22-24 November 2021)[2-3] <<https://csiw-ectg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-12-20-Kinshasa-PrinciplesCLEAN.pdf>> accessed 9 April 2026.

^[29] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct' (1 December 2020) <www.unhcr.org/media/policy-victim-centred-approach-unhcrs-response-sexual-misconduct#:~:text=This%20policy%20%28i%29%20clarifies%20what,spells%20out%20which%20entities%20are> accessed 9 April 2026.

2. Survivors' Views of the Causes and Drivers of CRSV

Across three locations, survivors consistently linked CRSV to power, impunity, inequality and the erosion of protective structures.

Participants did not describe CRSV as random or inevitable, but as the result of identifiable political, social, economic, and institutional conditions.

The information below retains survivors' language, logic and prioritisation, combining narrative analysis with structured points and direct quotations. In Location 1, survivors worked in groups and drew a collective "problem tree", annotating the underlying causes of CRSV as the tree's roots, the core problem as the trunk, immediate consequences as the branches and long-term impacts as the leaves. The findings were as follows:

Underlying causes (roots):

- Inequality
- Proliferation of weapons
- Harmful traditional practices and social norms
- Ignorance and lack of awareness
- Absence of justice and the rule of law
- Poverty
- Unemployment

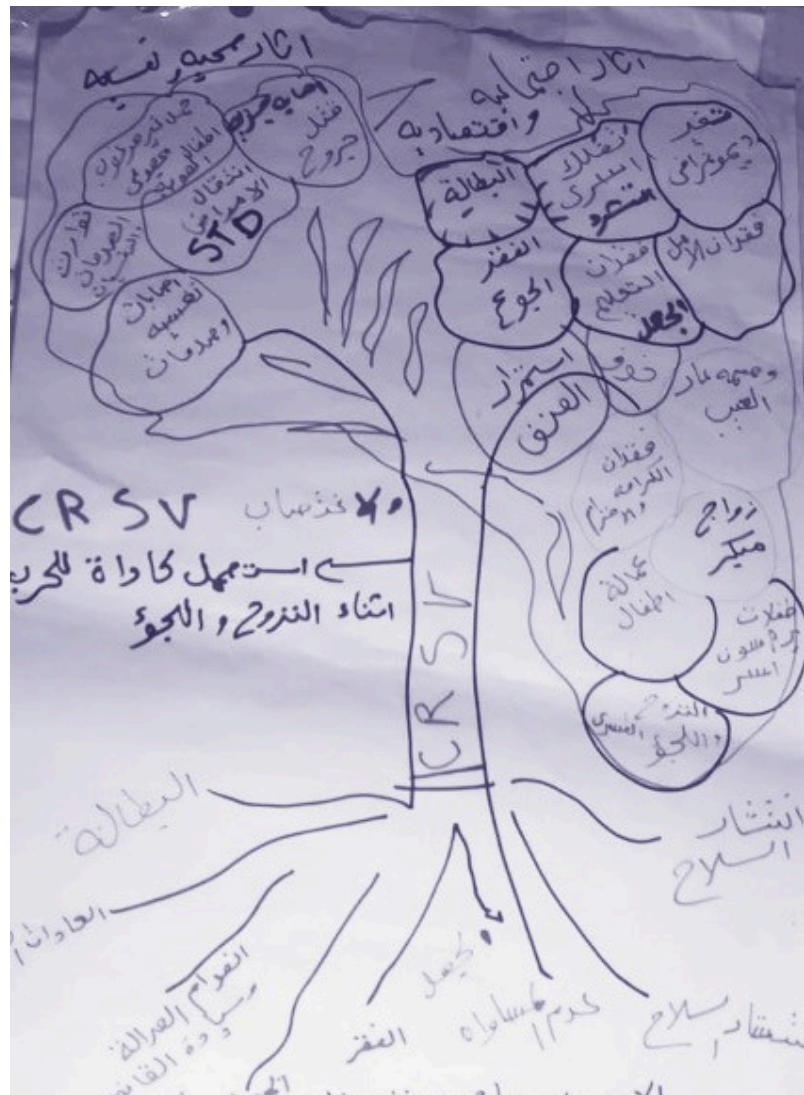
Immediate consequences (branches):

- Physical injuries: killings and wounds
- Psychological trauma, need for psychosocial support services.
- Intergenerational transmission of psychological trauma

- Unwanted pregnancies, children of unknown/undisclosed parentage
- Transmission of STDs

Core problem (trunk):

