

PRACTICE NOTE

Community Stabilization and Violence Reduction: Lessons from Darfur

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Ravaged by years of conflict and environmental decline, Darfur's economy has been unable to create sufficient opportunities for youth, creating a link between social instability and high concentration of youth without productive employment. In 2011, the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) designed a community stabilization and violence reduction programme to bridge a critical gap between the increasing 'youth bulge' and the government's capacity to deliver youth empowerment and job creation solutions to youth in Darfur, leading to militarization of youth. The programme offers vocational skills training and temporary employment of youth through implementation of community-based labour intensive projects (CLIPs). Youth are targeted in particular, since they are an essential part of the solution to resolving the conflict in Darfur. Youth tend to be directly involved in hostilities and are seen to be most likely to return to the battlefield. At the same time, youth are often the community members most open to engaging in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding activities. Since the conception of the programme in 2011, a total of 58 projects were implemented in 45 communities, and directly targeted over 9,000 youth. In a situation where the peace agreement is non-inclusive and the level of violence against unarmed civilians is high, CLIPs have played an important role in community stabilization and violence reduction in Darfur, building trust, contributing to a secure environment and helping build the foundation for longer term peace and development. As recognition of its contribution to peace and stability in Darfur, in October 2014, UNAMID's CLIPs programme received the UN 21 Award for Outstanding Vision.

The Sudanese region of Darfur remains beset by serious, immediate challenges – the legacy of a conflict that has destabilized the region since 2003 and gravely affected communities' self-reliance. A range of causes have driven conflict in Darfur, none of which can be identified as sole or primary:

historical grievances, local perceptions of identity, demands for a fair sharing of power between different groups, the inequitable distribution of economic resources and benefits, disputes over access to and control over increasingly scarce natural resources (land, livestock and water), the proliferation of arms, lack of opportunity for increasingly militarized youth or the absence of a participatory process for decision-making. Negative environmental trends, demographic shifts

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and governance-related challenges are widely perceived as the underlying causes of protracted emergency hampering the region.

There are ongoing efforts to achieve peace and stability in Darfur. In Doha, under the joint African Union/United Nations-led mediation, the Government of Sudan and some armed opposition groups have negotiated a political agreement, while the United Nations - African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been deployed to restore the necessary security conditions and provide protection of civilians and humanitarian workers.

Due to the years of protracted conflict, with limited progress toward a comprehensive peace agreement with all stakeholders to the conflict, resources for Darfur operations have been targeted to life-saving emergency assistance. However, notwithstanding the humanitarian nature of the UN activities in Darfur, UNAMID and UN Agencies are embarking on stabilization, peacebuilding, recovery and development activities in Darfur, in order to enhance communities' self-reliance, explore durable solutions and foster enabling conditions for comprehensive peace.

Ravaged by years of conflict and environmental decline, Darfur's economy has been unable to create sufficient opportunities for youth, recalling an often discussed link between social instability and high concentration of youth without productive employment. Therefore, youth often become either perpetrators or victims of violence and crime, mostly because of economic and social marginalization, and remain exposed to potential mobilization into armed movements and criminal groups due to the lack of education, basic life skills and employment.

Following the February 2013 workshop of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) stakeholders in Khartoum, the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC) endorsed a national strategy that moved from traditional, individual disarmament to

a community-based approach. This approach offers a softer and more expansive means of implementing DDR by emphasizing community projects in areas with a high concentration of ex-combatants and where community violence persists. Youths are targeted, in particular, because they are seen to be most likely to return to the battlefield. Sudan's new effort is executed by a range of government, UN, and NGO partners (HBSA 2013).

In order to address the social exclusion of youth and to bridge a critical gap between the increasing youth bulge' and the government's capacity to deliver youth empowerment and job solutions to youth in Darfur, leading to increasing militarization of youth, UNAMID developed a community stabilization and violence reduction programme to offer opportunities for youth to acquire a variety of livelihoods and life skills and to engage them in rebuilding their fragile and vulnerable communities through implementation of community-based labour intensive projects (CLIPs). The programme was developed in consultation with national counterparts, international partners, civil society organisations and tribal and community leaders, based on a comprehensive analysis of root causes and dimensions of conflict in Darfur. It aims to empower youth to develop alternative livelihoods and income-generating activities and to encourage youth to rebuild their communities and promote peace and stability in Darfur. Youths are an essential part of the solution to resolving the conflict in Darfur, as they tend to be directly involved in hostilities and are seen to be most likely to return to the battlefield. At the same time, youth are often the community members most open to engaging in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding activities.

UNAMID's community-based labour intensive projects (CLIPs) apply the community-based approach to implementing projects in areas with a high concentration of youth and where community violence persists. They are implemented through local non-governmental and community-

based organisations in coordination with Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The projects implemented in Darfur can be broadly divided into two groups:

- Provision of vocational skills training on specializations that are high on demand on the local market, such as welding, metal works, auto mechanics, electrical works, computer training, carpentry, solar power, generator maintenance and repairs, etc. Upon completion of vocational skills training, study tours around relevant functioning workshops are organized for youth participating in the projects, and then start-up toolkits are provided to enable them to open their own small businesses or commercial activities.
- Engagement of youth in construction activities and thus on-the-job learning of construction skills during rehabilitation or construction of communal infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, multi-purpose youth centers, etc. Youth are directly employed during project implementation period and receive incentives in addition to acquiring construction skills (UNAMID 2013a).

