



Best Practices and Lessons Learnt Workshop  
[Youth Promotion Initiative] – **Darfuri Youth  
Empowerment in Civic Spaces for the Advancement of  
Peacebuilding 2022 - 2023**

**West Darfur and Central Darfur** [Workshop to be held online due to ongoing conflict].  
Workshop held on **7th of December** from **0800 AM** to **1530 PM**.

[Final Report]

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*[Youth Peace Ambassadors from Darfur in conversation  
with the SRS / UN PBF © Freya Byfield.]*



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## Background

The PBF-funded youth promotion initiative, '**Darfuri Youth Empowerment in Civic Spaces for the Advancement of Peacebuilding**', jointly implemented by UNHCR and UNDP in West and Central Darfur, originally ran from January 2022 to July 2023 with a 9-month no-cost extension until April 2024. The implementation of the project saw some significant progress, but also some significant challenges. Furthermore, the overall implementation of the project was halted by the nationwide outbreak of conflict across Sudan in April 2023. This has meant that some of the originally planned activities have not been implemented - instead being re-programmed to support the winter agricultural season in North Darfur and ease inter-communal tensions resulting from the food insecurity crisis - and many of the gains that were beginning to come to fruition have been undermined.

As a result of the conflict, the originally planned monitoring and evaluation approach for the project is no longer feasible. A baseline and perception survey were conducted for the project; however, the data collected, and the targets set, will no longer be relevant. The reduced relevance of this data, the challenging security environment in Darfur and ongoing access constraints, and the impact of the conflict on the implementation of project activities have rendered the original plans for a formal endline assessment and final project evaluation both difficult to operationalize and unlikely to provide value for money. As a result, UNHCR and UNDP have decided, with PBF approval, to remove the formal endline and final project evaluation.

To replace the endline and final project evaluation, UNHCR and UNDP conducted an informal evaluation by organizing an online **internal lessons-learnt workshop** involving key project staff and implementing partners. The workshop explored areas in design, analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring, that have proven effective and are worth expanding or consolidating in future programming. It also identified areas for improvement. These insights can be utilized by UNHCR, UNDP and other PBF partners for future implementation in Sudan.

## Project Summary

'Darfuri Youth Empowerment in Civic Spaces to Advance Peacebuilding' is an 18-month (+9 months) youth promotion initiative funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund and implemented by UNHCR and UNDP. Throughout 2022 and 2023 this intervention has supported young men and women from target locations in West and Central Darfur to claim civic spaces to which they had limited or no access through strategic communications and digital engagement, youth-led community initiatives, and facilitation of youth inclusion in decision-making fora. The outcomes of the project were:

**Outcome 1:** *Youth access to civic spaces in West and Central Darfur expanded by enhancing their capacity to develop and disseminate digital content and*

*Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials on issues related to peace and conflict.*

**Outcome 2:** *Positive social and civic engagement by youth in their communities enhanced by youth-driven dialogues, micro-projects, and leadership skills building that contribute to peaceful coexistence.*

**Outcome 3:** *Youth engagement in public policy spaces augmented through improved access to state, locality, and community-level powerholders.*

## Objective

The objective of the workshop was to bring together all the available internal (UN Agency and Implementing Partners) project stakeholders to review selected project cycle steps for the PBF-funded YPI program. The workshop identified areas of best practice – particularly in design and implementation, lessons learnt, and elucidated potential areas for expansion or continuation in future programming.

## Participants

UNHCR and UNDP nominated representatives from each agency that were directly involved in the project, as well as representatives from management or other concerned departments that will help to ensure programming continuity and the integration of lessons learnt into future related programming. Implementing partners' representatives were also invited to ensure that there is an operational perspective brought to the fore.

## Modality

The workshop was held online on **Microsoft Teams**, due to the current security situation in Sudan. The workshop was recorded for note-taking purposes.

## Workshop Notes & Recommendations

### Introduction

Opening remarks were made welcoming everyone and thanking participants for the active participation during the day ahead. Some ground rules and the background of the workshop were set. It was noted that the workshop replaced a formal endline and final evaluation process. This was agreed with the PBF due reasons including 1) the project was not completed in its entirety, nor in its originally conceived way. Crucial aspects of the implementation were interrupted and therefore the impact was not what it should/could have been. 2) Baseline data was flawed and not to the standard it should have been. 3) Evaluators would not have been able to access the area, making the process much more difficult. 4) Many project beneficiaries have been displaced. 5) It would be against principles of conflict sensitivity to collect data on peacebuilding activities in the current context.

Participants were encouraged to engage in reflection to try to get best results from the project to leverage lessons learnt for future programming.

### Implementation

**Facilitator:** Mubarak Haroun, UNDP

The implementation session kicked off with a brief review of the achievements of the project against the planned outcomes. The discussion began with a reiteration of the missing community/beneficiary point of view on the project, which ultimately dictates whether the project was a success or not. Participants highlighted that in some respects, the project exceeded expectations in terms of the impact of the actual activities, however those impacts were achieved with probably more intense engagement with the youth than expected. This was required to ensure that the activities were of an adequate standard, because the capacities of the youth were lower than had been expected in planning and execution of the youth-led activities. Nevertheless, implementing partners highlighted that youth-led dialogues supported in developing trust amongst communities, while also empowering youth and supporting connections between them as a group. They also recognized that the dialogues were critical in supporting youth to come up with appropriate ideas for the micro-project aspect of the project. The microprojects too, which included football tournaments, cultural days, and drama activities, allowed youth to build bridges across communities, strengthen their own relationships between each other, as well as attract a lot of community and media attention at the local level. This attention in turn attracted the interest of key stakeholders, including the Supreme Council for Peace and Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC).

Multiple examples were given by the participants of small successes from particular dialogues or microprojects that changed perspectives and, in some cases, encouraged further adoption of initiatives by the community themselves. For example, one Youth Peace Ambassador from West Darfur, said, 'I have learnt to see and enjoy peace ambassadors from nomadic communities as close friends, not different from me. I come from Geneina community and often feel we do not do as well as we are potentially capable of doing, simply because we do not know how to appreciate our differences and working with each other. Now, I have no doubt I will be more comfortable and confident in working with people from others tribes and communities.'

