

# Reducing land conflict and improving service delivery

An impact evaluation of a project in East Darfur, Sudan supported by the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund



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## Highlights

- The project reduced the number of land conflicts and increased residents' perceptions of the effectiveness of local peace committees (90 percent confidence).
- Reductions in the number of land conflict were largest among households from a minority tribe and female-headed households.
- The project also increased school enrollment, meaning that a child in an implementation village was 11 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in formal schooling (95 percent confidence).
- The project increased residents' satisfaction with services, particularly administrative and sanitation services (95 percent confidence).
- Exploratory results suggest that the project may have increased women's perceptions of their voice in local decision-making.
- The impact evaluation was possible because of the robust large-scale baseline household survey implemented at the outset of the project.

# Background

Achieving the international community's goals for peace and poverty reduction requires addressing the needs of people in the world's most fragile contexts. Darfur, Sudan, represents an extremely fragile region that has witnessed high levels of violent conflict for more than two decades. In 2020, as Sudan's political space opened up after the fall of Omar al-Bashir's regime, the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) invested over \$20 million in projects aimed at addressing local conflict drivers in Darfur. The PBF-supported projects aimed to enhance good governance, provide durable solutions for the return of displaced people, and avoid further escalation of inter-communal disputes into violent conflict. This brief presents findings from a rigorous impact evaluation of this PBF-supported intervention in Darfur.

Darfur shares many challenges with other parts of the Sahel where resources are scarce and governance is weak, and it also has seen high levels of violence for two decades. Many of the peacebuilding needs in Darfur have origins in conflicts that broke out in 2003. That year, rebel groups opposed to Bashir's rule – the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) – attacked government installations in Darfur. Paramilitary groups allied with and supported by Bashir – referred to as the Janjaweed – retaliated with violence, leading to huge death tolls.<sup>1</sup> The conflict cooled and conflict deaths declined after peace agreements were signed in 2006 and 2007 and the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) deployed peacekeeping troops to the region, where their mandate would last until 2020.<sup>2</sup> Deaths spiked again in 2013, with battles resulting both from armed groups challenging the state and from armed groups fighting each other. Although the number deaths and conflict events declined after 2016, the wounds from years of war remained raw and many of the underlying disputes about land and power remained unresolved.<sup>3</sup>



## Impact evaluation methodology

This impact evaluation is based on a rigorous quasi-experimental research design utilizing fine-grained household survey data collected in communities where PBF-supported projects were implemented (treatment areas) and in those where they were not (control areas). Although PBF-supported projects were implemented across all five states of Darfur, our impact evaluation focuses only on East Darfur. Both baseline and endline data were collected by enumerators from IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix team. Our endline data, collected in February and March 2023, includes surveys from 3,512 individuals from 2,376 households.



# Intervention

Starting in early 2020, the PBF allocated nearly \$20 million to projects across the five states of Darfur. For methodological reasons, this impact evaluation focuses on the East Darfur Assalaya-Sheiria-Yassin Triangle of Peace and Coexistence project. The goal of the project was to support peace by enhancing good governance, strengthening local institutions' abilities to resolve conflicts peacefully, and creating conditions in which communities had physical security and access to basic services. The intervention placed a particular emphasis on resolving the land conflicts of displaced people and returnees.

The project was implemented by a consortium of UN agencies: FAO, IOM, UNDP, UNHCR, UNHABITAT, and UNICEF. Each agency took responsibility for intervention components that fell within their mandates, as the projects were designed as a bundle of intervention components to address the drivers of local conflicts in Darfur. They were organized around three outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Durable solutions for the return of IDPs and refugees are made possible by peaceful resolution of land disputes, and sustainable land and natural resource management facilitates enhanced agricultural productivity, processing and value-chains to create jobs and improve livelihoods.

**Outcome 2:** The social contract between Government and the people is restored and renewed: armed groups are disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated into society; freedom of movement and physical security is taken for granted by men and women, and the rule of law is perceived to be applied without fear or favour; quality basic services are accessible to all, and all feel a stakeholder to their provision.

