From conflict to cooperation in Beliel, South Darfur

In 2013, in Abga Rajel, Beliel locality, South Darfur conflict-affected civilian populations faced significant gaps in basic services. Deep resentments between different groups over land ownership and use were resurfacing. Conflict resolution platforms and peace building efforts initiated during previous interventions had been derailed as many families fled their homes. The community felt nervous about the security situation, and the local market was mostly empty.

Abga Rajel is a spread-out community with 19 clusters. Each cluster is made up of several villages, and seven major ethnic groups make their homes there.

According to Mercy Corps Scotland’s initial assessment in 2013, the community identified basic education, agricultural inputs, and cultural activities that bring different ethnic groups together as critical to rebuilding community trust.

Mercy Corps’ programme aimed to address these challenges by supporting community based reconciliation mechanisms and improved resource management.

Demarcating animal routes

**Purpose:** A lack of clearly demarcated boundaries can lead to the destruction of farmer’s crops by animals during the annual roundtrip migratory journey from south to north in Darfur.

This, in turn, can stoke conflict between communities. To mitigate the tension, projects involve community members from pastoralist and farming communities to work together on the route demarcation exercise.

**How it works:** Tribal and community leaders gather information about villages along the routes, numbers of farmers and pastoralists, and availability of water and other natural resources.

From this information village maps are developed and communities and pastoralists identify mutually acceptable migratory routes. With the support of authorities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Urban Planning, and Farmers and Pastoralists Unions, these preferred routes are marked and socialized with both pastoralists and communities along the route. GIS data is used to determine the precise placement of the posts marking the route, which are then constructed, painted, and maintained by community members.

Route demarcation in North Darfur supported by UN Habitat. Photo: UN Habitat.
management. A key part of this was improving the demarcation of animal migration routes.

Zalata Murhal migratory route had been closed since 2004. Now, thanks to intense effort by the Local Migratory Route Committee formed by the Mercy Corps programme, the nomad commission, and community leaders, the route is better demarcated and open to migrating livestock owners. During 2015 an estimated 60,000 head of livestock have used the Murhal.

Zalata Murhal has become a model for cooperation and positive engagement between diverse groups of farmers and animal herders. In early September, the Mercy Corps team visited the project and spoke with community members to better understand the impact of the programme.

One pasture committee leader reflected, “This season our communities have shown unprecedented restraint as almost all farmers... abided by the agreement facilitated by the pasture committee not to plant close to the newly demarcated livestock migratory route. It was also quite an achievement to see animal herders honoring their part of the deal by keeping their animal strictly within the demarcated route.”

On the side of nomadic and herding communities, the newly demarcated route is both used and respected. “We have seen migrating animal herders fixing marking pillars along the migratory route, this is something that has never happened before,” said a community leader.

Moreover, says a member of the pasture committee, “[community members] are now resorting to community arbitration mechanism to settle disputes." This is a huge step forward from when such disputes would boil over into violence.

These successes were hard won, according to colleagues working in the field: “When we started this program, we struggled to engage [community members] in our meetings and discussions, [they] have become increasingly engaged in the pasture committee and actively participate in meetings.”

Biliel locality’s commissioner describes the key impacts: “This season we are working towards declaring Beliel a conflict – free locality. We will capitalize on the solid foundation of positive engagement and peaceful coexistence established by the DCPSF project to achieve our goal,” he noted. “Communications between pastoralists and farmers have significantly improved and mobile phone[s] [are] now used regularly to report incidences and warn against potential conflicts.” This early warning system helps avoid conflicts before they have a chance to escalate.

The project also supported the rehabilitation of the community’s market - important to raising community confidence and facilitating interaction between different groups. “The market in Abga Rajil, is considered one of the biggest markets in Beliel locality, attracting people from diverse backgrounds,” noted a DCPSF staff member. Hopefully, increased interaction between communities as part of daily community life will further reduce conflict in the locality.
Access to water and sanitation to reduce conflict in Jebel Moon, West Darfur

Water collection in Jebel Moon could take almost the whole day. Women used buckets to get the water out of the wells. They transferred water pots into leather containers for the long journey home, carrying them on donkeys, camels, or in their own arms. They could spend up to 12 hours a day collecting water.