Another Youth Peace Ambassador from said that after watching a documentary on apology screened by Sustainable Dialogue Centre, "I was challenged to go back to my community and speak with actions rather than rhetoric. I will organize open discussions on the role of youths in peacebuilding which I believe is what we need to be able to bring about true reconciliation in my community."

Another example was given on a peace forum organised by youth in Zalingei, Central Darfur, in response to the armed conflict between the nomads and IDPs which resulted in the burning down of the IDP market. The youth managed to bring together nomads and IDPs

in one yard to celebrate peaceful coexistence through football and volleyball matches. In between they sent messages about peaceful coexistence, and the event was appreciated by the government.

The youth-led nature of the project was highlighted as a key success of the project implementation. This element received particularly good feedback from youth CSOs, especially as there are very few funding streams available to them. This aspect, it could be argued, has led to some catalytic effects. Just prior to the conflict outbreak and continuing to this moment, youth CSOs have, on their own initiative, began a coordination mechanism amongst themselves, meeting weekly to discuss activities, coordinate on approaches and sharing information. They have also discussed joint programming. It was also noted that some of the youth CSOs are now working with some international NGOs to support humanitarian aid delivery to West Darfur and overcome access challenges of less agile organizations, while others continue to implement their own community activities with whatever funds they can gather. These initiatives are explained in more detail in the 'project design' section on page 12.

The youth peace ambassador cohort was also raised as a great initiative of the project because it allowed connections across the age, gender and diversity spectrum and these links remain today. These connections were only strengthened through the Alternatives to Violence training program because it required extensive internal reflections, albeit in a larger group, while also developing their skills for dialogue and communication.

Some of the challenges that were raised by the participants included the outbreak of the conflict, short overall project timeframe, large delays in finalizing project partnership agreements (implementation design, budgeting etc), unrealistic project timelines creating difficulties in supporting continuity of programming and additional administrative burden through changes to partnership agreements, the fact that there wasn't any project launch events for IPs, a lack of overall technical expertise by agencies and IPs, difficulties in getting police escorts which limited monitoring and evaluation capacities, high implementation costs of UN agencies which ultimately limits funds directly to youth CSOs who actually engage with communities.

With regard to adaptive management, participants noted that in some respects, it was crucial to have the support of UN agencies on the ground to assist in the communication and management of relationships with government counterparts, who often tried to influence implementing partners and the youth-CSOs. UN agencies were often required to step in to explain and advocate for a more flexible administrative approach from the government. Frustration was also noted in the inability of UN agencies to adapt to the outbreak of conflict, despite the readily available funds. The PC1 and PC2 restrictions on

activities resulted in a missed opportunity to place youth at the center of a community based and localized humanitarian response.<sup>1</sup>

Other key challenges that were mentioned, but will be fleshed out in the next section, include not enough effort in achieving synergies with other ongoing projects, coordination between agencies and the sequencing of activities, and communication with authorities.

## Recommendations

- The youth-led aspect of the project activities was a critical and successful innovation of the project, along with the creation of formal youth networks. **The youth-led element creates a sense of belonging and ownership amongst youth and presents an opportunity to integrate, expand, or iterate into future youth-related programming.**
- Additional time needs to be included in project design for overall project activities. This is particularly needed to allocate additional time to community engagement, and to allow the intended behaviour change to take root. It was also noted however that there was a big delay on UN agency side in initiating partnerships agreements and planning implementation. Future projects, and/or the PBF should **consider mandating a 3-month inception period with key deliverables such as staff recruitment and onboarding, partnership agreements, workplans and M&E plans to ensure that time is not wasted in allocated implementation times.** This should free up implementation time.
- **Start-up/project launch workshops should be held at the outset of each project to align all of the project stakeholders around a common understanding of the project, required roles, and concrete steps to be taken.**
- While still recognizing the importance of the technical expertise and role of other soft activity implementation, recipient Agencies or the PBF themselves should **consider alternative funding mechanisms that cut out expensive links in the chain** for activities like micro-projects or grants to community-based or civil society organizations. A trickle-down effect is occurring that results in the bulk of funds being utilized by UN agencies, followed by IPs, with only small amounts being passed on to the communities. Opening PBF submissions more widely to (I)NGO's may be a simple solution.
- The adaptive management of the project was hindered by PC1 and PC2 UN system-wide security restrictions, resulting in missed opportunities to further the project goals even amidst a significantly changed environment. **PBF and senior UN agency management need to be better informed of the potential adaptations and demonstrate a greater buy-in to the project to more proactively advocate for the continuation of activities,** if there is a possibility.
- Project coordinators and key immediate managers involved should be wary of using the **'peacebuilding' framing of activities when talking with Senior Managers as it can be reductive and does not account for its intersectoral nature.** In the case of UNHCR where peacebuilding is a subject of contest in

<sup>1</sup> UN Programme Criticality Framework <https://programmecriticality.org/Static/overview.html#assessment-section>

discussions on organizational mandate, key language such as ‘community-based’ and ‘localization’ framings achieved a much greater reception.

## Coordination

**Facilitator:** Conor Grosser, UNHCR

With regard to the internal coordination of the project, participants noted that there was a regular monthly meeting between UNHCR and UNDP to discuss different issues related to implementation and that there was regular daily/weekly engagement with implementing partners. It was recognized that this perhaps should have been extended further to implementing partners and some of the implementing CSOs. Another option to be considered was to include government stakeholders in a regular meeting. It was also noted that there was not enough effort given to achieving synergy with different ongoing projects, including others funded by the PBF. The extent of other ongoing projects only really came to the fore after the UN-PBF high level visit in November 2022. Despite the regular meetings, some participants recognized that there was still substantial difficulties in inter-agency coordination and with implementing partners which sometimes made the sequencing of activities difficult. The feedback from IPs was generally positive, despite a lack of support and guidance at the very start of the project to understand the framing and required activities. This was resolved after a dedicated person was hired for UNHCR.

