Seminar syllabus

Title

The Struggle for Higher Education and Scientific Research in Sudan at War: Challenges and New Pathways

Format

10-session online seminar series | **90 minutes per session** | weekly
Structure each week: mini-lecture + Sudan case file/testimony + interactive prompt + moderated Q&A/discussion

1) Seminar description (general audience)

This 10-session seminar investigates how Sudan's armed conflict (since 15 April 2023, now entering its third year) is reshaping higher education and scientific research in real time. We begin by placing universities within the wider national crisis—mass displacement, loss of livelihoods and income, insecurity, and institutional fragmentation—while focusing on what these dynamics do to academic communities and institutions. Because the conflict is not a single event, the seminar follows multiple phases: the initial shock and closures, the prolonged erosion of institutional capacity, and uneven attempts to sustain learning and research through relocation, hosting arrangements, diaspora support, and remote/low-connectivity solutions. Across these phases, we examine how displacement, income loss, disrupted teaching and learning, and the destruction, occupation, and looting of campuses, laboratories, libraries, and data systems interrupt academic continuity and weaken knowledge production. Drawing on documented Sudanese evidence, selected regional comparisons, and participant dialogue, the seminar co-develops practical, ethical, and inclusive pathways for safeguarding higher learning during crisis and rebuilding the sector after conflict.

2) Rationale / Why this seminar now

- Higher education is not only a service; it is a **national capacity system** (human capital, public service workforce, research and innovation, social cohesion). When it collapses, recovery in health, economy, governance, and peacebuilding becomes harder and slower.
- Sudan's war has created a combination of **mass displacement + infrastructure destruction + institutional fragmentation** that threatens long-term educational continuity and research capacity.
- Despite disruption, there are emerging strategies—hosting by regional universities, partial relocation, diaspora networks, low-connectivity learning—that can be assessed and strengthened into realistic pathways.

3) Learning goals and aims (measurable)

By the end of the seminar, participants will be able to:

1. **Map and describe** Sudan's higher education and research landscape before April 2023 (institutional types, governance constraints, research-capacity limitations).
2. **Describe** how the impact of the conflict on higher education has varied across time and location, showing how shifting conditions—from institutional collapse in heavily affected areas to temporary academic continuity in relatively safer regions—have shaped academic life in different ways, and why a single "snapshot" cannot capture these dynamics.
3. **Analyse** how armed conflict disrupts universities and research (campus damage/occupation, loss of labs/libraries, displacement, breaks in academic continuity).
4. **Assess** lived impacts on students and staff (learning loss, barriers to teaching, psychosocial strain, fragmentation) using evidence + case material.
5. **Evaluate** resilience strategies (hosting/relocation, diaspora networks, remote/low-connectivity learning) for feasibility and equity implications.
6. **Apply a protection and ethics lens** (safe learning environments, safeguarding, gendered risks, responsible documentation).

7. **Co-produce a "Pathways Memo"**: a prioritized set of practical actions for protection + recovery (governance, admissions/exams, QA, infrastructure, research renewal, partnerships, digital continuity).

4) Target audience

- Higher education leaders and administrators
- Academics/researchers (inside Sudan and diaspora)
- Education policy actors, humanitarian/peacebuilding practitioners
- Donors and program designers supporting education and research in crises
- Students and civil society actors engaged in safeguarding education

5) Teaching and engagement design (fits webinar limits)

Each session follows a repeatable structure:

- **15–25 min mini-lecture:** key concepts + evidence + "so what?" implications
- **10–15 min Sudan case file:** one university/lab/cohort/region (facts + short testimony/excerpt when safe)
- **5–10 min interactive prompt:** Mentimeter (ranking/word cloud) or Padlet (structured board)
- **30–40 min moderated Q&A + discussion:** guided reflection + audience questions

Consistency feature: each session ends with a **1-slide takeaway** shared afterward (key insight + evidence point + pathway idea).

6) Safeguarding and ethics

- **Do no harm:** no identifying details that could endanger students/staff; anonymise testimonies and locations when needed.
- **Consent:** any personal testimony is shared only with explicit permission and can be withdrawn.
- **Safe participation:** anonymous Q&A option; clear moderation rules; no naming of survivors/perpetrators.

- **Trauma-aware facilitation:** content warnings for GBV-related sessions; avoid graphic details; provide referral links to support services where possible.

