BASELINE STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Empowering Women as Key Partners in Building Peaceful and Resilient Communities in Sudan

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Overview

Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international conflict transformation NGO that aims to transform the way individuals, groups, governments and companies deal with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. Headquartered in Washington DC, USA, and Brussels, Belgium, with field offices in 35 countries, SFCG designs and implements multifaceted, culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive programs using a diverse range of tools, including media and training, to promote dialogue, increase knowledge and determine a positive shift in behaviors. SFCG began working in Sudan in 2009 and has focused on two main objectives: strengthening local capacity for conflict transformation and peacebuilding, and supporting community actions for peace and reconciliation. For the past six years, SFCG has actively engaged and empowered marginalized groups, especially women and youth, to develop alternatives to cycles of violence in Sudan and to raise their voices for peace in the volatile border regions of South and Western Kordofan. Our long-established relationships at the community level with a number of non-state actors, civil society and traditional community leaders, as well as on the state and national level with various authorities, enable our staff to engage effectively in hard-to-reach areas.

Context of the Baseline Study

The present report presents the results of the baseline study conducted as part of the project “Empowering Women as Key Partners in Building Peaceful and Resilient Communities in Sudan,” a 24-month project (October 2015–September 2017) that SFCG implements in collaboration with the Badya Center for Integrated Development Services (Badya), a leading NGO founded in 2000 in South Kordofan that works in development, education, social work, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, along with community-based organizations. The project is funded by the US Department of State’s Bureau of African Affairs – Women, Peace, and Security (AF-WPS) and responds to the political and socio-economic marginalization of South Kordofan, one of the areas most affected by conflict in Sudan. This baseline study was conducted in April 2016. It was led by a research team from Dalanj University, with support from the SFCG and Badya teams. The study had three objectives: (1) measure the state of the project’s indicators prior to the implementation of program activities; (2) analyze conflict dynamics in the project areas; and (3) identify specific capacity-building needs to enable the economic empowerment of women.

Project Overview

The project “Empowering Women as Key Partners in Building Peaceful and Resilient Communities in Sudan” has the overall goal to empower women as key partners in building peaceful and resilient communities in South Kordofan. It is supported by three complementary objectives:

- To improve the role of women as peacebuilders in targeted communities;
- To create a more conducive environment for women’s protection and empowerment;
- To increase targeted women’s economic resiliency.
The project is based on the theory of change that if women are empowered through skills and opportunities in peacebuilding and economic development, and operate in a more gender-sensitive environment, then they can play a greater role in mitigating conflict and promoting resiliencies within their community. As such, the project’s approach has been designed to respond to both a political program element and the economic program element.

Methodology

Objectives of the Baseline

The baseline study was conducted to inform the SFCG-Badya team, as they prepare and guide the implementation of program activities. More specifically, the baseline had three specific objectives:

- Measure the state of the project’s indicators prior implementation of the activities;
- Analyze conflict dynamics in the target areas: how women and men are involved and affected by those dynamics, the priority groups to target with the project, and how the project can be conflict-sensitive;
- Identify targeted women’s capacity-building needs for economic empowerment and needs for support to local economic activities, including barriers to women’s economic empowerment.

Methodology

To meet these objectives, the research team used a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, including 700 surveys with randomly selected heads of household, 9 focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews with community members from IDP and host communities, as well as women leaders from government ministries, legislative assemblies, civil-society organizations, universities, and members from local peace and conflict resolution committees. The FGDs and interviews collected qualitative data on the participation of women in peacebuilding, women’s economic activities, the role and ways to get the community involved in the protection and empowerment of women. The research team also produced an analysis of the history and context of the Sudanese civil war and the impact of the conflicts on civilians, especially women. Data collection took place in 12 villages or neighborhoods in Dilling, Al Qouz, and Habila. Many of the selected data collection sites host a significant number of IDPs or were created by IDPs as a result of the war.
Key Findings

Objective 1: State of indicators prior to project implementation

Household Income Contribution

The survey asked respondents whether women contributed to household income, whether children contributed to family income and whether any disabled persons contributed to household income. 85% of respondents said that women contribute to their household income, 54% said children contribute to household income and 29% said a disabled person contributed to household income. Interviews with local experts attribute the increased reliance on women’s income to the effects of the conflict that forced men to migrate without their families, left men disabled or preoccupied men with the conflict. Despite their increased responsibility to provide for their families, women’s skills and capacities to do so have remained stagnant.

Attitudes towards Women and Knowledge of Gender Issues

The survey questionnaire included questions to gage attitudes toward women, about violence against women, women’s community roles and the role that female leaders play in empowering other women. The survey also asked whether respondents had received training on gender issues, while involving women in decision-making at the community-level constituted a primary theme of the FGDs conducted by the research team. 68% of survey respondents said that involving women in community decision-making is important, with another 15% viewing it as somewhat important. In discussion groups, participants asserted that poverty is the largest inhibitor of women’s participation at the community level. Experts interviewed by the research team asserted that the effects of violent conflict included women’s social withdrawal, causing more women to choose not to participate in community events.

Domestically, women also face the effects of gender-based violence. 71.4% of the survey respondents agreed (14% somewhat) that exposing women to violence, especially domestic violence, impacts women and community development negatively. However, leaders and experts interviewed asserted that, while most people of South Kordofan agree that domestic violence has a
negative impact on women and the community, most do not do anything to fight or prevent it.