The coordination of the project with authorities was in some cases very positive and they always expressed their support for the project, but there were also some significant challenges reported. The key interlocutors for the project were the Ministry of Youth and Sports, HAC, the Wali’s Peace Advisor and subsequently the Supreme Council for peace. It was observed that while government representatives were invited to the project kick-off and were given formal explanation of the project, there was often a disconnect and misunderstanding of who would implement the project. IPs were often the subject of requests for incentives, pressure from authorities, and substantial administrative burdens including approvals and registrations. In one case, HAC communicated directly with youth-CSOs notifying them that no activities should be carried out without their expressed approval. These instances required UN agencies to meet with government representatives alongside IPs to further explain the project rationale and the modalities that had been chosen for activities (for example, youth-led initiatives). It appeared that UN agencies had more clout and ability to negotiate for the project outcomes, but generally the issues stemmed from miscommunications or misunderstandings.

Similarly, it was difficult for the project to invest significant time in relationship building because the interlocutors for the project changed throughout. The project initially interacted through the Ministry of Youth and Sports and HAC, but this later changed to the Wali’s Peace Advisor and then the Supreme Council for Peace. It was not always clear what the respective responsibilities of each body/position was, and often there was ostensible overlap.

Despite these shortcomings and challenges, the emergence of the peacebuilding advisor at state level and the supreme council for peace who worked closely with HAC facilitated our work considerably. There was a development of a strategy and a commitment for the inclusion of the youth peace ambassadors in a steering committee. The workshop participants discussed the importance of outcome 3 (Youth engagement in public policy spaces augmented through improved access to state, locality, and community-level powerholders) to the success of the project. It was highlighted as a critical element to complement the more tangible activities and could have had a potentially much greater impact had the project been able to continue.

The project's direct engagement with the communities primarily took place during the project launch and during the selection of the Youth Peace Ambassadors. It was noted by workshop participants that the approach taken was not a traditional one and rather centered the youth as the key interlocutor with the communities. Therefore, much of it was done indirectly by facing the Youth Peace Ambassadors and the youth civil society organizations toward the community, empowering them, and shifting community perceptions of them from perpetrators of violence to key changemakers and leaders. Since youth are often considered as a marginalized group in Sudan, there was a discussion on how the rest of the community received this project approach, particularly the native administration who are generally much older. It was noted by IPs that the youth-led dialogues were critical for bridging these intergenerational divides and communication gaps with government stakeholders, since they provide a structured conversation with both native admin and government stakeholders and the communities themselves, with youth in the middle and as facilitators.

### Recommendations

- **Consideration should be given to joint coordination mechanisms including UN Agencies, IPs, CSOs and government counterparts.** This needs to be weighed up against the practical needs and added benefit, as well as the sensitivities or perceived partiality of including authorities in project implementation decisions.
- **The continuation of structured, regular coordination meetings between UN Agencies and IPs should be continued, as they encourage proactive problem solving as well as ensuring a shared understanding of the project objectives.** Ad-hoc coordination meetings can be considered and extended to civil society groups involved in the project as well. In case that difficulty is observed in achieving this, project teams should consider an output indicator to measure the frequency of coordination meetings that could be included into an M&E framework to ensure accountability.
- **Greater attention to other ongoing or planned projects need to be ensured in future project implementation to generate better area-level synergies.** An updated mapping of projects should be done at the start of the project and periodically throughout. This should be supported by the PBF who may have a broader understanding through their engagement at capital level and can be



bolstered by establishing an area coordination mechanism, or utilizing existing ones.

- Outcome 3, which focused on **working directly with authorities and advocating on behalf of youth to ensure project objectives and the consolidations of outcomes 1 and 2 is a useful initiative of the project and generated fledgling success. Depending on the expressed theory of change of future projects, this should be considered as a soft supporting component** to more tangible activities. Doing so generates a broader impact, while also establishing good relationships with key government stakeholders that facilitates project implementation.
- The 'youth-led' modality of the project was received well by the youth themselves, the community, and by UN Agencies and IPs. Furthermore, it firmly situated youth as key changemakers and as both beneficiaries and implementers of the project. **Recipient organizations should continue to explore avenues and funding for supporting youth-civil society organizations and allowing them to implement activities, this can be done through the lens of localizing humanitarian assistance in the changed conflict environment.**

### Thematic

**Facilitator:** Conor Grosser, UNHCR

#### Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

It was noted in the discussion that the PBF gender marker 2 was a goal for the project. This meant that while not specifically designed for GEWE principles, it was a significant goal of the project. There were some specific activities that were included in the project that targeted only women, including the creation of a women's leadership curriculum (which was developed by women, in collaboration with the female youth peace ambassadors). It was noted that the youth peace ambassador cohort achieved a gender parity and that activities generally had strong female representation. Most activities stressed a 50:50 inclusion, including the facilitation of youth-led dialogues, and specific accommodations were made for events that favoured one gender. For example, to complement football tournaments, volleyball tournaments were also held for girls to take part in. Nomadic women presented a specific challenge for inclusion, as they are often excluded from similar programs because of their lifestyle, and they often face specific cultural barriers, including in feeling free to speak up in public. Furthermore, women in urban areas such as El Geneina and Zalingei are significantly more likely and willing to engage in activities while those from rural areas are much more difficult to engage with. This is sometimes due to clashing livelihood obligations. Nonetheless, the project saw the involvement of two entirely women-led civil society organizations who played a significant role, and workshop participants noted that, when comparing to many other UN/NGO implemented projects, the participation of women was very good, and they appeared significantly engaged at most activities.

It was also noted that while the project is expressing GEWE goals, the project teams themselves do not reflect these principles at all. There was a lack of women included in the

implementation team of the program and there were challenges experienced in the recruitment processes with a lack of qualified female applicants. Another pertinent observation was made, stating that the project needed to also engage with men on issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment, as part of a more holistic approach to achieving the gender marker 2. It was also mentioned that income generating activities could also be considered for future programming as a good way to empower women at a community level.