7) Core evidence base (what anchors the series)

This series deliberately avoids relying on a single source. It triangulates across:

A) Government baseline before the war (official reform priorities)

- **MoHESR Strategic/Reform Plan (2021)** as the official benchmark for governance reform, quality assurance, distance/online learning ambitions, research strengthening, and monitoring logic.
  MHESR Reform Projects-2021

B) War damage and disruption (Sudan-specific, ministry-linked + corroboration)

- MoHESR statements/communications on sector damage and disruption of academic activity (supported by credible Sudan-focused reporting where the original circular/PDF is not available).
- Field-informed reporting on higher education damage, displacement, and continuity constraints.

C) Humanitarian and displacement context (UN sources)

- UNHCR operational displacement data and OCHA humanitarian snapshots as the "big picture" drivers of education outcomes.

D) Gendered risks and protection constraints (UNFPA and protection reporting)

- GBV risk, service disruption, mobility constraints, and implications for women students and women academics.

E) Resilience/adaptation and recovery roles (research/working papers)

- Regional universities hosting/relocation roles (CMI and comparable policy research).
- Higher education under displacement (Rift Valley Institute and similar field-based analyses).

F) International protection and academic freedom frameworks

- GCPEA (attacks on education), Scholars at Risk (academic freedom/risks), and internationally recognized guidelines on protecting education facilities from military use.

G) Mental health and learning capacity (Sudan-specific clinical evidence)

- Peer- reviewed clinical and population-level evidence on mental health outcomes during Sudan's armed conflict, documenting high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress linked to displacement, income loss, and insecurity, with direct relevance for educational participation, persistence, and recovery planning.

8) 10-week syllabus outline (weekly outcomes + diversified readings)

Reading rule: ~20–25 pages/week total. Use **selected pages/sections** from long reports.

Week 1 — Why universities matter in war

Focus: Why higher education matters (human capital, cohesion, innovation) and why it becomes vulnerable.

Outcomes: define core functions; identify conflict "attack points" on universities.

Prompt: Mentimeter — "When education collapses, what collapses with it?"

Readings (choose 2):

- World Bank education-in-FCV overview (selected)
- Scholars at Risk: *Free to Think* (overview/selected)
- OCHA one-year conflict snapshot (short)

Week 2 — Sudanese higher education before April 2023

Focus: system structure, governance, chronic constraints, research capacity.

Outcomes: build baseline map; extract reform priorities to reuse in Week 9.

Case file: "A normal academic year" (teaching, labs, supervision, publishing).

Readings:

- **MoHESR Reform/Strategic Plan (2021)** — priorities/pillars + distance learning + research strengthening (selected).
  MHESR Reform Projects-2021
- Pre-war higher education landscape study/report (selected sections)

Week 3 — Shock phase: April 2023 and immediate disruption

Focus: closures, insecurity, early displacement patterns, first continuity attempts.

Outcomes: describe first breakpoints; connect displacement to institutional shutdown.

Prompt: Padlet — "What does a university lose first: space, people, funding, or trust?"

Readings:

- UNHCR displacement overview (selected)
- OCHA humanitarian snapshot (selected)
- Sudan-focused higher education situation analysis (selected)

Week 4 — Campus destruction, occupation, and collapse of research infrastructure

Focus: labs, libraries, archives, fieldwork, ethics, biosafety, data stewardship.

Outcomes: produce a "research continuity risk map."

Readings:

- Rift Valley Institute report on higher education/research under displacement (selected)
- GCPEA (Sudan profile or relevant excerpt on attacks/military use) (short)
- MoHESR damage communications (excerpt) + credible corroboration (short)

Week 5 — Students: displacement, barriers, and the "lost campus" experience

Focus: access barriers, interrupted semesters, documentation loss, inequity by region.

Outcomes: rank urgent needs; identify equity risks and mitigation ideas.

Prompt: rank "most urgent student needs."

Readings:

- UNHCR (selected pages)
- RVI (student sections)
- Practical host-university guidance on displaced learners (short)

Week 6 — Teachers and researchers: survival, ethics, and "brain drain"

Focus: access barriers, interrupted semesters, documentation loss, inequity by region, and the mental-health consequences of prolonged conflict on students.

Outcomes: distinguish brain drain vs diaspora continuity; rank urgent needs; propose support mechanisms.