**Outcome 3:** A culture of peace and rights is nurtured and sustained in Darfur by a vibrant civil society with the commitment and capacity to represent the interest of all stakeholders in the resolution of disputes, and in holding Government to account for maintenance of the social contract.

The projects' theory of change focuses on a rights-based approach. It integrates multiple disparate project components to address the many needs of target populations in Darfur. Different specific intervention pieces, including service provision, support for local dispute resolution structures, and efforts to empower marginalized groups, are linked in this theory of supporting local-level peace. All project components target the needs of the displaced, returnees, and host communities.



# Findings

## Conflict

The PBF-supported project caused a reduction of 0.07 conflicts per household in treatment areas, a result which is significant at the 90 percent confidence level. This reduction is equivalent to about 1 in 14 households with one fewer land conflict. For some subgroups, the estimated effects are larger. Among non-Arabic-speaking households – members of a minority tribe – the reduction is equivalent to more than 1 in 4 households reporting one fewer land conflict. For female-headed households, the reduction is 1 in 10 female-headed households reporting one fewer land conflict. Non-Arabic-speaking households and female-headed households are also often marginalized groups in Darfur. Therefore, our results suggest that PBF-supported projects reduced land conflicts more among these marginalized groups.

Relatedly, the results show that respondents in treatment areas perceived peace committees to be more effective than those in control areas, another result that is significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Detailed interviews corroborated these findings. A respondent in a PBF implementation village said:

**“The region is stable and security is better than the previous periods because of the reconciliations that took place in the region, by the formation of committees by the United Peace Organization, where committees were formed to resolve conflicts in the community.”<sup>4</sup>**

Note: United Peace Organization was a local PBF implementing partner.

**Table 1: Effect of the PBF-supported projects on land conflict**

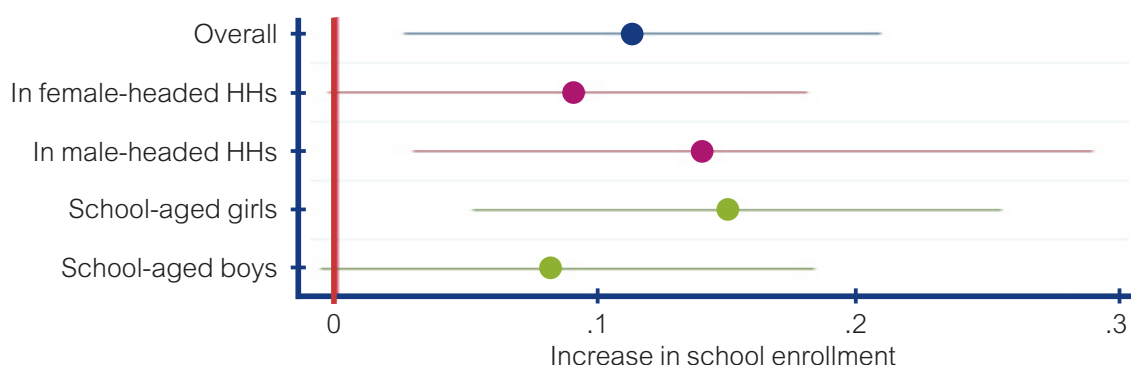
	Reduction in land conflict
Overall effect	1 fewer conflict per 14 households
Non-Arabic speakers (proxy for minority tribe)	1 fewer conflict per 4 households
Female-headed households	1 fewer conflict per 10 households

## Education

A child in an implementation village was 11 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in formal school. This effect was bigger among children in male-headed households, where it increased by 14 percentage points. The treatment effect was also bigger among school-aged girls as compared to school-aged boys. A school-aged girl was 15 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in a school in an implementation village.

The project also caused more children to attend school; a child in an implementation village was 4 percentage points more likely to attend school at least 4 days per week.

