# Manual on Protecting Humanitarian Responders and Strengthening Their Role in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

**NEW**
Civil Society
Development Institute

Darfur Civil Society Consultations Project for Developing a Peer-to-Peer Network and Best Practices in Security, Peace, and Conflict Resolution

## Manual on Protecting Humanitarian Responders and Strengthening Their Role in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

| JULY | 2025 |
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دليل حماية المستجيبين الإنسانيين وتعزيز دورهم في بناء السلام وفض النزاعات

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# ABOUT NCSDI

The New Civil Society Development Institute (NCSDI) is a non-profit civil society organization established to empower young women and men by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights. NCSDI promotes evidence-based and rights-based approaches to strengthen the capacities of youth actors and their organizations, working tirelessly to facilitate collaboration among them to promote freedom, peace, and justice, and ensure a sustainable democratic future.

Since its establishment, NCSDI has worked on building trust with local communities by supporting humanitarian responders following the April 15, 2023 war. It has developed its intervention framework and engaged directly with them through interactive activities aimed at providing the knowledge and tools necessary to strengthen basic service delivery systems and to develop localization plans for humanitarian work, ensuring an effective and sustainable humanitarian response.

Amidst violent conflicts, NCSDI works on building strong social protections that effectively protect humanitarian responders and facilitate their movement. NCSDI also focuses on equipping responders with skills that enable them to actively engage in conflict resolution efforts, promote peace and social cohesion, and leverage the long-standing local and community heritage in Darfur. It aligns this indigenous knowledge with modern knowledge and expertise to design interventions responsive to the local context. Through these efforts, NCSDI aims to build the resilience and cohesion of these communities to support recovery, restore normal life, and prevent the recurrence of conflicts and gross human rights violations.

Amid the difficult circumstances that Darfur is going through, especially after the outbreak of armed conflict on April 15, 2023, which led to a devastating humanitarian crisis and severe social consequences, there is an urgent need to strengthen the protection of humanitarian responders and support their crucial role in building peace and stability.

This manual, which I am honored to present, is the result of extensive research and fieldwork conducted by the New Civil Society Development Institute. It aims to highlight the major challenges faced by humanitarian workers on the ground. Our studies revealed serious issues such as the widespread loss of civil documents, which limits people's freedom of movement and access to rights; the shrinking of safe spaces, which makes daily life more difficult; and the lack of effective international protection mechanisms, which should support both affected communities and humanitarian workers.

The manual is written in simple language to ensure its message reaches the widest possible audience of responders and those dealing with the crisis. It combines field experience with structured analysis, making the information practical and usable for those who need it most.

Understanding these challenges, the manual offers practical insights and best practices drawn from real experiences in Darfur. Its content is inspired by indigenous wisdom, the resilience of communities, and the vital role of youth emergency committees, who have proven capable of filling gaps and delivering essential services during crises.

# FOREWORD

We believe that protecting humanitarian responders goes beyond just ensuring their physical safety. It also includes building their capacity in conflict resolution, strengthening social cohesion, and restoring basic services—key pillars of any durable peace.

This manual is designed to be a practical tool for humanitarian organizations, government bodies, local communities, and all frontline responders. We hope it helps deepen understanding of the challenges on the ground and inspires community heroes to apply creative, locally driven solutions that emerge from hardship and reinforce a culture of self and community protection.

Protecting humanitarian responders is not only a moral duty—it is an investment in peacebuilding and preserving human dignity. We call on all stakeholders to adopt the principles and recommendations in this manual and work together to empower these heroes so they can continue their vital service for a safer and more peaceful Darfur.

I also express my deep solidarity and heartfelt appreciation for the heroic efforts of emergency response teams across Darfur and Sudan, who have become a unique model of selfless community service during the most difficult times. My sincere thanks go to the dedicated team—Alfatih Alnour, Mustafa Bosh, Eyhaa Siddeeg, and Omar Shull—who worked with commitment and faith to prepare this manual, believing in the importance of this noble cause.

With sincere appreciation,,,

**Munzer Mustafa**
**Researcher | Public Policy Institute - Sudan**
July 7, 2025

# GLOSSARY

- **Humanitarian responders:** Individuals or groups involved in providing humanitarian aid and services to vulnerable people in conflict and crisis areas.
- **Darfur:** The geographical region of Sudan that the manual focuses on, which is experiencing violent conflict and major humanitarian challenges, especially after the April 15, 2023 war.
- **Violent conflicts:** armed conflicts that lead to widespread destruction, population displacement, collapse of basic services, and fragmentation of the social fabric.
- **Civil documents:** Essential official documents (such as ID cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates) necessary to prove identity, mobility, and access to services and rights.
- **Safe spaces:** Areas relatively free from military threats and violence, which have shrunk significantly in conflict zones, restricting the movement of populations and responders.
- **International protection:** Measures and mechanisms aimed at protecting civilians and humanitarian responders in accordance with international law, which the Manual has identified as deficient in the Darfur context.
- **Emergency response rooms:** Voluntary community-based initiatives that provide essential services (such as medical support, food, and water) and fill gaps left by the absence of formal institutions.

# GLOSSARY

- **Native administration:** Local leaders and traditional structures that play a role in organizing communities at the local level.
- **Peacebuilding:** Processes and initiatives aimed at establishing the foundations for sustainable peace, by addressing the roots causes of conflict, promoting reconciliation, and rebuilding community trust.
- **Conflict resolution:** The mechanisms and methods used to resolve disputes and conflicts between conflicting parties peacefully and prevent their escalation.
- **Social cohesion:** A state of harmony, cohesion, and unity within a society, where individuals feel a sense of belonging and mutual support.
- **Displacement:** The situation in which individuals or groups are forced to leave their homes due to conflict or disaster, in search of safety.
- **Advocacy:** The process of publicly supporting a particular issue or policy with the goal of bringing about positive change, often used to raise awareness and mobilize support for the rights of affected people and responders.
- **Nonviolence:** The principle and practice of refraining from the use or threat of physical violence as a means of achieving goals or resolving conflicts.
- **Civil registration:** The official process of recording vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, which is essential for proving identity and rights.
- **Humanitarian Aid Commission:** A Sudanese government body responsible for coordinating and monitoring humanitarian activities in the country.
- **Neighborhood committees:** are community-based organizations formed within residential areas to organize community affairs, distribute aid, and provide basic services, especially during crises.

The Darfur region has a long history of violent conflict, which intensified following the April 15, 2023 war in Sudan. In some areas, the conflict has deepened, essential service delivery systems have been destroyed, and civilians have lost their civil documents, depriving them of access to basic services, their right to work and education, and in some cases, even the right to life and restricting their freedom of movement.

Safe spaces in Darfur have significantly diminished as the conflict has expanded in the region. As a result, safe areas have become suffocating, restricting residents' ability to carry out their daily activities. Normal life has disappeared and daily life has become highly militarized.

The conflict has also caused deep social divisions, as the current war is a conflict between government entities, fueled largely by widespread militarization of tribes. This has created social inequalities and fractures within communities, threatening community cohesion and increasing intercommunal violence. These dramatic developments have also undermined trust in traditional community institutions.

Some traditional leaders have become involved in this conflict, further threatening the social fabric and deepening divisions within local communities. All of these factors have coincided with the collapse of the peacebuilding infrastructure. Large-scale forced displacement has occurred, particularly of those trained in peacebuilding, weakening the human capacity to lead peace initiatives, which has become almost nonexistent. Institutional peacebuilding capacity has completely collapsed, and trust in traditional institutions has eroded.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These factors combined have contributed to the escalation of the conflict in Darfur and the expansion of violations against civilians, threatening the survival of communities and their normal ways of life.

Local communities urgently need to rebuild social cohesion among diverse groups. To achieve this goal, this manual is designed to enhance the protection of humanitarian responders, build their capacity in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and maximize their contribution in promoting social cohesion. The manual includes three main chapters that address the most prominent challenges facing humanitarian responders regarding personal protection, the efforts of indigenous wisdom and its role in conflict transformation, and the challenges associated with the disintegration of the social fabric:

## Chapter 1: Personal Protection Protocols for Humanitarian Responders

- This chapter focuses on enhancing the safety of responders and humanitarian personnel by addressing the challenges associated with the loss of civil documents, methods for preserving and accessing them, and establishing alternative means of obtaining them after the collapse of issuing institutions.
- It also focuses on creating safe spaces based on local norms that contribute to reducing militarization, restoring normalcy, reducing the extent of conflict, and limiting the militarization of public life.
- This chapter also highlights the current international protection approach in Sudan, its impact on local communities, and its implications for the personal safety of humanitarian responders. It also focuses on how to leverage international laws and institutions to strengthen the protection of responders and humanitarian workers.

## Chapter 2: Indigenous Wisdom and its Role in Conflict Transformation

- This chapter aims to restore trust in local traditional institutions as a beacon fueled by indigenous wisdom. It also focuses on expanding the participation of youth and women in local efforts to support access to humanitarian assistance and basic services, peacebuilding, and social cohesion.

- This chapter also highlights the importance of strengthening the capacities of local actors in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, as well as developing early warning systems as a preventative measure to prevent sudden collapses in peace efforts and enhance the ability of local communities to respond effectively and resiliently.

## Chapter 3: Strengthening Social Cohesion

composed of two main components:

### 1. Building Social Protection Mechanisms:

- Tools such as advocacy, nonviolence, building community trust in local initiatives, and mobilizing local efforts.
- Engaging communities in humanitarian initiatives and strengthening links between these initiatives and communities, which enhances community recognition of the initiatives and legitimizes their local leadership.

### 2. Restoring Basic Service Delivery Systems:

- The manual strengthens responders' capacities to restore and rebuild trust in the formal aid system, as a step toward restoring normalcy through the provision of services such as education, health, telecommunications, water, and the reopening of markets.
- The safe spaces associated with these services also help protect responders and humanitarian workers; reduce the militarization of communities; strengthen social bonds; and reduce the causes of conflict resulting from poor or absent services, insecurity, and growing hatred between communities.

The manual also includes a community engagement toolkit that contributes effectively to addressing the challenges arising from the April 15, 2023 war. It enables the rebuilding of trust between local communities, their leaders, and the formal aid system—paving the way for equitable relief operations and a context-responsive skills system that contributes to strengthening social cohesion and peacebuilding, ultimately leading to the restoration of normal life.

# METHODOLOGY

## 1) Literature Review

### A) Objectives of the Review

- To understand the current security context and security protocols in place for youth in emergency response rooms.
- To become familiar with existing and historical practices for conflict resolution and management.
- To identify data gaps in current reports and studies.
- To assess local, regional, and international efforts related to security protocols, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.
- To accurately identify key stakeholders, major actors, their levels of engagement, and the effectiveness of their interventions.

### B) Literature Review Stages

- Conducting a comprehensive secondary review of all relevant documents, reports, and publications.
- Categorizing the documents based on the manual's methodology.
- Evaluating secondary data based on these criteria: timeliness of publication, source credibility, quality and validity of findings.

# METHODOLOGY

## 2) Manual Structure

The structure chosen to work on this manual is based on three main elements that represent the conceptual framework for developing protection protocols and best practices in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Darfur:

**Problem**

It highlights the key challenges and issues facing frontline humanitarian responders, supported by case studies from the five Darfur states.

**Good Practice**

Best practices and efforts by humanitarian responders to promote peer-to-peer knowledge and skills exchange, supported by case studies that reflect local efforts.

**Guidance Note**

It illustrates the potential outcomes resulting from the implementation of good practices, and their positive impact on protecting humanitarian responders, expanding safe spaces, enhancing social cohesion, and building peace in Darfur.

## 3) Research Tools

The manual primarily relied on qualitative data. This primary data was collected using the following tools, each designed to gather information on protection protocols for humanitarian responders and best practices in peacebuilding:

| Research Tool | Target Group | Sample Size |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Focus Group Discussions | • Humanitarian responders from civil society organizations and emergency response rooms (ERRs)<br>• Traditional community leaders | 79 participants |
| In-Depth Interviews | • Humanitarian responders from civil society organizations and emergency response rooms (ERRs)<br>• Traditional community leaders | 20 participants |
| Questionnaires | • Humanitarian responders from civil society organizations and emergency response rooms (ERRs) | 65 participants |

# Chapter One:

## Personal Protection Protocols for Humanitarian Responders

# Problem 1: Loss of Civil Documentation

Local residents in Darfur have lost their civil documents due to forced displacement, which significantly restricts their mobility. Without personal identification, individuals face severe risks when attempting to move, especially when passing through military checkpoints. The absence of a passport, in particular, is widely regarded as the primary barrier preventing individuals from traveling abroad.

The loss of civil documents has deprived vulnerable groups and communities in areas most affected by the conflict of access to humanitarian assistance and basic services such as education and health. A birth statement, officially known as a birth certificate, is one of the most essential documents required by service providers to deliver aid, as well as educational and health services for children. The interconnectedness of documents and individuals' lives poses a significant challenge, as most documents require additional proof for issuance. This means that the loss or absence of a document may prevent individuals from obtaining the required civil document. For instance, if an individual is unable to obtain an official marriage certificate, it may hinder the issuance of birth certificates for their children.
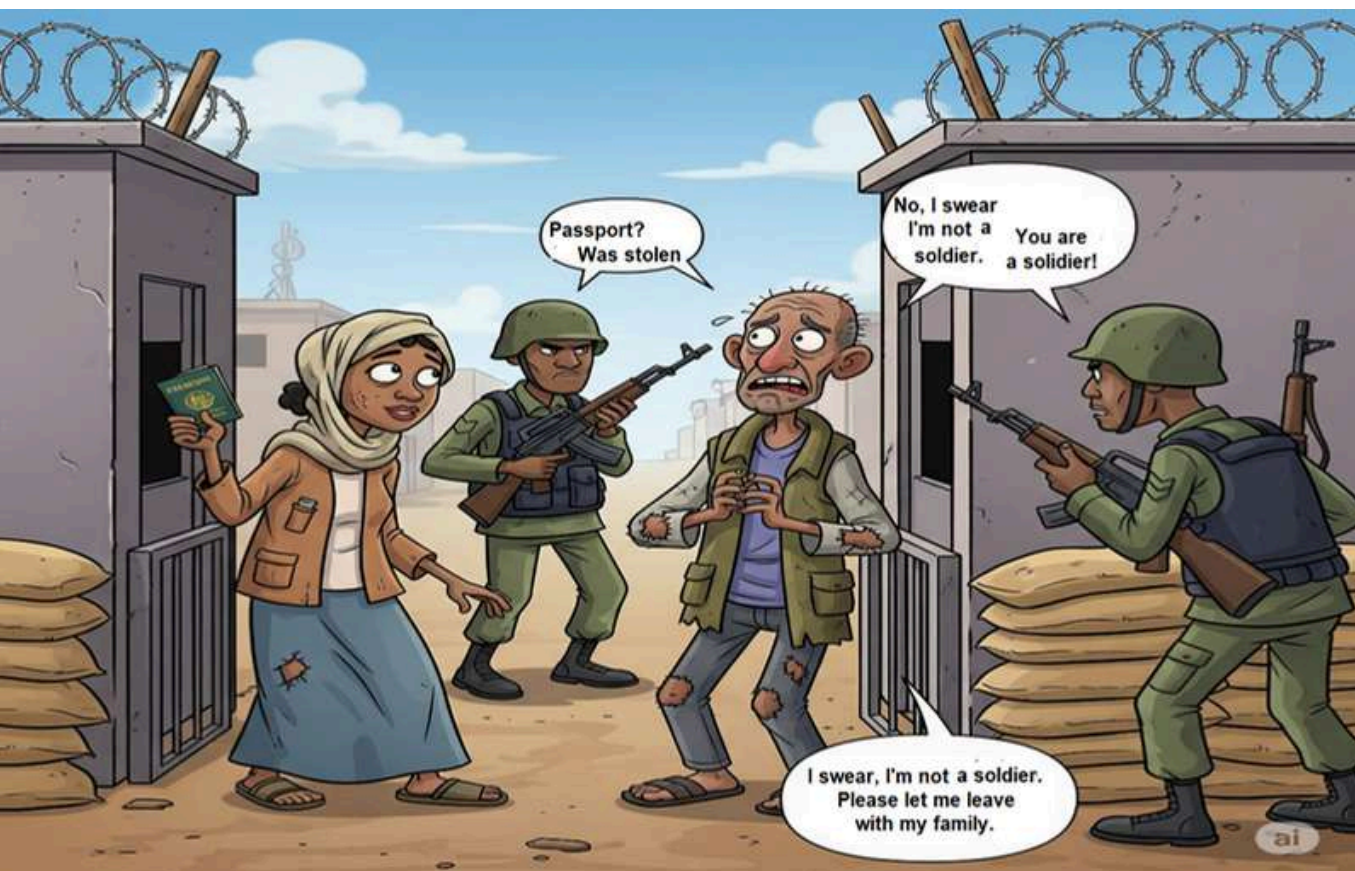
> I am distressed by the fact that most students do not have passports, which prevents them from traveling to a safe place to continue their studies. A passport is a very basic and necessary document, and without it, it is difficult to overcome travel restrictions to the places one desires.

