

DECEMBER 2005



# CHILD ALERT **Darfur**

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Health, Education, Equality, Protection  
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# Darfur's Children

## Introduction

After almost three years of conflict that has killed tens of thousands and forced 2 million to flee their homes, the children of Darfur today continue to face significant threats due to a potent and persistent mix of ongoing fighting, insecurity, drought, crop failure and economic collapse.

While more than 1.5 million children living in and around camps for the displaced now have access to some of the most complete social services in Darfur's history, a daily reality of insecurity and economic paralysis dominates the lives of Darfur's children – both those in and around the camps and the nearly 1.25 million who live beyond. With little prospect of immediate change on the horizon, these factors suggest a bleak future for an entire generation.



## Smashed food and water pots in a destroyed village.

Daily life in the region is now characterized by sporadic clashes and surging lawlessness. This has led to a virtual lockdown in a region where mobility is essential for the core economic activities of raising crops and livestock. Delicate customary agreements on resource-sharing among farmers and animal herders, which were already breaking down under the pressure of population growth and resource depletion, have collapsed. This, in turn, is destroying the livelihoods of the people of Darfur, irrespective of tribe or vocation.

Children have been scarred by each great turn of events in Darfur. When people speak or hear of the tragedy of Darfur – the plundering of food, the denial of water, the destruction of shelter, and murderous rampages – it is the region's children, who make up the majority of the population, who are at stake. The truth behind terms like 'ethnic cleansing' and 'displacement' takes its shape in the fractured lives of more than 3 million children who have either been forced to flee across the arid landscape or struggle for survival beyond the reach of humanitarian relief. What in diplomatic language is called 'stripping of assets' is, at its most fundamental, keeping food from a child's plate.

A consequence of the humanitarian intervention is that at the end of 2005, more than 1.75 million children living in and around camps have access to some of the most complete social

# The Idea of *Child Alert*

This is the first of a series of reports on children in countries-in-crisis, where it is traditionally difficult to raise attention. The aim is to convey the core problems facing children in these countries at a particular point of time.

This *Child Alert* seeks to serve as a landmark, examining the question: What are the forces shaping the lives of Darfur's children today, more than two years after the start of the conflict that displaced millions and altered the balance of life in the region? And by looking at this present state of affairs, what is the likely future for these children and, by extension, Darfur?

It surveys all available independent reports and international news coverage, and draws upon first-person reporting from across Darfur that included extensive conversations with children, families and workers in the field. The findings are not hopeful, but they are realistic.

- The economy is rapidly declining as insecurity strangles commerce, agriculture, and the raising of livestock, leading to deepening reliance on international aid. The struggle for food is almost certainly set to increase during 2006.
- Conditions are worsening for children who live outside the displacement camps, in areas unreached by humanitarian aid.
- Displacement camps and villages continue to be attacked. Civilians face a multitude of security risks, including the daily prospect of rape as girls and women gather firewood.
- People are living in a virtual state of lockdown, unable to fully pursue independent lives, trapping families and children in a state of bare survival and little hope.

There are no answers in this report. There is only a picture of the lives of children today, and a summary of the difficult conditions that confine them to tomorrows that look little better. Our aim is to jar those with the power to influence events into asking how their choices and actions affect Darfur's children.

*We are indebted to the fine work of those whose material we have drawn from, and to the tireless work of our implementing partners in Darfur.*

services in Darfur's history. Ironically, it is this population growing up in and around camps that is currently best positioned to survive the conflict. By contrast, neighbouring populations in remote rural areas, most outside government control and far from humanitarian assistance, are more exposed to the fighting and food insecurity that is now a chronic reality. No place is safe, however, and even if children in camps escape further attack, they live in dependence and, too often, in fear.

At the time of this report, government and rebels are engaged in the 7th round of peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria – a process which remains the best hope for a break in the political deadlock. Pressure is mounting on all parties, as the fear for 2006 is that the current stalemate will persist, thus further eroding hope for return, recovery and any meaningful restoration of livelihoods. This is as true for the three factions of rebel groups, which are not yet speaking with a single voice, as it is for the government.

This *Child Alert* aims to look with fresh eyes at the situation of Darfur's children and the factors shaping their lives as of December 2005. It strives to capture the importance of reaching an agreement in Abuja not only for the benefit of Darfur's children – but for the stability and development of a generation of youth in the whole of Sudan. The urgency cannot be more clearly stressed. Every day that passes further erodes the capacity of communities to cope and diminishes even more the opportunities for children to reach their full capacity. Children in Darfur need more than survival. They deserve peace.

