***Youth Volunteers Rebuilding Darfur Project (YVRDP)***

***Independent Evaluation***

***Draft and brief preliminary findings, conclusion and recommendations***

By

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1. ***Findings***

*An evaluation field survey was conducted in six localities in three States of Darfur. The survey entailed bilateral interviews and group discussions. These are the preliminary findings presented per output:*

***Output 1: Youth Volunteers Rebuilding Darfur Scheme established and institutionalized in five states of Darfur***

One Project Coordination Unit (PCU) and three State Project Coordination Units (SPCUs) were established and operational in the Peace and Development Centers of the three Darfur Universities, El Fashir University in North Darfur, Nyala University in South Darfur (to cover South and East Darfur states) and Zalingei University (to cover West and Central Darfur States). There was a structural change at Zalingei University in the beginning of 2015. The Zalingei University campus in Geneina became Geneina University. Therefore, SPCU Geneina now belongs to the Peace and Development center in Geneina University. It will become UNDP implementing partner for the YVRDP in the 2nd phase.

The PCU and the SPCUs have trained the 205 university graduates (M: 114, F: 91) and selected 139 of them to function as Youth Volunteers and senior volunteers (M: 78, F: 61) deployed to 47 communities in five Darfur States.

Through discussions and interviews with the staff of the SPCUs in the states (North, South and West Darfur), it is observed that the coordination between the PCU and SPCUs as well as between the SPCUs is not strong enough. There is a need to improve the database and reporting system which will allow to share more information among PCU/SPCUs. One of the issues reported was that some of the project information was not kept properly. In addition, the SPCUs staffs need more training and more volunteer spirit. This should be addressed in the second phase of the project since the PCU/SPCUs are the main and essential partners of the YVRDP.

***Output 2: Pool of graduate youth volunteers trained and deployed in their*** ***communities***

205 university graduates (M: 114, F: 91) were selected and trained by the three SPCUs in El Fashir, Nyala and Zalingei Universities. 100% of the interviewed youth who received training by the SPCUs responded that they are satisfied with the training and subjects they received. 100% of them also responded that the training increased their knowledge. Out of the 205 trained youth, 139 youth volunteers and 13 senior volunteers were deployed to their communities. 95% of the deployed Volunteers interviewed, expressed their satisfaction from the support and cooperation they received from their communities. This is an indication that the Darfur communities in the rural areas are positively responsive to volunteerism. With this background, it is recommended the YVRDP to expand their activities in the rural areas of all Darfur states.

From the interviews and discussions with the volunteers, it was found that the incentive provided by the project (350 SDG per month) to the deployed volunteers was very small to support their food while they are living in villages and not with their families.

Additionally, transportation of the volunteers from their resident villages to other village for the community training was a challenge for the volunteers during the deployment period in Phase I of this project. Many senior volunteers and environmental volunteers cover more than 2 communities which meant that they had to travel between the communities.

Regarding the senior volunteers, the evaluation showed that their TOR and selection criteria need to be revised so that their roles and tasks will be clearer. In order to avoid creating a feeling of superiority among the volunteers, it is recommended not to make any differences in volunteers’ incentives and allowance among them.

Regarding the community members trained by the deployed youth volunteers, 92% of the community members interviewed replied that they had acquired knowledge through the training they received from the youth volunteers. This is an encouraging indication for expansion of the YVRDP to cover more communities in the rural areas in Darfur.

The volunteers were equipped with laptops and internet access devices, however these did not necessarily help them in their work and communication with the RDP/NGOs and the SPCUs. During this evaluation, 93% of the interviewed youth volunteers responded that the laptops did not help them for many reasons; (a) there is no electricity for recharging the laptops in rural areas, (b) the solar chargers which were supposed to be delivered were not provided in the end, and (c) lack of mobile internet coverage in almost all the rural areas of the Darfur states. They concluded that the laptops and internet access devices were not useful during the implementation the YVRDP Phase I. Some of the youth volunteers interviewed added that it would have been more useful and beneficial if the funds allocated for the laptops and internet equipment had been used to increase the amount of the loan/grant or to increase the number of the loan/grant beneficiaries.

