

PROJECT BRIEFING

Improving the urban environment in Africa: Working with internally displaced communities in Eastern Sudan

Ella Sprung and Lucy Stevens



This briefing focuses on the Sudanese component of a three-country project exploring community-based approaches to improving the urban environment in African slums and low-income settlements. In Sudan, the project worked in housing, water, sanitation, and enterprise development. It adopted an integrated approach to building the assets of beneficiaries in a co-ordinated way. It also focused on creating effective partnerships between community-based groups and relevant stakeholders, in particular local authorities and the Water Corporation. The project was successful in helping the residents of internally displaced settlements to become more fully accepted as citizens of their towns, who require, and have a right to receive, basic services. Innovative models were developed in housing and institutional buildings (classroom design) which have helped to bring down costs and reduce the risks of damage from occasional flooding.

One of the groups involved in offering loans and constructing housing was awarded a prestigious national prize by the World Bank. Hundreds of people have benefited from small enterprise loans, or from employment created through the project's construction and building materials activities. There is scope for future work in expanding the credit for housing system throughout Kassala, and more broadly in applying the lessons learned to work with displaced communities elsewhere in Sudan.

Introduction

In Sudan, civil war and drought have raised urban growth rates since the mid-1980s. In the town of Kassala there are at least 50,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) out of a population of 350,000, some of whom have been living in camps on the outskirts of the town for 20 years or more. New influxes arrived with every new phase of the war or season of drought. The town also suffers from occasional flooding (every 5–6 years) of the River Gash which runs through the town. The last time this happened (2003) caused widespread damage to housing, and water and sanitation systems. Before the project began, water was brought to the camps by donkey cart from other areas of the town, and residents paid a high price for it. Only 15 per cent of households had access to any type of latrine (ITDG Sudan, 2001).

In addition to the problem of extreme poverty, there is also an issue of poor urban governance. Before the project, the authorities in Kassala were very wary of engaging with IDPs who they believed were aligned with rebel factions, and who they hoped would return home once the war ended. As a result,



A house under construction through Sawa Sawa's credit for housing scheme

Yasir Yousef/Practical Action



the IDPs were often excluded from decision-making on policies that affected them.

Practical Action's existing programmes of work in urban areas have adopted an integrated approach to addressing these problems. The approach recognizes the multi-dimensional nature of urban poverty, and therefore seeks to overcome a range of barriers to improving people's lives. This project aimed to improve the livelihoods of poor women and men through developing sustainable, community-managed models of water, sanitation and waste management services. It took place in three countries: Kenya, Sudan and Zimbabwe, with funding of £759,446 provided by Comic Relief, of which £207,147 supported the work in Sudan.

Building on work which began in 2001, this project took place in the town of Kassala, in the settlements of Kadugli and Wau Nur, and in Gedarif, in the settlement Jebel Marco. Work commenced in January 2005 and finished in September 2008.

Project sites

The project worked with IDP camps in two towns in Eastern Sudan: Kassala and Gedarif both of which are the capitals of their respective states. Kassala is located close to the Eritrean border, 415km east of Khartoum. Gedarif is 360km to the south-east