**A 12 year old girl (striped scarf) explains how she was separated from her 2 friends, and raped while looking for firewood.**



# Background

This report does not focus on the roots or immediate impact of the Darfur conflict. This has been covered extensively in numerous reports by the United Nations, universities, non-governmental organizations and others. However, a few basic historical and contextual points are useful in understanding the current state of children in Darfur. The area consists of three provinces – North, South and West Darfur – comprising 500,000 square kilometers and 6 million people. The main towns are more than 1,000 kilometers from the capital, Khartoum, a distance that has kept the region on the periphery of Sudanese politics and policies. A pivotal issue in the current conflict is this marginalization: the desperately poor region has been neglected by the central authorities since colonial times and has limited infrastructure and social services.

The conflict has been classified as one of pro-government Arab tribes fighting African rebels. However, the labels ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ are viewed as a false dichotomy by both Sudanese and outside observers because of the interconnected nature of the tribes, which are all Muslim. In reality, it is a complex and often fluid mix of ethnicity and livelihood which distinguishes groups. For generations, the nomadic herders and settled farmers lived in symbiosis. But population growth coupled with a series of droughts and desertification has led to dwindling resources and, consequently, competition and conflict.

The spark for the current crisis is generally considered to be a March 2003 rebel raid on Sudanese military aircraft and soldiers at the airport in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. The Sudan Liberation Movement, with limited support from the Justice and Equality Movement, launched the attack to publicize their demands that the region not be overlooked in the highly visible and internationally-supported negotiations to end the war with the South. Taken by surprise, the government responded with military operations. When attempts to route out insurgents failed, proxy militias, drawn in part from local nomadic tribes, responded with scorched earth tactics reminiscent of the war in the South.

The result is one of the world’s most serious ongoing humanitarian emergencies.

A mother and child are treated by Médecins Sans Frontières at a Therapeutic Feeding Center in Morni camp.

# Current Situation

The initial wave of violence and subsequent humanitarian response has divided the population of Darfur into three loose and fluctuating categories. The first group is comprised of those who were forced from their land by conflict and now live in displacement camps; they number about 2 million people. More than 1.8 million of these are dispersed in some 200 camps inside Sudan, with another 200,000 in refugee camps over the border in Chad. More than one million of the displaced are children under 18, with 320,000 of those aged five and under. While these are the most affected people – they have endured tremendous suffering and most lost everything – their basic needs are being met by the international relief effort.

The second group is affected residents, or host communities, which total around 1.5 million. They comprise people that live in towns and villages that have received an influx of displaced persons and share their dwindling resources with new arrivals, or those communities that remain in their homes but are nevertheless adversely affected by physical and food insecurity. Due to their location, logistical and insecurity constraints have prevented consistent delivery of social services to the latter, even prior to the conflict.

The third group lives outside the humanitarian safety net – numbering around 2.5 million people scattered across both government and rebel-controlled areas. This group is significant because very little is



known about their condition. Some communities may not have critical needs— but most, because of the collapse of the economy and militarization of the region, are feared to be extremely vulnerable to food insecurity as their livelihoods and coping mechanisms have been exhausted. As obstruction by both government and rebel groups eases, humanitarian aid organizations have made efforts to reach these previously inaccessible groups. This is one reason why, even when major hostilities decrease, the number of affected residents continues to rise—by 90,000 in October alone.

## Insecurity

The persistent insecurity in Darfur remains the defining problem for its people. The military confrontation has settled into a pattern of sporadic skirmishes between rebel and government forces or allies across fluid zones of control. The very location of these forces has tightened the economic stranglehold as they prevent access to services and markets, grazing areas and transit routes. There are also outbreaks of fighting between rebel groups themselves, calling into question their fragile alliance. Infiltration of Chadian rebels onto Sudanese territory further complicates the situation as their support to ethnic allies threatens to internationalize the conflict.

Direct attacks on villages and displacement camps also still occur. Cattle-rustling and competition over arable land or traditional migration routes is an essential part of the larger conflict.

