

'Shaking hands, not clenched fists'*: Peace building work in Darfur (*African proverb)



Above: A peace and reconciliation meeting in progress at Um Dukhun locality between the Misseriya, Salamat and other tribes.

Context

Um Dukhun locality in Central Darfur, Sudan shares international borders with Chad and Central African Republic (C.A.R.) and internally with the states of South and West Darfur. Its population was estimated in April 2010 to be at 75,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs), 2,000 refugees and a host community of 63,000¹ (total population 140,000). 35 tribes are now present in the area, including a number of nomadic populations. Um Dukhun locality, in Central Darfur, largely escaped the open conflict that characterised the rest of the region up to 2005. However over recent years there have been reports of increasing inter-tribal clashes and heavy fighting, forcing many to flee once again or move into towns from the rural areas. In April 2013, fighting broke out between the tribes of the Salamat and the Misseriya², over resources and land rights. Despite the signing of several reconciliation agreements, incidents of conflict between these two groups continued on and off throughout 2013, with the area fluctuating in regard to access for humanitarian aid agencies, according to security.

Impact of the fighting

The impact of the fighting on the locality of Um Dukhun and its surrounding villages has been severe. Over 50³ people were killed in one incident in November 2013 and many more injured. The overall estimate is that 25,000⁴ people in total have been internally displaced due to this fighting between the two tribes since April 2013, and in addition, many others (mainly Salamat) have fled to Chad (36,200, according to United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees⁵). The UN recorded in September 2013 that 15,000⁶ people, particularly women and children, had fled their homes to seek shelter in Um Dukhun Town itself. The new displacement, both out of the area and into the main town, has therefore brought the population in Um Dukhun town to 109,632⁷. For the IDP camps, international non-government organisations (INGOs), and host populations who now care for these people, this in turn means overstretched resources.

The conflict has meant that many places in Central Darfur that had long been considered successful return areas, where the government, donors and humanitarian agencies had worked to restore water, sanitation, hygiene, education, health and livelihoods, have now taken steps backwards, becoming almost deserted due to fighting. For example three villages Tearfund has worked in have been completely deserted, with a fourth village having lost 60% of its population due to displacement.

Peace building work in Darfur

The economic impact of the conflict is substantial. Livelihoods have been destroyed and the social fabric of communities broken, with many schools around the localities closed down. Um Dukhun had been known as the breadbasket of Central Darfur but the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned that next year there could be a serious food security problem in the area, as less land has been cultivated due to the ongoing fighting. In addition, the weather forecast issued by the State Ministry of Agriculture has indicated that Central Darfur is expected to receive below average rainfall this year, which will affect crop yields. Trade and commerce have been damaged following the closure of roads by militia and the state government has lost significant revenue from the closure of the international border with Chad and CAR. There is also a significant loss from cancelled contracts etc due to the insecurity e.g. the construction of mobile telephony repeater stations by Sudani telecoms.

Tearfund peace-building work in Um Dukhun



Tearfund began working in Um Dukhun in 2011, with projects in Abujaradil, Kabar and Selayleh villages in the rural locations of the locality. Following the outbreak of recent conflict in early 2013 the organisation had to suspend some project activities. However peace-building activities continued as far as was possible, with Tearfund seeking all available opportunities to bring the communities together and starting the process of dialogue between the warring tribes and other tribes in Um Dukhun. Beneficiary priorities changed drastically as they became newly displaced outside of Tearfund sites. During this period Tearfund trained up young people, in order to provide them with constructive outlets for their time and energy, as well as women, because of their

Above: Different community groups during a dialogue session at an IDP camp
 central role in the family and in community communication. In July 2013, due to ongoing displacement of the target population and subsequent settlement of many of them in Um Dukhun Town and surrounding villages, Tearfund reactivated its work in full.

