

A young girl in a blue school uniform is walking across a vast, cracked, and dry landscape. The ground is parched and fissured, indicating severe drought. In the background, there are sparse, leafless trees and a few small structures under a clear sky.

# Conflict Prevention in South and West Kordofan, Sudan

For decades, communities living in South and West Kordofan have been caught up in an increasingly complex web of violence. Most recently this has been between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), as well as between communities and groups that are allied to one or more parties to the conflict. Disputes over borders and resources such as water, land and oil, as well as political violence linked to South Sudan's independence and the conflict in Darfur have exacerbated an already volatile context, resulting in hostility and multiple outbreaks of violence.

This learning summary highlights the main successes, challenges and lessons learnt from an ongoing project delivered by Peace Direct and the Collaborative for Peace Sudan (CfPS) in South and West Kordofan. The project aims to strengthen local conflict prevention capacity by creating and supporting local Peace Committees (PCs) across the region. 11 Peace Committees were established and supported between 2011 and 2016 to address short term and longer term drivers of conflict, as well as to conduct 'rapid response' mediation activities when violence flared. The following is based on the findings from an independent evaluation conducted in March 2016.



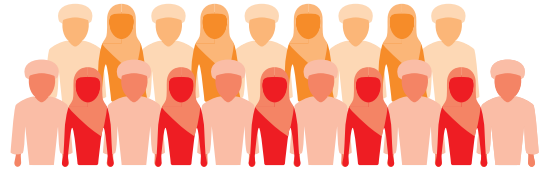
## Evaluation of Efficiency and Effectiveness

11 cost-effective, independent and locally-led PCs were established and supported by CfPS in South and West Kordofan, showing potential for expansion and replication into other communities and regions.

- **Cost Effective:** PCs were found to be very cost-effective, with 32 interventions funded by the establishment of a 'Rapid Response Fund' (RRF) by CfPS and Peace Direct, with non-RRF funded interventions relying on and encouraging the culture of voluntarism and community solidarity.
- **Sustainable:** In both RRF funded and non-RRF funded interventions, PCs functioned independently from CfPS, highlighting their sustainability and potential for long term viability.
- **Participatory:** All beneficiaries, local authorities, and local and international peacebuilders interviewed saw PCs as inclusive, participatory and accommodating of multiple stakeholder perspectives. Contrary to tradition and local structures in the region, many PCs also had high female participation, with for example 45% of members in Lagawa being female.
- **Accountable:** In interviews, CfPS' and PC members were seen as accountable, transparent, trustworthy and credible actors holding a high degree of social legitimacy compared to other NGOs working with the same sectors. Local acceptance of the project



32 rapid response activities to tackle the threat of violent conflict successfully implemented



45% female participation in Lagawa Peace Committee

is evident from the growing number of new members joining PCs on a voluntary basis and the number of communities requesting the support of PCs in mediating in local conflicts.

## Challenges

- **Lack of long term plans:** There was little evidence that the project supported the Peace Committees to develop long term Peace Action Plans. This is attributed in part to the short term funding that Peace Direct was able to secure.
- **Inconsistent communication:** The evaluation pointed out shortcomings in the communication between CfPS and PCs, particularly with regards to giving feedback on applications for funding from the Rapid Response Fund, which influenced the PCs effectiveness in intervening in urgent cases.
- **Coordination:** The lack of coordination among local and international actors limited CfPS' ability to coordinate with relevant stakeholders. This seemed to be a general issue in the region, although there was also a high degree of awareness among stakeholders about the importance of collaboration and a shared strategy.
- **Transportation:** The lack of transportation was identified as the most significant factor directly limiting the effectiveness of PCs in intervening in urgent conflicts to prevent escalation.
- **Dependency:** Despite high voluntary participation the project was reliant on external support and PCs struggled to get

volunteers because many local and international NGOs pay people for doing similar work.