Sometimes there wasn’t enough. Ibrahim, from Fadilla village, notes: “Because it was difficult to get sufficient water in the past, our livestock and poultry drank dirty water that was collected after being used in household chores.”

Jebel Moon is an arid locality in Sudan’s far western border, near Chad. The area is also one of the most populous localities in the northern corridor of West Darfur state with an estimated population of some 50,000, including farmers, people displaced by conflict, and nomads. With key resources scarce, this social diversity can boil over into tension and violence.

Many wells are owned by individuals or families, and other people can only use them with permission, which owners sometimes refuse. These difficulties create tension, and sometimes conflict, over water resources. As families congregate in communities with the best water sources, and as formerly nomadic people become increasingly sedentary, competition for water sources has intensified. Thus, more water availability is an important peace builder.

What is a water user committee?

**Purpose:** Water User Committees (WUCs) are village level local community groups formed to manage water facilities constructed and improved by a programme. Each committee includes 10 - 15 members depending on the population of the specific village; in the interest of promoting women's participation in decision making, facilitators encourage communities to strive for committee composition where at least 30% of the committee members are women.

**How it works:** WUC members are trained in management, operation and maintenance of the specific water facility, in addition to water and environmental sanitation and hygiene. To ensure sustainability of the water facility, the committee members are trained in operation and maintenance. If the water facility is fitted with a hand pump, they are provided with practical training on the techniques of hand pump repair and maintenance. They are also trained on procedures for pump installation on completed wells, as well as diagnosing and correcting faults.

**Funding:** Sustainability also requires cash in the event of a breakdown or repair. WUCs vary in their approaches to cash collections needed to cover the cost of repairs. In some cases collections in the community are made every month, house-to-house. Dues can be paid in cash or farm produce. Other communities choose to charge those with large herds for water, which then subsidizes poorer community members. It is up to the community to decide what works best but the programme facilitator introduces ideas and helps communities put these systems into practice for sustainability of water systems and continuous access to clean water.
In the last two years (2012-2014), Concern Worldwide, an international NGO, in partnership with the Community Development Association (CDA), a Darfur-based NGO, started implementing a programme centred around water resources in Jebel Moon locality. The project aims to strengthen community-based management of natural resources - and thus, access to safe water and sanitation- as part of a larger strategy to reduce community tension.

Water resources including hand-dug wells, water troughs, hand pumps and subsurface dams were rehabilitated or constructed in different locations around central Jebel Moon (Arafa, Arasharow, Hejlija, Manjura, and Seleia towns).

These are managed through water user committees (see inset, page 3), who monitor functionality, make repairs, share information on hygiene and sanitation, and collect fees to pay for maintenance.

Community members told Concern about the real-life impact of the WASH activities in their communities. One woman from Arafa noted: “Life is much easier now. These resources are now nearer and easier to access. And we have more free time to engage in other activities other than water collection.”

The subsurface dams constructed in Jebel Moon have also improved water availability and Ishag, a member of the water committee in Bardi, told Concern: “Due to the ...dam in Bardi, water availability increased during the dry season that starts from January to June. It helped people relax during drought and thus [avoid] moving with their livestock [to seek] water in remote areas.”

Ali is a nomad and a member of Rahad Kitraya water committee. He noted: “We are a mixed group of nomads and host community living here in Rahad Kitraya in Arafa centre. In the past, there were no water resources in the area except for the seasonal valleys and shallow wells. But in 2013, Concern supported the rehabilitation of hand-pumps. This now provides Rahad Kitraya community with safe water.”

*The Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund aims to address local-level conflicts in Darfur through community reconciliation mechanisms, joint management of natural resources and the creation of new livelihoods opportunities.*