

The Darfur Community Strengthening Program:

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES TO CREATE CHANGE
IN A CONFLICT-AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT



The Darfur Community Strengthening Program (DCSP):

Engaging Communities to Create Change in a Conflict-Affected Environment



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DCSP was funded by USAID and implemented by FHI 360's Center for Civil Society and Governance.

DCSP Key
Achievements
2007-2011

193

Projects implemented that brought together Darfuri community members, government agencies, and civil society organizations to create tangible improvements in their communities

65,527

Darfuri community members engaged in civil society-led development projects

214,000 USD

Value of support to 3 Peace and Development Centers at the Darfur State Universities

113

Civil society organizations trained
in FHI 360's community mapping
methodology

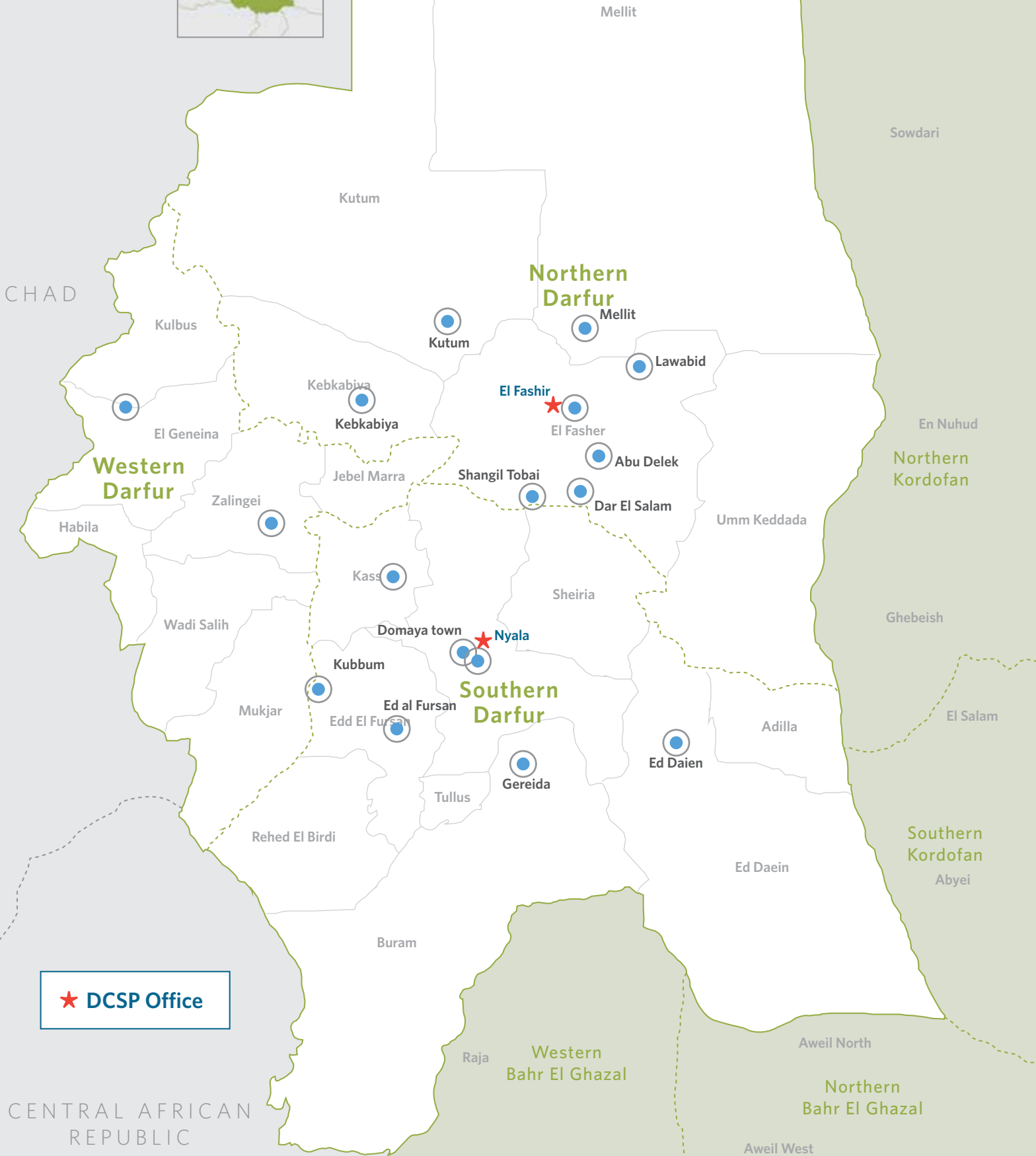
529

Youth in Darfur trained to increase
employability

47

Secondary schools throughout Darfur
that received in-kind support from DCSP





Overview

The USAID-funded Darfur Community Strengthening Program (DCSP) empowered Darfuri citizens to take ownership of rebuilding their communities. It worked through local partners, training and supporting Darfuri civil society organizations (CSOs) to involve their communities in bringing tangible improvements to sectors that both Darfuri citizens and the government identified as important, economically and socially: secondary education and youth empowerment.