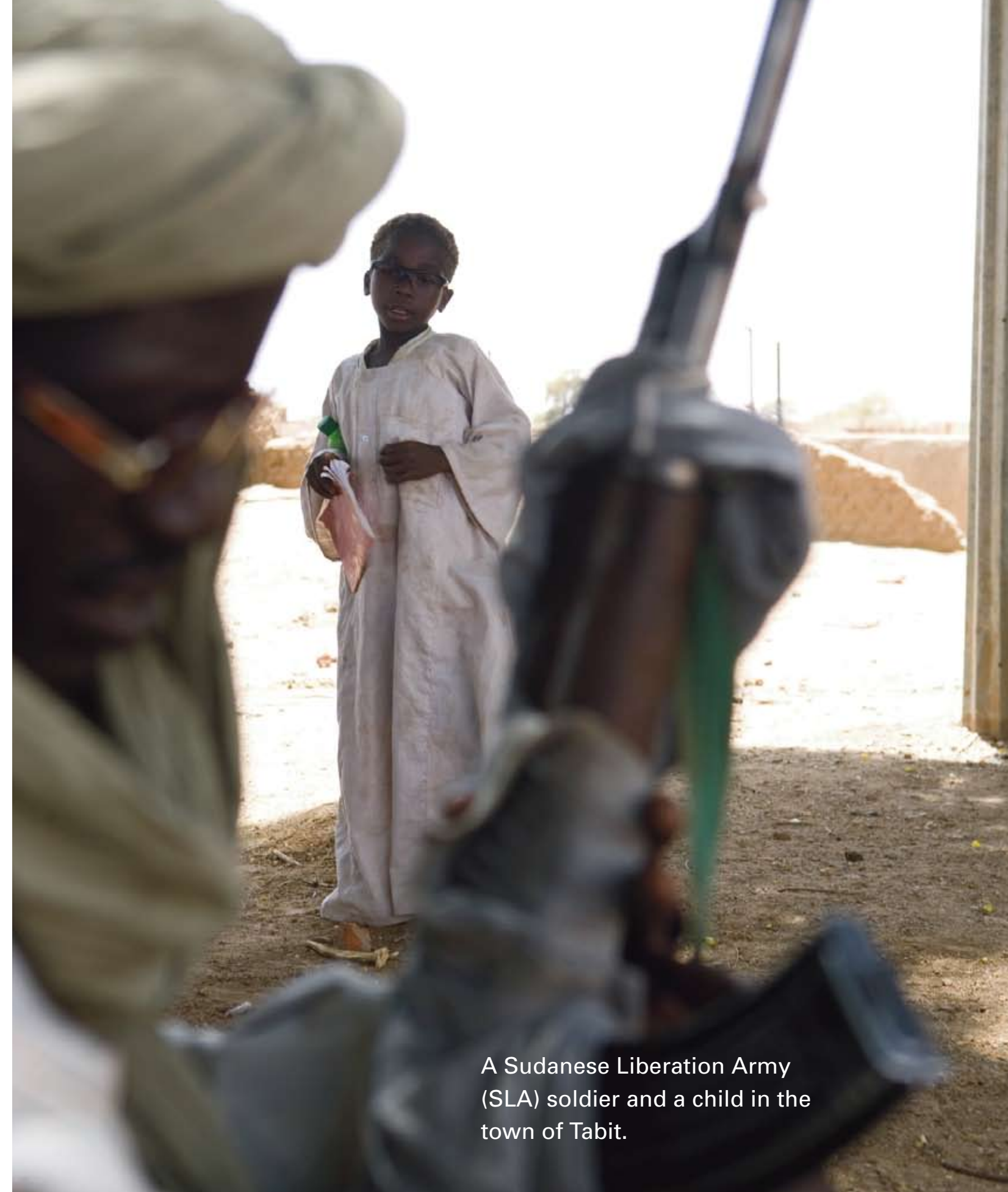
Getting caught in armed conflict is not the only threat to the physical security of children and families— looting, banditry and illegal taxation regimes enforced by irregular armed groups also pose a threat, especially during harvest time. Meanwhile, widespread sexual violence on the outskirts of camps continues to erode the health, dignity and mobility of women and girls. As with all other security threats, civil unrest within crowded camps endangers the lives of children, as it prevents the entry of humanitarian actors and the reliable functioning of services.

Humanitarian workers also run the risk of getting caught in the crossfire and, not infrequently, report being the actual target of attacks. Entry into rebel-controlled areas is particularly risky, as non-governmental organizations, the UN and African Union monitors have been the victims of harassment, detention, abuse and direct physical attack resulting in injury and death.