#### Youth Inclusion

Was not discussed due to time constraints and the fact that the project was directly targeted toward youth and centred around youth issues and perspectives.

#### Conflict Sensitivity

Multiple examples were given at the start of the discussion with instances where the project team had to adapt to significant events or exercise particular caution in implementation to avoid any adverse effects on programming. Some of these examples given were from external influences, but some related directly to the way that the program was implemented, communicated, or perceived. Overall, it can be concluded that incidents and near misses were common across the project timeframe, however the awareness and responses of both UN agencies and implementing partners was generally quite good. Particularly worrying were some examples given that related to potential inclusion of civil society organizations with affiliations to armed groups, which may have had significant detrimental impact on the public image of the project and undermine goals.

It was also noted that it is important to distinguish commitments to conflict sensitivity by agencies and IPs with the commitments of youth themselves, who were primary implementers. In some cases, they took concrete steps toward conflict sensitive approaches, engaging with multiple communities prior to the implementation of some of the activities. In some cases however, their attention to the concepts was perhaps lacking and needed greater attention and education.

Participants in the workshop made a number of observations from which we can draw recommendations, including that sensitization and clear communication with communities was key to either swift resolution of issues, or prevention altogether. Furthermore, the project expressed commitments to age, gender, and diversity in its design, which allowed for a preventative approach to conflict sensitivity. It was noted that problems often arise from misunderstandings or miscommunications, and thus transparency and a strong commitment to communication with communities is a good means to avoid issues. This is particularly true when organizations have developed robust selection criteria. Another key point was made by an implementing partner that expressed the importance of interacting and working with stakeholders who hold legitimate power and influence among the communities in which we work.

Overall, national staff intuition and contextual knowledge was key to upholding a conflict sensitive approach. International staff cannot be relied upon to achieve this. This also means that it is essential that all members of the project team, including UN agencies, implementing partners and in future, implementing youth organizations or youth individuals, have a deep understanding of the concept.

## Recommendations

- **Special provisions for each project activity need to be better considered in order to accommodate the triple burden of women.** While each activity will warrant a unique strategy, some considerations include the rural/urban setting, as well as any cultural nuance across groups. Strategies to mitigate the marginalization of women could include additional sensitization, shifting of activities to different times of the day, provision of childcare, or additional incentives.
- Future programming should **incorporate a GEWE approach that seeks to engage male youth, co-opting them as gender champions and allowing for more informed engagement between youths and subsequently being projected outward toward the broader community.** The PBF secretariat can lend support to project development here, drawing from other ongoing or previous projects such as UNFPA, IOM and WHO's work in West Darfur on militarized masculinity.
- National staff institution and knowledge is critical to upholding principles of conflict sensitivity. Therefore, **project teams need to continue to ensure that all members of the team, and all those who will implement activities (including youth individuals and CSO's) have a deep understanding of the concept.** This should be achieved through trainings at the project outset, with continued technical guidance provided throughout. A communicative and open environment should be encouraged amongst managers to ensure that small issues are raised before they escalate into more significant problems.
- All programs must **continue to demonstrate strong commitments to age, gender, and diversity to ensure that diverse groups are represented in project activities and that there is limited exclusion. This needs to be achieved through thorough, written selection criteria which are communicated proactively to potential beneficiaries and are extensively sensitized** to communities and government stakeholders.
- **Stakeholder analysis should be completed at the outset of the project and on a periodic basis** to ensure that the project works with and through the most appropriate interlocutors who have legitimate power, influence, and interest amongst the communities in which the projects are implemented.
- Transparent and proactive communication builds trust and opens lines of communication with a range of project stakeholders. It also presents the most viable, sustainable, and low-cost approach to risk mitigation and prevention. It also enables the swift resolution of problems. **Project teams should plan and consider how communication with communities and authorities will be rolled out prior to project launch** and can consider dedicated community mobilization staff.

## Project Design

**Facilitator:** Sandor Madar, UNDP

The session began by highlighting the six PBF key principles by which we could evaluate the project design including timeliness, catalytic effects, inclusiveness and national ownership, integrated support, risk tolerance and cohesive UN strategies.

With regard to the timeliness of the project, it was noted that it was developed in the post-coup transitional government phase, alongside ongoing initiatives to support the Juba Peace Agreement in Darfur. The project also accounted for the major role of youth in the 2019 coup and sought to consolidate this experience. With this in mind, the project had a realistic scope and was well designed and targeted toward youth and key issues that affected them, for example with the digital content and hate speech components and the 'youth-led' nature. Questions were raised regarding the location targeting and whether or not it was too much or too little, and whether or not the project design withstood over time and was able to apply in changing contexts. This prompted a discussion on whether or not the project's impact will withstand the current conflict environment and whether the current civic spaces will be able to maintain, given the flourishing youth engagement that was occurring prior. Since many youth CSOs now have the know-how and appetite to work within their communities, there is hope that the impacts will sustain.

The local context in which the project was designed was also elaborated as a way to support community stabilization after multiple waves of intercommunal violence in January and April 2021 which resulted in massive displacement and the establishment of many gathering sites and IDP camps. The design had in mind to support youth in taking a central role in community support initiatives, shifting the way that they are viewed from perpetrators and victims of violence toward key peacemakers. A participant noted that perhaps the project could have considered supporting some basic services such as health, food security, WASH or livelihoods, noting that without these key elements communities cannot be committed to peace.