**Figure 1: Change in school enrollment between treatment and control villages**



# Findings

## Services

Residents reported higher satisfaction with sanitation services and administrative services in places where PBF-supported projects were implemented. The biggest effects on these outcomes were seen among male respondents.

Despite the project's components to support water services, there was no overall effect on satisfaction with water services. Village-by-village analysis revealed stark differences by village, with one specific village reporting large improvements, but not others. Qualitative interviews showed that in some other villages, there were technical implementation problems with the water projects.

## Women's voice in local decisions

In an exploratory finding, it appears that women in implementation villages perceived an increase in their voice in local decision-making as a result of the project. This finding is exploratory because the primary specification as pre-registered is not statistically significant. However, women in implementation villages reported having more voice in local decision-making, and reported that they had gained more voice within the previous two years as the project had been operating.



# Discussion

This impact evaluation presents micro-level results showing the effectiveness of a PBF-supported project targeting local conflict drivers. The results paint a picture in which the project's support for local peace committees made them work more effectively and/or inclusively, leading them to successfully resolve land conflicts for residents in implementation areas. Given the large effects for non-Arabic speakers, one possibility is that the presence of UN support encouraged peace committees to address the complaints of minority groups. At the same time, the project's support for schools and services led to increases in school enrollment and satisfaction with services. In the interviews cited above, residents said they viewed connections between both the increased provision of services and the support for peace committees in the reduction in conflict. These results on increased support for services, increased effectiveness of peace committees, and a reduction in the number of land conflicts move together in the project's theory of change, in our quantitative results, and in respondents' own words.

Given the absence of other comparable evaluations, our findings represent a first piece of evidence supporting the effectiveness of the bundled approach of this PBF-supported project. We show that combining improved service provision with support for dispute-resolution mechanisms can yield results on both conflict and service outcomes. While there are important limitations to what these projects can be expected to accomplish at a national level – as shown, unfortunately, through national conflict outcomes in Sudan – this evaluation suggests that targeted, bundled projects like this intervention are promising for improving local conditions in fragile conflict-affected areas like Darfur.

# About this brief

This brief was authored by Paul Thissen and Sara Ansari. They are solely responsible for all content, errors and omissions. The brief is based on Impact evaluation of the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund-supported East Darfur Assalaya-Sheiria-Yassin Triangle of Peace and Coexistence project, 3ie Impact Evaluation Report 139 by Paul Thissen and Sara Ansari. It is designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta, Mallika Rao and Tanvi Lal.

# About the PeaceFIELD initiative

The Peacebuilding Fund Impact Evaluation, Learning, and Dissemination (PeaceFIELD) initiative conducts impact evaluations of projects supported by the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), builds capacity to conduct impact evaluations on PBF-supported projects, and disseminates key evaluation findings. Launched in January 2021, the initiative is a collaboration between the International Security and Development Center (ISDC), the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), and the Peace Building Support Office (PBSO). Generous support for PeaceFIELD is being provided by the German Federal Foreign Office for the initiative and by Global Affairs Canada for the Darfur impact evaluation. The views expressed in this report are of the authors and not necessarily those of PBSO, ISDC, 3ie, IOM, German Federal Foreign Office or Global Affairs Canada.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Flint, Julie, and Alex De Waal. 2008. Darfur: A short history of a long war. London: Zed Books.

<sup>2</sup> Magdy, Samy. "UN to halt joint UN-AU peacekeeping in Darfur by year's end," Associated Press, December 23, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/sudan-peacekeeping-forces-russia-africa-united-nations-8d754764af865e0c6e5c570ec0148f60>

<sup>3</sup> Tubiana, Jérôme. 2022. "Darfur after Bashir: Implications for Sudan's Transition and for the Region." Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/04/darfur-after-bashir-implications-sudans-transition-and-region>

<sup>4</sup> Interview with traditional authority figure in a treatment village, East Darfur, February/March 2023.



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