Banditry and looting do not always have physical casualties but they slow operations, further constrain access and prevent aid from reaching those who need it most – thus taking a more devastating toll than the incident itself.

## The Humanitarian Intervention

After what has been widely recognized as a dangerously slow response to the unfolding crisis in 2003 and early 2004, relief efforts scaled up significantly in mid-2004 and continued to grow in 2005. While the conflict-affected population has risen from 1 million in April 2004 to almost 3.5 million in November 2005, the number of national and international aid workers rose from under 1,000 to 13,700 during the



A Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) soldier and a child in the town of Tabit.



A nomad whose son was killed and herds stolen by the SLA. Now, blind, he must support a family of 20.

same period. The number of people receiving some form of assistance also increased from less than 500,000 to over 3 million today.

The impact of this assistance can be clearly seen on the ground. The WHO survey conducted in June 2005, shows a crude mortality rate of 0.8/10,000 per day, below the international crisis threshold of 1/10,000 and a three-fold decrease from the previous year. These positive indicators are combined with the preliminary results of the WFP/UNICEF Darfur-wide Food Security and Nutrition survey which shows that the nutritional status of the population which is being reached by humanitarian aid has improved dramatically, with Global Acute Malnutrition among children under 5 dropping from 21.8percent in 2004 to 11.9percent in 2005.

Complementing food assistance are emergency services designed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and protect child health. They include ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, primary health care facilities and immunization campaigns, the distribution of items such as soap and jerry cans, as well as aggressive hygiene education programmes. For particularly vulnerable communities, nutritional centres have been set up to care for severely and moderately malnourished children. The re-establishment of basic education programmes throughout the conflict affected areas is helping children to remain productive during this period of upheaval, while designated 'child spaces' offer some elements of a protective environment.

However, only the 3.5 million people reached by humanitarian programmes have access to these services. The remaining 2.5 million people still un-reached in remote rural areas will be a major challenge in the year ahead.

These short-term responses, while helping to stabilize the situation, are tenuous and require enormous effort and funding to sustain. Moreover, they have little to do

with addressing the long-term needs of the population, particularly the displaced, which require security in order to return to their villages, then further support to rebuild their homes, economy and society.

## Life in the Camps and Host Communities

The camps for refugees and displaced persons have become the symbol of the Darfur conflict and the focus of most international activity. There are around 200 camps in the region, some near the border with Chad, others clustered around major towns. They range from the largest in the world, the 163,000-person Kalma camp, to unnamed spontaneous settlements of a few hundred people. The displaced, including some 200,000 refugees across the border in Chad, number around 2 million. Most have lost everything and are dependent on humanitarian relief. The camps are also dramatically affecting nearby towns and villages, overall home to one million people, in addition to the displaced they have taken in.

Humanitarian workers say children endure a whiplash of emotions that shift between extremes of stability and fear. The relief of receiving food and shelter is countered by the fear of militias who lurk in and around some camps. The boredom and tedium that comes with camp life is balanced by unaccustomed access to primary education and 'child spaces' for hundreds of thousands of children. The desire to have more permanent structures to replace hastily erected tents is undercut by a constant yearning to return home. The relative stability inside the camps gives way to the terror of leaving them and being exposed to the possibility of abuse, theft, rape and murder. The sum effect of these extremes is one of the worst environments for a child: one that is unpredictable and dangerous.

One of the oldest and largest of Darfur's camps is Abou Shouk, which houses 50,000 displaced including approximately 30,000 children. The camp lies about a kilometer outside the provincial capital, El Fasher, a market town of 220,000 (including some 30,000 displaced Darfurians), of which around 120,000 are children. Most of the displaced are from Darfur's largest tribes, such as the Fur and Zarghawa, who fled the initial waves of violence in early 2004. Some walked with small children as far as 400 kilometers, a journey of several weeks.

Once a vast expanse of UN tarpaulins atop walls of woven straw, Abou Shouk now has a more permanent feel. Many people have upgraded their dwellings to sturdier mud-brick houses to better protect them against a harsh climate that shifts from 50-degree Celsius heat to drenching rain to Saharan winds that whip up eddies of stinging sand. They are receiving enough to survive and protecting child health remains the critical first priority.