- **Presence:** Most PCs did not have an office, which limited their visibility and accessibility. This also meant that they did not qualify for formal registration with the Humanitarian Aid Commission, which the commission expressed dissatisfaction over.
- **Addressing root causes:** The evaluation highlighted the need for the project to tackle the root causes of some conflicts, such as poverty and a lack of resources and livelihood opportunities. Most of the recurring conflicts reviewed in the report, for example, happened during the dry season due to competition over scarcity of water, grazing and farming land.

## Impact

- **Durable peace:** The majority of interventions resulted in durable local peace with no subsequent incidents connected directly to the resolved conflicts. Importantly, a number of these conflicts were, prior to intervention, at high risk of triggering mass atrocities and/or escalating into wider inter-communal violence. For example, of the eleven conflicts which were successfully resolved by the Muglad peace committee between 2011 and 2016, three had led to the deaths of 492 people before the intervention of the peace committees.

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From the nine conflicts intervened in from 2011-2016 by the Peace Committee in Lagawa, none have restarted

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- **Community support:** The project received a high degree of broad community support, including requests for PC interventions from other communities. The committees were able to rely in part on voluntarism, all of which is an indication of positive community perception and participation in local peace and stability efforts.
- **Cross border relations:** There are also indications that the project has strengthened cross-border



### Indications of strengthened cross-border relations with groups in South Sudan

relations with groups in South Sudan, offering opportunities for sustainable conflict prevention efforts that could be replicated elsewhere. Examples of this include the establishment of local cross-border markets in the border towns of Sag el Na'am and Abyei where the Misseriya and Dinka Ngok now exchange and trade with each following communal collaborations across the Sudan-South Sudan border.

- **Intercommunal relations:** The evaluation found a positive change in some of the structures creating conflicts, such as attitudes, historic antagonisms between groups, the normalisation of violence, and competition over resources.
- **Capacity building:** According to participants, the training in conflict resolution skills and general support provided by CfPS has increased the capacity and self-confidence of the PCs to solve conflicts in their areas.
- **Scalability and replicability:** The PC model has good potential to scale up because PCs are largely autonomous and operate without much support from CfPS. The model stands out because of its reliance on voluntary efforts. Unfortunately, bad practice by other international agencies, for example paying per diems, can undermine voluntary efforts, making it challenging to scale up these models.

“ All direct beneficiaries, local authorities and local peace builders, interviewed during the field work, agreed that the Peace Committee initiatives in reconciliation, mediation, and conflict resolution are the most cost effective and appropriate at grassroots level in the studied areas. ”

Excerpt from evaluation

## Reflections from Peace Direct and CfPS

### CfPS

The evaluation shows that the approach of CfPS is highly effective and that there is a need for working directly with communities to build peace. It also highlights the need to work more closely with local authorities to create impact on a national level. A key concern according to CfPS is the lack of collaboration between local NGOs. Moving forward, the organisation believes that they would need to implement rapid response activities in collaboration with other stakeholders in the area in order to achieve wider impact.

### Peace Direct

These findings show that although there are communication issues between CfPS and the PCs, the model is appropriate, valued by communities and highly effective at resolving outbreaks of violent conflict. It demonstrates that peacebuilding and conflict prevention can be achieved through highly cost effective means in a 'hot' conflict where the international community has very limited reach.

“ There are sizeable numbers of conflicts which were prevented from escalating through local resolution mechanisms initiated by peace committees. ”  
Excerpt from evaluation

## Recommendations

The following are recommendations taken directly from the evaluation. However, many are relevant for any organisation wishing to support local peace structures in any conflict context.

- Improve the visibility and accessibility of Peace Committees, by establishing small offices in key locations.
- Improve the effectiveness of Peace Committees to carry out timely interventions in urgent conflicts, by providing advance funding for transportation and communication.
- Improve communication between Peace Committees and the head office of the support NGO, by agreeing turnaround times for all communication and regular check in calls with all PCs.
- Support the expansion of the Peace Committee network by establishing autonomous intercommunal Peace Committees at village level for wider reach.
- To tackle resource based causes of conflict, consider partnering with local community development organisations who can support access to water and grazing rights projects.



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