DCSP was unique in Darfur:

- **a development and capacity building program**, when most international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) were focused on relief.
- **working in established communities**, when most INGOs worked in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps and only with IDPs.
- **focused on supporting secondary education**, when other education-focused INGOs addressed primary education.

With a budget of 7,749,655 USD over nearly four years, DCSP provided a strong example of how community development can be done successfully, despite an ongoing conflict, and how it can foster a transformation from relief work to sustainable development.

DCSP Methodology

The lynchpin of DCSP's success in Darfur was its **community mapping methodology** in which DCSP **trained 113 local partners**. The methodology served as:

- a capacity-building tool to teach participatory community development.
- a community-engagement tool to spur interest and confidence in the ability to identify and solve problems locally.
- a relationship-building tool that provided a process for reconstructing patterns of community interaction post-war and amid continued conflict and instability.

DCSP's community mapping methodology was successful because:

1. It served to build relationships with partners, beneficiaries, and communities, establishing trust between DCSP and its local stakeholders.
2. It gave the program a consistent design.
3. It allowed DCSP to build local capacity to meet local needs.
4. It provided a process for building relationships within and among communities that were fragmented and redefined by an ongoing conflict.



What is Community Mapping?

Community Mapping is a participatory development strategy that engages people in canvassing their community to identify community needs, resources, and connections.

Mappers use selected survey tools to collect information on community needs and resources—and then analyze this information to create a plan of action, with community participation.

The action plan serves as the road map to implementing a community-driven development project. After the project is completed, a launch ceremony is held to share the results with the community.

This approach allows CSOs to consult the public every step of the way and demonstrates how their active participation can improve their community.

“The community mapping training was so useful to us. It has brought the community and the schools closer together. The community understands the role of the PTA and they see how they can help, too.”

-Teacher at Althoura Secondary School for Girls, North Darfur



Left: Ed Daien community mapping.

DCSP's Implementing Partners

As a community development program, DCSP placed emphasis on empowering local institutions to carry out development activities and all DCSP activities were implemented through our Darfuri CSO partners.

PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS (PTAs)

Every secondary school in Darfur has a PTA of 15 members, male and female, as mandated by Sudanese law. PTAs mobilize community members to raise funds for the school, involve parents in schools, and provide a forum for community-based decision making. Although some PTAs are more active than others, the structure exists across Darfur and provides an indigenous entry point to engage the community in secondary school improvement.

DCSP **trained 62 Darfuri PTAs** and PTA networks to consult their communities to design school improvement projects, which we then supported. DCSP also funded joint PTA projects—football tournaments, music and dance festivals, livelihood training for women and girls, and workshops to train youth to use interactive theater to resolve community conflicts.

“Before, people would not come to school because the environment was so bad. The changes in our school from this project made us have a real desire for education. It has linked the school with the community and helped us to get better technology.”

-Wahiba, Dinar Secondary School for Girls

MOTHERS' COUNCILS

In 2010, DCSP launched a small pilot project, founding and supporting women-only PTAs called Mothers' Councils. The Mothers' Councils were trained in community consultation and designed and implemented projects that provided training and supplies for valuable livelihood skills (sewing and food processing) for **73 women and secondary school graduates from eight schools**. The products



Mothers' Council members: sewing training; food processing products; awareness-raising campaign with community members on the importance of girls' education.

were sold in the market and the proceeds used to train a new group of women and girls, thus ensuring sustainability. The pilot project was so successful that, less than a year from its founding, the El Fasher Mothers' Council received recognition from local government officials, who invited the organization to register as an official NGO.

COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS

Youth associations in Darfur are groups of people under age 32 from a particular neighborhood that work together to implement youth improvement activities. DCSP trained these neighborhood-based youth groups in community mobilization and advocacy skills, emphasizing:

1. The need to find and use local resources to solve problems.
2. The advocacy skills to engage local government officials and NGOs to meet their immediate needs and to continue to support long-term change.

With DCSP support and training, **over 7,600 Darfuris were engaged** by youth community-based organizations (CBOs) in neighborhood clean-up campaigns and environmental improvement projects.

PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS, DARFUR STATE UNIVERSITIES

DCSP provided training in community engagement and in-kind support to the Peace and Development Centers at the three state universities in Darfur. DCSP supplied their libraries and upgraded their communication infrastructure. Additionally, The Salam Institute worked with DCSP to train the Peace Centers on current trends in conflict analysis and resolution, focusing on Muslim and indigenous approaches to peacebuilding, as well as to professionalize the Peace Center's course offerings for MA students on these topics. DCSP also provided MA in Peace and Development Studies scholarships for 15 qualified college graduates from IDP communities in North, South, and West Darfur. DCSP provided over **214,000 USD** in trainings and support to the three Peace Centers.