In terms of catalytic impacts, examples were discussed. These included the creation and continuation of a youth-led CSO coordination network working in both Chad and West Darfur which has drawn interest from more agile (I)NGO partners such as NRC, Solidarity and TGH who are looking to localize humanitarian responses. This will hopefully promote the use of the network for humanitarian response. Another key catalytic aspect of the project is the linkages of the Youth Peace Ambassadors and Youth CSOs with global networks such as the Alternatives to Violence Program and a Ugandan network of Civil Society organizations who have created a learning curriculum to support organizational development amongst emerging CSOs. This discussion section also noted that there were specific activities that pushed other stakeholders, such as government actors and other UN/International organizations into action, which presents a form of catalytic impact. Taking Youth Peace Ambassadors to Khartoum to talk with the Peace Commissioner and to

participate in multiple UN roundtables ensured the Darfuri youth perspective was carried forward. Similarly, the dialogues and microprojects carried out by youth forced local officials to take notice and develop their own strategies, coordination mechanisms, and response, lending further legitimacy to youth.

Another concrete and very important observation was made by a IP, stating that the youth CSOs that we were working with were very flexible, adaptable and overall a lot quicker to see the opportunities that existed after the outbreak of the conflict in providing a combined humanitarian and peacebuilding response to the current conflict. As a project and as organizations we were not quick enough or adaptable enough to support communities and the youth. Peacebuilding activities needed to change shape in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the conflict and not cease altogether, this would have allowed us to better achieve our overall project goals and serve all community stakeholders better.

The discussion progressed toward risk management and tolerance and participants noted that too often risk assessments are conducted only once as a tick box exercise. It is generally done at the beginning of the project and not updated on a regular basis throughout. Furthermore, risks that have been identified need to be communicated across the team to ensure that triggers and signals can be identified at the grassroots level and communicated upward. Participants also raised the question of what risks can be controlled at the project level, and what can be done when bigger influences which are difficult to manage manifest upon the project. Here, it was felt that the wider UN system and bodies such as UNITAMS need to play a greater role in managing and communicating risk to the wider international organization network. It was suggested that part of tolerance to the project risks is about making sure that project design is enduring and relevant through significant potential changes in the operational context. An example was given of the restrictiveness of generic UN risk management approaches, whereby the project missed an opportunity to place youth at the centre of humanitarian response which would have provided real longer-term dividends at the community level for peacebuilding due to the internal security program criticality restrictions.

The section on national ownership was largely brushed over, since it had been discussed in large across the previous sections of the workshop. It was reiterated that the work with authorities and their willingness to create a youth strategy was positive, the community appears to take good ownership of the project, and that it is difficult to gain continuity with local officials due to the high turnover. This presents difficulties for building national/state ownership of programming.

The discussion on the integration of the project across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding borders centered around the difficulties in coordinating the YPI with other ongoing projects. The national rollout of the Durable Solutions Working Group, durable solutions strategy and the new national solutions structures were raised as coinciding with the project implementation. This gave the project a forum in which to coordinate, however it was never clear if it fit well within the durable solutions category since it most likely does

not align with the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) standards on Durable Solutions. Overall, participants felt that the coordination with broader HDP efforts was somewhat lacking on the project.

## Recommendations

- **Risk assessments need to be comprehensively conducted at the outset of the project and updated and reviewed at regular intervals throughout the project.** Outcomes of each review should be communicated and understood at all levels of the project to ensure appropriate attention and early warning for risk materialization.
- The project has pushed other actors to take notice of youth capacities for community-based responses both in peacebuilding and humanitarian action. This is true of government stakeholders, other NGOs and community members. **Organizations should centralise localized approaches in their Darfur strategies as an effective, sustainable, impactful, low-cost, and access mitigating implementation modality.**
- **A liaison function should be considered to ensure that the voices and actions of youth civil society do not fall by the wayside.** This could be in the form of a dedicated staff member in UNHCR or UNDP, or a delegated focal point, ideally someone that can represent in broader humanitarian structures such as at the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), as well as with local government or, in the current case of Darfur, de facto authorities and armed groups.
- Youth CSOs were much quicker to realize the potential opportunities to combine peacebuilding and humanitarian response in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the conflict. All organizations were not quick or adaptable enough to support external project stakeholders who wanted to continue working toward the project goals. **Agencies need to better communicate with and hear communities, while also ensuring their feedback is reaching internal decision makers.**
- The project struggled to identify where it should coordinate with other ongoing initiatives. This limits synergies with other projects and across HDP classifications. **When activities resume or in future, UNHCR and UNDP should advocate at a wider national HCT level to confer a decision-making structure for peacebuilding activities, giving impetus to establishing state or regional level structures.**
- It was noted that the changes in the national peacebuilding coordination structures, moving the advisor from UNDP to the RC's office along with the solutions portfolio was supposed to promote greater accountability and coordination across the HDP nexus. While this never properly materialized, **efforts to better coordinate solutions need to ensure that peacebuilding remains on the table, even in the current volatile environment.** This also needs to include consideration and coordination of peacebuilding not just on the political analysis but also on the local front.
- One of the recommendations from the Darfur program was for a **gender advisor to be included into the project to provide dedicated support and guidance to**

**mainstream GEWE.** This did not materialize and should be reconsidered for any future programming.

### Local vs National Peace Building

**Facilitator:** Kyle Jacques, PBF Secretariat

This portion of the workshop sought to reflect on the different levels of peacebuilding in a conceptual way. The discussion was framed around big 'P' (national level diplomacy, top-down peacebuilding) and little 'P' (grassroots, bottom-up) peacebuilding and the trade-off between them. These concepts can also be understood in an individual and institutional level, with big 'P' representing government or national communities while the little 'P' can represent the individual. This then gives additional credence to the concept that unless there is change within an individual there cannot be change amongst the community, and vice versa. Both ends of the spectrum present risks to each other, and one is hamstrung without the other. The purpose of the discussion was to look at where projects and institutions should focus their attention to best support overall processes, and how projects can seek to bridge the gaps between.

Participants noted that vertical and horizontal linkages of peacebuilding need to be considered in project design, and that the agencies and the PBF need to be cognizant of ensuring these connections are present within approved projects. For the YPI, there was an effort in the design to vertically integrate peacebuilding efforts from community to state level, utilizing youth as connectors and supporting their inclusion into decision making structures. It was noted that the PBF appear to focus more on horizontal peacebuilding – choosing to focus more on the community level – while there was an apparent lack of a coordinated strategy on peacebuilding at the national, top-down level by the whole of the UN, which the PBF could have played a bigger role in setting. If this is in fact the case then the UN put our eggs into one basket, so to speak, and did not appropriately link the big and little 'P'. Similarly, it was noted that if there is too much focus on one end of the peacebuilding spectrum then it risks relinquishing responsibility and attributing blame for failures at the other end.