The aim of Tearfund's peace-building work is to support activities and processes that will enable diverse communities to come together through common goals and improve peaceful co-existence, trust and confidence towards early recovery. The reactivated work began in mid-2013 with the conducting of a rapid assessment to verify the situation on the ground especially with regards to the immediate needs of the displaced community. Tearfund then reactivated three peace-building within the IDP camps and surrounding villages, utilising original members and reaching out to new members of the host areas (IDP camps and villages). This initiative helped to re-established communication channels between communities, and after Tearfund signed Memorandums of Understanding with the committees, they charted out a joint action plan to take into account priority needs outlined in the assessment. Their non-partisan approach focused on:

- Providing hope to the non-fighting communities with emergency supplies; with a total of 404 IDP households receiving non-food items during the second half of 2013 (e.g jerry cans, blankets, kitchen sets, plastic sheets and mats).
- Building trust amongst the newly displaced people; through activities such as starting up social centres, income generating activities for multi ethnic groups and cultural open days to celebrate peace (on occasions such as the Islamic Eid al Adha Holiday).
- Supporting the peace and reconciliation process through awareness raising in the camps and surrounding areas and facilitating reconciliation committees to travel to oversee the demobilisation of militias and thus re-opening of major trade routes.
- Reviewing issues that connect and divide the local residents; through the establishment of activity centres and meeting places where people could meet to discuss issues affecting their communities.
- Engaging youth in activities of mutual interest so their use of time is both constructive and peaceful e.g. sports such as football tournaments, activities in social centres with provision of skills and ways to generate income etc.

- Promoting dialogue amongst all and with the groups engaging in violence; for example they established a public dialogue that climaxed in a peace conference in September 2013 to bring all stakeholders together to negotiate a road map for peace and reconciliation.
- Engaging the Sudanese administration to be pro-active in trying to solve the main underlying problems; as a result of Tearfund engagement through the peace-building committees, the government secured all the routes to and out of Um Dukhun and by mid October 2013, started providing security escorts to ensure a smooth flow of people and commerce.
- Facilitating communication and movement for the peace emissaries from the committees; including organising cross visits between village peace-building committees, in order to share experiences with each other.
- Supporting local national non-government organisation (NNGO) Al Fajir to establish an outreach programme towards the resident community, made up of active community volunteers from different tribes in the locality; this included providing logistic support for Al Fajir and local authorities to spread goodwill messages, and facilitation of activities such as traditional Hakama singers who produced and sang peace songs.

Impact

Tearfund worked closely and inclusively with a number of stakeholders and key actors, including; community members (men, women and youth), community leaders, local authorities (Locality commissioner, Humanitarian Aid Commissioner), religious leaders (Imams and Sheikhs) and traditional singers and dancers (Hakama). As a result of this work many of the people in Um Dukhun have been able to kick-start their lives once more and are hopeful of returning to their villages once the environment is suitable to do so. It is expected that when peace finally prevails, approximately 70% of the newly displaced will go back to their villages⁸.

Some notable successes to date have included:

- At present out of the 35 tribes resident in Um Dukhun locality, 33 are largely at peace with each other. Tearfund-supported peace-building committees, made up of people from the internally displaced communities, have been acknowledged for their critical role in facilitating dialogue between combatants. Given their knowledge of the affected communities and areas, they are currently actively involved in supporting the ongoing peace and reconciliation process which is being facilitated through the Government of Sudan in Um Dukhun Town. This is in addition to organising various tribes to participate in this process.
- Three peace-building committees have been actively engaged in peace-building initiatives to pacify the newly displaced, longer term IDP's and host communities. These committees, comprising of 55 members (men and women), were the main driving force in the peace and reconciliation process that was initiated by the July 2013 'peace agreement' between the Misseriya and Salamat communities.
- In September 2013, these peace-building committees (in collaboration with the government-appointed Peace and Reconciliation Team) facilitated a peace dialogue conference in Um Dukhun Town between the adversaries. The successful outcome of the conference brought about initial peace and harmony in the locality including amongst the newly displaced communities settled in Um Dukhun Town and surrounding villages. Most of the resolutions agreed upon in the dialogue conference, such as reopening of the trade routes to Geneina, Zalingei, Nyala, CAR and Chad, have been acted upon. At the end of the conference, the Government of Sudan and the peace building committee sent a letter of acknowledgement to Tearfund for facilitating the peace process. A rapid survey carried out in September indicated 90% of community members were satisfied with the reconciliation mechanisms. However sadly after this there were further breaches of the peace agreement and so the committees continue their work in this area.
- As a result of DCPSF funding, Tearfund was able to sponsor and facilitate seven days of consultative meetings with 200 members of peace-building committees, the government appointed Peace and reconciliation committee, community and religious leaders from Salamat and Misseriya tribes and the Um Dukhun Tribal Council, during the festive and holy month of Ramadhan.
- Between the month of August and September, members of the Um Dukhun Women Union and the Youth Committee (men) were deployed as emissaries to talk to Salamat and Misseriya in Chad/Sudan and contributed to the staging of the dialogue conference in mid September 2013 through outreach and the organising of inter tribal meetings, working alongside the government appointed committee.
- Income-generating activities (IGA) have started up in seven groups from different tribes, including training and assistance to start petty trades and businesses like handicraft, butchers, bakeries, sheep trade and flour grinding. A market shed was established in one of the villages for the sale of these commodities. The total number of women undertaking IGA has reached 73 by October 2013.
- Currently 63 individuals, drawn from different tribes and sub-tribes, are interacting with each other commercially. This number notably doubled during the last quarter of 2013.
- Four community centers have been collaboratively built, for communities to have common space to meet in, with Tearfund mobilising the community to provide land for construction and developing the capacity of the community members through the youth to produce soil stabilised blocks (SSBs). The community also provided the casual labour and participated in latrine construction. Tearfund provided materials for