Female Volunteer | Zalingei Emergency Response Room

In Darfur, the loss of civil documents remains one of the most pressing challenges for humanitarian responders. Survey data shows that 88% of respondents reported restricted freedom of movement, identifying it as the most critical impact. This was followed by the inability to complete education, noted by 60%. Additionally, 53.85% stated that it results in the loss of rights for those who have lost loved ones, while 52.31% reported being deprived of access to basic services.

On the other hand, 43.08% of respondents stated that women face particularly complex challenges, including reduced access to humanitarian aid. Additionally, 41.54% believed that the loss of civil documents can lead to forced unemployment. About 38.46% indicated that individuals may be denied compensation, while 24.62% noted that it could lead to enforced disappearance. Finally, 16.92% expressed concern that such loss could even lead to murder, as security agencies reportedly confiscate civil documents from their personnel during service. Consequently, anyone lacking identification is often presumed to belong to one of the warring military groups.

Some groups face difficulty in obtaining these documents due to their affiliation with specific ethnic groups or geographic regions. Civil documentation institutions and census archives face significant challenges, with 41.54% of respondents indicating that these institutions and census archives are out of service but still retain their records and are unable to provide services. Meanwhile, 29.23% reported that these institutions were completely damaged and lost their archives. 21.54% indicated that these institutions were still operating to a limited extent. Finally, 7.69% indicated that archives were partially damaged and the institutions were completely out of service.

Currently, in Nyala and in all areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces, there is no available civil registry. Data on births, deaths, and other official documents are recorded in a large paper register archive, and data can be retrieved from this register using the registration number or page number. However, in the event of any new raids or clashes, there is a high probability that all records will be lost, posing a serious threat.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

I believe the biggest problem we faced regarding civil documents in the current war, was that government institutions and other agencies where people worked retained the original documents of their employees. This practice was one of the main reasons for the exacerbation of the current problem, as these institutions were subjected to systematic looting and were unable to protect employees' files or transfer them to safe places. Many documents were burned, destroyed, or even thrown into the streets. People searched for them for years, directed from one place to another in vain. Only about 30% of them were able to retrieve their files, while the rest still do not know the fate of their documents and their whereabouts.

Female Volunteer | Zalingei Emergency Response Room

The lack of identity documents has significantly impacted travel within the country. When traveling from one area to another, travelers are required to present their documents at security checkpoints. If their documents were burned or lost during the war, they are temporarily detained until someone can guarantee their release. Sometimes, they are asked to pay a sum of money before being allowed to leave. They are then asked to name their neighborhood. In this case, they have to to name a neighborhood with no security problems, as mentioning a neighborhood that witnessed previous incidents could implicate them in security problems. Currently, there are students who have lost all their documents due to the war and face significant difficulties when applying for exams, applying for scholarships, or traveling, which represents a major obstacle for them. Some have resorted to keeping electronic copies of their documents, which has helped them to some extent overcome some of these problems. However, having a smartphone to view documents makes them a target for robbery.

Former Volunteer | Sudanese Red Crescent Society

## Good Practice 1

Humanitarian responders in Darfur led awareness-raising efforts on the importance of civil registration, a system established by governments to record vital events (birth, death, marriage, and divorce) of their citizens and residents, giving them the right to identify themselves. The United Nations defines civil registration as the continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording of vital events related to a population and the characteristics of those events, in accordance with each country's legal regulations. Civil registration aims to create legal documents that can be used to protect people's rights and identify them.
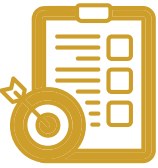
## Good Practice 2

Following the loss or inability to obtain civil documents, local communities developed informal and alternative solutions. The The most prominent solutions reported included obtaining proof of identity from local leaders and issuing temporary documents within shelters and IDP camps, each cited by 44.62% of respondents. Some individuals also relied on written confirmation from service providers or used electronic archives and internal records maintained by service institutions as alternative forms of documentation. The results further indicated that people commonly used temporary documents or paper copies of official documents while traveling, in order to protect the originals from loss or damage. Additionally, civil payment receipts were used as evidence of civil status or legal identity.

Local communities now have a variety of alternative institutions and actors for issuing civil documents, responsive to the local context and the challenges they face. Census offices and hospital internal registries issued birth and death certificates, while marriage officiants used copies of official marriage certificate forms and their official seals to issue marriage and divorce certificates. For other documents, such as national identification numbers and passports, no alternative entities were able to officially issue them in most affected areas. However, native administrations and chiefs played a role in managing some of these processes, particularly the issuance of personal identification documents and proof of residence documents, effectively protecting thousands of civilians in conflict-affected areas. In some areas, youth and civil society initiatives were used to provide these services by issuing identification cards and documents to responders. However, the potential for forgery was high, so these were abandoned in some areas, while they proved effective in other areas, such as Zalingei.

At the relief level, the majority of organizations and initiatives operating on the ground currently rely on what is known as a registration certificate, which serves as a document proving individuals' eligibility for assistance. Its function is similar to the "refugee ID card" recognized by international migration agencies. This certificate is recognized either by the Humanitarian Aid Commission in areas under the control of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) or those under the control of the army. Obtaining a registration certificate is often done through the head of the neighborhood committee, a well-known figure with extensive knowledge of the neighborhood's residents, given his extensive experience, which may extend to twenty or thirty years. For this reason, the head of the neighborhood can confirm the identity of individuals even if they have lost their identification documents, due to his close connections and extensive knowledge of the entire area's population.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

Some health centers have a statistics department responsible for registering births and deaths. When a child is born, they are taken to the center's statistics officer, where their data is recorded and the family is given an official statement, which was previously used to refer them to the civil registry office to obtain a birth certificate. This statement is stamped by the statistics department within the health center. The statement serves as a temporary proof of identity for the person, whether born or deceased, especially if the person intends to travel or if there is no official source through which to obtain a birth or death certificate. Deaths that are not recorded in health centers, often involving individuals whose lives are little known or whose deaths did not occur within the center, are not documented and no statement is issued.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

## Guidance Note

Civil documents are a key tool for protecting humanitarian responders, as individuals without them are not legally recognized. Failure to register a birth with the civil registry means that the child does not exist in the eyes of the law. This can result in children being denied citizenship and unable to access government services. Civil documentation is also essential for safeguarding rights, as many legal entitlements require official documentation. For example:

**1** A birth certificate guarantees a child's right to education, inheritance, and family reunification.

**2** Marriage certificate gives women their marital rights.

**3** The divorce certificate guarantees the rights of both spouses and the wife's right to receive her dowry, alimony, and child support, in addition to her ability to enter into a new marriage.

**4** Death certificate guarantees the rights of the heirs

Civil documents facilitate access to assistance, and eligibility for assistance often requires civil documents to prove the following:

**1** Person's identity

**2** The child's lineage to his parents

**3** A woman's relationship with her husband

4. It must be emphasized that the lack of documentation deprives some vulnerable groups of access to assistance and services designed specifically for them, such as:
Widows who may be denied services due to lack of proof of their husband's death.

Civil documents also protect people from vulnerability in both home and host communities for several reasons, including:

**1** Issuing civil documents empowers individuals and prevents their vulnerability.

**2** Having civil documentation protects people from abuse and violations, including arbitrary arrests and detention.

**3** Having documents gives people freedom of movement whether inside or outside Sudan.

As for identification documents, national ID cards haven't been updated for a long time, and even the simplest procedures, such as obtaining a SIM card, have become impossible due to their expiration. Birth certificates and civil registry documents have stopped for a long time, and what is issued now is simply a handwritten piece of paper. As for university degrees, in some displacement centers, they can be tracked using the university number, while academic transcripts are mostly based on the national ID number. Most of the currently available documents are expired, and there are no effective centers for issuing replacements except in remote areas such as Port Sudan. Regarding preservation, some individuals have kept electronic copies of their documents, but many of these are no longer valid due to their expiration. The biggest problem lies in banking transactions, as you cannot open an account or conduct any banking transaction without a valid national ID card or passport.

Volunteer | El-Genina Emergency Response Room

Additional Case Studies

I would like to elaborate a bit on the issue of marriage. As the son of a certified marriage officiant (ma'zoon), I can explain how, since the suspension of official issuance of marriage and divorce certificates, officiants have adopted an alternative process. They went to the marriage registration office (that was available at certain times) at the court, and the officiants would photocopy the complete marriage certificate with all its details. When anyone requests a marriage document, the officiant uses the photocopy of the original certificate, fills in all the spouses details in a new form, and stamps it with their official seal as a recognized officiant. Although this version is not officially recognized by state institutions, it serves its purpose temporarily. Once government institutions resume operations, the photocopied version can easily be formalized into an official document. For now, if a couple needs to travel, this document is considered sufficient, as it bears the officiant's stamp, which holds social recognition within the community.

<u>Volunteer | E;-Daein City</u>

We have marriage documents, which are kept by the official marriage officiant (ma'zoon). However, we do not have any documentation for births, deaths, or national identification numbers, as these rely on the civil registry office—which is currently unavailable.

<u>Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room</u>

All procedures related to obtaining official Identity documents are completely suspended. Local documents are issued only through the Native Administration and are valid within limited areas. As for passports, they are extremely difficult to obtain and are issued only to individuals who possess original documents. While electronic copies are accepted in certain specific cases, they are not officially recognized by all institutions. In principle, the original document is required for formal validation.

<u>Volunteer | El-Genina City</u>

Obtaining a birth certificate has become extremely difficult. However, as part of the Native Administration's efforts, we implemented alternative measures. It was decided that every licensed midwife must issue a written note following the delivery, indicating the date of birth (day and month) and the name of the attending midwife. Each person is advised to keep this note until conditions improve, so it can later be used to obtain official documentation.

<u>Volunteer | El-Genina City</u>

Additional Case Studies

Regarding civil documents, there are some local documents that can currently be issued—such as marriage or birth statements—but these are not considered official. They are provided as temporary attestations by hospitals or relevant authorities and can later be used to obtain official documents once conditions stabilize. However, accessing essential identity documents such as the national ID (civil number) and passport is extremely difficult at the moment. Even for those who possess previous copies, reissuing or updating them is nearly impossible in some areas due to the disruption of the civil registry and relevant government institutions.

Volunteer | Alsalam IDP Camp | Zalingei City

Without civil documents, individuals cannot verify their identity or access the rights that should be provided by the relevant authorities—rights that may include safe passage to secure areas. The absence of documents also makes it difficult to demonstrate neutrality to conflict parties, which puts humanitarian workers at risk of suspicion and may compromise the humanitarian principles that underpin their work.

Female Volunteer | Alfasher Emergency Response rooms

One of the challenges I personally faced was that when I was displaced from Khartoum, I never expected the war to last this long. At the time, all I took with me were my children's clothes and came to Nyala, leaving all of my documents behind. As a result, I was unable to prove my identity to the agencies providing services. I discovered that many other displaced people from different states had also lost their identification documents—some have no documentation at all. In my case, the only remaining document proving that we are from Khartoum is my young son's school certificate.

Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

Many people lost their documents within government ministries and institutions—some were destroyed by fire, while others were completely lost. While a few individuals managed to recover their documents, three-quarters of public employees lost theirs, and a similar proportion of young people lost their jobs and are now unemployed. When someone tries to apply for a position at an institution, they are asked to present their official documents— which they no longer have.

Female Volunteer | Neighborhood Community Committees | El-Genina City

Additional Case Studies

We are faced with two difficult choices: either individuals keep their identity documents or dispose of them. This challenge is especially acute for citizens from Darfur when traveling to eastern states of Sudan. Carrying documentation can expose them to serious violations, while not carrying it can also subject them to other forms of abuse. As for children born from 2023 to the present, they have no official identification documents at all. This means we now have children who have turned two—and are approaching their third year—without any form of documentation to prove their identity.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room

We had a patient who did not have a passport and needed to travel to Egypt for medical treatment. We had to transfer him to Chad to apply for a passport. However, due to the lengthy procedures involved in obtaining it, the patient passed away before the process was completed. The lack of a passport prevented him from accessing timely medical care and ultimately led to the loss of his life.

Volunteer | Alsalam IDP Camp | Zalingei City

As some have mentioned, one of the current challenges is that even if you carry your national ID number while traveling to other states, you may be accused of being a social supporter or collaborator with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). If you do not carry your passport, that poses a problem—and if you do, it can also put you at risk. You may be forced to remain in Nyala and face the threat of death, or attempt to leave and risk losing your life or encountering other dangers. In the past, people didn't place much importance on having a national ID or a birth certificate, often saying, "We live in Sudan, and the situation is stable—why would we need a national number?"

Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

Since the beginning of the war, a large number of births have not been registered, and similarly, a significant number of deaths have occurred without the issuance of death certificates. As a representative of the Emergency Room at Al-Neem IDP Camp, I can confirm that we are currently witnessing around 400 to 500 marriages. All of these marriages—100%—have been conducted without official marriage certificates or documentation. Every Friday, dozens of marriage ceremonies are performed, yet the wives cannot approach any official institution or access their legal rights, despite the fact that the marriages were conducted in accordance with official procedures. The absence of a formal certificate prevents them from proving their marital status.

Volunteer | Al-Neem IDP Camp Emergency Room | El-Daein City

# Problem 2: Shrinking of Safe Spaces in Darfur

During the two years of war, safe spaces were nearly nonexistent in areas affected by active conflict. Civilian facilities was not spared from bombing, agricultural land was diminished, service institutions were looted, and the official aid system was completely disrupted. Schools were turned into shelters and health centers, power supplies were cut off, water became scarce, and homes and markets were subjected to looting and intentional burning. Even camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), protected by international law, were not spared from bombing and targeting, including those established in 2007 following the Security Council resolution authorizing the deployment of the UNAMID mission to Darfur.

As for safe spaces, at the beginning of the war, they were far from being directly targeted. There were no attacks on civilian gatherings or public spaces. However, as the conflict evolved and took on an ethnic character, attacks escalated, with markets and shelters becoming more frequently targeted. Many civilians were forced to leave their shelters and flee the cities due to the repeated shelling and imminent danger. More recently, IDP camps have been directly targeted, such as those at Abu Shouk, Naivasha, Abuja, Zamzam, and Shagra.

Volunteer | Abu Shouk Youth Center | Alfasher

## Good Practice 1

IDP camps as safe spaces and protective zones for humanitarian responders: Following the April 15 war, camps constituted the largest area of safe spaces, representing 60% of the total safe spaces in Darfur. Community customs within the camps, facilitated by "camp sheikhs," contributed to creating a safe environment for humanitarian and civil society work in the most conflict-affected areas.

## Good Practice 2

Homes of traditional and religious leaders and places of worship as safe spaces: Some local leaders transformed their homes into centers for providing essential services and provided direct protection. Others allowed humanitarian responders in the community to use their homes as shelters. With their assistance, places of worship were opened and transformed into centers for providing protection and essential services. Local norms and efforts played a pivotal role in providing immediate protection during crises, reflecting the strength of community organization and the importance of social structure in addressing risks in the absence of formal protection systems.

At the beginning of the war, it was very difficult to move around, and I didn't know how to go out or travel safely. But now, after the formation of committees and emergency rooms and the participation of neighborhood chiefs, I feel safe and confident when moving around as a girl. Previously, I could only go out with my brother or a family member, but now I can move around freely and find my own personal space. This is one of the most significant benefits achieved thanks to the presence of neighborhood committees and chiefs, as they constitute a supportive entity if you encounter any problem, standing by you and reclaiming your rights. At the city and neighborhood levels, manifestations of racism have begun to decline, a positive development that is credited to these community efforts.

Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

On the first day of the war, a committee known as the Mediation Committee was formed, comprising the city's most respected people, including scholars, sheikhs, and tribal leaders. Their voices were heard and influential. This committee succeeded in halting the fighting for a period of time and successfully preserved large areas of the city, including the Grand Market, schools, Quranic schools, mosques, and markets, from any attack or looting for a period of four to five months.

Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

During the war, people faced many hardships, but the native administrations in various neighborhoods formed special committees. These committees identified the affected neighborhoods and worked to accommodate their residents in safe areas, whether in mosques or nearby schools. They were then provided with basic services, and even the sick were cared for by seeing local doctors, providing medication, and administering first aid. This role contributed significantly to protecting the population because it came at the direct initiative of the native administrations. In some places, such as health insurance facilities, the Faculty of Medicine, and dormitories, the native administration assumed responsibility for their protection by forming committees that transported university and medical insurance equipment to safe locations, where it remains to this day. Shelter was also provided for citizens under the supervision of specific committees, and the premises where the equipment was stored remain intact to this day.

Volunteer | Alsalam IDP Camp | Zalingei

# Guidance Note

Safe spaces established by local customs, provide a wide range of public goods and services, ensure fair access, and allow humanitarian responders to move and access all areas, enhancing the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Safe spaces also provide an environment that reduces feelings of insecurity and minimizes militarization.

The role of the Native Administration is highly significant. At the onset of the conflict, it played a major role in calming tensions and was able to halt the fighting for nearly a month. Currently, it provides a reasonable level of protection to the emergency rooms, enabling us to carry out our humanitarian activities in South Darfur safely and without obstruction.

<u>Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room</u>

The traditional leaders have fully carried out their responsibilities. Whenever a problem arises in a given area, they intervene to protect civilians and relocate them to safer locations. They also make every effort to prevent aggressors from reaching residential neighborhoods and work closely with the youth to ensure people's safety and help them reach secure areas.
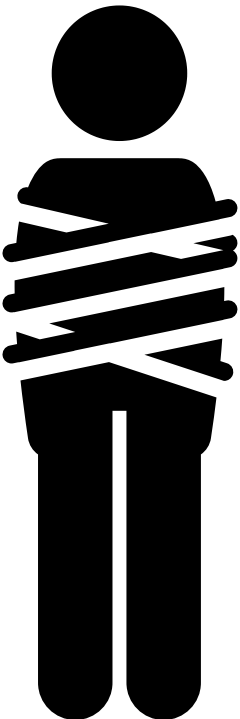
<u>Female Volunteer | Neighborhood Community Committees | El-Genina City</u>

I wouldn't say the Native Administration played a weak role, but the greatest effort came from the youth. At the beginning, men and others had stopped working entirely. For a whole year, people received no salaries or stable income. Most couldn't afford food, which led to a surge in looting and robbery. In response, we established security checkpoints, which the youth took turns guarding throughout the day. Every household contributed what they could, and meals were prepared and distributed at designated points across the neighborhood. I remember we had 19 checkpoints at the area's boundaries. As youth, the first thing we did was come together, mobilize funds from residents based on their ability, and accept in-kind contributions from those without money. We collected donations and developed a plan to manage scarce resources, ensuring support for the checkpoints we had set up. The community's appreciation and support were instrumental to the success of the initiative. Strict policies were implemented with community consensus—no one was allowed to enter without clear identification and purpose. We were so vigilant that some accused us of hiding something inside the neighborhood. Similar efforts were carried out in neighboring communities as well.

<u>Volunteer | Konjomeyia Youth Coordination Office | Zalingei City</u>

# Problem 3: Lack of Protection Coverage Systems

Some respondents noted the complete absence of international protection interventions in their areas, reflecting an urgent need to improve coordination and ensure effective international protection for responders in Darfur. Most also emphasized the prevalence of international and regional efforts focused primarily on evacuating humanitarian personnel from their communities. This created a significant gap, limited response efforts in the first months, expanded the conflict, increased hate speech, military mobilization, and fragmented communities. Following the rapid collapse of the formal aid system and the collapse of government institutions, humanitarian responders lost a critical protections in the form of government institutions and a network of national organizations, leaving only the efforts of community and religious leaders.

Unfortunately, when some emergency rooms were harassed by soldiers from conflict parties, there was no pressure other than a few attempts by local leaders. There were timid interventions from some organizations, but their efforts proved futile. Emergency rooms faced unbearable and insurmountable challenges with the de facto authorities, with several of our staff being persecuted, harassed, and arrested. We do not understand the reasons behind the international community's indifference and inaction. Therefore, it is important that civil society focus on pressuring them to seriously address the mistreatment of frontline responders and end the crimes being committed against them.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

Since the beginning of the conflict, there has been a clear absence of government agencies, and healthcare facilities were initially run by volunteers. This led to a new reality, as the country became entirely voluntary. Initially, donor organizations were concerned with evacuating their staff, and most of the people in the room worked voluntarily, even during periods when these organizations were absent or weak. With each shift in the conflict, new challenges emerged, and the pressure on us increased. One of the challenges we faced was the absence of protection.

Over time, volunteering became more organized and diverse, to the point where more than one organization was working in the same health center or shelter. Initiatives became more organized, and coordination with government agencies such as the Humanitarian Aid Commission and the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs became part of our work. This coordination with government agencies gave us a sense of protection when providing services. If any of us wanted to provide services in a shelter or government center, we coordinated with the relevant ministries and the camp administration, preventing any attacks. However, not all of us had the necessary documentation, and this is where the harassment began.

Volunteer | Alfasher City
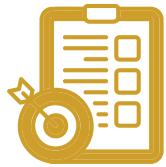
## Good Practice 1

Employment of humanitarian responders in international organizations: Some humanitarian responders in Darfur have been listed as volunteers or temporary employees with international and national organizations such as the United Nations and the Red Cross and Red Crescent, enhancing their protection and reducing violations against them. A total of 36.92% of respondents reported a decrease in violations against Red Crescent volunteers, compared to 23.08% who observed a decrease in violations against volunteers from UN agencies and other international humanitarian organizations. Red Crescent volunteers are also working in the Lagawa and Sabreen IDP camps, where they enjoy protection and freedom of movement.

As for employees of international organizations, there are many young people working for the NRC, the Red Crescent, and others. There is relative stability in security within the city, but employees of these organizations face some problems when leaving the city. The organizations' vehicles are fully protected, and we are under their protection. However, working with them requires academic credentials and experience. But overall, the employees are protected.

Volunteer | El-Genina City
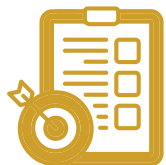
## Good Practice 2

Traditional leaders providing strong social protection for humanitarian workers and their offices: local and religious leaders in El Daein, Zalingei, and El-Geneina, provided strong social protection that effectively protected humanitarian responders and facilitated their movement. Community leaders also formed "local groups" to protect international staff residences during the first months of the war.

The pivotal role of the native administrations lies in solving major problems. I remember that once a person came to our area and was killed by a stray bullet. Some parties tried to attribute the crime to us. This was a major problem we faced, but a number of chiefs and elders in the neighborhood intervened. They sat down with the concerned parties and explained to them that we were not the cause of the incident. In this way, they were able to prevent the problem from escalating. If the case required blood money, they would reduce it to a post-funeral meal, known locally as 'karama', and resolve the dispute between the tribes. In the end, they were able to reduce the amount of the blood money, and clear us of the case.

Female Volunteer | Kanjomiya neighborhood | Zalingei

The Native Administration intervened and made it clear to the warring parties that the volunteers were neutral and that they should not bring their weapons into the area. They made it clear to them: 'We are neither with the army nor with the Rapid Support Forces.' If a young man from the camp was attacked, the Native Administration would immediately intervene and saves the victim. Occasionally, volunteers were arrested by the army and accused of being spies, but the Native Administration would intervene and release them. I also recall that the identification card served as a vital form of protection during field operations. Initially, the military forces would even refuse to allow the Red Crescent to pass through to collect the bodies, but when they wore their identification cards, they could pass without any problems. There were also volunteers from the Protection Network, sponsored by an international organization, who worked to raise community awareness on issues such as female circumcision, unexploded ordnance, displacement, and various forms of violence. IDPs only paid attention to them after they put on their official vests and wore their identification cards.

Volunteer | Youth Office in Five Minutes Camp | Zalingei

## Guidance Note

Temporary and long-term work or volunteer contracts with international and local organizations, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent and United Nations agencies, provide humanitarian responders with protection and international advocacy in the event of arrest or assault. This has greatly facilitated their movement through military checkpoints without being detained, especially after they wear volunteer IDs and official vests from these organizations. Community protection also provides social protections that effectively contribute to protecting responders and enhancing their response capacity.
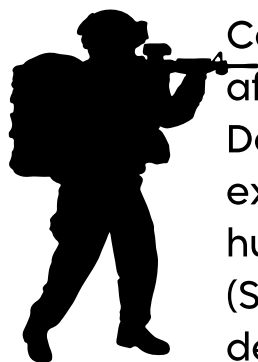
# Chapter Two:

## Indigenous Wisdom and its Role in Conflict Transformation

## Problem 4: Obstruction of Access to Humanitarian Aid

Conflicting parties have obstructed aid access to 90% of those affected by the conflict in active conflict zones across the five Darfur states. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have imposed excessive travel fees on individuals and food supplies, or humanitarian aid has been stolen. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) also prevents relief access to areas where the RSF is deployed (US Envoy 2024). In addition, humanitarian organizations and actors are facing a funding gap. Only about 12.7 million people in Sudan received assistance to varying degrees in 2024, and the Humanitarian Response Plan is only 30% funded (OCHA 2024). Humanitarian partners require an estimated $4.2 billion to support the humanitarian response, $1.8 billion of which will be allocated to refugees and host communities to strengthen basic service systems and provide safe transportation for those stranded at the borders. Only 6% has been received since the beginning of the year (OCHA 2025).

## Good Practice

Local and religious leaders in Darfur have played a significant role in enhancing and facilitating access to humanitarian aid through direct mediation with conflicting parties and bandits, as well as granting passage permits to local humanitarian responders and international staff and providing protection to volunteers as they travel to carry out their mission.

A number of volunteers accompanying our aid convoys were arrested, and the Native Administration facilitated their release after testifying that they were indeed volunteers responding to humanitarian appeals and had no affiliation with any party to the conflict. The relative stability in the area is attributable to the customary efforts led by the Native Administration, rather than to legal or official procedures.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Rooms

The native administrations play a role in protecting the shelters. This role involves forming special committees among them, and all matters are managed through them. They are the body responsible for the displaced and are the ones who receive them through the committees. They are also the body that grants entry if you present official papers and indicate your origin. I did not encounter any problems because we operate under orders issued by the native administrations.

Volunteer | Alfasher City

Neighborhood chiefs and youth committees facilitate operations and support voluntary committees in carrying out their duties within the neighborhoods efficiently and in an organized manner.

Female Volunteer | Alfasher City

## Guidance Note

he efforts of traditional community leaders and religious figures have enhanced humanitarian access and contributed to the provision of safe havens during periods of random shelling. Their absence prevents volunteers and humanitarian workers from remaining in the most vulnerable areas and hinders the timely delivery of aid. Their efforts contribute to accelerating the release of food and medicine shipments held by warring groups and facilitating the flow of humanitarian aid.

# Problem 5: Forced Displacement of Peacebuilders in Darfur

The warring parties forced large groups of local residents to flee their areas as a result of the expansion of military operations. 44.62% of respondents also indicated the severe harm inflicted on local communities as a result of the arbitrary evacuation of peacebuilders in Darfur. Some respondents expressed their extreme astonishment at the excessive insistence of some initiatives, their repeated requests, and the offers of facilitation to secure funds and leave during the first months of the war. 32.31% believe that the large-scale, arbitrary evacuation of local actors, particularly peacebuilders from areas not experiencing violent conflict at the time, had disastrous consequences for local communities, increasing levels of fragility and hatred.