The discussion progressed toward a discussion of the apparent inability of the wider UN system at the country level to build trust amongst key stakeholders involved in peace processes, which led us to overlook warnings and triggers, as well as underperform on our respective organizational mandates. Furthermore, from the Darfur perspective, the UN approach was inappropriately siloed which sometimes led to competing peacebuilding initiatives. It is partially for this reason too, along with the scarcity of available funds, that has driven an unhealthy culture of competition amongst UN agencies.

Conversely, at the local community level, much of the project's success came from the ability of agencies and implementing partners to build trust and relationships amongst key project stakeholders. This triggered a progression of the discussion toward localization. It was noted that it can be sometimes seen as new jargon that organizations pay lip service

to but are often not adequately committed. Participants discussed the various meanings and opacity in interpretation of the term. For example, localization can be equally used to discuss national, state, or community level responsibilities transfer.

The discussion finally shifted toward identifying some of the key takeaways from the project. One participant noted the extremely embedded nature of land in peacebuilding processes, since Native Administration power is rooted in Hakura, which remains a fundamental continuation of Sudanese historical governance processes. The cost of project implementation was also again raised, with the suggestion that alternative funding mechanisms or options should be made available to organizations at all levels to support more direct transfers of funds. It was also noted that in the case of this project, and others, youth CSOs and national NGOs rarely receive the needed overhead costs for them to ensure organizational continuity. Localization is often considered a low-cost implementation modality, which generally it is, but grants that do not appropriately resource local groups and organizations will not be sustainable and will likely collapse following the end of programs/funding.

The PBF noted that they are continuing to discuss plans to establish a small grant function within the country mechanism that would potentially enlist NNGO's to administer and support the implementation of the grants. It also delineated for the participants its country managed projects with the HQ managed YPI and GPI initiatives.

Finally, at the West and Central Darfur state levels there were some recommendations made that included finding ways to continue supporting youth and youth CSOs who are willing. There was a suggestion that if there is no follow-up from UN agencies in the near term then trust will be lost and it may undermine future similar initiatives. Examples of youth efforts for a ceasefire agreement in Zalingei, and their willingness to continue operating in Chad demonstrate the ongoing efforts that need to be supported. Furthermore, youth CSOs need to be connected in some way to current coordination structures such as the humanitarian cluster system and the area HCT.

### Recommendations

- Building trust at the community level was a key success of the YPI. However, it was also recognized that this takes time which is often not available with current project timeframes. **PBF should consider extending the maximum project lengths for the YPI/GPI to recognize the long-term nature of behavior change programming.**
- UN Agencies and the PBF are uniquely positioned to ensure that there are always vertical linkages in peacebuilding programs. **All institutions should ensure conscious efforts to work toward the convergence of big 'P' and little 'P' peacebuilding are made in programs.**



- Intercommunal division, governance, conflict, and peacebuilding are fundamentally intertwined and embedded in the way that hakura is attributed to ethnic groups, which will continue to limit youth inclusion. **Reconciling traditional and democratic governance mechanisms with intergenerational gaps and their impact on youth warrants further study prior to strategy development for future peacebuilding programs.**
- While localization provides a lower cost implementation alternative for international organizations, too often organizations are not receiving the appropriate overhead costs to achieve organizational continuity. **A fair allocation needs to be given to local implementers that considers staffing and running costs to ensure their sustainability beyond the life of projects and funding mechanisms.**
- Local organizations allow for a 'more with less' approach, but middle-man costs are often not accounted for in this equation. **The PBF and international organizations should consider ways to reduce their own costs in administering small grant mechanisms to NNGO, CSOs and local organizations, while also providing a more forward-leaning risk posture to ensure adequate resources are provided to them.**
- The PBF are considering a small grant function to reach local civil society groups and organizations which would represent a positive concrete step toward localization. **PBF should be cognizant of lessons learnt from the UNDP-led Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF) in establishing the fund, while also ensuring that recipient organizations are provided with the appropriate technical support for both programming and organizational management, as well as simplified administrative procedures.**
- UN Processes were recognized as unfairly burdensome and complicated for international and national organizations, as well as local CSOs. These processes serve to transfer the risks to implementing partners to the point where the comparative advantage of providing funds to expensive UN bodies as opposed to NGOs is put into question. **Managers need to continue advocating for higher thresholds for simplified grant procedures and simplicity in financial management and reporting.**
- Competition between UN Agencies is an unfortunate reality of the current system. **PBF could mitigate this competition by developing and actively communicating a document outlining an institutional strategy with explicit target themes for agencies to cooperate around, while also actively supporting the coordination between agencies.** A unified strategy may serve to provide for a more united front.
- In addition to the above, the **PBF may benefit from a coordinated and explicit national strategy by which it can better plan its main country-managed portfolio with the HQ-managed YPI and GPI initiatives.**
- While recognizing funding restraints, **UN agencies should source internal or direct implementation funds to support limited youth initiatives in West and Central Darfur within the first quarter of 2024.** Communication could also be made with Chadian agencies colleagues to explore potential support and synergy. This will be crucial in consolidating gains made by the project as well as maintaining trust amongst youth participants.

- **Non-financial support should also be considered as part of broader 2024 agency implementation** including continued advocacy with authorities and donors, linking youth CSOs with coordination structures, and organizational support with existing fixed-term staff.