construction and paid for the skilled labour needed for the centre construction.



- Eight teams have engaged in football tournaments over the past two years, totalling 108 men. 35 of these young men were also trained in refereeing skills. An income-generating activity which has proved popular is holding televisions/film shows, and charging entry fees. Seven TV sets with satellite dishes have been installed in the camps and host community for the monthly benefit of social interaction of more than 1800 men, women and young people.
- Approximately 1,500 people attended the two cultural open days in Um Dukhun and Al Gantur in October 2013 (600 men and 900 women).
- 477 community members have received training on conflict resolution (52 women and 425 men), empowering them with knowledge and skills to engage with the communities during conflict resolution.

Challenges and lessons learnt

The peace building work in Um Dukhun and the surrounding areas has not been without its challenges, predominantly the prevailing but sporadic conflict which has meant an uncertainty in implementation, with activities being suspended, delayed, interrupted or incurring setbacks. An on-going lack of access to deep field locations, due to factors such as rains, flooding or insecurity means peace dialogues and discussions often haven't taken place. Due to displacement and other factors the programme has seen a loss of personnel, up to 11 staff, and it has not been possible due to insecurity/uncertainty to hire new staff. Moreover communication with tribal representatives and bringing them to a round table conference has been a challenge due to continuous breaches of the peace agreement that was signed in July 2013 by the Misseriya and Salamat militias within and outside Um Dukhun locality, thereby resulting in an increase in mistrust between the two sides. Tearfund has worked with local NNGO Al Fajir to ensure long term sustainability but they, like many other local organisations in the area, have substantial capacity building needs in order implement such work on their own in the future.

The project's main lessons learnt have been:

- The voiceless in the community, often the most vulnerable groups such as women and youth groups, can be powerful weapons in mediation. This is because they come from groups that are the worst hit in times of conflict and can bring an accurate picture of the impact and intensity of the situation, and resulting needs on the ground that should be addressed by bringing peace.
- No success in fostering peace and harmony can be realised without in depth understanding of local community dynamics, and that this process of conflict mapping is one that should be guided by communities rather than project staff. This should be done continuously, not only before but during the project.
- Networking is critical for success in peace building. Tearfund found that the existence of a peace building network, which survived the conflict, was then crucial for rebuilding and facilitating work for the newly displaced as well as a useful entry point for re-assessing the context and re-initiating activities in communities.

References

(1) April 2010 figures, taken from last election census.

(2) The main two tribes involved were the Salamat and the Misseriya but there were also a few individuals from other tribes involved on the side of the Misseriya, because they empathised with them. However their tribes in general were not a part of this conflict.

(3-5) OCHA Sudan Humanitarian bulletin issue 46 (11-17 November 2013)

(6) OCHA Um Dukhun Mission Report (21 – 25 September 2013)

(7) Humanitarian Aid Commission situation report for October 2013

(8) Tearfund estimate based on discussions with communities

For additional information, please contact:

Munene Kibera, Tearfund Sudan Programme: zalingei-ac@tearfund.org

TEARFUND