- Rape
- Use of CRSV as a weapon of war
- Targeting women and girls during displacement and in IDP camps



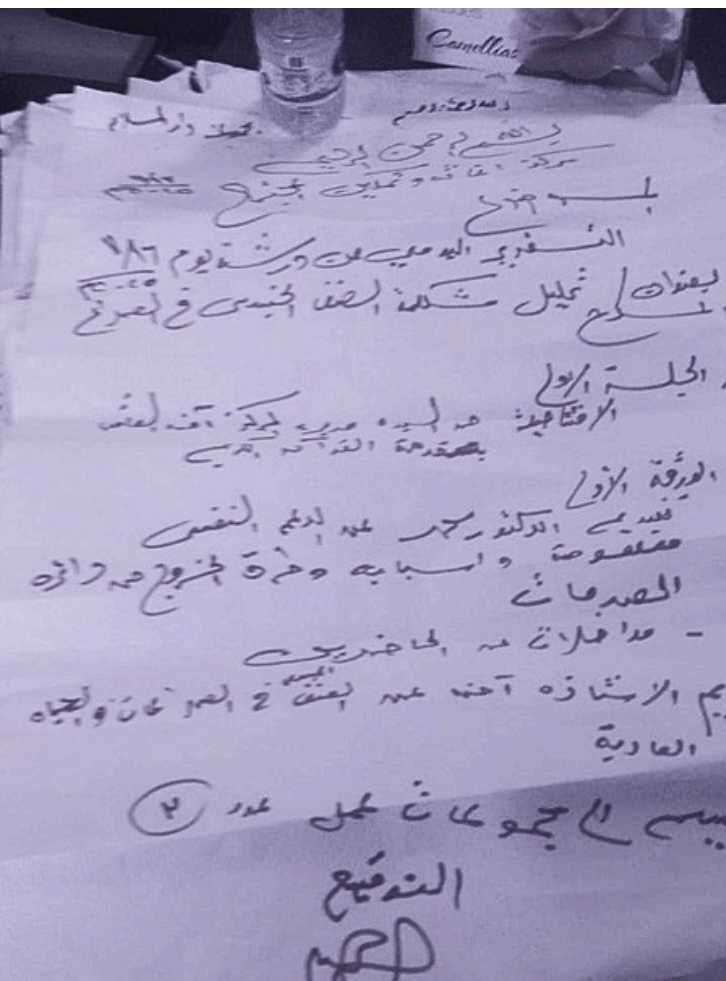
Long-term impacts (leaves):

- Social stigma and isolation, community and family breakdown
- Demographic change
- Loss of hope
- Poverty and hunger
- Loss of education and employment opportunities, especially amongst youth
- Continuation and escalation of the cycle of violence
- Child marriage and child labour

2.1 Harmful social norms, gender inequality and community silence

Participants described harmful social norms and gender inequality as providing an enabling environment for CRSV. Acute inequality as well as harmful beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are a root cause of violence, exacerbated by armed conflict. Survivor-participants talked of patriarchal authority structures that reinforced male dominance, silenced survivors and discouraged community intervention.

Among the most harmful gender attitudes are the beliefs that women are subservient to men and that physical violence can be exacted as a justified form of punishment. In many Darfuri communities, across ethnic groups, traditional gender roles position men as heads of households with authority over female relatives. This can manifest in beliefs that husbands or male family members have the right to "discipline" women through physical means, particularly for perceived transgressions like speaking to unrelated men, leaving home without permission, or not fulfilling domestic duties adequately. The survivors' discussions about gender-ascribed status are backed by other evidence: 68% of women in Darfur believe that it is justified for a man to beat his wife, compared to a national average of 47%.^[30]



^[30] UNAMID Human Rights Section, 'Human Rights First' Vol. 2, Issue 1, p. 11 (February 2018)

<https://unamid.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/hrs_first_2018_edition-final.pdf> accessed 12 June 2023.

Sexual violence was described by the survivors as being treated as a private or shameful issue rather than a crime. A participant commented that ***"in my community, anything that happens to a woman is considered a disgrace and is tied to the family's honour"***.^[31] If women go out to collect wood, they can be targeted on the road, but what is worse is the culture that blames them for the sexual violence that they might suffer, with some narratives even suggesting that they continue to collect wood because they enjoy it.

'Ird' (family honour) is closely tied to a woman's behaviour, with violence against women viewed as a private family matter to be shrouded and resolved discreetly rather than as a crime requiring formal intervention or publicity. Survivors fear reporting violence because it could bring shame upon their families.