According to the findings, 60% of respondents reported that evacuation-based strategies constituted the predominant pattern of international protection for youth actors and humanitarian responders in Darfur. Respondents also emphasized that displacement and evacuation operations reduced the level of emergency response and reduced support to civilians, heightening the need for humanitarian volunteers and first responders to receive training in peacebuilding and conflict resolution to fill these capacity gaps.

Many organizations, associations, and activists have received training from the Center for Peace & Development Studies at Nyala University. UN agencies, such as UNITAMS and UNAMID, have also trained civilian groups to deal with conflict. People were trained on how to analyze conflict, its types, and the strategies needed to participate in dialogues and negotiations. Unfortunately, 90% of the people trained are no longer on the ground, and are divided between displaced, homeless, and missing. The groups that are currently active, need real training to deal with conflict and support to enable them to make their voices heard by the United Nations and the Security Council, so that an effective response can be achieved.

Female Volunteer | Peace studies center | Nyala University

Regarding conflict resolution, in 2016, I was part of a committee tasked with resolving conflicts related to nomads and their routes in the East and West Jabal areas. Among the challenges we faced was identifying grazing routes after the completion of harvest. However, conflicts erupted just a day or two after this announcement, demonstrating that these conflicts are historical and require significant efforts to address. There are young people trained in conflict resolution, but there is still a need to intensify training. Peacebuilding requires multiple phases, and the war in Sudan broke out suddenly, and there were no trained personnel capable of absorbing the shock of war. Consequently, there was no clear peacebuilding process. There are young people working in the humanitarian field, but they need training in peacebuilding concepts. Only then can we begin the actual peacebuilding process.

Volunteer | Alfasher City

## Good Practice 1

New Leadership for Local Peacebuilding Efforts: A new leadership for emergency response efforts, centered on frontline responders directly engaged with their communities, has emerged following the forced displacement and widespread arbitrary evacuation of trained actors in Darfur. The emergence of new frontline responders as an alternative leadership for local efforts has helped continue service delivery in some areas, but at a more limited scale than previously provided.

During the conflict, a large number of volunteers emerged, gaining practical skills by going directly to the field without any prior training, and were able to handle emergency response situations. Another advantage was their flexibility and ease of working with existing national organizations, which contributed to the success of many initiatives and created a smooth flow of communication between them. There is a need to train young people in humanitarian work skills. Access to volunteers is currently easy, and all volunteers and initiatives are active. However, they require additional training and networking to run smoothly. Subsequently, humanitarian aid should be better documented and strengthened.

<u>Volunteer | Alfasher City</u>
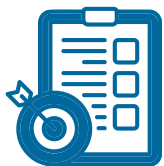
## Good Practice 2

Youth Peace Ambassadors Program: The program has provided intensive and specialized training for local youth leaders in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and has had a positive and effective impact in promoting peacebuilding in the region.
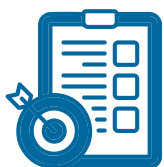
## Good Practice 3

UNAMID Capacity Building Programs: UNAMID organized training programs on peacebuilding and promoting good governance for local leaders, strengthened the capacity of community judges in mediation and conflict resolution, and designed youth training programs focused on unarmed civilian protection.

Before the war, we were part of a group of volunteers trained by international organizations such as the UNDP and the UNHCR, which were supporting peacebuilding programs in the region. We worked with them, along with HOPE Sudan Organization, to implement training workshops aimed at promoting peacebuilding concepts in and around Zalingei city, including IDP camps. These efforts resulted in a strong community network known as "Peace Ambassadors," individuals trained to volunteer in the areas of social peace and community cohesion, distributed throughout Zalingei's neighborhoods, as well as in the surrounding villages and rural areas. This network served as a nucleus for peaceful intervention in community conflicts. However, the outbreak of war led to the suspension of the activities of partner organizations, significantly impacting the continuity of these initiatives. Despite this, the Peace Ambassadors Network remains active on the ground, although it currently lacks the institutional and logistical support to fully resume its role in community cohesion.

Volunteer | Youth Office in Five Minutes IDP Camp | Zalingei City

I worked on the Peace Ambassadors project, which had 70 ambassadors. They had mini-projects: a theater project, a soccer project, an awareness project, and an education support project. Theater was used to deliver awareness messages through a theatrical performance followed by a cultural program, after which the messages were presented to the people. The soccer project included soccer matches between camps and villages, which contributed to building the social fabric. The education project provided support to students with pens and books, and support to schools with tools such as chalk. Currently, the ambassadors have established a network among themselves and founded an organization called the Peace Ambassadors Organization. They are now planning to hold a meeting to raise funds and begin implementing the projects.

Female Volunteer | Zalingei Emergency Response Rooms

UNAMID provided training to feminist groups on fair trial standards, including referrals and addressing gender-based violence. The legal department conducted several capacity-building workshops for existing institutions (organizations and associations), in addition to raising community awareness on peacebuilding, fair trial standards, trial monitoring, and litigation. People were encouraged to document their testimonies that were supposed to be submitted to The Hague, but I have no confirmed information as to whether some individuals were actually recorded or whether their voices were heard there. UNITAMS funded capacity-building activities for the Councils of Elders in partnership with the Center for Peace and Development Studies. feminist groups also organized a protest against the October 25, 2021 coup and submitted a memorandum to them, but we received no response. As feminist groups, we were working to document violations, resist the coup, and push for change, but UNITAMS focused more on peacebuilding than on its supposed mission of supporting change processes.

**Female Volunteer | Peace studies center | Nyala University**

## Guidance Note

Building the capacity of humanitarian responders and viewing them as potential peacemakers is critical in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It plays a pivotal role in strengthening the triple nexus approach—linking relief, peace, and development—while fostering social cohesion, reducing random military recruitment, and empowering youth to become positive agents of change capable of leading mediation and peacebuilding efforts. It also empowers youth to participate in efforts to prevent the outbreak of violence in pre-conflict settings by implementing pre-interventions to prevent violence, starting with education that promotes a culture of peace, peace discussions and dialogues, religious dialogues, civic education, educational theater, community radio, sports and music festivals, and providing humanitarian support.

A group of young people ended a bloody conflict between two localities, Raheed Al-Berdi and Ed Al-Fursan, by reviving a tradition. A peaceful procession was organized, with the participation of about forty cars loaded with young people from Ed Al-Fursan, including activists. They were met with a similar visit from the other area, who welcomed them warmly, and thus visits were exchanged. This initiative ended a major conflict between the Ta'aisha and Bani Halba tribes. The initiative is titled "Sons Initiative to Bind the Social Fabric." They also organized football matches and leagues.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Rooms

The emergency response rooms worked very hard on the ground to build community peace, and they succeeded. In the field of sports, we held many tournaments. Just a week after the war, we held our first sports tournament, and after that, we held sports tournaments within the neighborhoods of Nyala. The athletes, in turn, succeeded in solving many community problems and building peace. Despite the challenges in Nyala, this operation hosted members of the army who came to play football with the people and then left. Even those who were identified and arrested were treated appropriately. We need to develop sports, as there are currently no institutions that sponsor this field. There are only initiatives by the existing youth and athletes who contributed their own money to hold tournaments for juniors and athletes. These tournaments had a huge impact that was fully reflected in the entire population. Some came from the far east to play a match in the far west. There was harmony and a restoration of familiarity.

Volunteer | El-Genina Emergency Response Rooms

Prior to the agricultural season in Zalingei, emergency rooms convened youth leaders to discuss how to address conflicts that typically erupt during harvest time. It was known that one of the causes of conflict was herders entering cultivated fields before the harvest was complete, leading to crop damage and disputes. Therefore, the youth took the initiative to offer practical solutions, including establishing a consensus-based agricultural production project that included a time-bound agreement between farmers and herders. The agreement stipulated that livestock would not be allowed to enter the fields until the harvest was complete and the crops were transported, after which livestock would be allowed to graze the harvested land. This initiative contributed to community peace, as the community benefited from the full harvest, which was reflected in price stability, such as lower grain prices, and a revitalized local economy in Central Darfur. Most importantly, it helped end the traditional conflict between farmers and herders. This experience has become a model for Darfur, as part of efforts to support productive projects that contribute to building community peace.

Volunteer | El-Genina Emergency Response Rooms

# Problem 6: Collapse of Modern Peacebuilding Institutions and the Decline of Traditional Institutions Roles

Before the April 15 war, Darfur had multiple types of peacebuilding institutions, represented by four main categories: governmental, native, Community Solutions Organizations (CSOs), and international organizations, with varying levels of reach and effectiveness.

The role of international organizations in supporting peace efforts declined following the outbreak of the April 15, 2023 war; due to the security situation, the evacuation of international staff from Darfur, and the suspension of their operations.

Government institutions—most notably radio, the primary medium used by the state to support peacebuilding efforts in Darfur—were shut down. Peace commissions, university-based peacebuilding centers, and state television also ceased operations. Furthermore, the efforts of native institutions in peacebuilding declined to varying degrees due to the involvement of some community leaders in militarization.

The scarcity of resources and the loss of assets and human capacities are obstacles to the sustainability of the efforts of local organizations working in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Peacebuilding institutions currently operating on the ground are primarily civil society organizations, which remain almost the only active actors in the field. Governmental peacebuilding bodies are entirely absent, reflecting a broader collapse of state. As for international institutions, we have already lost them. Institutions such as UNITAMS, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were present before the war, but rapidly exited the region. However, in the past few days, there have been signs of their return.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Rooms

## Good Practice 1

Restoration of native and civil peacebuilding institutions: Native administration institutions played a pivotal role in peacebuilding processes. 58.46% of respondents indicated that they are well-established institutions with a proven track record of learning through practice. While traditional mechanisms such as Judiyya, Rakuba, and Shajara remain important indigenous tools for conflict resolution, post-war youth-led initiatives emerged as the most prominent actors in this field, as reported by 93.85% of respondents. These were followed by civil society organizations (67.69%) and girl-led groups (29.23%), reflecting the vitality, resilience, and leadership of local communities despite limited resources.

Civil society plays a significant role in implementing peacebuilding dialogues and training individuals on conflict resolution, as well as supporting projects related to cultural and recreational activities that contribute to creating social peace and acceptance of others. Furthermore, sports leagues were organized by neighborhood associations, such as the one held between the nine localities of East Darfur and some administrative units. This league had a significant positive impact in the state, bringing participants from areas as far away as Shaeria, Bahr al-Arab, and Abu Karinka. This interaction created good relations between youth from different regions and led to the strengthening of peaceful coexistence.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Rooms

The people who work in peacebuilding are mostly youth initiatives, because they have a more effective role than workshops and lectures. They touch people's hearts directly and address the problem in a tangible way. For example, there was a youth initiative called "Education Without Borders" in various sectors of Nyala. Their goal was to learn and exchange experiences, and it had a significant impact on peacebuilding. The second tangible initiative is the emergency response rooms, where individuals were not discriminated against based on their tribes. In fact, they had lived together peacefully and in social cohesion, only becoming aware of each other's ethnic backgrounds after their arrest. They lived in peace and were capable of making peace. Therefore, youth initiatives have the greatest impact on peacebuilding.

<u>Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Rooms</u>

## Good Practice 2

United Nations Peacebuilding Fund: The Peacebuilding Fund's interventions in Darfur have played a key role in sustaining the work of existing institutions by providing essential resources. The Fund's efforts have also been supported by international organizations that provide direct support, or through local partners, to peacebuilding centers in universities, civil society organizations, and NGOs.

The Center for Peace and Development Studies at Alfasher University specializes in peacebuilding and reconciliation. In the past, it implemented training programs under internationally funded projects, targeting prosecutors and legal departments within government institutions, with a primary focus on peace-related issues. The Center also collaborated with quasi-governmental entities, such as the Bar Association, and held workshops and dialogues with government agencies on legal reform, the dynamics of conflict in Sudan, and the establishment of institutions capable of playing a significant role in peacebuilding. These activities contributed to the creation of a network comprising university professors, prosecutors, and native administrations, but it never saw the light of day due to internal disputes.

Volunteer | Alfasher City

The Center for Peace Studies at El Daein University actually had a role before the war. We had experience with the National Mechanism for the Protection of Civilians, funded by UNITAMS. There was a direct contract with the center to work on peacebuilding with the state community as a whole. I remember that among the activities it implemented was a training program in peacebuilding and civilian protection for a group of native administrations and civil society actors, and they obtained certificates. After that, registration was opened for a diploma, which is awarded even to those who do not hold a previous certificate, for those wishing to work in the field of conflict resolution or legal studies, especially for native administration leaders. They were given the opportunity to complete this diploma within three months and were awarded a certificate. However, following the outbreak of the war, UNHCR—the primary donor of the Center—suspended its operations and withdrew from the state.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Rooms

## Guidance Note

The importance of restoring peacebuilding institutions lies in improving relations between various local actors, enhancing collective ownership of peacebuilding initiatives, providing human and tangible resources to community-based organizations by expanding partnerships with international and civil society organizations, and viewing humanitarian responders and youth actors as potential peacebuilders and agents of nonviolent change. Revitalizing the Peacebuilding Fund's efforts is critical, as the Fund's flexibility, adaptability, and demand-driven nature enable it to provide essential resources to sustain existing peacebuilding institutions and establish new ones in response to local needs in active conflict zones and conflict-affected areas across Darfur.

International organizations are not currently operating directly on the ground; however, they are partnering with national organizations and providing support to deliver peacebuilding awareness workshops for communities. Several youth-led organizations and initiatives—including Wa3y Organization, Al-Rakiza Democratic Forum, Change Pioneers Forum, and the Awareness Forum— previously collaborated with the Adeela Organization, which receives support from international partners. Currently, international organizations primarily focus on delivering humanitarian assistance, such as relief projects, while peacebuilding and awareness-raising initiatives are carried out by national organizations with support from international partners. These national organizations had already received peacebuilding training prior to the outbreak of the war.

Female Volunteer | People of Zalingei Initiative

In the past two years, the Center for Peace Studies has delivered capacity-building programs to native administrations across Darfur, focusing on peacebuilding and community cohesion throughout the different stages of the peace process. It has also organized escalation conferences for IDPs' participation in peace negotiations. IDPs from four camps participated, with the exception of Kalma IDP camp, which did not participate until the agreement was signed. In 2007, all delegates participating in the peace conferences in Doha, Abuja, and Abéché were trained on negotiation processes, types, and various models, enabling them to participate effectively. Even the women who carried out the feminist tactic in Doha had their role as a result of training, as those were the final moments of the negotiations, when women played a major role in convincing the negotiators to sign the agreement. When the negotiations stalled in Doha, women mobilized in the streets, putting significant pressure on Qatar and the negotiators. The center also has significant efforts in training civil society organizations as trainers in peacebuilding. In March 2023, before the war, a training course was organized for traditional chiefs at the Center for Peace Studies on a conflict resolution model, where they were provided with aid such as mattresses and hospitality supplies to facilitate reconciliation sessions.