### Limitations

- This workshop, while replacing the endline and final evaluation, does not take into account any perspectives from the communities in which the project was implemented, nor does it take into account any of the perspectives of individual beneficiaries. This is a large flaw in the evaluation process, and was recognized by the team. Nonetheless, the exercise was an important internal look at how the project was implemented.
- Similarly, much of the project implementation team, and almost all of the participants in the workshop were male, therefore, there is a significantly skewed perspective on the evaluation which inevitably will not do justice to the sensitivities of gender.
- The project was interrupted by the outbreak of the nationwide conflict on April 15, therefore, it was not completed in its entirety. Therefore, this project review is limited by what could be achieved prior to the conflict and does not reflect the full impact of the project design/activities.

### Annex 1

#### Evaluation Questions (Proposed)

##### Implementation Focus

Reflecting together on the key achievements/impact of the programme, main implementation challenges and adaptive management. This can include reflections on: - key challenges (both internal and external) during the implementation, adaptive management practices, risk mitigation, contextual shifts and what might have been done differently.

- What were some of the main challenges faced by UN Agencies, implementing partners, community stakeholders, youth themselves?
- What was done, or should have been done, to mitigate risk or adapt to changes in the operational environment? Are there particular things that worked well, what and for whom?
- Were the implementation modalities selected in the program design the most relevant and operationally feasible modalities? Should alternative implementation modalities be considered in the future? (*Implementation modalities meaning anything from the type of activities to the way they were implemented, such as through IPs or direct*)

- Were the achievements aligned with the expectations of the donor and the communities in which they were implemented?
- Were most of the implementation challenges exogenous (external) or endogenous (internal)? What was the ratio?
- To what extent was the physical presence of UN agencies and implementing partners on the ground key to achieving objectives, and would some or all elements of similar programming be feasible to support with remote management?

### **Coordination**

Reflecting on the coordination structures in place for the programme. This could include discussions on how effective they were and how could they be strengthened. The section should also include a discussion on community engagement and coordination, how can we promote synergies and better communicate. Finally, reference should also be made to coordination with authorities, which was a designated outcome of the project. What worked well and what could be improved?

- What were the main mechanisms by which communication/interactions for coordination of the project took place, was this successful or are there areas for improvement?
- How well did implementing partners understand the overarching project rationale and theory of change?
- How did agencies and IPs adapt when coordinating with communities and government stakeholders?
- How frequently were there interactions with government counterparts and communities and what was their understanding of the project and its aims?
- Was Outcome 3 successful and could something similar be integrated into future programmes?
- Was the CwC approach successful and how could it be improved?
- Was their complementarity and coordination with other ongoing area programs?

### **Thematics**

Reflect on the gender and youth focused elements of the program, along with how well it subscribed to principles of conflict sensitivity. Discuss key achievements with regard to GEWE and youth empowerment, challenges, and improvements to be made. Also consider how well conflict sensitivity was applied and give examples, both positive and negative.

- How well did the project adhere to its GEWE commitments? In design, implementation, and communication? Did we meet the Gender Marker 2 target?
- What were some of the challenges and improvements that could be made?

- What could have improved the overall GEWE commitments and their implementation?
- The project directly addressed youth issues, did it meet expectations or are there changes and improvements that could be made?
- Did the project adhere to planned conflict sensitivity principles? How were these principles implemented/overseen? Were changes made?

## **Design**

Reflecting together on the project design process, what went well and what could have been done better. This can include reflections on: consultations with UN agencies, communities, government and implementing partners; conducting conflict and risk analysis; formulating theory of change, key outcomes, and outputs; targeting beneficiaries as well as localities and villages; gender and youth considerations; budgeting. It should also seek to provide recommendations to improve future PBF project proposals.

- Was the conflict analysis that informed the project accurate, well utilized and updated as needed?
- Was the conflict analysis tailored around youth issues?
- Was the programme realistic in its targets, scope, timelines, and activities?
- Did the theory of change materialize? Were there positive or negative indicators?
- What elements of the project would you change? What would be kept?
- What was the potential for catalytic effects and program sustainability?
- Was the targeting (location and beneficiaries) successful?
- Was the budgeting realistic?

## **Peacebuilding: Local vs. National. Tensions and Trade-offs**

This section, while not directly related to the project, seeks to discuss the trade-off between big “P” and little “p” peacebuilding. The project was undermined by nationwide outbreak of conflict, but what can we take away from this. Is there something that can be done at community level, or how should be better manage the inherent trade-offs at different levels.

- Following the outbreak of the conflict, were there indications of project successes/impacts?
- Is there more that could have been done on a programmatic level to shield local peacebuilding efforts from wider influences?
- What takeaways can we glean from the outbreak of the conflict and the current situation in West and Central Darfur (with a programmatic lens)?
- What are the project risk management and business continuity takeaways from the current situation?

## Annex 2

# Baseline Recommendations

*These recommendations were developed following a similar exercise, the Darfur Programme Lessons Learnt Workshop, held in El Fasher in June, 2022. The workshop aim was to review all aspects of the project cycle management and come up with best practices and lessons learnt. This workshop was held in-person over two days. These recommendations provide somewhat of a baseline for us to compare the progress made over the years.*

### Project Design

- Project design should be more inclusive by consulting all stakeholders, especially community representatives, at different stages of the process (e.g. conflict analysis, theory of change, results framework) and verify the final product with them before submission.
- Conflict analysis should not be led by external consultants, but by the teams in the field, with dedicated support from Khartoum colleagues. More efforts should also be made to conduct analysis at the locality and community level to capture important nuances.
- Projects should be more realistic when it comes to scale, thematic areas, timelines, and budgets. Projects should not try to address too many issues and include too many UN agencies; the focus should be on quality over quantity.
- The project design team should have a national gender expert or advisor to ensure that gender is included into all parts of the project design in a meaningful way, including the analysis, Theory of Change, risk mitigation strategy, project approach, results framework, and budget.
- Project design should be more adaptive to the context and update the conflict analysis, theory of Change, risk mitigation strategy and result framework following major events or changes in the context.

### Conflict Sensitivity

- End “business as usual” attitude when it comes to Peacebuilding implementation.
- Build synergies beyond the silos by improving coordination, establishing a shared understanding and clearer division of labor and responsibilities.