In rural Darfur in particular, customary practices govern social relations more than formal state law. Certain forms of domestic violence are also not regarded as criminal offences; instead, these are matters for family or tribal elders to handle through compensation or reconciliation.

Prevalent attitudes also hold women responsible for preventing violence against themselves through dress, behaviour, or location, which shifts blame from perpetrators to victims, making violence seem like a consequence of women's actions rather than a criminal act.

Violence against women is normalised, tolerated and silenced. Misconceptions, stigma, and fear of shame are seen as major barriers to prevention, reporting and survivor support.

^[31] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).



One survivor noted that: ***“Some ways of thinking make violence seem normal, especially against women and girls”***.^[32]

After over two decades of conflict in Darfur, where sexual violence has been systematically used as a weapon of war by various armed groups, communities have become desensitised to such violence. What begins as an extraordinary atrocity can, through repetition, come to be seen as an unfortunate but inevitable part of life—particularly for displaced women and girls in camps.

Participants explained that silence is not neutral; it actively protects perpetrators and allows violence to continue. They stressed that ***“the silence of the community”*** perpetuates violence.^[33]

Across each location, the strong message emerged that in Sudan, violence against women and girls is minimised through silence and normalised due to systematic repetition.

Survivors face stigma, shame and threats of social exclusion or divorce if they report rape, with the victim often blamed rather than the perpetrator. One survivor stated that ***“women and girls need protection, not silence or discrimination”***.^[34] Another commented that: ***“sometimes I keep silent because I fear harm or I fear the community’s reaction”***.^[35]

Traditional gender roles in Sudan also include women's limited access to land, inheritance, and independent income, particularly in traditional Darfurian communities. This creates economic dependence on male relatives, which can reinforce power imbalances that make leaving abusive situations extremely difficult and reinforce perceptions that male control is normal. These factors reinforce CRSV by preventing survivors from speaking out and accessing support services. There is a tolerance of violence against women and girls, and it is shrouded as a private matter, forming a structural barrier to prevention. One survivor noted that ***“silence protects the violence, not the survivor”***.^[36]

2.2 Impunity is a driver of CRSV

For survivors, ***“there is no law, no accountability and no security.”***^[37]

Participants mentioned that before the outbreak of conflict, ‘omda’ (chiefs) would facilitate customary measures to resolve disputes and render justice for crimes. The perpetrator’s family would pay ‘diyah’ (blood money) as compensation to the victim. However, traditional leaders now fear

^[32] Participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[33] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[34] Participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[35] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[36] Participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[37] Participant contribution, Location 2 (29 November 2025).



retaliation from perpetrators of CRSV and no longer intervene.

Widespread displacement due to decades of conflict has resulted in a breakdown of social norms that influence behaviours. Participants discussed how youth lack the community cohesion, mentorship and role models that were previously provided by traditional structures, which set and enforced positive behaviours. Coupled with a proliferation of weapons, youth are no longer held to account by their communities.

In addition to the breakdown of social structures, the formal justice system – that was already neglected and ineffective – is no longer functioning. Survivors described that the absence of effective law enforcement has removed deterrence and enabled perpetrators to act without fear of consequences because **“now, there are no functioning courts”**.^[38] Participants highlighted that armed actors are

not held to account. Across all three locations, survivors framed CRSV as inseparable from the collapse of legal systems. They cited the lack of state protection as a key factor, explaining that for decades the legal system and enforcement of the law have deliberately been neglected, both in terms of formal justice enforcement and the erosion of customary mechanisms. For them, impunity is one of the strongest drivers of CRSV.

“The series of conflicts which have afflicted Sudan for decades has led to an absence of accountability”^[39] and a lack of justice.

Survivors described impunity as emboldening perpetrators to act without fear. Some went as far as to say that **the current violence is the result of impunity**, suggesting that had there been justice for the atrocities of twenty years ago, the current level of sexual violence would not be happening. This identifies CRSV not as an inevitable consequence of war, but instead as a preventable outcome of impunity,

^[38] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[39] *ibid.*

discrimination and neglect.

As put by one of the survivor-participants, ***“prevention must start before conflict, not after it begins”***.^[40]

The breakdown of formal and informal justice structures is, in turn, heavily influenced by the power of armed actors who carry weapons, command territory, or benefit from political protection. Participants repeatedly emphasised that those in control of military power effectively have control over civilians and their bodies. CRSV was consistently described as a weapon of political reprisal against civilian populations that are perceived to support opposition movements.