Readings:

- RVI (faculty/research continuity sections)
- Scholars at Risk (risks + protection framing, selected)

- Short piece on research ethics/data stewardship during conflict (selected)
- BMC Psychiatry (2025) — Mental health outcomes during armed conflict in Sudan

Week 7 — Gender, protection, and women in academia/STEM during war

Focus: gendered risks, mobility, safeguarding, women's leadership in resilience.

Outcomes: draft a minimum "safe learning environment" checklist.

Prompt: anonymous Q — "What does 'safe learning' mean in war?"

Readings:

- UNFPA Sudan reporting (selected)
- Short evidence piece on women's education/work under displacement (selected)
- (Optional) MoHESR baseline on equity goals (short, from 2021 plan)
  MHESR Reform Projects-2021

Week 8 — Regional universities as lifelines

Focus: hosting displaced students/staff; capacity strain; partnerships; local recovery roles.

Outcomes: draft a "host university policy outline."

Prompt: Padlet — "What must a host policy include?"

Readings:

- CMI working paper on regional universities (selected)
- Practical displaced-students policy guide (selected)

Week 9 — Policy and rebuilding pathways

Focus: autonomy/governance, funding, QA, admissions/exams, labs/libraries, academic freedom, partnerships, digital continuity.

Outcomes: build a "policy menu" by timeline: 0–6 months / 6–24 months / 2–5 years; link to MoHESR reform pillars.

Readings:

- **MoHESR Reform/Strategic Plan (2021)** governance/QA/research/digital continuity (selected).
  MHESR Reform Projects-2021
- World Bank (rebuilding education systems in FCV) (selected)
- (Optional) academic freedom measurement lens (short)

Week 10 — Lessons beyond Sudan + audience roadmap (Pathways Memo)

Focus: cross-conflict lessons + participant-generated roadmap.
Outcomes: finalize Pathways Memo (top 10 actions + actors + timeline).
Prompt: live ranking — "Top 10 actions to safeguard higher learning during war."
Readings:

- GCPEA comparative excerpt(s) (short)
- Guidelines on protecting education from military use (short)
- CMI conclusions (selected)

9) Deliverables (what participants leave with)

- **Weekly 1-slide takeaways** (shared after each session)
- **A shared glossary** of key terms (continuity, hosting, safeguarding, academic freedom, recovery phases)
- **A final Pathways Memo (1–2 pages)**: prioritized actions, responsible actors, and timeline bands

Full reference list (core evidence base + weekly readings)

1) MoHESR (Sudan) – **Strategic/Reform Plan** (PDF)

2) MoHESR (Sudan) – **Official website news** (Dec 21, 2025)

3) UNHCR – **Sudan situation** (Operational Data Portal)

4) OCHA – **Sudan: One Year of Conflict** (Key Facts & Figures) – Infographic page

-OCHA (**ReliefWeb mirror**)

5) UNFPA – Sudan Situation Report #21 (June 2025) – **Web page** and **PDF**

  -UNFPA (**ReliefWeb mirror**)

6) Rift Valley Institute (RVI) – Research in Displacement (Higher education & research in Sudan) – **Web page** and **PDF**

7) Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) – **Regional universities in Sudan's war & rebuilding**

  -(Open **archive** record)

8) GCPEA – Education Under Attack 2024 (main publication page + full report PDF)

  - **https://protectingeducation.org/publication/education-under-attack-2024/**

  - **https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2024.pdf**

  - (**Executive summary PDF**)

9) GCPEA – **Sudan country profile** (Education Under Attack 2024) – PDF

10) Scholars at Risk – Free to Think 2024 (report page + download page)

  Free to Think 2024 | Scholars at Risk

  Download the Free to Think 2024 PDF | Scholars at Risk

([All Free to Think reports](#))

11) Academic Freedom Index / V-Dem – reference pages and data

[Academic Freedom Index](#)

[AFI - Data](#)

[Academic Freedom – V-Dem](#)

([AFI quality assessment working paper PDF](#))

12) World Bank – Education in FCV ([overview](#) and [approach paper PDF](#))

13) Guidelines – [Protecting Schools & Universities from Military Use](#) (PDF + UNESCO hub)

-([Commentary PDF](#))

-([UNESCO knowledge hub page](#))

14) [BMC Psychiatry](#) (2025). *Mental health outcomes during armed conflict in Sudan.* **Springer Nature**

15) MoHESR (Sudan) – [Damage statement on Facebook](#) (Arabic)

16) Beam Reports (Arabic) – [104 institutions report](#)