Top: El Fasher Peace Center Library
Bottom: Training with Salam Institute

NATIONAL NGOS

The most formal of DCSP's partners were Dafuri NGOs, registered with the Government of Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), which monitors both national and international NGOs. The DCSP NGO partners had a wide range of goals, from improving secondary education to educating the community on good hygiene and its importance to health.

"[The institutional assessment process] was like magic. All of this work led us to realize exactly what we really need to do to improve our organization."

-Dr. Abdel Hamid, Voluntary Net for Rural Helping and Development

DCSP built the institutional capacity of national NGOs through:

- individual institutional assessments
- institutional development planning
- customized technical assistance
- individual and joint trainings

These NGOs were trained in community consultation skills, managing projects responsibly throughout the project cycle, and identifying and meeting the needs of their constituents. NGOs also built their networking skills during joint trainings and events. Community-based projects implemented by 11 NGO partners **benefited over 9,800 Darfuris**. Institutional strengthening packages also helped NGOs to secure funding from other international donors.



Why DCSP was Successful

As the project timeline shows, DCSP was implemented against ongoing conflict, pervasive insecurity, and consistent local government harassment. Yet, it was a successful community development program, and the reasons why can inform future programs in a similar context. Some of the keys to DCSP's success include:

- **Using a slow, process-oriented approach**—Community mapping is a slow, intensive process that gives CSOs the tools to engage the community from design to inception, deliver products that are based on community needs, and develop lasting relationships which in turn can build the foundation for future development efforts. Additionally, DCSP's project partners have found that the tools they learned during their community mapping training and project implementation increased their competitiveness for funding from other donors.
- **Building trust**—DCSP generally worked between six months to one year with any given partner on a combination of initial assessments, meetings, and the community mapping process before initiating the project planning and implementation stage. Investing this time to build trust with local institutions and communities allowed the program to be effective.
- **Employing a development, not relief, approach**—DCSP was one of the few donor-funded projects in Darfur working solely on early recovery/development programming in towns, rather than relief in IDP camps, so the project was more palatable to the government and relevant to the needs of established communities. While the needs of IDPs are enormous, it is important to build on the small developmental gains that have been made since the cessation of major hostilities and rapid urbanization.
- **Being consistently transparent with government agencies and local staff**—DCSP was careful to ensure open communication about project activities and that the way it reported on programs was consistent across all of our interactions with the Sudanese government and with local staff. The HAC was able to feel that it was familiar with the program's goals, its beneficiaries, and its activities, which reduced the scrutiny of DCSP activities.
- **Selecting an appropriate area of focus**—DCSP was a community development program with a narrow focus on secondary education and youth. This focus helped DCSP in several ways: 1) it was a non-threatening area in which to work that received approval from government authorities and local communities; 2) it was an unmet need (other implementers working on education were focused on primary education); and 3) it gave the program a consistency and coherence that helped activities “make sense” locally.

- **Careful partner selection**—In an environment like Darfur, choosing a partner with particular political and other affiliations can quickly undermine the effectiveness of a project, endanger staff and beneficiaries, or result in increased harassment or even expulsion. We began work with PTAs after our assessments showed that PTAs were consistently present in all communities and less directly affiliated with various government or rebel groups than any other group. Once on the ground and beginning community mapping work with these PTAs, DCSP found other CBO partners with whom to work—youth associations in Nyala and El Fasher, national NGOs, and the Peace and Development Centers at the Darfur State Universities.
- **Networking**—Even without the destruction of entire villages and communities that characterizes the Darfur situation, sustained conflict destroys community connections and leaves people isolated. Bringing people together—within a community, between towns, and across the region—is critical to rebuilding the social fabric of communities. DCSP’s Linking Events—conferences focused on capacity building, sharing experiences, and networking—and joint trainings gave our partners opportunities to build new relationships and partnerships.



Darfur NGO-led Soil Stabilization Bricks construction training in Domaya town, South Darfur.

Looking Forward in Darfur

DCSP leaves behind a legacy of local institutions that are respected by their communities as well as trained and experienced in implementing community-driven projects to address the needs of community members. These local institutions—PTAs, women and youth CBOs, NGOs, and Peace and Development Centers—are the building blocks of an emerging civil society in Darfur that has the potential to contribute to local development, represent a grassroots voice in the peace process, and rebuild the social fabric of communities in Darfur. DCSP also leaves behind a legacy of new and reforged relationships—between CSOs and their constituents, among CSOs, and between CSOs and government officials.

Darfur sits poised between relief and development. Most areas of the region still require a mix of relief and development programming, but it is critical that gains made towards development are not lost by focusing only on the relief needs. Long-term, closely supervised programming with local NGOs presents a promising avenue for the development of Darfuri civil society, opportunities for enterprising young Darfuris, and the development of nascent democratic practices.





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