“Those who control military power have control over civilians and their bodies”.^[41]

Militarised might has effectively supplanted the police and courts, which are under-resourced, inaccessible or corrupt, as well as being driven by discrimination, resulting in traditional leaders being threatened into silence. Even when reporting violence to the police is possible, it can expose survivors to reprisals, traumatising and intense social stigma. The Sudanese Ministry of Social Welfare Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children (CVAW) documented 164 incidents of sexual violence between the

outbreak of war on 15th April 2023 and September 2024; yet the body said that this ‘represents no more than 2% of the violations and assaults happening in reality’.^[42]

In the context of the Sudanese conflict, survivors recognised that many cases remain unreported due to a lack of trust in authorities, weak accountability, and limited access to psychosocial and protection services. These gaps were seen as enabling the continuation of sexual violence. As put by one survivor, ***“without strong laws and accountability, perpetrators will continue because they do not fear consequences”***.^[43]

Participants emphasised that when justice mechanisms fail, violence becomes normalised and repeated, undermining any effort at prevention. A survivor explained that ***“when violence is not documented, it continues without consequences”***.^[44] Hence, survivors stressed that accountability is not only a matter of justice, but also a core CRSV prevention measure.

Survivors went further and connected the breakdown of formal and informal justice structures with not just military power, but also the **proliferation of weapons** at the community level, which inherently facilitates CRSV. It gives armed actors power, enabling them to commit sexual violence without fear

^[40] Participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[41] *ibid.*

^[42] Combating Violence Against Women Unit, ‘Sudan Briefing on Gender Based Violence’

<www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/a-79-500-submission-sudan-en.pdf> (September 2024) accessed 9 April 2026.

^[43] Participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[44] *ibid.*



of accountability. The widespread circulation of weapons has, for decades, shifted power, normalising violence and silencing communities through fear.

Survivors also considered the influence of conflict and widespread **psychological trauma**, including its effect on the behaviours of perpetrators. Participants explored the motivations of the perpetrators in committing such crimes, and raised the potential impact

of conflict on a perpetrator’s psyche. Trauma can lead to challenges in anger management, alcohol or substance abuse, contributing to the problem. However, there was a strong consensus that **trauma does not excuse sexual violence** or remove responsibility for the commission of CRSV. One participant summed up the discussion, stating that: ***“Conflict affects people psychologically, but trauma cannot be used to justify sexual violence”***.^[45]

They concluded that psychosocial interventions should target perpetrators, as well as victims.

^[45] Participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

2.3 CRSV has become a form of ethnic targeting

Participants stressed that the use of CRSV as a weapon of war is not new. They described clear continuity between the Darfur Genocide of 2003–04 and the current conflict, noting that the same patterns of violence, perpetrators, and targets have re-emerged. Survivors underlined the deliberate targeting of non-Arab women and girls, identifying CRSV as occurring along ethnic lines, particularly against the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa communities. One survivor noted that the deliberate failure to invest in education and the protection of non-Arab communities since the colonial period has contributed to their long-term vulnerability and marginalisation.

Sexual violence was described as a weapon of ethnic persecution. Participants explained that CRSV is used to dehumanise non-Arab communities, impose fear and submission, and ultimately destroy family and community structures. In Location 2, survivors highlighted that CRSV was being used against Fur women to send a message to their male family members, with the intention of degrading the Fur tribe.^[46]

They described rape as a means of altering the ethnic composition of Darfur, a practice which has continued since 2003–04, whereby perpetrators seek to use CRSV to change the “genes” of Darfuri inhabitants.^[47]

Genocidal intent to eliminate non-Arab groups has been documented in Darfur as well as in other regions of Sudan, such as Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and particularly the Nuba Mountains. Widespread and systematic ethnic violence in Darfur, including sexual violence, has been evidenced for decades. For instance, the UN Commission of Inquiry noted in its 2005 Report that:

"The vast majority of the victims of all of these violations have been from the Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit, Jebel, Aranga and other so-called 'African' tribes [suffering] killing of civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, destruction of villages, rape and other forms of sexual violence [...] throughout Darfur."^[48]

A witness cited in the 2025 ICC Judgment against Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (aka Ali Kusheyb) ascribed genocidal intent to then Minister of the Interior, Ahmad Muhammad Harun, who, in early August 2003, allegedly called on the Janjaweed to:

^[46] Focus Group Discussion report, Location 2 (20 November 2025).

^[47] *ibid.*

^[48] International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 'Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary-General' (United Nations, 2005) https://www.un.org/news/dh/sudan/com_inq_darfur.pdf accessed 26 April 2026.