Since the conception of this programme in 2011, UNAMID successfully implemented 58 CLIPs projects through local implementing partners. These projects directly targeted over 9,000 youth across 45 communities in different parts of Darfur. In addition, 15 new projects are currently in the process of implementation. To ensure sustainability, CLIPs were designed and implemented in consultation with local communities, locality commissioners and relevant line ministries. This was to promote the direct ownership by community members and line ministries providing the required support after completion of the projects. Youth engaged in these projects are young men and women typically

between 18 and 35 years old. Participation in the projects does not depend on political, tribal or ethnic affiliation. People with disabilities are also encouraged to join (UNAMID 2013b).

Young people across Darfur have benefited from the multidimensional vocational training CLIPs projects geared towards furnishing Darfuri youth with practical skills and knowledge in livelihood activities such as welding, computer science, perfume making, handcrafts, electrical works and so forth. The ultimate objective of these projects is to create secure foundations for establishing stable communities in the region. This objective is achieved by equipping unemployed youth with skillsets that are designed to ensure income-generating opportunities in harsh socio-economic conditions caused by the decade-long conflict.

Prior to their enrolment in such vocational training initiatives, beneficiaries are assessed for eligibility. Young people characterized as the most vulnerable, such as divorced or widow women, the homeless, unemployed or displaced, are treated as a priority for these projects. Implementation of such CLIPs needs close coordination with relevant local authorities. For instance, most vocational training projects have been implemented in collaboration with the technical education departments in Darfur's state education ministries. Technical and industrial schools across Darfur, traditionally known for their roles in contributing to the community through training initiatives, have been popular venues with many young people opting to benefit from the direct supervision of experienced teachers. In the end, vocational training initiatives enable Darfuri youth to acquire survival skills, help reduce poverty, combat unemployment and, ultimately, contribute to community stabilization across the conflict-torn region. Additionally, many view such vocational training courses as an exercise in spreading peace, tolerance and understanding among different Darfuri communities. During the courses, trainees are

usually grouped together in units that share a common aim, enabling them to inculcate core values such as discipline and collaboration (UNAMID 2014a).

The on-going conflict in Darfur has led to the large damage to basic infrastructure in all five states. Targeted CLIPs projects provide a means whereby youth can harness their talents in a positive fashion and embark on reconstruction, development, peacebuilding and recovery processes. To deter youth from being drawn into the conflict, a number of education, health, water and livelihoods projects have been implemented across the region. Through on-the-job training of youth, CLIPs supported the construction or rehabilitation of schools, clinics, multi-purpose youth centres, etc.

An example of a successful education project undertaken through CLIPs is the Shangil Tobaya Girls' Secondary School in North Darfur State where three classrooms, an office, a bathroom and a surrounding fence were constructed by youth through a CLIPs project. Construction of this school has made a positive impact on the local community, especially on those school-children whose education was disrupted by the conflict. Additionally, it has created a platform for teachers to become actively engaged in fulfilling the learning needs of the local community. CLIPs educational projects were designed to result in an increased enrolment of children in schools, provide a vocational opportunity for educated young Darfuris and ensure access to a conducive learning environment for those who live in remote locations.

Another focus of CLIPs is to construct youth centres to mobilize Darfur's young people. With a number of them built, these centres are serving as places where young people can meet, discuss ideas and engage in various learning activities, such as classes to counter illiteracy or workshops that address HIV/AIDS. The Ardamata youth center, on the outskirts of El Geneina, West Darfur State, is among several dozen centres that have been

constructed through CLIPs to create spaces where young people can talk together. While the profiles of CLIPs participants are diverse, the young workers all share a similar passion for acquiring new vocational skills and having a rewarding experience that leads to potential new careers.

The impact evaluation results of CLIPs conducted in 2013 demonstrated that over 95 per cent of surveyed beneficiaries responded that they learned new skills that would help them secure employment. In fact, during the initial surveys and interviews with project beneficiaries, it was found that most of them had no basic education and could not read. CLIPs have been helping these youth through providing them with marketable skills so that they can also have equal access to economic stability. Moreover, the recent developments in Darfur indicate that there is increasing demand for services in various specializations that are also covered in CLIPs vocational training projects. For example, vocational skills projects provide the youth with training on welding, electrical work, auto-mechanic, computer skills, arts and crafts and many other important specialties that are widely demanded in the local job markets of Darfur today. According to the recent survey results carried out in 2014, 77 per cent of the youth stated that their livelihood skills gained through CLIPs helped them find employment (UNAMID 2014b).

One of the success stories of CLIPs vocational skills projects is the journey of five young men who fled their war-torn homes and found themselves standing in the camp for internally displaced people (IDP) in El Geneina, West Darfur State. When they were selected as project beneficiaries of CLIPs to receive vocational skills training, they chose to learn welding. As they highlighted, 'there is a great need for welders in Darfur.' Upon their graduation they received start-up tool-kits and opened a new welding workshop near their IDP camp. They said, 'Before we became IDPs, we had different plans: to go to school, build a new house and have a family.