_Female Volunteer | Peace studies center | Nyala University_

## Problem 7: Erosion of Trust in Native Administration Institutions

The involvement of certain traditional community leaders in conflict-related mobilization was identified as a major factor undermining trust in the native administration institution. Respondents expressed that indigenous wisdom failed to produce tangible results in some areas, largely due to the role of these leaders in military mobilization and advocacy.

They are also not effective in all types of conflict, especially complex issues such as gender-based violence. Their impact has also been observed to be weak in the absence of effective coordination with authorities or when adequate support is lacking. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that some agreements led by local actors were not actually adhered to by the conflicting parties, undermining the credibility of these efforts. The absence of law enforcement institutions and the total reliance on these grassroots mechanisms without a clear legal framework may result in unjust or unsustainable solutions.

Native administrations were not neutral during the war; rather, they contributed to its expansion, siding with the conflicting parties and participating in mobilization. Although native administrations play an important role in promoting peace, some have contributed to fueling the conflict. If native administrations do not return to neutrality and call for peaceful coexistence, peacebuilding will remain difficult. Moreover, Indigenous wisdom, which must be disseminated among the people in public spaces and community institutions, will have no positive impact in stopping the war unless native administrations intervene effectively.

Volunteer | Abu Shouk Youth Center | Alfasher

In Zalingei, traditional leaders and educated community members resolve disputes through the Judiya approach. However, sometimes this Judiya has negative effects, as the victim's rights are neglected. For example, in rape cases, it is often asserted that the matter is "not a serious issue" and is resolved through fines, resulting in the victim's rights being lost. In murder cases, it may be said that there is no "blood money" among us. In reality, the native administrations wield more power than the official courts, as the judge consults the native administration in some cases, particularly in rape cases where the perpetrator is close to the victim's family. In these cases, bargaining takes place and the victim's rights are sacrificed, resulting in a lasting stigma.

Volunteer | Zalingei City

In Darfur, the concept of native administration dates back to the time of the Sultanate, and its history is very long. However, the Judiya has significant downsides, especially in its treatment of women. If a rape case occurs, the victim is often not present at the reconciliation session and is not informed of the details of what happened. A compromise is simply reached and a sum of money is distributed among the chiefs present in the Judiya, while the victim only receives a certain amount from the session. This occurs due to the absence of law and criminal justice, and it must be addressed through a judicial process, where the victim must obtain her rights.

Female Volunteer | Alfasher City

After April 15, 2023 war, law enforcement agencies established models of Indigenous courts, one in the popular market of Nyala South and the other in Nyala North. This was a model of judicial administration, but it was not a model of justice, as proper due process was not followed. There is a precedent: a woman filed a complaint against her husband. She was flogged and told that she was ill-mannered and that she should listen to her husband because he is "your cousin and you are forced to listen to him and you have nothing to do." This is a model of an indigenous court, but it was run by unqualified individuals. In rape and sexual assault cases, they do not allow cases to reach a conclusion, which leads to the continued killing of women due to rape, even by the same perpetrators. Therefore, this is not a mechanism for protection, but rather a mechanism to relieve social pressure on women.

**Female Volunteer | Peace studies center | Nyala University**
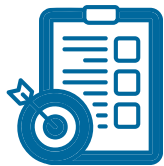
## Good Practice 1

Development of the Native Administration Institution: Some Darfur states have witnessed significant progress in the Native Administration Institution; with youth and women playing pivotal roles in all its interventions, dispute resolution mechanisms have become more equitable.

The mediation and reconciliation committees—locally known as "Judiya"—in North Darfur State do not include women at all. Moreover, Darfuri women often remain reserved due to cultural norms emphasizing modesty; consequently, when issues are brought before the Judiya, they frequently feel unable to speak openly and tell the truth. Therefore, we intervened as a mediator to ensure that the truth is told as it is, and this was the right way to properly resolve women's issues. It is important to bridge the generation gap between chiefs and youth, as chiefs possess valuable experience. Furthermore, the Native Administration and Reconciliation Committees should try to involve youth and provide them with effective training so that they are able to solve their own problems.

**Female Volunteer | Alfasher City**
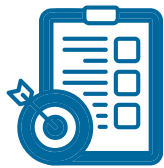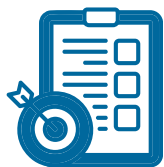
## Good Practice 2

Indigenous Courts: Following the collapse of law enforcement institutions, the role of indigenous laws and practices —particularly Indigenous courts and native administration—emerged as primary alternatives for resolving disputes and enforcing the law. Indigenous courts were formed by community leaders, holding sessions in markets and under trees, relying on custom and tradition to resolve community issues such as theft, murder, and individual disputes.

After the war and the suspension of formal courts, the native administration in East Darfur established indigenous courts in the city of El-Daein. These courts were spread across many locations, including major markets, livestock enclosures (zareeba), religious endowments (awqaf), and water tanks (sahariij). They were considered locally recognized reconciliation committees and successfully resolved hundreds of cases, serving as a model for conflict resolution. However, with the continuation of the war, the court became unacceptable due to two major flaws. The first flaw was its transformation into a venue for levying fees. If the court ruled in favor of one party, the offender would be fined large sums, with the proceeds going to the court itself. Even when a ruling was made, the initial payments went primarily toward court fees, with no mechanism or effort from the court to ensure the victim received compensation from the offender as per the ruling. The second flaw was the exclusion of all individuals who opposed the court's shift from a popular judicial body to a revenue-collecting committee, which undermined the court's integrity.

<u>Volunteer | El-Daein City</u>

## Good Practice 3

Local Reconciliation and mediation committees (e.g, Judiya and Rakuba): Darfur's communities have a long-standing heritage and practices, such as reconciliation councils and conflict resolution committees grounded in customary law, traditions, and prevailing social values. These committees are often composed of elders, local tribal and community leaders, and influential figures in the local community (intellectuals, merchants, government officials, and international organizations).

There was a discussion between the Rizeigat and Fellata tribes regarding one of the major disputes, and a reconciliation was reached in Nyala inside the Dhaman Hall between 2021 and 2022. The Governor of the Darfur Region and representatives of all Darfur states were present. This resulted in an official document they mutually pledged to uphold. Tribal leaders and chiefs from all tribes also attended, and the matters were discussed openly—including what should happen in the event of someone's hakura (traditional landholding) being encroached upon. Agreements were reached through written commitments and treaty terms.

Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response room

In our region, internal conflicts are resolved according to five main steps. First, the two disputing parties are identified and brought together, and then separated by being sent to different areas for approximately three years. Second, conditions are set to protect each party's private property, such as crops or wells, if available. Third, the perpetrator is quickly identified and apprehended. The victim's family is informed of this and asked whether they wish to resort to court or settle through the Native Administration. If the victim's family agrees to a settlement through the Native Administration, the fourth point is to inform the perpetrator's family, confirming that the victim's family has agreed to the settlement through the Native Administration. Finally, a committee is formed to mediate between the two parties to ensure coordination and follow-up on the resolution of the conflict.

Chief | Native Administration | El Daein City

Native administration has played a significant role in resolving all types of conflicts, from farmer-herder issues to social issues. In East Darfur, we have a unique experience. For example, if a murder occurs, the killer's family is relocated to another area to protect them from retaliation and revenge. To preserve the lives of others, the entire family is relocated from the neighborhood they lived in, and sometimes from one locality to another or from one village to another. The goal is for the perpetrator to be imprisoned and for his family to be spared the harm caused by the victim's family.

Female Volunteer | El-Daein City

## Guidance Note

Rebuilding and strengthening trust in the Native Administration institution plays a critical role in sustaining grassroots governance efforts led by community and religious leaders. It also enhances the impact of peacebuilding initiatives, particularly in the context of the weakened or absent formal aid institutions. It provides local leadership capable of rebuilding the social fabric, reducing tribal conflicts, supporting youth initiatives, providing safe corridors for humanitarian and civilian responders, engaging in awareness-raising to combat hate speech, containing crises, providing advice and guidance, and promoting a culture of peaceful coexistence.

The youth of Darfur faced serious danger and had no freedom of movement; their only options were to remain confined in their homes or seek refuge in Chad. Crossing the border became the most viable solution. In coordination with neighborhood elders, I arranged for a vehicle to arrive early—around 4:00 AM—when movement was minimal and the area relatively safe. Each day, I helped transport the youth across the border, accompanied by an escort. Some elderly individuals and pregnant women were also evacuated through these efforts.

Volunteer | Red Crescent Society | El-Genina

Peace is of great importance to the Native Administration, as the East Darfur state has approximately 42 tribes, and is a state brimming with tribal diversity. During times of conflict, the primary concern of the Native Administration was how to ease tensions and maintain stability. We were able to communicate with all the tribes to distance ourselves from tribal disputes and problems, and as a result, there was cohesion within the state, and tribal disputes were no longer present. During times of peace, we would hear about problems between the tribes and seek to resolve them, and consider whether they require relocation. Although we do not favor the option of relocation, due to the fragility and absence of the government, it has become necessary. Previously, with the presence of the State, no one dared to take revenge, but today anyone can carry a stick and go take revenge. Therefore, we worked to relocate the perpetrator's family to a safe place as a solution to prevent the situation from escalating. We also work with the warring parties to arrest the criminal by any means possible, so that the situation does not exacerbate.

Chief | Native Administration | El-Daein City

Additional Case Studies
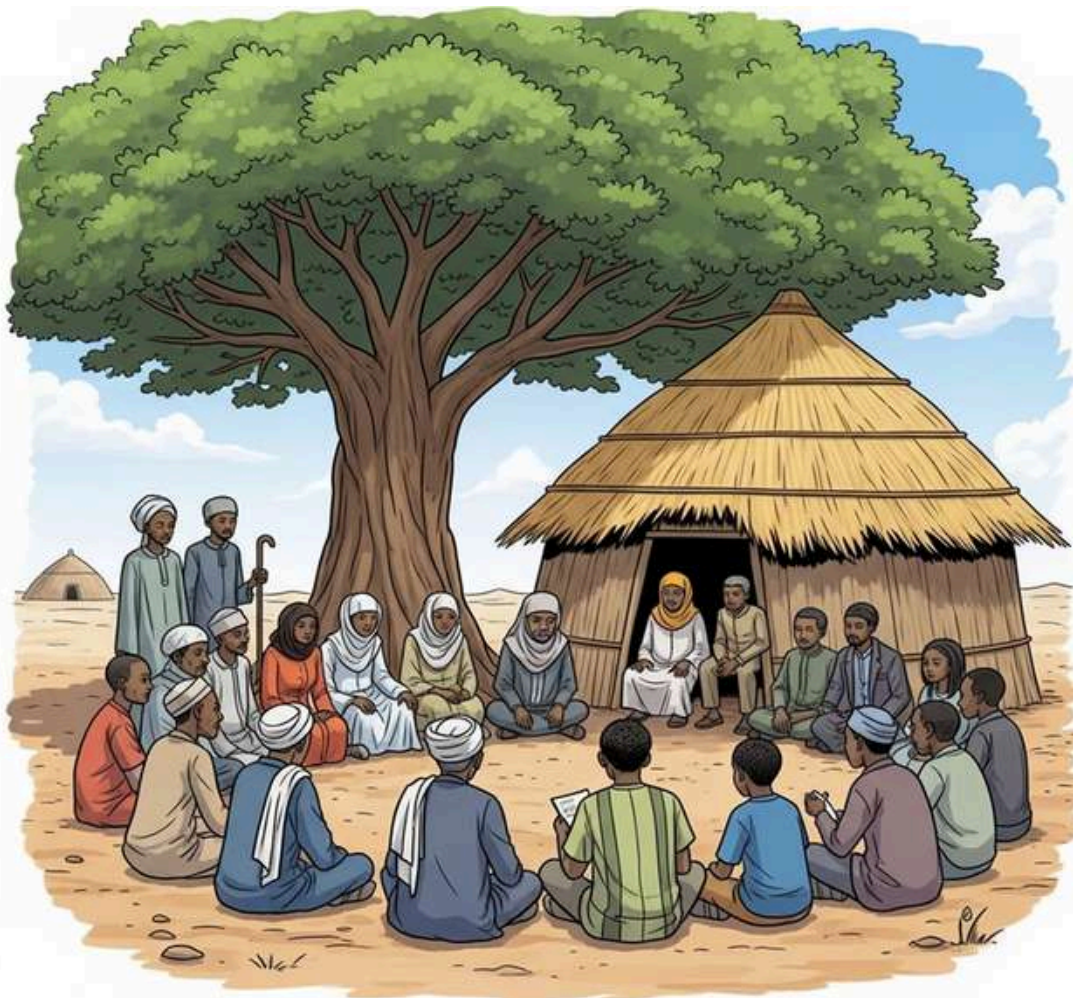
At the health center, a neighborhood committee is formed, including members of the native administration and a group of young men who guard the medical center. They understand that destroying the center or stealing its equipment and medications would deprive neighborhood residents of access to medical services. These efforts have helped protect the health centers, and people continue to receive treatment there. People only need to go to main hospitals or private centers in critical cases.

<u>Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room</u>

I worked in the Public Prosecution Office in the Family and Child Protection Department. There is a department called the Native Administration, which often intervenes in Article 45 B, C, D cases (rape cases). Some cases reached the point where people were on the verge of burning down an entire neighborhood or town because the girl and her family were unable to speak out, while the perpetrator's family was able to. The Native Administration has a procedure called "the tree," which involves bringing together the families of the victim and the perpetrator to reach a settlement instead of going to court. In this settlement, either a sum of money is paid to the victim's family, or the two parties are married. This reduces the chances of the problem escalating and causing loss of life, and helps preserve the social fabric. In Nyala, every court has a Native Administration department headed by a Native Administration head from the city or region to which the court belongs.

<u>Female Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room</u>

I will address the mistake made by the Native Administration in forming committees to resolve internal issues (Indigenous Courts). I was chosen to work in some areas, but I refused because I was unable to find a law regulating this process. For example, the court fees, there is no decision from the native administration specifying the percentage that individuals should receive. Some have established their own laws and collected funds based on them. If the war persists, we will need these committees, but they must be trained and codified, and have a clear mechanism for resolving issues and not exceed them. There must be a specific solution for every issue. For example, a certain issue must be resolved in a certain way, and another issue must be resolved with a specific fine. A bill must be issued by the Native Administrations and the responsible authorities, specifying the rules that everyone must follow, and anyone who does not follow them must be punished.
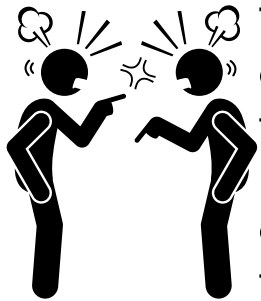
<u>Chief | Native Administration | El-Daein City</u>

# Chapter Three:

## Strengthening Social Cohesion

# Problem 8: Social Fabric Fragmentation and Rise of Hate Speech

The April 15, 2023 war decimated the civilian population, escalated hate speech to unprecedented levels, disintegrated the social fabric, and deepened the social crisis. It also multiplied existing challenges, as urban communities were destroyed and production operations were forced to cease due to the arbitrary seizure of capital and means of production.