'wipe out and sweep away the Fur, do not keep anyone alive.'^[49]

Mirroring the Darfur Genocide of 21 years ago, participating survivors reported that, in the context of atrocities committed in El-Fasher in October 2025, the RSF made statements showing genocidal intent, including:

"We have to empty El-Fasher of the Falangiyat" (understood locally as a slur roughly meaning "slaves" or "infidels").

"These are slaves. Kill them, destroy them, rape them";

"We are your only men, no other men";

"We are allergic to Zaghawa"; and

"You must give birth to our children."^[50]

The survivor-participants explained that women from these targeted groups are highly vulnerable, the majority having already been forcibly displaced in waves of violence. The survivor-participants explained that when they would leave the IDP camps to collect wood, they were invariably targeted.



^[49] The Prosecutor v. Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman ("Ali Kushayb"), ICC-02/05-01/20, Trial Chamber I, Judgment, 6 October 2025, para 352.

^[50] Human Rights Council, 'Sudan: Hallmarks of Genocide in El-Fasher', Report of the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan' (17 February 2026) [84-85] <www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session61/advance-version/a-hrc-61-77-auv-en.pdf> accessed 23 February 2026.

2.4 Loss of education due to conflict and displacement, both a root cause and driver

The lack of access to education, especially for boys, was described as both a root cause and a long-term driver of sexual violence. School closures and displacement deprive children of structure, protection, role models and future opportunities. Participants explained that children have missed years of schooling due to conflict and displacement. This lack of education has increased child labour, exploitation, drug use, and the normalisation of violence, including domestic violence, in local communities and among young people.

Violence has become normalised among youths, facilitating the recruitment of boys into armed groups. One participant stated: ***“we have forgotten about school and education; we only think about securing our daily bread”***.^[51]

It has become normal for young people to grow up without guidance on respectful behaviour or access to schooling. One survivor noted that ***“the war has left many children orphaned, and the burden on women has become very heavy”***.^[52] This lack of opportunity has pushed some youths towards armed groups, increasing their likelihood of committing CRSV and driving violence.

“We have displaced children who are in need of child protection through education”.^[53]

2.5 Breakdown of family and community structures are fueling CRSV

Participants explained that poverty and displacement force women and girls into situations that increase their exposure to sexual violence, compounding their vulnerability.

“Economic pressure and political instability create conditions where violence spreads and women are extremely vulnerable”.^[54]

Participants linked sexual violence to the **breakdown of family and community protective structures** that conflict causes. The deaths, disappearances and targeting of men, as well as displacement from repeated waves of violence prior to April 2023, have left many households without traditional sources of income, protection and authority. This has made the occurrence of CRSV more likely in two compounding ways.

Firstly, increasing families' reliance on women and girls to perform tasks outside the home without protection gives perpetrators more opportunities to commit CRSV in a setting where women and girls are unprotected. Multiple female participants identified themselves as the breadwinners and responsible for providing economically for their families, often while also supporting numerous children. One shared that ***“my***

^[51] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[52] *ibid.*

^[53] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[54] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).



husband is missing; I do not know whether he is dead or alive". ^[55]

Rural populations have traditionally been more vulnerable to mass atrocities. Survival needs, such as collecting water, firewood, building materials or food, were described as daily risk factors for CRSV. Another participant linked farming work to sexual violence: **"I go to work in agriculture, and that is where I was raped."** ^[56]

A survivor noted that their dependency on the collection of firewood as one of their only sources of income within a context of limited income-generating opportunities was **"a key driver of violence"**. ^[57]

Secondly, children, especially adolescent boys, have been left without supervision, guidance, or support, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and recruitment

into armed groups which commit CRSV. The conflict environment embedded within Sudan has also resulted in a marked increase in **domestic violence**, normalising violence within homes, and providing destructive learned behaviours for boys. This is compounded by a lack of education and good role models for children growing up. One participant recounted seeing **children acting out sexual violence as part of their play**. While she found this shocking, she explained that it is now a common lived experience for children, even within households. The increase in domestic violence in "post" conflict contexts is not unique to Sudan. ^[58]

Children born of conflict-related sexual violence

Survivors expressed that the incidence of, and stigma against, **"sexual violence increases**

^[55] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[56] *ibid.* ^[57] *ibid.*

^[58] Global Irish Studies, *Gender-Based Violence in 'Post-Conflict' Northern Ireland: An Epidemic*, 2024, <https://globalirish.georgetown.edu/gender-based-violence-in-post-conflict-northern-ireland-an-epidemic/>

when communities lack awareness and guidance". This includes children born of conflict-related sexual violence, who face extreme rejection as a result of being born from CRSV. This often leads to homelessness, drug use and vulnerability to exploitation or recruitment. They face discrimination and exclusion, reinforcing cycles of marginalisation and violence. One participant stated that a child born of rape **"is viewed as a criminal who will inherit his father's genes in the future"**,^[59] underlining the stigma dually faced by both these children and their mothers. The exclusion they suffer can also contribute to their leaving to join armed groups.