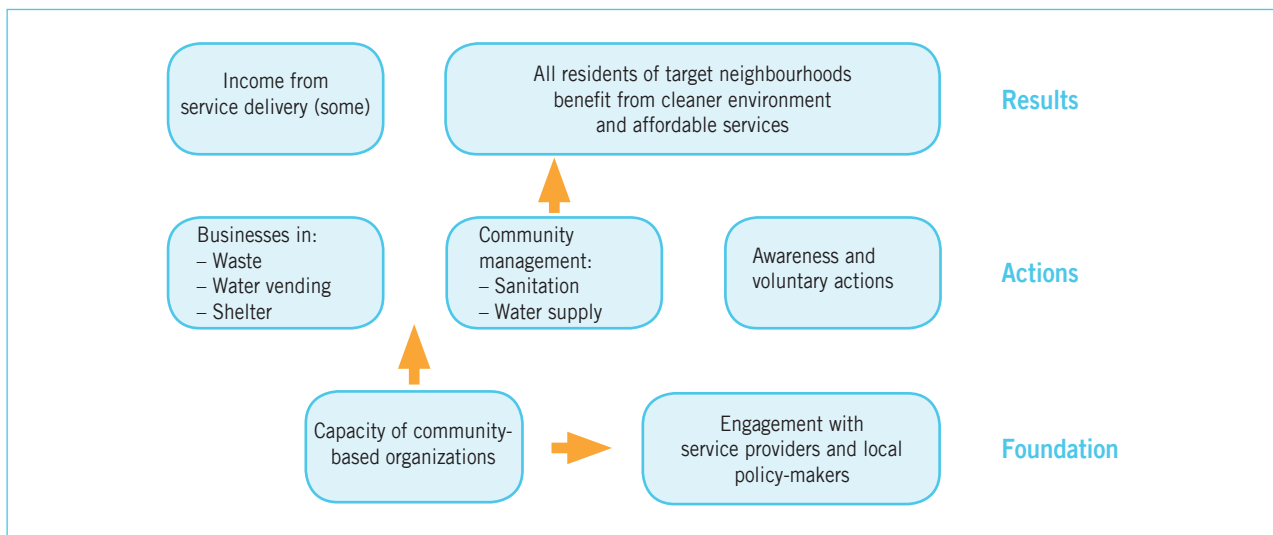
of Khartoum.

Kadugli, Kassala: The settlement is located on the outskirts of the town and was formed in 1984 after the drought that hit the south and west of Sudan. The population has increased since then with new waves of IDPs joining the settlement. It is estimated that the camp is now home to around 500 families, nearly all of which are from Nubian tribes. The baseline study in 2001 found that two-thirds of the population were women (ITDG Sudan, 2001).

Wau Nur, Kassala: This settlement is larger than Kadugli with around 1,600 households.

As is the case for Kadugli, the settlement was formed in 1984, and the population has increased since then. The baseline study in 2001 found that 57 per cent of the residents were women. The population is much more ethnically diverse than Kadugli, with a mixture of people from many areas: Southern Sudan, Nubian mountains, Eastern Sudan and Kordufan.

Jebel Marco-Gedarif: This settlement is on the outskirts of the town of Gedarif. The settlement was first established in 1986, and has increased in size over the years, to its current size of around 600 families. Population numbers vary a great deal depending on the season. During the dry season, there are no jobs in the surrounding agricultural areas, so many men leave to find



The project approach

work in the brick-making industry nearer Khartoum. The settlement is dominated by people from southern tribes, but belonging to a range of sub-tribes.

Approach

The innovative aspect of the *integrated approach* used in all three countries in this project is its comprehensive nature; addressing multiple elements of poverty rather than focusing on a single one. The model developed out of thinking based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (DFID 1999), trying to build people’s assets in a co-ordinated way. The term ‘integration’ also applies to the project’s approach to creating effective partnerships. The work therefore starts with a foundation of community capacity building and engagement with local authorities and other service providers. This allows for actions leading to service delivery through three channels (although not all of them were present or given equal weight in all countries): small enterprises; management of services by representative community groups; and voluntary groups often involved in awareness-raising. Other inputs at this level include ensuring technologies are appropriate, and that households and businesses have access to savings and credit systems. The main objective was that large numbers of (sometimes all) residents would benefit from a cleaner environment and affordable services (and in the case of Sudan, affordable housing), which constituted an improvement in their physical assets. A smaller group would benefit

from increased income (financial assets) from delivering and managing those services. Social assets would be strengthened through the capacity-building activities, and an enabling environment created through work on policies, institutions and practices.

External factors

In Sudan, national political events and changes had an important bearing at the local level. In Kassala, relations between the communities and local authorities had to be carefully rebuilt after an attack on the town in 2000 by rebels from across the Eritrean border. The IDPs were accused of facilitating, or at least allowing, the attack to take place. However, circumstances changed over time, in particular with the signing of the national peace agreement between North and South in January 2005. The importance of this landmark for those displaced by the war was emphasized by the scale of celebrations in the camps in Kassala, including a ceremony attended by the State Governor. Political manoeuvring continued between various factions within the National Unity Government during the project’s life. At times these conflicts were played out at the local level. The community structures in Gedarif, for example, suffered a particularly acute conflict which was partly inspired by the national situation.