This was accompanied by mass atrocities and forced displacement within and across borders, creating new challenges in the five Darfur states, such as relief and reconstruction. Traditional priorities, such as economic recovery and political reform, were frozen. According to the findings, 75% of respondents characterized the current war as a conflict between government parties, intensified by widespread tribal militarization. Meanwhile, 33% described it as a conflict between tribal groups and government forces. Additionally, 32% noted that conflicts between herders and farmers have diminished, primarily due to reduced cultivated areas and disruptions to livestock movement caused by ongoing violence.

In some areas, individuals are classified based on their geographic and ethnic backgrounds, presumed to be members of the Rapid Support Forces, regardless of any factual evidence of their involvement. In some cases, direct action, including execution, is taken against them without investigation, solely based on their tribal affiliation. This situation is further exacerbated when moving between areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces and those controlled by the Sudanese Army Forces, as such travel becomes risky. Even within a single state, classification is sometimes based on identity or ethnic background, resulting in clear disparities in treatment and privileges. Some individuals receive benefits or protection solely because of their ethnicity, while others are denied even the most basic rights, exacerbating discrimination, threatening the social fabric, and undermining justice.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

The war took on a tribal character. For example, a person might be classified as belonging to one of the warring parties simply because of the color of his skin, even though he might not be.

Volunteer at a National Association | Alfasher City

I will continue to address a point that should not be overlooked: the issue of conflict between herders and farmers, which is a major concern in the state. There are no designated or clear public spaces separating grazing from farming, so you find herders walking their livestock into agricultural lands, leading to major and recurring conflicts every year. We tend to ignore this problem and do not pay enough attention to it, even though it causes huge human losses, as many of our people lose their lives as a result of these recurring conflicts between herders and farmers.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room
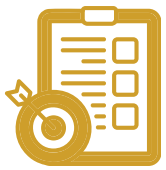
## Good Practice

Establishment of Emergency Response Rooms: The community cooperation mechanisms initiated by Sudanese people, known as "emergency response rooms (ERRs)," since the beginning of the war, which has lasted for more than two years, are compelling evidence that they are a sustainable source of social cohesion and, consequently, peace. Local communities have intensified their efforts to restore normalcy and strengthen social cohesion by restoring basic services; leading consultations and negotiations on security, food, and market stability; organizing peaceful coexistence campaigns; promoting volunteerism; and establishing social protections.

At one point, when we were establishing emergency rooms within neighborhoods, we developed a model that involved all segments of the local community—elders, neighborhood chiefs, religion leaders, women, and children—sometimes reaching 100 to 250 individuals, who enjoyed widespread community acceptance. This model effectively contributed to creating strong social bonds even before the provision of humanitarian aid. For example, in Nyala, the emergency rooms succeeded in unifying the neighborhood, despite long-standing disputes among residents. Everyone, regardless of their previous positions, was compelled to take part in collective activities, such as cooking and distributing food, which strengthened community harmony. Neighborhoods that had been fragmented as a result of the policies of the former regime became more cohesive. When some of the young people involved in the emergency rooms encountered a problem, the head of the Native Administration was the first to support them, which strengthened the community's sense of ownership and responsibility for the initiative. People understood that these rooms belonged to them, and had nothing to do with totalitarian regimes. I hope this model will be replicated in other states, cities, and localities.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

In the second week of the war, emergency rooms were established as a result of a power outage in the hospital and a failure of oxygen machines in the children's wards, during which approximately 10 to 13 children died. This incident shook the community and prompted volunteers to provide fuel to power the hospital, restore several departments, such as the dialysis unit, and provide scarce medicines for this department. Among the interventions was the maintenance of blood bank refrigerators, and wards were also maintained several months after the war began. The emergency rooms are now well-known both in the community and within government institutions, having provided tangible services witnessed throughout the state. A visual identity was created, demonstrating that the young people present at the hospital's emergency room were providing humanitarian services, distributing medicine to displaced people and refugees who could not afford it. Certain volunteers have become well-known. In addition, these activities have been publicized on social media.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room

The emergency rooms played a pivotal role in restoring one of the city's most important services: the rehabilitation of the Musih water station, one of the largest projects in the city. The project resulted in the operation of five wells that pump water to the city's water authority, contributing to the resumption of the distribution network in half the city. The impact was clearly felt by residents. This work enhanced the emergency room's recognition within the community and showcased its effective role in restoring normal life. In addition, the room implemented health education workshops, training 160 health officers in various areas of the city. This work was carried out in full coordination with the Ministry of Health, which strengthened trust and official recognition of the role of the rooms at the government level.

Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Room

## Guidance Note

**1** Building trust between emergency response room volunteers and local communities is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of humanitarian response initiatives. It strengthens community ownership, amplifies local engagement, and enhances efforts to foster peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.

**2** Mobilizing local communities' financial and human resources is essential for ensuring community ownership and adoption of proposed solutions. When communities are not involved in mobilizing resources, initiatives are often perceived as externally imposed and misaligned with local priorities. Conversely, local funding strategies not only foster a sense of ownership but also enhance the effectiveness and impact of community-based initiatives.

**3** Recognizing community and grassroots efforts, building their resilience, rewarding them, strengthening their peace-oriented interventions, and opening local channels for communication and community consultations—is the most practical and effective approach to counter the rise of hate speech and strengthen social cohesion.

El-Daein's emergency rooms have been in operation since May and have been working on key issues. We have a health office still operating in the hospital, providing services to patients. There is also a dedicated health team to deal with special cases. This team assesses the individual's case. If they have a companion and cannot afford medication, or if they are undergoing surgery and cannot afford it, we send the case file to the Zakat House for contributions. Sometimes, zakat contributions are insufficient, so we raise the need for the emergency room and mobilize resources through social media to secure support. Since the rooms were established, this service has continued. Regarding food, we have established 13 shelters. The state government initially refused to open shelters in schools, citing a lack of capacity and essential services they could provide. However, we in the emergency rooms emphasized the urgent need to establish them and began engaging with the public by launching a fundraising campaign under the slogan, 'We Are One Family.'

<u>Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room</u>

# Problem 9: Collapse of Basic Service Delivery Systems

61.54% of government institutions were completely damaged. 55.38% were looted and robbed before being destroyed. Additionally, 36.92% of these institutions ceased operations completely, 33.85% due to shelling, while 24.62% were partially damaged. Despite this damage, 20% of government institutions continue to operate with limited capacity.
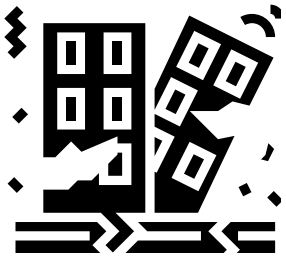
As for local organizations, 41.54% were looted and robbed, and 38.46% were completely damaged. Only 40% of the total organizations continue to operate under difficult conditions, while 33.85% were partially damaged. 18.46% of organizations ceased operations due to security restrictions and the loss of their headquarters and staff, while 13.85% were bombed.

49.23% of international organization headquarters were completely damaged, 41.54% ceased operations, another 41.54% were looted or robbed, 16.92% were partially damaged, and 15.38% were bombed. Despite these challenges, 23.08% of these organizations remain operational.
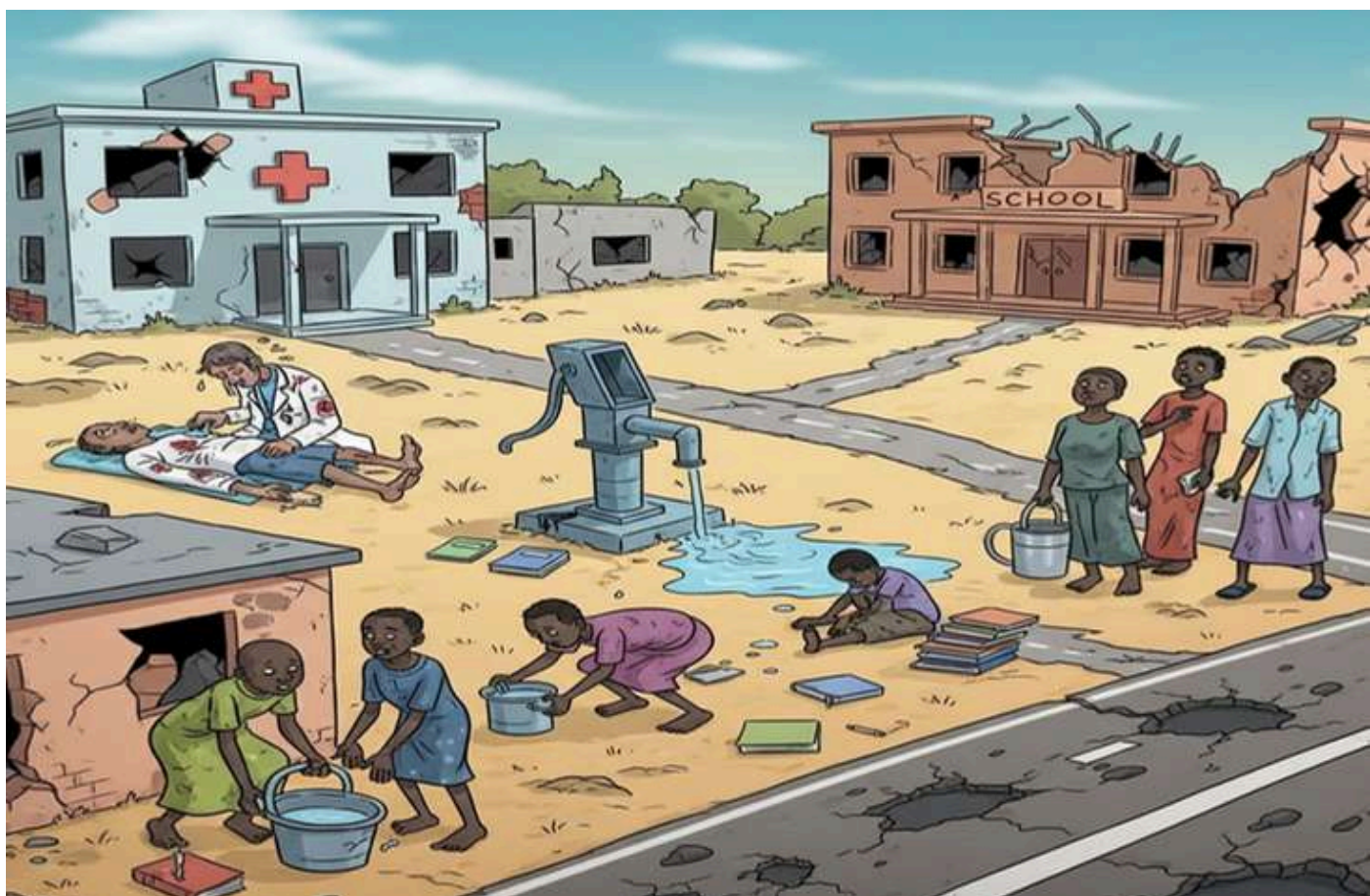
87.69% of respondents reported that Darfur's electricity system is out of service, 7.69% indicated it is partially operational, and only 4.62% reported full power availability.

The health system in Darfur collapsed early on, with 76.92% of respondents reporting that health facilities were partially functioning, primarily through emergency rooms and local response groups operating with limited capacity. Additionally, 15.38% reported that health facilities were completely out of service, while only 7.69% indicated they were fully operational.

All the equipment at Zalingei Hospital was looted. In one tragic incident, a woman in critical condition was brought in, requiring an emergency cesarean delivery. As the doctor struggled to perform the life-saving operation, militia members began dismantling and stealing the surgical equipment. The situation was extremely difficult, as there was no one to stop them. Some young men intervened and pleaded gently, saying: "Please, don't take the equipment until the operation is over—this woman is like your mother." Shortly after the operation was miraculously completed, another woman arrived, also in urgent need of a cesarean delivery. But by then, the equipment had already been dismantled and stolen, resulting in the tragic loss of both the woman and her unborn child.

Female Volunteer | People of Zalingei Inititative | Zalingei

6.92% of respondents reported that educational institutions are operating partially through local efforts, 35.38% indicated these institutions are out of service, while only 7.69% stated they are fully operational.

The education sector has been on hold for two years, and hospitals continue to suffer from a severe shortage of essential supplies and services. What is currently available is purely voluntary, with no regular or institutional support to cover citizens' basic needs.

Female Volunteer | El-Genina City

According to respondents, markets have been a lifeline for millions of Darfur residents, receiving significant attention from local leaders and demonstrating remarkable resilience compared to other service systems. 70.77% reported that markets remain partially operational, 23.08% stated they are fully operational, while 6.15% indicated that markets are completely out of service.

According to respondents, Darfur suffers from a scarcity of clean water, with 58.46% reporting that water supply sources are severely damaged, 33.85% stating that these sources are completely out of service, and only 7.69% indicating that they remain fully operational. This scarcity has contributed to the spread of conflicts, increased rates of violations—particularly against girls and women—and the proliferation of epidemics and diseases.

> After the war outbreak, there was no education, no water, and even hospitals were only partially functioning. There was no electricity. Women carried water from wells and sometimes went to seasonal water collection centers carrying their containers on their heads. Water was unavailable and the pipes were not working, causing a major water crisis. People took risks to fetch water, and girls or women were sometimes flogged on their way back. After the intervention of organizations, water was distributed to neighborhoods weekly, and those with the money could purchase a water tank (a fontas) for three to five thousand Sudanese Pounds. All water pipes stopped working due to the lack of electricity, as the pumps run on fossil fuels.
>
> <u>Female Volunteer | Charity Association | El-Genina City</u>

Telecommunications systems were completely disrupted, with 95.38% reporting that telecommunications networks were out of service, while only 4.62% said they were operating partially and intermittently in limited areas.

Most Darfur states witnessed a decline in agricultural areas to less than 10%, as confirmed by 61.54% of respondents. Meanwhile, 38.46% reported that agricultural areas had decreased to less than 50% in regions not experiencing ongoing military operations.

I would like to highlight the issues of electricity, education, and telecommunications. In East Darfur, our electricity was cut off for almost two years, starting in the first week of the war, and we haven't seen any electricity since then. Regarding education, UNICEF worked on supplementary learning programs for core subjects (Arabic, English, and mathematics). They operated for about a month, then stopped due to funding cuts or something similar. With respect to schools, they are open from kindergarten to high school. Regarding health, the situation remains unstable, with only two hospitals (one government and one private) and a limited number of clinics available. These two hospitals and the few clinics cannot accommodate the large population, and the hospitals are under a very heavy load. This problem is a result of the war, as patients suffer from a shortage of medications for some chronic diseases. For example, medications that used to come from Khartoum were stopped, and now they are coming from neighboring countries, but with difficulty, which has led to an increase in the cost of treatment. Many patients have lost their lives due to deteriorating health conditions and lack of food. East Darfur's infrastructure is known to be catastrophic, and we are virtually the only state without a road linking us to any other state. Consequently, any patient suffers greatly while traveling, exacerbating the crisis. As for telecommunications, networks have been cut off since November 2023, equivalent to a shutdown lasting nearly two years.

