Transitional justice technical working group in East Sudan

East Sudan (Gedarif, Kassala, and Port Sudan)
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Section I: Narrative

The project aims were to support international justice in three states in East Sudan through activities that involve enhancing the role of documentation and reporting human rights violations, peacebuilding, and advocacy campaigns. It also supported developing and implementing a civilian-led mechanism promoting transitional justice and conflict prevention in East Sudan to deliver civilian-led monitoring and documentation activities related to Human Rights and humanitarian law violations in 2021 in Sudan.

The transitional justice project has multi-layers; there was technical support from civil society in East Sudan, activists who provided insight into the context and advised on lessons learned from previous similar projects. I received technical support with regards to the monitoring tool, to use offline database and other methods that activists and practitioners are trained to use. Additional support included the nomination of participants and key stakeholders to the project.

I came up with the idea after being involved in a fundraising campaign to provide reparation for six families who lost their members in a protest in Kassala, East Sudan. The team and I managed to mobilize resources from donations and support the investigation by helping the families pay for forensic fees to allow for subjective evidence that help prosecutes the perpetrators; after we achieved that goal, I started writing down a proposal for a technical working group to expand the idea to go beyond reparation to include other components of the transformative justice, which are no substitute for one another. So I invited members to join a virtual group, but then I realized I might put other people in Sudan in danger by discussing this topic without a clear safeguarding policy and resources to help manage the committee. That was when I learned about the Davis Projects for Peace and decided to apply for the grant to help the community in eastern Sudan, to which I belong, address human rights violations, and provide an opportunity for reconciliation.

The project was created in response to the competing necessity to coordinate civilian lead activities to document and monitor human rights and humanitarian law violations in East Sudan due to the rise of breaches towards civilians in these areas and other parts of the country. But also, the nature of violence in East Sudan is, as it often has an ethnic base - state aggression - in the case of arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture of peaceful protesters. That conflict analysis inspired me to design a project related to the need for tackling such complex humanitarian crises in East Sudan. But also, to
establish a platform for identifying early warning signs for violence and enhancing the law's role in the area.

Nevertheless, it was extremely challenging to work remotely on the project during a pandemic, one significant challenge was to safeguard the project collaborators, as the issue is sensitive and deals with criminal investigation matters that require a delicate and sensitive approach. But I was prepared to assess and update the project to the best way to work for the individuals’ safety and achieve the desired goals. The initial phase of the project was not going as planned; coordination was a bit hard, as the modality to implement was designed to be through two different entities, which had to maintain such a delicate relationship with the implementing partners without compromising on the project's objectives, but also allow for stakeholders’ input to create a sense of ownership of the project, while at the same time remaining the budget owner in control of the project elements, and establish a reporting line, which was not up to the standard I expected in terms of clearance, but also understandable since most of the activities took place in remote and rural areas. Some of the challenges faced were communicating with people sometimes due to lack of means of communication, where there is no network or electricity; in that case, I must trust the process and try to give as many instructions as possible when there was an opportunity to communicate.

I believe peace is a state of being where one feels safer in the inner side and the surrounding; peace at large is a state where societies can strive and fulfil their needs without fear. Peace is the end of violence and the distribution of livelihood. And the transition to space where the inhabitants of that space can achieve their potential.

I believe the project helped connect activists and operations working on documentation and monitoring of human rights violations together, and coordinate efforts that contribute to transitional justice and social justice, highlighting root causes of the conflict and providing the means to enhance civilian role in the transitional justice. In addition, it offered a vision for a group of activists in East Sudan and in the diaspora to identify early warning signs of conflict. It also provided a road map for the documentation process and the role of media and technology to aid criminal prosecution. The project helped me understand the nature of conflict in Sudan, and history repeats itself! It allows me to realize the solution for a problem in a community lies within itself, and sometimes it's not a necessity to bring new ideas from outside, it could be beneficial to strengthen and enable something already there, and plan for pictures to be sustainable, and Do No Harm. Like many other businesses, my project was affected by the pandemic, including the number of people who could be part of the project and measures to be taken to plan an event. There were several cancellations of events because of the federal restriction. There was a delay in receiving the funds, which affected the implementation. It interfered with my university deadlines as I was behind on schedule for the performance and had to work in a highly stressful time; this could have been avoided if the funds had been released earlier. Furthermore, the delay in sending the funds also decreased the morale of the partners in Sudan. I would suggest dispersing the funds as early as possible and extending the project's duration to create a meaningful impact, so project leaders are not stressed with finishing up and reporting back, instead of being comfortable with the time to make an impact and reflect. I would also suggest including a section for the lesson learned from working on the chosen project.
To overcome these challenges, I had to include another phase to the project directed to research and data collection, as the situation was rapidly changing in Sudan and the stakeholders' inputs to the project. I had to amend some parts of the project activities to make them covid-friendly. But also, the order of the project was planned, i.e., the documentation phase was continued during the implementation. For example, I tried to limit contact and organize online meetings as much as possible; some of the changes made was to produce learning materials that can be shared in the future. Also, I decided to give small grants for the nominated PEER educators to continue documentation work in their communities while training their PEERS. I have also worked with the East Sudan association in the diaspora, namely the East Sudan association in the UK, especially regarding the procession of findings and drafting reports to be shared with the international human rights organization.

I would advise the future PfP grantees to plan and to include any possible scenarios that will impact the project, health, political and socio-economic. To prepare a contingency plan in case something happens. Also, design the project activities in an adaptable way, so they can be altered, in response to the pandemic, without compromising on the project objectives, i.e., if you are planning an in-person workshop, try to prepare for an online one just in case. And check if advance the project site allows it. This brings me to the most crucial point: assessing the site and what it can offer and speaking to locals; they know about their community and what works best for them.

**Personal Statement**

The project was an excellent opportunity for me to establish my social enterprise in the non-profit sector and practice the knowledge I acquired in law school. It was an honor to serve my country in a meaningful way in a most critical issue as transitional justice. The project also allowed me to understand that any small steps towards peace count, and no matter how small the idea is, it can grow bigger with time, effort, and dedication.

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Section II: Photographs