Capacity building of community-based organizations

The first outcome of this project was the institutional and organizational development

of community-based organizations (CBOs) dealing with the urban environment. Each settlement has a 'Community Development Committee' (CDC) consisting of 12–13 people. These were established during an earlier project, are elected annually, and have the remit to represent their area on a wide range of issues. When an initial capacity assessment was done in March 2005, it was found that the CDCs had weaknesses in certain areas. These included; not having (or not implementing) a mission or strategic plan, group members not having clear roles, and low levels of participation from the wider community. In addition, and usually under the umbrella of the CDCs, further groups were set up to look at specific issues. Overall these committees involve 138 people, and 65 people were involved in training for management, leadership and organizational capacity-building. Three community development centres were equipped and furnished, to enable them to serve as a space to promote community development activities in the three areas. All the groups were assisted in legal registration which gave them added legitimacy in dealing with the authorities.

For the CDCs in particular, workshops on strategic planning were organized. Residents developed short- and long-term strategic plans, identifying and prioritizing needs for a period of five years. Through this, the three communities have been able to formulate and implement strategic plans and advocate for the needs of their settlements.

The specialized groups have proven to be dynamic and successful in working for the community. For example:

- Women's business groups were provided with organizational capacity building seminars and, as a result, 469 business women are now organized into groups,



Yasir Yousef/Practical Action

Meeting of Sawa Sawa Self-Help Group for Housing

which are linked to the Women's Development Associations in the towns of Kassala and Gedarif. Women are now participating more in the development of their settlement, and their voices are being heard within communities and by the local authorities.

- Builders' associations were trained in managerial skills and enabled to give technical training in sustainable housing techniques. This helped to create job opportunities for 176 people.

Influencing local policies and practices

Before this project started, links between the community groups in the IDP settlements and the local government were poor. The project has succeeded in creating links and improving relationships between the groups, with many positive and concrete outcomes. Examples of successes include: after training in lobbying

Table 1: People benefiting from housing and infrastructure services delivered by the project

Service	Location	Users of service
Water supply network (13 km)	Wau Nur	620 HHs, 3719 people
Water supply network (5.5 km)	Kadugli	483 HHs, 2898 people
Household latrines (366)	All three settlements	3529 people
Housing (16 new and 5 improved)	Wau Nur and Kadugli	21 HHs, 110 people

and advocacy, the CDCs from Kadugli and Wau Nur convinced the city water company to provide piped water networks in their settlements, and to agree to receive payment for the connection charges in instalments; and three health and sanitation awareness-raising sessions were held, with a total of 300 attendees (whereas previously the settlements would have been excluded from such campaigns). The local authority in Kassala also began to send its waste removal truck to the IDP settlements.

Improving services and the urban environment

Community priorities for improving services in the three settlements were in water and sanitation. Significant progress was made in both (see Table 1). In Kadugli, 482 families are now served with clean drinking water, after the project helped to install a water distribution network of 5,550 metre lines in collaboration with Kadugli CDC and Kassala Water Corporation. In Wau Nur, the community organized themselves and formed a committee for managing the water in the settlement. After an agreement between the three parties involved (CDC, water corporation, and the project), 13 kilometres of water pipe was laid, supplying water to the settlement with 620 households now benefiting. In sanitation, 20 builders were trained in latrine construction,

and a total of 366 latrines were constructed in the three locations, serving 38 per cent of the population. This included 41 toilets built on the initiative of households without any subsidy or support from the project. In addition, the Sawa Sawa Self-Help Group for Housing has set up a generator, and as a result 48 houses are now supplied with electricity.

Housing

In Kassala, the project facilitated the establishment of two self-help groups, Sawa Sawa and Kada, to manage a credit system for housing, and to strengthen the linkages between households, local builders and materials producers/suppliers. Sawa Sawa was one of the groups to benefit from an equipped centre from which to operate.

The project constructed two demonstration houses in order to estimate actual costs and train builders. The designs were created by the project engineer, taking into account not only affordability, but also sustainable use of materials, functionality, and flood resistance. They were designed so that people could build incrementally: starting with one room, up to the full design of four rooms. The self-help groups also offer smaller 'home improvement' loans, and are now branching into loans for latrine construction. So far, 16 people have borrowed for new houses, and 5 for home improvements.