<u>Female Volunteer at a Charity Association | El-Genina City</u>

## Good Practice 1

Restoration of basic service systems led by humanitarian responders and local leaders: Some basic services have been restored through local efforts. Markets topped the list of services being restored, followed by agriculture and health, then water and education. To a very limited extent, responders were able to restore telecommunications services. The restoration of these services contributed to a gradual return to normal life and had a tangible impact by enhancing the protection of humanitarian responders, facilitating their movement, and creating a less stressful and more receptive environment for humanitarian action. This led to a gradual expansion of safe spaces for both responders and affected communities. At the social and official levels, the restoration of essential services enhanced the recognition of responders by local communities and authorities, legitimizing their service delivery, offering additional informal protection, and reducing friction with local authorities.

The city witnessed many community initiatives after most of its neighborhoods and institutions were burned during the crisis. At the onset of the conflict, initiatives proliferated within neighborhoods, working in a collective spirit. When one initiative announces a campaign to clean up a particular site, others join in and participate in its implementation. There were also clear efforts to support the injured and train volunteers in first aid, all of which were provided free of charge. The entire community worked as one body and contributed effectively to bringing life back to the city. Local radio played an important role, serving as a media platform that encouraged young people to highlight their efforts. This helped, in one way or another, motivate the initiatives to be effective, influential, and present in the public sphere.

Female Volunteer | El-Genina City

The basic philosophy of emergency rooms is to provide services in the absence of relevant institutions. One of the activities undertaken by the emergency rooms is the reopening of schools. For example, the women's emergency rooms in Adeela successfully reopened 14 schools between September and December—prior to the official state decision to reopen schools. Secondly, the emergency rooms in Al-Neem IDP camp opened a school in September, receiving approximately 700 first-year students. The emergency rooms in Bahr al-Arab and Asalaya also provided treatment and opened hospitals, and there are many examples demonstrating how emergency rooms have protected communities. Currently, one of the primary tasks the state's emergency rooms are addressing is water supply during the summer. In Asalaya, the rooms intervened to repair a broken water well, as they lacked a water tank. Another intervention took place in Kiliki Molo, where their well was broken. Currently, areas such as Nabq, Baqloul, Bakhit, and Muhajiriya are in need of water-related interventions, and all state emergency rooms are working to provide water, as we face an unprecedented challenge during the summer.

Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room

When we were in Zalingei Hospital, there was no network, no services—nothing at all—but we all stuck together. The first major challenge was the lack of water, and it was an extremely difficult period due to the widespread presence of weapons. Some young men would go to the Rapid Support Forces to request permission to fetch water. At that time, no one was allowed to leave to collect anything without their approval, so securing their permission was essential. We were ready to cooperate with anyone, even the devil. After all, we were trying to provide a vital service to our communities. The second problem was telecommunications. Some had to leave El-Genina to connect with organizations and individuals to secure medical supplies and medicine, and ensure the provision of health services to the people of Darfur. Many of us traveled to West Darfur and other safe areas to bring humanitarian aid. There were also contributions from people outside the state, and some organizations, such as WR, SUDO, and MSF, contributed to providing services inside the hospital. We faced significant challenges in stabilizing the hospital, as it was robbed and doctors were assaulted. However, we opened educational centers within the hospital, such as the Tawfiq Computer Science Center, where many young people came to learn computer basics. A health center for nursing sciences resumed operations, providing services for nine months. An English language institute was also opened, along with laboratories and other training facilities for young people. Many have benefited from these initiatives, which have significantly impacted the development of their minds and thoughts.

When the organizations arrived, they did not have space to work due to theft and violations. Therefore, the hospital was the only safe place, and offices were opened within the hospital for the various organizations. Even Wi-Fi was initially available within Zalingei Hospital. At that time, the young people lacked sufficient awareness, but they were able to divide the hospital spaces into media and health offices. Despite their lack of experience, they managed to overcome the challenges they faced and allocated offices to support people in need who were unable to afford treatment. There was also a community fund to help these people access treatment and communicate with organizations. This initiative successfully solved many of the problems for those who came from outside and were unaware of what was happening. To this day, the impact of this initiative continues, not only within the hospital but also in the camps, where basic services such as food, drink, money, and psychological support were provided, in addition to initiatives focusing on women and children.

<u>Female Volunteer | People of Zalingei Initiative | Zaliengei City</u>

## Good Practice 2

Women's leadership for efforts to restore normal life and basic services: Women in areas that witnessed brutal killings have led efforts to restore normal life by opening safe corridors to evacuate those trapped, delivering food, and negotiating to save lives and protect the vulnerable. The involvement of young men in these activities during that period meant certain death.

> Women contributed greatly, and life was under their responsibility. Women left their homes and sold their belongings to provide food. Some sold their furniture, some sold their gold, because no one was able to work, and women bore full responsibility. Women would walk to far places, sometimes to support people in other neighborhoods. They would cross neighborhood security checkpoints without anyone asking them about their destination. In this way, food was secured for the children.

Female Volunteer | People of Zalingei
Initiative | Zaliengei City

## Guidance Note

**1** Strengthening basic service delivery systems (water, health, education, energy, etc.) enhances cooperation and builds trust between local governments and citizens, thereby contributing to the restoration of internal governance within collapsed local government institutions.

**2** The gradual restoration of basic service systems helps reduce social fragmentation caused by displacement toward essential services in relatively low-intensity conflict areas. This process not only focuses on repairing the fragmented social fabric and improving conditions for solidarity but also extends to ending the militarization of basic services by both parties to the conflict.

**3** Service provision is not limited to the service dimension alone; it is also a supporting element in enhancing protection and social recognition for the efforts of humanitarian workers, especially in the complex and volatile context of Darfur.

During the war, a significant number of young people contributed to providing community services. I volunteered in the Zalingei People's Initiative, which played a significant role in providing support to the whole state. We participated in recovering bodies. We weren't concerned about our own lives as much as we were concerned about providing a service to the people and the state. We intervened between the warring parties, telling them that we were young people from Zalingei and that our goal was to provide support to the people of this state, nothing more and nothing less. We faced many challenges, including that some classified us as affiliated with certain conflict parties, but our goal was clear: to serve the community. We issued volunteer ID cards, and whenever we encountered a party to the conflict, we would show them the card so they could allow us to continue our work. In the neighborhoods, the young people cooperated and worked together, as there were emergency rooms and community kitchens to meet people's needs. Also, in the event of any problem, assault or murder, the native administration would resolve the conflict peacefully, handle the problem wisely, and ensure the safety of the volunteers if they encountered any problem.

_Female Volunteer | People of Zalingei Initiative | Zaliengei City_

**Additional Case Studies**
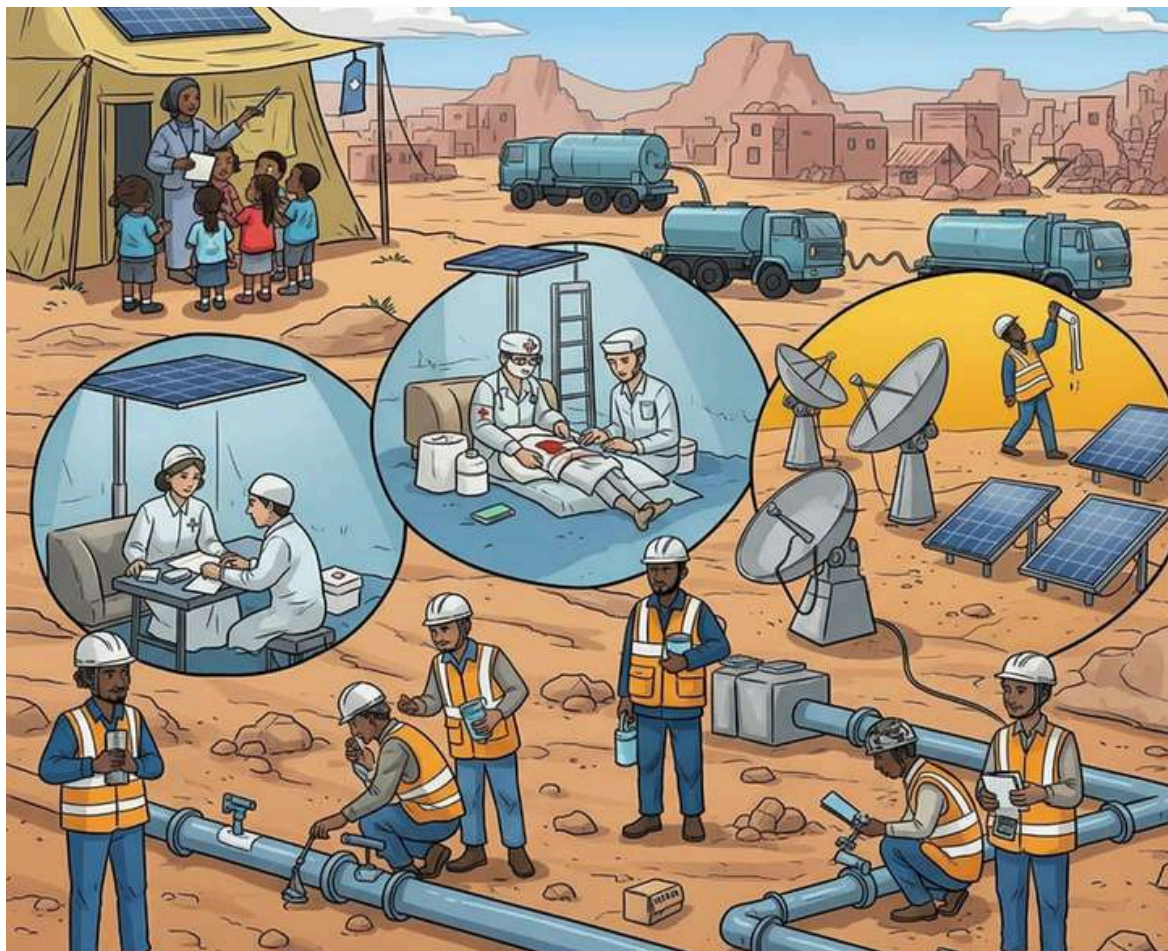
During the war, we were based in the Five Minutes IDP Camp—one of the areas most affected by violence. Large numbers of displaced people arrived, and we had to shelter them. Many were accommodated in the school and student dormitories. With limited access to food, some people survived on just one meal a day. Residents contributed small portions of food prepared at home to support the newly displaced. Youth volunteers also played a key role—they identified water sources and connected them to the camp, gradually improving conditions. Regarding medical services, health centers were closed, and roads were blocked, making it extremely difficult to transfer the injured to hospitals. We had a women's office, which was converted into a health center. A group of former Red Cross workers volunteered to run it, and medicines were transferred from the closed Karrank Health Center to this new facility in the Five Minutes Camp. It provided care to anyone who had suffered injury or abuse. Unfortunately, we lost many lives due to the repeated shelling of the camp, which had a severe impact on the entire community.

<u>Volunteer | Five Minutes Camp | Zalingei City</u>

In addition to their roles in the emergency rooms, volunteers also carried out environmental sanitation efforts. El-Daein Hospital was unusually dirty despite having cleaning staff, as they only worked inside the wards, while the hospital's overall area was very large. Therefore, volunteers from El-Daein emergency rooms dedicated one day each week for environmental sanitation throughout the hospital. They also collaborated with the Health Insurance Administration to operate the CT scan unit, which was one of the most expensive services available. This intervention added significant value to the hospital's services.

<u>Female Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Reponse Room</u>

Regarding the Saudi Hospital in Alfasher, we adapted to the situation by establishing shelters within the hospital. During periods of active military operations, people take refuge inside these shelters.

<u>Female Volunteer | Alfasher City</u>

**Additional Case Studies**

At the beginning, some neighborhoods had water pumps that were not functioning. Youth committees formed to repair these pumps, marking a key step in improving water supply. Meanwhile, local chiefs and community leaders fetched water from distant wells and distributed it to residents. Regarding electricity, it was available until last Ramadan but was later cut off. Thanks to the youth's efforts, those knowledgeable in electricity joined neighborhood committees, and currently, these electrical committees consist entirely of local volunteers. As for water distribution networks, pipes are operational in some neighborhoods but remain out of service in others due to pump malfunctions and high maintenance costs. Youth initiatives, in cooperation with the Red Crescent, helped collect bodies during the crisis. After relative stabilization, the Red Crescent reopened training centers, and most of the youth in El-Geneina now receive training in disaster response and other programs run by the Sudanese Red Crescent. During the challenging period, young doctors, pharmacists, and health workers opened clinics within neighborhoods, providing first aid. Nearly every neighborhood has such a clinic. The Sudanese Red Crescent was the main support for the community during this time, organizing body collection and sanitation campaigns. Once conditions improved, other organizations entered the region. Active organizations in the state now include CRS and NRC. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) manages El-Geneina Hospital, providing health services including nutrition and maternal care. NRC handles food and education, having been responsible for bread distribution; currently, some families receive monthly food cards. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has registered over 60 youth initiatives within national organizations, all providing various services.

<u>Volunteer | El-Genina City</u>

When the emergency rooms were first established, their role was limited to supporting kitchens, health centers, and hospitals. Naturally, any initiative goes through transitional phases. When we considered the water project, it was the result of our work in 18 neighborhoods with a budget of $87,000. Of this amount, 25% was allocated to providing portable water tanks for home delivery, which was a temporary solution. We then began thinking about how to develop the project further. Instead of distributing water in this way, we decided to repair the main water station, achieving a qualitative leap from providing a simple service to delivering something much more substantial.

<u>Volunteer | Nyala Emergency Response Response Room</u>

# Problem 10: Absence of an Integrated Approach to Localizing Humanitarian Work in Sudan

Addressing the three major shocks (conflict, floods, and disease outbreaks) and their impact on populations and basic services is a key priority (OCHA Statement on the Launch of the Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2025 – December 2024).

These priorities represent the priorities of the official aid system. The Sudanese have other priorities that are essentially aligned with the need for the international community to accompany the Sudanese people on the path to peace and stability. Therefore, any urgent priority today implicitly includes support for stability and assistance in strengthening the resilience of the local population.

Meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups is a key requirement in most Darfur states. Already, approximately 61% of Sudanese were poor (World Bank 2021) and 80% were in need of direct financial support (Transitional Government 2020), requiring adequate food assistance even before the April war. Some areas of Darfur have not been directly affected by the fighting, yet their populations are suffering from the fragility of the state and its difficulty in maintaining the economy, resulting in a situation that exceeds the level of tolerance and endurance.

Despite the ever-increasing number of emergency rooms, communal kitchens, community protection groups, and women-friendly spaces, community efforts cannot be fully expressed.