Food and water, of course, are essential. Relief agencies deliver grain, oil and other staples to families in the camps.<sup>1</sup> Chlorinated water is available from 31 wells equipped with hand pumps and reservoir tanks. Around 3,300 latrines have been built to ensure safe sanitation. If a child is stricken ill, there are six primary health clinics within the camp. Primary schools have been established, as have 'child spaces' and community centres, places that help ease the everyday mixture of stress, fear and boredom. In Abou Shouk, more than 13,000 children attend primary school in 194 classrooms, with Sudan's ministry of education providing 235 teachers. There are no secondary schools for those displaced.



If there is a silver lining to the dark cloud that has engulfed Darfur's displaced, it is the camp services that many are accessing for the first time. About 80 percent of the displaced in camps have access to clean water and 65 percent to sanitation, which protects children from deadly water-borne illnesses like cholera and diarrhea. Health services have been established in most camps, with over 230 fixed and mobile primary health clinics reaching almost all the displaced population. In addition, the supply of food and nutritional supplements appears to have stabilized the malnutrition rates in the camps, as noted above. Among the displaced, over 340,000 children ages 6 to 13 attend class, almost half of them girls. There are 355 facilities for children not attending school that support 166,000 conflict-affected children and 2,000 adolescents.

It is testimony to the historical neglect of Darfur that, although the current health and education services provided by the emergency relief effort are the best in its history, their overall impact is limited and long-term sustainability doubtful since they continue to be delivered in the areas of displacement, rather than return. The number of children in school still only represents about 28 percent of school-age children in Darfur, and there is no guarantee how long emergency funding for education will last. Child health remains very

**A woman carries her severely malnourished baby after being turned away from a hospital. Unicef took the family to a Concern feeding center.**



**Hawa, 10, and her father take a break from farming in their destroyed village. They are the only people to have returned.**

precarious. With disease outbreaks a constant threat, health clinics remain on high alert. In densely populated camps, all it takes is one or two cases of cholera to spark an epidemic that could kill hundreds.

Moreover, while the camps may help people survive, they are desperately difficult places to live. With each day a struggle, displaced persons are adapting a new set of coping mechanisms, often involving children. Some families earn small amounts of income by seeking menial jobs in towns, selling part of their food rations or sending their children to beg. Some grow meager crops on land borrowed from farmers in nearby towns. Inside the camp, boys make bricks for the burgeoning construction that is turning tents into mud huts – and in turn further depleting water supplies.

Abou Shouk, which did not exist two years ago, is now a sprawling suburb of El Fasher. The town's residents, much like their neighbors in Abou Shouk, don't venture far for fear of attack. Normal economic activity, such as the once-lively markets, has collapsed. These days, income is mainly derived from the humanitarian agencies. Often, though, the services of these agencies don't extend to the town, where people must pay fees for water, health and schooling, and buy food from scant resources. It is not surprising, then, that there are reports of El Fasher residents moving to Abou Shouk to get free services, especially for their children.

Furthermore, the huge influx of people to El Fasher, coupled with the inability to leave the immediate area, has upended the delicate balance between the people and the land. Essential natural resources, like water and wood, are being depleted at an alarming rate, a pattern being repeated across Darfur and over the border in Chad. The boreholes drilled for the camps draw from the same water table as El Fasher. Of Abou Shouk's 31 wells, six are already dry. The last rainy season – the first since the humanitarian services were fully established – recharged underground reservoirs to some extent. But there is serious concern among water experts about the impact of haphazard drilling of wells, which may drop the water table in this arid area to unsustainable levels.

The dusty wasteland around El Fasher used to be filled with scrubby acacia trees up to two meters tall. They are now gone, gathered by displaced persons, who have scoured the land for wood to fuel fires and to sell for income. Collectors are usually girls, who are forced to travel farther from the camp each day, exposing them to the possibility of rape and abuse. Yet, these hours-long journeys are critical. Without firewood, families cannot make their meals: the grain-based humanitarian provisions must be cooked. It's a problem as alarming as it is simple, and one with no obvious solution. And it is indicative of the myriad daily hazards facing children in Darfur today.

## Beyond the Camps in Rural Darfur

About 2.5 million of Darfur's 6 million people are in areas outside the humanitarian safety net. Little is known about their situation, although that is starting to change as relief workers gain greater access. People in rebel-held territories, about whom humanitarian workers know the least, are cut off from markets and services. Others in government-held areas live in a state of fear from soldiers and militias and often do not move from their immediate environs. Many are in hamlets across the vast swathe of undefined territory, including nomads unable to move their herds along seasonal migration routes. The biggest concern for all these groups is hunger and thirst.