***Output 3: Micro-enterprises in target communities established and expanded in an*** ***environmentally sustainable way, with focus on women and youth***

The youth volunteers transferred the knowledge they gained through the training sessions, to the community members. The training subjects included business and financial skills, risk management, bargaining skills, natural resource management, water harvesting reforestation and peaceful negotiation etc. This activity was an important and useful intervention of the YVRDP. 100% of the interviewed beneficiaries responded that they are satisfied with the training on business and environment. Among the grant/loan winners who benefited from the grant/loan, 100% of those interviewed responded that without the training in business management, they would not have benefited from the grant/loan. Female community members who received the grant/loan were the most successful beneficiaries of the project. It can be attributed to their traditional lifestyle in Darfur. Women, especially in rural areas, bear more responsibilities in their livelihoods. They often take any chance and make utmost efforts to sustain or improve their livelihoods for their families.

Although the amounts of grant for the IDP beneficiaries in South Darfur was very small (1,400 SDG per individual), the impact was substantial in terms of repayment rate and creating employment opportunities for some of the IDPs. The businesses established in IDP camps were more successful than the loan businesses in the rural areas. This is because the small businesses products (Juice, handicrafts etc) have higher demand and markets are available throughout the year within the IDP camps while livestock and agricultural crops markets are seasonal.

The loans provided to the winners in North, West and South Darfur (Id el Fursan) were SDG 3,000. Many of them could not make much profits from the business they started by the loan. Generally, livestock fattening or cash crops farming requires more than six month or at least one year to produce tangible profits. Moreover, risks and market challenges and constraints are high in the present protracted conflict context in Darfur. During discussions and interviews with the loan beneficiaries in North and South Darfur, it was found that six months was too short to run any type of business, especially in the rural areas. , Three month grace period, the period before you start to repay your loans, was not long enough. Moreover, agricultural inputs requires more than 5,000 SDG. Livestock fattening or breeding business requires a reasonable amount of money to succeed (e.g. a capital of 5 male goats to be fattened for three months to generate 20% to 25% profit requires 3000-4000SDG in addition to another 10%-15% of management and fattening costs)

***Output 4: Market access facilitated for rural MSE profit increase, with focus on women & youth entrepreneurs***

139 volunteers were provided with microfinance mediators training as well as Accumulating Savings and Credit Associations (ASCA) training in order to link beneficiaries with microfinance institutions and to form ASCA groups in the communities. However, the evaluation shows that these activities were not fully implemented as planned. The evaluator only found ASCA groups formed in the IDP camps in South Darfur. In North Darfur, (Dar es salam and Kelimindo Localities) it was found through discussions with the senior youth volunteer and the representative of the RDPs, that there was a confusion among the RDP/NGOs as well as the volunteers in terms of understanding the concept of ASCA. Since Farmers Union groups (50-100 members) had already been formed in these areas and registered in the Ministry of Agriculture at the state and federal level as farmers unions, the RDP/NGOs thought there was no need to form another group in their communities but that these Farmers Union Groups could function as ASCAs.

In West Darfur, the evaluator found that a leather and shoes makers group consisting of 101 members and a women group with 200 members (handicraft making group) had been activated through UNDP’s Pro-Poor Value Chain Projects. The two groups are registered under the General Corporation of the artisan. Each of the two groups received 3,000 SDG from the YVRDP as small loans. Although the two groups benefited from the loan, they are not presently accessing the credit institutions to get further loans or credits. Traditionally in Darfur, small businesses are reluctant to access banks or credit institutions because these institutions make profits through imposition of interest and requiring collateral. Many small business owners, including both men and women, in Darfur consider interest rate in lending as a sin (haram in Islam). This should be taken into account when the project delivers future ASCA activities. The project should revise ASCA’s repayment system so that it will meets the conditions set by the Islamic law.