> The United Nations needs to develop its emergency response mechanisms. Many organizations have suspended their activities after the war intensified, leaving no alternatives to provide services to those in need.
>
> Volunteer | El Fasher City

## Good Practice 1

United Nations Fund for Recovery, Reconstruction and Development in Darfur: Since its establishment in 2013, the Fund has contributed to:

**1** Building trust in a future based on stable peace

**2** Reducing dependence on humanitarian aid

**3** Creating alternatives for young women and men through education, jobs, and livelihoods to prevent them from returning to conflict again.
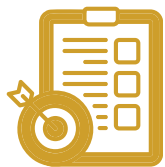
## Good Practice 2

Humanitarian responders' participation in developing humanitarian response plans in Darfur: Despite its limitations, humanitarian responders' participation in designing humanitarian response plans in Darfur has allowed them to redirect international community resources to support localization efforts and the restoration of basic service delivery systems. It has contributed to strengthening resilience and aligning humanitarian response plans with local community priorities, which are fundamentally aligned with the need for the international community to accompany the Sudanese people on their path to peace and stability. Any urgent priority today has an implicit goal, the essence of which is to support stability and help strengthen the resilience of the Sudanese people. Meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups is a key requirement at this stage by most cities in Darfur, given the scarcity of protection activities and the widespread violence associated with the conflict.

Currently, in emergency rooms, we have a system ranging from F1 to F6, where we engage communities in identifying their needs. If we want international organizations to help our local communities develop and move forward, planning must start with the community itself, involving them in projects that meet their needs. Currently, the needs of neighborhoods vary from one area to another. In the Railway area, the need is for electricity and water pipes, while in Al-Safaa, this problem has been overcome because they have electricity and water. Therefore, if services are provided without basing them on the specific needs of the neighborhoods, the results may be inaccurate, and some may need a health center instead of electricity. It is important that communities participate in identifying their own needs. In the emergency rooms, we approach donors to obtain funding, then return to the local rooms for each neighborhood to identify its needs. Each area meets and determines its priorities, and we provide them with funding to implement these projects. As a result, we find that our communities have begun to develop and progress. On the other hand, there is a negative experience in the Neem camp; The displacement that began in 2004 and has continued for 21 years now is an emergency that cannot be dealt with indefinitely. The displaced were supposed to be able to emerge from the emergency within seven to eight years at most, through the provision of productive tools, investment projects, and income-generating projects. But this has not happened, because the projects that are written often do not correspond to reality. Someone writes a project and then goes looking for a donor, while the local community does not benefit from these projects. Many buildings have been constructed in remote areas that benefit no one. Communities must determine their priorities and should be supported as they see fit, rather than projects imposed on them without consideration of their real needs.

<u>Volunteer | El-Daein Emergency Response Room</u>

# Guidance Note

Building resilience requires practical recognition of courageous community efforts and ensuring these efforts are embedded in all phases of the program cycle. Localization is a practical approach to achieving this goal, as conflicts create tipping points that support agents of transformational change. Localization also strengthens the capacity of local responders in Sudan, including women and youth, ensuring flexible and rapid technical and financial support, supporting local institutions, establishing early warning systems, and building life-saving preventative measures that pave the way for recovery and peacebuilding.

Therefore, delegating local communities as humanitarian agents and supporting them in protecting rights means a more positive political role, where citizens become active partners in the process of building their nation, rather than merely victims. Aid actors must consider sustainable mobilization, including the continued pursuit of localized aid and greater engagement with local community efforts.

Broad-based protection support programs will also help keep the flame of civil society alive, supporting efforts to achieve justice and ensuring positive community participation in reconciliation and redress efforts. Supporting the work of the independent international fact-finding mission can strengthen efforts to achieve justice and equity, while also opening new horizons for effective reconciliation.

Nominating Sudanese Emergency Response Rooms for the Nobel Prize acts as a bridge to connect with local and international organizations, making them aware of the value of the rooms and the efforts they provide. This builds trust between the rooms and organizations working in humanitarian aid. Before the Nobel nomination, support came from specific areas, but now there are many donors and organizations. The Nobel nomination also has a moral impact. We all need psychologists. Most of us, if not affected by war, have been affected by humanitarian work under shelling and airstrikes. We needed something to give us hope and to make us feel that people outside recognize our work. Although there has been no tangible change in the level of protection or advocacy, there is legitimacy for the future.

Volunteer | Alfasher City

**Additional Case Studies**
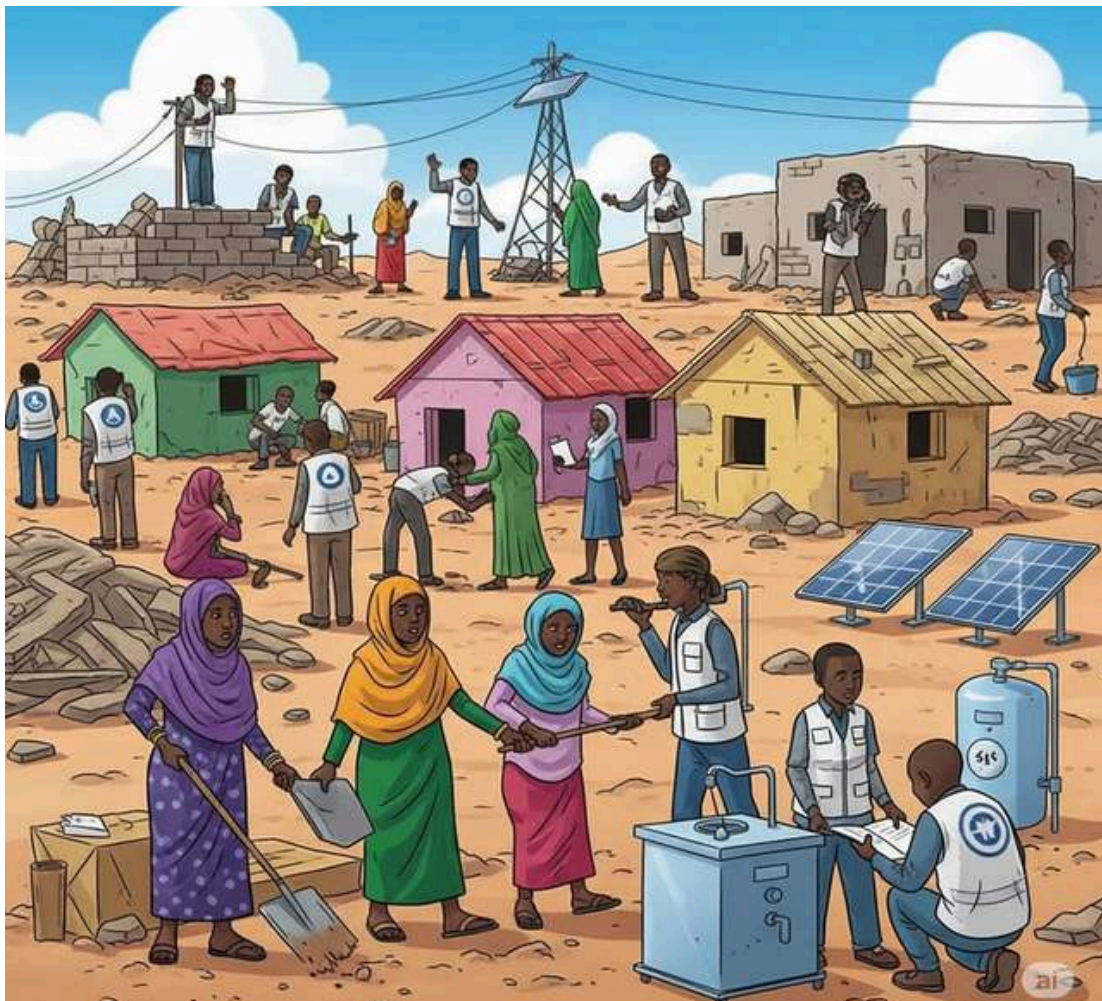
We do not underestimate our existing capabilities; instead, we work to strengthen them. What's missing is broader access to knowledge and awareness. Target groups are often excluded from training opportunities, which highlights the need for genuine community engagement and capacity-building. Focusing on only one segment of society creates a significant gap—especially since youth alone cannot drive lasting change. Our goal is to engage all groups that genuinely believe in peacebuilding. Meaningful progress starts with those committed to the cause, because without that belief, effective action is not possible. Peacebuilding must include everyone, at every stage.

Volunteer | Alfasher City

We often make valuable social contributions, but the question remains: how can our voices be heard? International organizations and similar entities should have accessible offices through which we can communicate our needs and gaps. Effective communication is essential to ensure that citizens live in stability and safe environment.

Volunteer | El-Genina City

Displaced individuals come to us seeking protection. In some cases, we refer them to the appropriate entities, while others are extremely vulnerable, so we help relocate them to safer areas. We also inform local institutions or neighborhood committees to offer immediate support, and then we follow up with relevant organizations.

Female Volunteer | Neighborhood Committees | Alfasher City

# Training Tools

## Tool No. 1

### Essential Elements for Building Protections for Emergency Response Initiatives

| | |
|---|---|
| Clear vision & goals | Flexibility in tactics |
| Performance monitoring & evaluation | Effective & cohesive leadership |
| Broad community support | Inclusive Participation |
| Commitment to nonviolence | Building trust |
| Relying on information and research | Effective and culturally sensitive communication |
| Mobilizing local resources | Education and awareness |
| Sustainability of efforts | Utilize advocacy techniques |
| Organization based on strategic planning | Alliances and partnerships |
| Legal support for volunteers | Innovation and creativity |
| Responding to changes | Celebrating successes |

**Tool No. 2**

## Elements of effective change

| Confusion | Sabotage | Anxiety |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| **Vision** | **Consensus** | **Skills** |
| 1 | 2 | 3 |

### Effective Change Elements

| 4 | 5 | 6 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Incentives** | **Resources** | **Action Plan** |
| ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Resistance | Frustration | Treadmill |
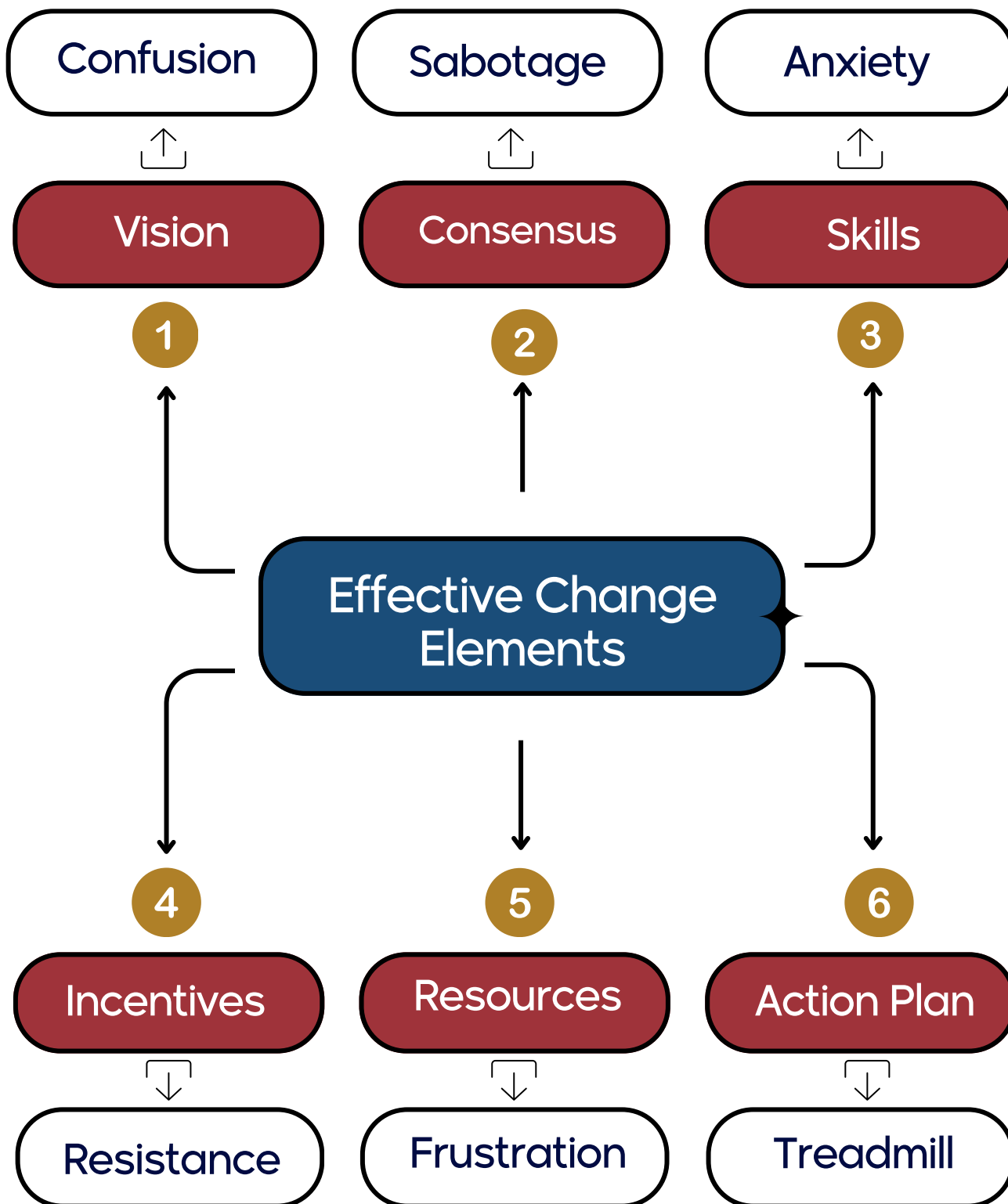
## Tool No. 3

# Advocacy Toolkit

### DETERMINE THE ADVOCACY GOAL

**1**

- Problem Definition
- Clear vision to solve the problem
- Effective & cohesive leadership

### DATA COLLECTION

**2**

- Evidence-based Interventions

### IDENTIFYING KEY ACTORS

**3**

- Stakeholder Analysis
- Power Relations Analysis

### PREPARING ADVOCACY MESSAGES

**4**

- Effective and culturally sensitive communication

### BUILDING ALLIANCES & PARTNERSHIPS

**5**

- Inclusive Participation
- Building Trust
- Context-responsive Organizational Patterns

### DESIGN CONTEXT-RESPONSIVE INTERVENTIONS

**6**

- Innovation and creativity
- Commitment to nonviolence
- Flexibility in tactics
- Legal Support

### RAISING RESOURCES AND FUNDING

**7**

- Mobilizing local resources
- Broad community support

### PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION & EVALUATION

**8**

- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Celebrating Successes

## Tool No. 4

## Stakeholders Analysis

**More influential**

### Giving information

- Media
- Opinion makers

### Dialogue

- Government
- NGOs

**Least affected**

**Most affected**

### Data Collection

More negative

- Common people

### Consultations

More interactive

- Local communities
- Target groups

**Less influential**

## Tool No. 5

## Community Power Relations Analysis

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## Disclaimer

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