Scarcity of food and water is a defining characteristic of Darfur. Its people live on the edge of the vast Sahara desert, far from major towns or modern trade routes, neglected by the central government and lacking even the most basic infrastructure. Such a precarious existence allows little room for error and requires a deeply ingrained survival instinct. Left to their own devices, the people of Darfur are able to cope in times of peace and stability. Like many in the Sahel region of Africa, Darfurians have experienced famine before, most recently in the mid-1980s. They have endured encroaching desertification, accompanied by a series of droughts, in the decades since. In lean periods, families relied on an array of coping skills. Adults ate less so children received at least a modicum of nourishment; families foraged for wild food to bridge the gap to the next growing season; some adults migrated to Khartoum and other countries in search of work to send back money to their families.

Still, a family's ability to feed itself can be fatally undermined by factors ranging from the vagaries of weather to the viciousness of man. When the two combine, disaster looms. This is explained in detail in the study *Darfur – Livelihoods Under Siege*, published by the Feinstein International Famine Center of Tufts University (Boston, USA June 2004). It asserts that, "Never before in the history of Darfur has there been such a combination of factors causing the failure of livelihood strategies and the loss of

assets. These factors include systematic asset-stripping, production failures, market failures, failures of access to natural resources and constraints on the remittances of migrant workers. Under these circumstances, region-wide famine appears inevitable.”

The preliminary results of the Darfur-wide Food Security and Nutritional survey indicate that malnutrition rates have dropped, but there was a significant disparity noted between children in camps and those surveyed in rural areas. Children in camps proved to be more stable — not because income or food security increased, but because their access to humanitarian aid was more reliable. In fact, families throughout Darfur are more impoverished than last year. In 2004, 50 percent of all the households in Darfur could finance their daily food out of their own income, but this year, only 20 percent of households are able to do so. These findings give us some hint as to what is likely happening in rural areas that are not yet under surveillance.

The situation in the village of Nabagaia in West Darfur reflects some of the problems facing those who remain on their land today. It was largely spared the burning, looting and killing that forced nearby villagers to flee into camps but has been beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance. It has a primary school, one water source, no health facility. Boys earn income by selling firewood or working in the markets of a nearby town. Villagers who spoke with

A child makes bricks for permanent dwellings at the Iridimi camp in Chad.



a visitor last June say that militiamen destroyed their crops, extorted protection money and continually stole from them. This is one reason why, according to the village sheikh, people are ambivalent about planting.

To get by, the villagers reduced their meal intake from three to two meals drawn from their remaining stocks of sorghum, onions, okra and oil. They then went down to one a day, with some adults skipping days so the children can eat. This careful use of scant resources has kept everyone, especially the children, alive. Last June, Nabagaia saw its first sign of the humanitarian effort when a World Food Programme team surveyed the area. The village is now counting on food deliveries to get it through lean periods. For the children it seems clear that in the short-run, without being able to farm or work, the only way to survive is via humanitarian relief. It remains unclear at what point their families, like countless other across the region, will be able to re-establish the economic patterns that allowed for self-sufficiency.

## Continuing Violence and Trauma

As this report has explained, much of Darfur can be considered in lockdown. Civilians have been targeted by both pro and anti-government forces. In this state of siege, lawlessness is surging, with banditry on roads a major concern for Darfur’s civilians and the estimated 13,700 local and international aid workers helping them.

The psycho-social impact is hard to quantify but it is apparent. Humanitarian workers describe a kind of mass trauma in the camps. While the protective structure of the family is crucial to recovery, parents feel hopeless and powerless, prompting a widespread sense of fatalism about a future they cannot control. Children talk of the violent events they witnessed and their continuing fear of armed men on horseback who often remain on the outskirts of camps and settlements. Since many men have either died or are mobilized in the rural areas, tens of thousands of women are raising their children alone, and often those of deceased family members as well. The daily stress for these mothers can seriously impair their ability to care for their children. Exhausted and depressed, they despair about their future and that of their offspring. This is also true for adolescents, who are at risk of recruitment into armed groups and community defence forces. Enlistment is not always a choice, but it is sometimes preferable to the sense of vulnerability that will plague them until security returns.

Humanitarian workers report that only a small percentage of children are seriously traumatized or in need of specialized care. The protective structure of the family is crucial. Some humanitarian services, based mainly out of schools and community centers, are attempting to bring a sense of normalcy through recreation and social activities. This is also true for adolescents, who risk being drawn into the conflict as fighters.