Regarding participation in women’s empowerment initiatives, 64% of respondents said they did not contribute to, or participate in them. About the same portion (65%) said they had never received training on, or instruction about, gender issues, although 69% of respondents agreed that awareness and capacity building in the issues and understandings of gender is important for the development and progress of their community. Despite the lack of participation, most respondents positively viewed female-led initiatives. The research team also found that most survey respondents (57%) thought that past capacity-building training programs had been successful. Interview participants, however, attributed past failures to a lack of coordination between project staff, authorities and local residents. Other interview participants indicated that another reason for past failure was perceived misallocation or misdistribution of program efforts or focus. Others asserted that a lack of monitoring and evaluation and a lack of public awareness or marketing of programs were to blame for past failures.

Finally, interview participants also asserted that culture and tradition negatively impact women’s economic empowerment by preventing them from working outside the home or with specific groups like national government organizations or particular people, such as foreigners and the most impoverished displaced persons.

**Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding**

The survey asked whether respondents had previously received training in conflict resolution or peacebuilding, and whether such training had increased their skills. It also asked whether respondents played an active role in peacebuilding activities. A large portion (68%) of respondents had never received peacebuilding or conflict resolution training. FGD participants emphasized that poverty was the main obstacle to women’s participation in such activities. 78% of those who had received training, however, said that the training increased their knowledge and skills. A majority (65%) of respondents did not see themselves as playing an active role in conflict resolution initiatives in their communities. This was said to be a result of the lack of awareness, training and mobilization of communities to play a role in building peaceful and resilient communities.

**Objective 2: Conflict dynamics in the target areas**

The research team compiled a summary of academic research on the effects of conflict on women and men in Sudan and South Kordofan in particular. They supplemented their analysis with the qualitative data collected in interviews with leaders and experts.
According to the study, an estimated one million men and women have been killed because of violent conflicts in Sudan, since before the country’s independence in 1955. In these conflicts, women have generally been disproportionately affected. Not only have women been killed, but they face higher risks of being victims of rape, torture, slavery and other human rights violations.

Participants in interviews and FGDs asserted that there are no major conflicts among displaced people, but highlighted a cleavage between displaced persons and host communities. Additionally, the team found that recent conflicts reduced available agricultural land, created economic insecurity, cutoff sources of financing and marketing, and reduced family income. In this context, and because of men’s participation in hostilities, preoccupation with war or migration, women have taken on an increased role in contributing to household income.

**Objective 3: Targeted women's needs for capacity building and support**

Through interviews and FGDs, the research team identified a number of areas where women would benefit from capacity building, the largest of which was agricultural skills. The study found that women who live on the outskirts of larger cities or villages could benefit from the opportunity to increase their household income by taking up farming, or improving their existing skills.

The research team suggested conducting a follow-up assessment to map existing women-led organizations and initiatives in South Kordofan, to ensure sound coordination and avoid redundancy. FGDs revealed that there are networks of women-led initiatives and organizations, but that they could greatly benefit from marketing, finance and management capacity building.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

In light of these findings, recommendations have been formulated with the aim to guide SFCG and Badya’s programming through the project’s implementation.

**1. Economic Empowerment of Families through Women**

*Focus efforts on grassroots training that is accessible to women with low education levels and sensitive to dynamics between displaced persons and host communities.*

The baseline portrays households in South Kordofan as disproportionately headed by women. The data show that women are an important source of income for families, but many households rely on children and disabled persons for income, as well. Participants articulated *needs for grassroots training in agriculture, communications, finance, marketing and business management for women.*
They also identified poverty as the primary barrier to women taking a more active role in community peacebuilding initiatives. Poverty is further compounded by low literacy rates and education levels. Programming will need to account for the fact that many participants will be illiterate (32%) or only have a basic level of education (38%).

Given the cleavage identified between displaced persons and host communities, the study underscored the need for programs to seek to reduce such cleavages by ensuring that activities bring together women across dividing lines.

2. Gender and Peacebuilding Training

To increase the role of women in peacebuilding, there is a need to involve men and women together in peacebuilding activities that incorporate gender training, with attention to gender-based violence.

Findings showed that a third of respondents believe it is not important to involve women in community decision-making, while the majority of respondents (64%) said they were not involved in initiatives to support women socially or economically. In interviews, participants indicated that those who were aware of the negative impacts of domestic violence on development have still done very little to fight or prevent it. These results point to an urgent need to involve men and youth along with women in program activities to transform society’s attitude towards women and gender roles.

These baseline findings also underscore the need to incorporate gender, specifically domestic violence issues, into gender training. Peacebuilding efforts must emphasize gender issues, to reach the large portion of the population who has never received training on gender issues and for those who feel that involving women in community decision-making is not important.

3. Program Coordination

Coordination between male and female grassroots leaders, media, CSOs and government institutions is key to ensuring success and follow-through from trainings.

The baseline found that one of the main reasons why past training initiatives had failed was when there had been a lack of coordination between project staff, authorities and local residents. Programs should target male and female leaders at the grassroots level and must be coordinated with government institutions. Projects should allow for coordination between authorities, community leaders and projects staff. Activities must be linked to women leaders at the grassroots level in villages and neighborhoods, women leaders at the local level, and women leaders at the state level. The trainings should focus on the exchange of experiences, knowledge and success stories.

Because the lack of monitoring and evaluation was also mentioned as a reason for failure of past capacity-building initiatives, it will be necessary to follow-up on the trainings and economic empowerment initiatives, and measure their results, forming women’s bodies and supporting existing ones, to ensure they play an active role in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and peaceful coexistence.