One participant recounted that after her sister was raped and became pregnant, her father

said that if she gave birth to the child, he would kill it. This forced the mother to flee to Kenana in White Nile State and take the child to the Red Cross to be raised. The family viewed the child born of rape as a **"child of the enemy"**.^[60]

Across all of these risks, survivors saw reductions in humanitarian assistance as exacerbating factors. A participant noted that **"now there are no active institutions"** aiding survivors.^[61] Sexual exploitation, including sex in exchange for aid or services, was discussed as a consequence of extreme economic vulnerability when families become increasingly dependent on women and children because of the displacement and fragmentation of communities that conflict causes.



^[59] Quotes are both from written participant contributions, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[60] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[61] *ibid.*

3. Recommendations for the prevention of CRSV

Preventing CRSV requires a combination of **structural reforms** and **locally led, community-based interventions**. Participants consistently emphasised that prevention must begin before violence occurs and be sustained over time, addressing both the systemic drivers of sexual violence and the everyday risks faced by communities living in conflict and displacement settings.

A. Structural prevention measures

1. Strengthen accountability, justice and the rule of law

Participants strongly linked the prevention of CRSV to accountability, justice and the rule of law. Sexual violence was described as thriving in environments where perpetrators do not fear consequences. Strengthening legal frameworks, enforcing existing laws and ending impunity were therefore identified as central deterrence mechanisms. As one participant stated, ***“without strong laws and accountability, perpetrators will continue because they do not fear consequences”***.^[62]

The conviction of Ali Kushayb for crimes including sexual and gender-based violence was cited as an important, though a limited, step toward accountability. Participants viewed the case as a signal that justice is possible even in protracted conflicts, while stressing that isolated prosecutions are insufficient without broader systemic reforms. The lack of accountability was repeatedly linked to the persistence of violence, with one participant noting that ***“when violence is not documented, it continues without consequences”***.^[63]

Ensuring that violence is documented in accordance with professional and legal standards, and handled sensitively by the media, was a key concern for survivors in one of the locations. They want to see laws and community mechanisms strengthened by ***“enacting and enforcing stringent legislation to prosecute perpetrators and ensure that they do not benefit from impunity”***.^[64]

^[62] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[63] *ibid.*

^[64] *ibid.*

Civilian protection was identified as a core structural prevention measure. Participants highlighted the need to regulate armed actors and prevent abuses of power, particularly in and around camps and civilian areas. The cantonment of the military forces, creating physical separation of armed actors from civilian populations, is essential to reducing sexual violence as it would help prevent abuses of power.

“Sexual violence increases where there is no rule of law and no accountability.”^[65]

2. Invest in women's empowerment and attitude changes

Long-term investment in gender equality and the **transformation of harmful social norms** was emphasised as essential for prevention. Participants stressed that discriminatory customs and deeply rooted gender inequalities normalise violence against women and girls and discourage communities from speaking out.

As one survivor noted, ***“the community itself is connected to and implicated in the problem”***.^[66] Challenging these norms was seen as requiring sustained long-term engagement rather than short-term interventions.

Participants further emphasised the importance of actively engaging men and boys in prevention initiatives. CRSV prevention efforts need to be more gender-inclusive, recognising that men can also be survivors. Addressing stigma and silence around male victimisation was consequently viewed as essential to comprehensive prevention. The importance of education and training on respectful behaviour, targeting youth and men, was emphasised, to increase low-profile discourse around CRSV afflicting men as well as women.

“Training youth, women, and community leaders is essential to stop sexual violence.”^[67]

3. Raise awareness, improve capacity and coordination of public services, civil society and humanitarian actors

Participants raised the need to strengthen the awareness and capacity of public service officials. Training police, security forces, health workers, and social service providers on prevention, protection and survivor-centred responses was viewed as essential and critically lacking.