The threat of rape is one of the most traumatic, persistent and well-publicized aspects of the Darfur conflict. Rapes often occur when women and girls leave their protective camp or home environments to collect wood and grass.<sup>2</sup> Accurate numbers are difficult to attain since most are not reported out of fear of further harm and social stigmatisation, but estimates put the number of rapes in the thousands.



Children at a Child Friendly Center  
in the Kass camp.

A recent report from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that in almost one in three reported rapes, the victims were children, and a recent UNICEF/ UN Population Fund study suggests that the number might be even higher. The immediate impact of these rapes is life-threatening and horrific for the victims. They are also attacks on the very fabric of families and communities, extremely painful events that add to the endemic feelings of humiliation and powerlessness. Longer-term concerns centre on healing the physical and mental wounds, and raising children born as a result of rape whom communities are reluctant to accept as their own.

There are some creative strategies developed to reduce the exposure of women to the risk of rape. They focus on helping women to decrease their consumption of fuel (and thus their trips outside camp) and on coordinating with African Union patrols for some form of limited protection. There is evidence that where the AU is stationed or are on patrol, women and girls are more likely to gather firewood or travel for other needs.

While these methods focus on prevention, there is very little in the way of victim assistance. Humanitarian agencies have advocated for unimpeded and immediate medical treatment – but this has been limited in many places due to political sensitivities. Some humanitarian services, based mainly out of schools and community centres, are attempting to provide psycho-social support through recreation and social activities geared towards children. Limited services exist to help families and communities resist rejecting women and girls who have been raped. In general, however, the camps are better equipped to deal with immediate physical requirements than their longer-term emotional needs.

Attacks on civilians and evidence of widespread rape are searing reminders that even with a negotiated agreement between parties, Darfur is not secure. A peace agreement is only the first, but crucially important step towards a larger reconciliation process among groups that must continue to live together and share resources, services, and a common future.

## Conclusion

While the participants of the Abuja peace process discuss power-sharing and wealth-sharing, they are undoubtedly thinking about the best way to secure their children's future.

But Darfur's 3 million children have borne the brunt of this crisis and their long-term prospects appear bleaker with every day that passes without a lasting solution. Tens of thousands have already died as a consequence of the conflict.

More than 1.75 million children live in and around camps where, despite receiving unprecedented social services, camp inhabitants live in a state of siege, traumatized by past events, continuing fear and a loss of hope for the future.

Another 1.25 million children live in areas only now becoming accessible, places where food and water are scarce and services almost non-existent. With the economy in freefall, fields fallow and livestock plundered, many families have no way to feed their children. Hunger, thirst and extreme hardship looms for those currently beyond the reach of humanitarian relief.

To ensure the immediate survival of Darfur's children and minimize the impact of the conflict, increased international assistance will be required at least through 2006, and probably for a further five years beyond.

Though essential to preserving life in the short term, humanitarian aid is not sufficient, as has been illustrated clearly during the decades-long conflict in the South. There must be a negotiated solution to prevent the humanitarian operations from turning into exhaustive 'care and maintenance' operations which maintain an unacceptable status quo.

The longer aid is used in place of real solutions, such as new agreements on security, shared land use and a functioning network of social services, the more dependent Darfur's people become on the fleeting solution of international relief.

Meanwhile, the children of Darfur have little prospect of a decent, independent future for themselves. The household-level economic outlook for families both in and out of the camps is precarious, and powerful entrenched forces are undermining the traditional systems for generating income, food, and trade. The majority of Darfurian children live beyond the reach of current international relief efforts, leaving them exposed to malnutrition, illness, violence, and fear.

The children of Darfur deserve the same opportunities that are being afforded to Sudan's children in the south and in the north. If the peace talks succeed in bringing about an agreement similar to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the north and the south, 2006 may bring stability to the region for the first time in years. Darfur's children may then begin to realize the hopes and dreams they now harbour only in their minds.

## References

- 1 Daily rations per person include: cereal, 500 grams; pulses 50 grams; CSB (corn/soya blend) 50 grams; vegetable oil, 30 grams; sugar, 6 grams; salt, 10 grams.
- 2 For example, girls in Abou Shouk average round trips of seven hours or more. Sometimes the distances are so great the girls are forced to stay out overnight.

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