***Output 5: Youth Employment increased***

To be completed

1. ***Conclusions***
2. The Youth Volunteers Rebuilding Darfur Project (YVRBDP) is one of the successful UNDP interventions in Darfur during the present protracted conflict.
3. The YVRBDP is a rational project because in the designing, the present protracted conflict context is taken into consideration and this is the reason of the project’s success, in spite of fund limitation due to none materialization of the Government share.
4. The training in business management and other training modules have provided the YV and the communities with knowledge and skills that helped many of them to improve their livelihoods.
5. The small grant/loan component of the project has tested the theoretical aspect of the training and many successes have been achieved by the loan/grant beneficiary winners who used their knowledge acquired from the training.
6. The grant/loan provided to the YV and to some of the beneficiaries was small, especially for the agricultural and livestock small projects; this is because business on livestock fattening or breeding needs more capital than SDG 5000.
7. Electricity power and internet network is not available in almost all the rural areas of the Darfur states. This however, undermined the use of the laptops and internet equipment provided to the deployed YV and this situation will continue for some time.
8. The agricultural and livestock extension intervention was not implemented due to limitation of the fund. These interventions were proposed to be implemented from the contribution of the Federal Ministry of Finance which has not yet materialized.
9. The grants for small businesses, although the amount of the grant is small (1400 SDG for one project), was more successful than the loan businesses in the rural areas. This is because the small businesses products (Juice, handicrafts etc ) is demanded and their marketing is available in the IDP camps while livestock and agricultural crops markets are seasonal.
10. The grant/loans provided to the YV and some of the beneficiaries at the end of the project phase thus resulted in weak follow by the RDP/NGOs, the implementing partners of the project. For example, the Global Hand Aid (the NGO project implementing partner) refused to distribute loans for Idd El Fursan loan winners because the agreement between GHA and the South Darfur SPCU has expired. This however, have affected the follow-up and monitoring of loan intervention, because until now the loan beneficiaries no one has asked them to pay back their loans as the evaluator told by the loan winners during the discussions in Idd El Fursan with YV and community beneficiaries received loan for small businesses.
11. ***Recommendations***

Based on the evaluation findings the following are some recommendations to be considered in the second phase:

1. **Continuation and expansion of the YVRBD:** Due to the success of the training provided to the YVs and the community beneficiaries and building the capacity and skill improvement, it is recommended to increase the number of volunteers trained as well as to expand the geographical coverage to more areas in the five states.
2. **Increase in sums for small grants/loans:** The amount is recommended to be increased to 4000-5000SDG for livestock and agricultural small businesses. It is also recommended to increase the loan repayment period to one year for livestock and agricultural crops production businesses.
3. **Training in accounting to be provided to youth volunteers:** More training in the subject of expenses and inputs, returns is recommended to be intensified for the YVs to be able to provide quality training for the communities. The evaluation shows that most of the beneficiaries do not know how to keep records in their business. It will bring bigger outputs and results for the beneficiaries especially those who gain the loans/grants.
4. **Improved coordination for PCU and SPCUs**: the coordination between the PCU and SPCUs as well as between the SPCUs needs to be improved. There is also a need to improve the database and reporting systemwhich will allow to share more information among the PCU and SPCUs. (During the project coordination meeting on 24 August 2015, this issue was discussed with PCU/SPCUs members. It was agreed to revise the reporting format and to complete the volunteer database by end of September 2015.)
5. **Laptops:** Since electricity and internet networks are not available in most of the rural areas in Darfur, it is recommended that the YVPDP Phase II should provide a desktop computer and printer to each hosting NGO/CBO so that the youth volunteers will be able to use them when needed at their offices. To avoid the risk of misuse or personal use by NGO/CBO staffs, it is recommended to provide a desktop computer not a laptop.
6. **Senior volunteers**: To avoid creating a feeling of superiority among the volunteers, it is recommended not to make any differences in volunteers’ incentives and allowance. .
7. **Volunteers’ incentives and allowance:** The amount of the monthly incentive should be increased and the monthly transportation and communication allowance should be provided. In Phase I, one environmental volunteer covered more than two communities and often the distance between their target communities was far. To reduce the transportation expenses for the environmental volunteers, the Project should assign one environmental volunteer per target community in Phase II.