Completed housing in Wau Nur

Yasir Yousef/Practical Action



Poster depicting peace between North and South at celebrations for the peace accord, January 2005

In 2007, Sawa Sawa SHG for Housing won an award from the local World Bank office in competition with 600 other entrants nationwide, as one of the best and most innovative development practices. The prize of \$20,000 has further helped to boost their activities.

A new 'zero energy' design was also developed and demonstrated for classrooms which maximizes the use of ventilation and natural light, is flood-resistant and reduces costs by 25 per cent compared to conventional designs. There has already been uptake of this design by other NGOs working in the state.

Businesses in service delivery

Providing services or housing can also be a way to increase income and strengthen livelihoods. The credit for housing scheme generated a range of job opportunities, with builders' and brick-makers' associations. On-the-job training was provided for 60 builders in sustainable building techniques. Links were forged between Kadugli Brick Makers' Association and Sawa Sawa SHG for Housing. As part of this agreement, 72,000 bricks were produced, for use in sustainable housing in the area. The construction of latrines alone has injected

around £10,000 into the local economy in the form of payment for labourers and masons.

Awareness-raising campaigns

Building awareness and communicating lessons learnt were a key feature of this project. The project used a participatory method for monitoring and evaluating progress, which meant that the community organizations were involved in the updating of data, and periodic meetings were arranged for the community to discuss progress.

To spread the lessons learnt to a wider audience, a national workshop on low-cost housing alternatives was organized. The workshop was attended by government officials, university academics, contractors, engineers, NGOs, journalists and financial institutions. The project was featured in two national newspapers, as well as on local radio and television. It was also represented at several national shows and exhibitions on housing and development.

Lessons learned

The final evaluation of the project highlighted several learning points. Through the project, Practical Action gained valuable insight into

the dynamics of displaced communities. The group that was the most stable and dynamic in terms of representing the needs of the community was the CDC of Wau Nur, despite this being the most ethnically diverse of the three communities. The reason seems to be that a clear distinction was made between the roles of various players. The CDC was given the mandate to work for development in the interests of all, while traditional leaders (sultans and sheikhs) held the responsibility for conflict resolution. The Jebel Marco CDC, by contrast, was dominated by tribal leaders who did not promote inclusiveness, leading to conflict between different factions. A greater awareness of the likely dynamics within displaced communities will make future work with other communities easier.

A second learning point was the importance of establishing specialized community organizations to deal with specific issues, under the wider community structure (the CDCs). These new organizations, especially Sawa Sawa and some of the women's development groups, have proved to be dynamic and successful, and especially good at handling revolving funds. When such funds were in the hands of the CDC, the community did not feel ownership of the funds, with

the result that repayment rates were low; by comparison repayment rates were better with Sawa Sawa.

Good results were obtained by working closely, consistently, and on a long-term basis with local authorities and service providers, a learning point that is constantly reinforced through our experiences. The members of the community, working in partnership with the local authority, are the best actors to resolve their own problems.

Conclusion

The key achievements of this project included the strengthening of community organizations through training and capacity building, leading to them being able to plan strategically and advocate for themselves. Specialized groups were set up to deal with specific issues, such as credit for housing and small businesses.

Links were developed on a consistent, long-term basis between the local authorities and community groups, to a point where the residents can now make their voice heard on issues affecting them, both by lobbying and joint working.

Technical, management, and financial skills were developed through training, and



Masons trained in latrine construction, Gedarif

groups are now providing services to the rest of the community, generating an income and improving people's quality of life. All the 13,500 residents of the three settlements have benefited to some degree, whether from better representation to the local authority, from providing or using a service, or in terms of income and business opportunities in construction and building materials.

Finally, Practical Action gained valuable insights into the functioning of displaced communities, finding that the process worked best where a clear distinction was made between the remits of the different actors. The role of traditional leaders can be maintained alongside representative, democratically elected groups which deal with development priorities. These insights, and the project approach in general, could usefully be tested and applied to work with urban communities of internally displaced people elsewhere in the country.

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Keywords

Capacity-building, housing, basic services, internally displaced people.

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For further information, please contact:

Lucy Stevens, International Programme Co-ordinator, Access to Infrastructure Services,
lucy.stevens@practicalaction.org.uk or at the address below.

PRACTICAL ACTION

The Schumacher Centre for Technology and Development
Bourton on Dunsmore
Rugby
Warwickshire, CV23 9QZ
UK

Practical Action

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