^[65] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

^[66] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

^[67] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

As one participant stressed, ***“police and service providers must be trained to protect civilians and human rights”***.^[68] Effective prevention was seen as dependent on coordination between national authorities, local institutions, civil society, and humanitarian actors, with one participant emphasising that ***“responding to sexual violence requires more than one actor; it requires coordination”***.^[69]

In one location, participants wanted to see the customs and traditions of the Sudanese refugee community aligned with the services provided by humanitarian organisations, so as to strengthen links between national, local and international institutions and ensure survivor-centred care.

“Everyone has a role in prevention: the State, organisations, and the community.”^[70]

B. Locally-led and community-based prevention

4. Target vulnerable youth with awareness-raising, education and opportunities

Participants stressed the importance of engaging youth and that prevention must be continuous and sustained, not just one-off activities. Awareness and training are necessary to change attitudes and behaviours over time, with a desperate need to restore education provision, particularly for adolescents. As one participant noted: ***“Awareness must be continuous, not a one-time activity”***.^[71]

Community education on respectful behaviour, consent, gender equality, and reporting pathways is seen as essential to shifting attitudes over time. Participants particularly stressed the need to provide education on CRSV reporting pathways and survivors’ rights to promote legal awareness. One survivor noted that:

“Our role, as people who have been directly affected, is to carry out comprehensive awareness-raising [...] among refugees from all groups about self-protection and how they can keep themselves safe, how to report and share information as well as the need to change attitudes.”^[72]

^[68] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

^[69] *ibid.*

^[70] *ibid.*

^[71] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (23 December 2025).

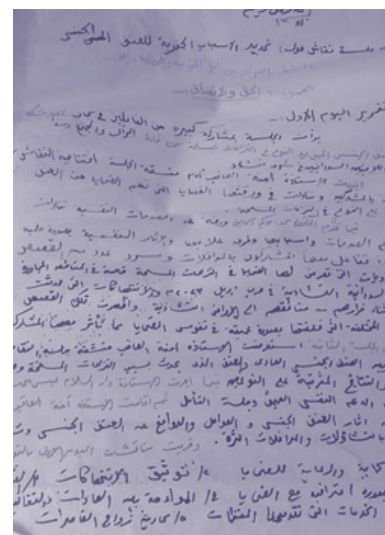
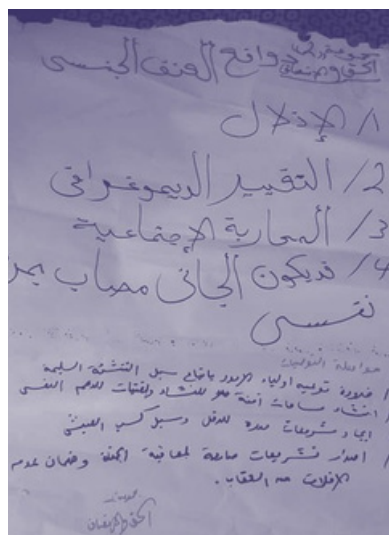
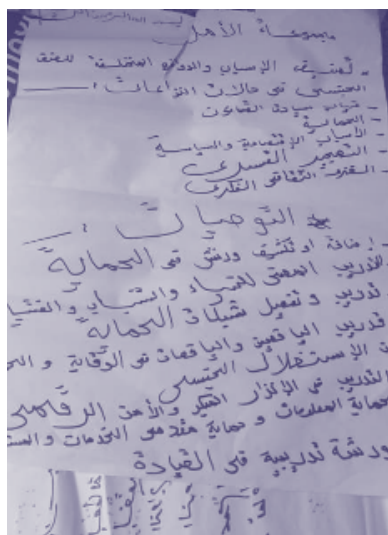
^[72] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

Another explained that ***“we need more workshops so that we can learn more”***.^[73] It is important to acknowledge the prevalence and perpetuation of CRSV within the specific context of Sudan, its conflict and ethnically motivated violence. One survivor said: ***“The problems we, as Sudanese, have experienced cannot be fitted into ready-made templates. We have been subjected to violations of a very particular nature”***.^[74] In this light, survivors noted that training, in particular on respectful behaviour and consent, survivors’ rights and reporting pathways, and specific sessions for men and boys in prevention initiatives, would all be key to prevention.

Education was consistently framed as one of the most powerful preventive tools available to communities. Schooling was framed not only as a **protective measure** but also as a **long-term investment in peace** and stability.

Participants underlined the need to strengthen education, particularly for adolescents, and expand vocational training and livelihood opportunities for young people. The absence of education and economic opportunities was frequently linked to recruitment into armed groups and the perpetuation of violence. To discourage youths from joining the armed forces, participants mentioned the need to restore and invest in education systems, provide vocational training and livelihood opportunities for youths, and address the intergenerational impacts of conflict.