- Adapt theory of conflict sensitivity into practice through all stages of project / programme design (consultations, selection of localities, villages, activities), implementation and daily operations.
- Improve the inclusion and participation of community stakeholders (women, youth and nomads, etc...) in consultations and project implementation.
- Improve the Government's capacities and gauge their interest / ownership to ensure sustainability of interventions.
- Enhance adaptive management practice to enable better and quicker response to unexpected events that can jeopardize the project implementation.
- Improve project visibility to foster accountability and transparency vis-a-vis the communities and the government.
- Advocate for the strengthening of UNITAMS' mediation efforts and for field presence in hotspot areas.

### **Implementation**

*There were no specific recommendations under this section, however some good practice was identified with regard to risk mitigation and contingency planning.*

- Partnering up with local implementing partners with strong presence and networks at locality level to ensure maximum access
- Bringing participants of activities to "safe" or "neutral" areas to be able to continue implementation.
- Ensuring diversity when recruiting implementing partner staff to reflect the communities and ensure access and networks.
- Conducting capacity building of all stakeholders at the beginning of project implementation on conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding, gender, youth, monitoring and reporting
- Ensuring that each UN agency recruits dedicated staff for the PBF project, especially for project management and coordination, peacebuilding, and gender expertise, and monitoring and reporting.
- Establishing early warning structures through community-based committees, such as CRCs, CBRMs and CBPNs.

- Holding regular state- and locality- level coordination meetings with all important stakeholders and clear objectives and action points
- Jointly updating the conflict analysis on a regular basis and adjust programming according to the changing context
- Deploying staff at locality level

### **Coordination**

- Establishment of a cooperation mechanism with the implementing partners.
- Strengthening the capacities of the implementing partners in terms of coordination, monitoring and evaluation, implementation and communication on the project.
- UN Agencies to coordinate closer, be more responsive and show more willingness to cooperate.
- UN Agencies to show more honesty and humbleness to identify shortcomings, gaps and mistakes and do the necessary course corrections.
- UN Agencies to expedite project inception processes such as recruitment, contracting IPs, deliver procurement processes and to set up coordination mechanisms for which time is extremely tight under PBF.
- Support the establishment of Peacebuilding Advisor functions embedded in the Wali's office.
- The RCO to issue an overarching, UN-wide guidance and strategy on the engagement with government.
- Establish ToRs to govern all 3 levels of coordination mechanisms.
- There is a need for strengthened and more inclusive coordination and engagement with the community members in a joint manner by all UN Agencies and implementing partners following a unified methodology.
- Pay attention to accountability and transparency vis-a-vis the direct beneficiaries of the projects through frequent engagement in order to create inclusion and ownership over the project.
- Pay attention to the identification of the right community leaders to work with and also employ staff from the target communities to avoid being context blind.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Baselines, result frameworks and monitoring tools should be developed at the early stages of the project implementation in a conflict sensitive and context responsive manner.
- Outcome and output indicators need to be developed early, with the contribution of all agencies and they should be adopted by all RUNOs to guide interventions in a harmonized way. These indicators should also be less abstract and more pragmatic.
- Use a mixture of different monitoring methods due to the limitations of each approach.
- Identify a clear and steady government focal point who can help ensure security and access to the field locations continuously.
- Invest more efforts to make the communities understand what Peacebuilding is and in what ways the different activities contribute to the broader agenda which is Peacebuilding and strengthening of social cohesion.
- Adjust and tailor the language of communication materials for the government and the communities by using a plain and simple language without UN jargons and theoretical concepts.
- Agencies should be more careful of the visibility of the project components in the field (properly designed and installed signs and banners) so that the communities could make the link between the interventions.
- Develop joint communication materials and showcase the intervention as a one UN team.
- Encourage informal interactions between the Agencies to strengthen their cooperation, information sharing and joint work.
- Observe if the DCPSF inherited MnE frameworks are feasible to adopt for PBF as well.
- PBF is recommended to apply a different reporting template and timeframe for projects that are implemented by a larger than normal consortium.
- PBF is recommended to use technology and a common database which all agencies can access in order to harmonize and document the necessary data for reporting and tracking of output and outcome level achievements over time.



- PBF Secretariat in Sudan is requested to organize and provide more capacity-building to partners and local actors on MnE and impact identification and evaluation.

### **Gender and Youth Responsiveness**

- Women and young people from different backgrounds should be better consulted from the design of the project onwards, to ensure that their actual experiences, needs and opportunities are reflected and addressed during implementation.
- The project teams should develop a clear definition of empowerment and participation at the beginning of the project to inform the interventions and measurement of progress.
- The UN agencies should have a long-term approach to promote gender norm change, including sensitization and capacity building, before commencement of activities.
- There should be more GEWE activities targeting men, including young men as champions for gender equality (“He for She”). Especially community influencers, such as imams and traditional leaders should be more actively engaged.
- Meetings and activities should consider women and youth’s time schedules (domestic and livelihood burdens) to allow them to participate.
- The project should put more emphasis on intergenerational dialogue and building trust between elders and young people.
- The project team should adopt or develop specific monitoring tools to measure progress on gender equality, and women and youth empowerment, beyond the number of beneficiaries.

### **Sustainability**

- Mapping of existing structures and initiatives.
- Map and utilize community capacities.
- Ensure longer inception periods.
- Government should be engaged and committed and also mobilize government resources and funds even during the project implementation to incentivize them to act and create ownership.

- Capacity building should go hand in hand with the IGA component (e.g. providing means of transportation - maintenance and operation needs to be assured which can be done through giving a commercial function to the equipment for the common good).
- Avoid constructions because it is a waste of resources due to the lack of government capacity and willingness to take ownership - further supported by a long list of failed UNAMID construction projects.
- Make the UN interventions sustainable as well, don't simply preach sustainability. The system is overly dependent on donor funding.
- Encourage UN wide joint planning and discussion on peacebuilding and development. A masterplan and a dedicated coordination mechanism is needed.
- Establish HDP nexus coordination at the state level to ensure catalytic nature of our work at the field level and build broader synergies.