We lost our homes because of conflicts and moved to El Geneina where we were struggling to make ends meet. Participating in CLIPs is a great deal for us. We are happier now and able to earn enough to prosper and improve our living conditions.' At present, these CLIPs graduates produce chairs, tables and many other demanded products for communities in West Darfur, and their business is growing. Their case serves as a life example of the impact of political problems on changing the directions of young people's lives. Such cases attract CLIPs mainly because the task of the programme is to block that thin line between hopelessness and armed violence.

Throughout the implementation period, CLIPs have collected many similar stories of youth who did not have jobs but could get employment by the help of vocational skills trainings they received. In Nyala, South Darfur State, CLIPs have been benefiting over 100 young men and women with vocational skills training every year. One of them is Idris Zakaria who always dreamed of working in the automobile industry. Vocational skills training opened a door for him to bigger opportunities for development and fulfilling his goals.

Zakaria said in an interview:

It was a dream. Now, it is a reality. I work as a car mechanic. My work is profitable and enjoyable. I have many customers from different communities of South Darfur. I see myself being a useful citizen and adding my input into stabilization of my country. I thank UNAMID for not just helping me become a car mechanic, but for that I also changed and better understand that weapons are most likely to harm us than bring us any good.

More evidence shows that CLIPs are contributing to the implementation of UNAMID's mandate related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former

combatants. In the last impact evaluation conducted in 2014, 575 direct beneficiaries were surveyed. Over 550 of them responded that because CLIPs contribute to social and economic development of Darfur, it also contributes to reducing violence and promoting peace. The same number of youth agreed to the following statement: 'Young people of Darfur with opportunities for education and employment also mean strong community security.' The evaluation results also highlight that the projects raise awareness about disarmament and its role in promoting peace: CLIPs beneficiaries choose not to use weapons and rebuild their communities with their bare hands through building schools and community centers.

CLIPs construction projects embrace educational and youth empowerment activities that instill values of responsibility and cooperation. For example, in Althoura Shamal, North Darfur State, the CLIPs beneficiaries came from different tribes. Relocation of their tribes to Althoura Shamal has caused the fragmentation of the community as people lost a kind of togetherness that a strong and whole community would have. During focus group discussions, the beneficiaries said the programme has brought them together as they built their community center working side-by-side and developed new friendships.

CLIPs also include projects implemented with youth in prisons of Darfur. One of them is the building of a workshop for young inmates within a prison located in Shallah locality, North Darfur State. Another example is the renovation of the female section in Zalingei Prison, Central Darfur State. These projects provided young men and women in the prison with an opportunity to engage in a development activity promoting volunteerism and activism for peace. It is also one of the many examples of CLIPs that shows commitment to gender mainstreaming and promotion of gender equality at all levels. There are many women in Darfur who work in the field of construction performing backbreaking

physical labour because they have no other skills. The life situations of Darfuri women have proven too many times that once widowed or simply abandoned, women fall into the category of the most marginalized population during and post-conflict.

It is obvious why many DDR beneficiaries are males: simply due to the fact that the men represent the main population among combatants and perpetrators of violence. Men are more likely than women to be involved in armed gangs mostly on account of socio-cultural background. There are, however, many cases of women who served as combatants for the same reasons men had for joining armed movements. Peace and sustainable development, two pillars of prosperity depends on equal contribution of women and men. CLIPs have benefited thousands of direct and indirect beneficiaries. One of the success stories is of Rawda Mohamed who received training in tailoring and sewing machine upon her graduation. 'I had no tailoring skills before, but now I run my own tailoring workshop. My daily income is sufficient enough to live a good life. CLIPs have significantly changed my life. I consider myself socially and economically empowered' said Rawda. Another example is Eiaman Hamid who was among a group of women trained in scientific methods of food processing through CLIPs vocational skills training projects. She said she plans to use the skills acquired during the training sessions to create work opportunities by processing food for sale to the community at large. Similarly, Arwa El Tigani, a law degree holder who has been unable to find a job, said she intends to open a sewing centre selling bed sheets, uniforms, curtains and so forth, and provide training services in cookery and handcrafts. She credits her business plan to the intensive sewing course she took through CLIPs.

Throughout its implementation, the CLIPs programme has provided the youth of Darfur with territory that breaks down barriers and gets everybody to work together

through eliciting civic participation. In some communities, after CLIPs the youth became involved in promoting art and education in the name of peace. It is a strong indicator illustrating innovative response of youth who use their perspectives and abilities to effect social change.

In a situation where the peace agreement is non-inclusive and the level of violence against unarmed civilians is high, CLIPs have played and continue to play an important role in community stabilization and violence reduction in Darfur, building trust, contributing to a secure environment and helping build the foundation for longer term peace and development. As recognition of its contribution to peace and stabilization in Darfur, in October 2014, UNAMID's CLIPs programme received the UN 21 Award for Outstanding Vision.

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