“We need education and guidance so that violence does not continue from one generation to the next.”^[75]



^[73] Written participant contribution, Location 2 (29 November 2025).

^[74] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

^[75] Written participant contribution, Location 1 (29 November 2025).

5. Support families, community and religious leaders in prevention

Participants identified families, community and religious leaders as central prevention actors. Families were seen as shaping values from early childhood, while community and religious leaders were viewed as powerful norm-setters capable of influencing behaviour. As one participant stated, ***"families play a central role by raising boys and girls with the same values of respect"***.^[76] Supporting families to fulfil this role was hence viewed as critical to breaking intergenerational cycles of violence.

Participants stressed that when respected leaders speak clearly against sexual violence, they can shift attitudes and reduce tolerance for abuse. A participant emphasised that ***"religious and community leaders have a responsibility to guide people away from harmful practices"***.^[77] They described prevention as a collective responsibility requiring solidarity, vigilance, and support for survivors. When ***"the sheikhs and the community see the woman as the one at fault"***, violence is socially permitted to continue.^[78]

A specific form of community-based protection that participants identified was the inclusion of **safe spaces**: not only for women and girls, but also for men and boys, particularly adolescents. Strengthening **survivor support** and **stigma reduction** was underlined. Participants stressed the need for dedicated spaces for women and girls to access psychosocial support and protection, as well as safe spaces for men and boys to receive education and guidance on non-violence. In one location, a participant commented on the ***"need to establish child-friendly spaces to help children recover from war-related trauma, since children are also being subjected to violence."***^[79]

Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening **women-led protection networks** within camps and villages, which facilitate information-sharing, accompany survivors to health facilities, and provide social and psychosocial support. Such networks were seen as particularly effective where formal protection mechanisms are weak. Participants consistently framed prevention as a collective responsibility; for instance, one participant noted that ***"supporting survivors and refusing to stigmatise them is part of community protection"***.^[80]

"Women and girls need safe environments inside the camp, not just words about protection."^[81]

^[76] *ibid.*

^[77] Focus Group Discussion, Location 3 (8 January 2026).

^[78] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

^[79] *ibid.*

^[80] *ibid.*

^[81] *ibid.*

6. Targeted livelihood opportunities are needed to mitigate risks

Risk mitigation strategies should focus on **reducing exposure** to CRSV that is linked to livelihoods and daily survival activities. To reduce vulnerabilities related to collecting wood, the participants emphasised the need for livelihood support and income-generating activities.

Fuel-efficient stoves to reduce the need for collecting wood were also suggested, as well as ensuring access to water within camps. Participants stressed that the need to leave camps should be reduced to mitigate risks. For example, one survivor said: ***“We must improve the living conditions of refugees and ensure the basic necessities of life to prevent them from having to go to distant and unsafe areas outside the camps.”***^[82]

Participants specified the need for training in the production of traditional and fuel-efficient stoves made from clay or metal, the production of sustainable fuel, and enhancing their income-generation capacity to improve their livelihoods and reduce vulnerabilities.

Other income-generating activities listed as ways of reducing exposure and vulnerability include:

- establishing ***“small-scale soap production, including handmade bar soap and liquid soap”***^[83]
- starting a ***“small sweets trade similar to that of the local tribes”***^[84] or;
- working on ***“handicrafts, such as sewing bed sheets, towels and children’s clothing”***.^[85]

“There must be employment opportunities and training in livelihoods, as well as income-generating projects.”^[86]

7. Establish dedicated support programmes for children born of CRSV

Provide comprehensive assistance for mothers and children born of CRSV that includes psychosocial counselling, access to education, livelihood training, and community-based reintegration initiatives. Such programmes should actively ***combat stigma, ensure the children’s legal right to identity and nationality, and involve survivors, families, and local leaders in designing culturally appropriate interventions*** that promote ***healing, inclusion, and the prevention of inter-generational cycles of violence***. Existing programming should include awareness training for staff to insure these children are included and that positive narratives are developed about children born of CRSV.

^[82] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).

^[83] Written participant contribution, Location 2 (29 November 2025).

^[84] *ibid.*

^[85] *ibid.*

^[86] Participant quote, Location 1 (30 January 2026).



We're all human. Yet around the world we see minority groups being discriminated, demonised, dehumanised, their rights eroded – paving the way to mass atrocities.

This isn't a new story. It's predictable. It's also preventable.

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