

# Building Resilience for Poverty Reduction among Disadvantaged and Marginalized Rural Populations

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**Abstract:** - The objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Building Resilience for Poverty Reduction (BRPR) initiative in Sudan's West Darfur state. We evaluated project achievements based on six OECD/DAC criteria: relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency, impact, and connectedness-sustainability. Data were collected from all stakeholders, including those directly impacted, the initiative's staff, partners, and pertinent government organizations. Where applicable, we divided the receivers by gender, age group, and special needs population. From January 2017 to December 2021, this analysis covers the entire project lifespan. Despite an unstable operating setting that included a change in administration, a difficult security scenario, growing inflation rates, and the depreciation of the national currency, the BRPR project remained relevant and well-designed. These achievements include the formation of village savings and loan organizations and village development groups, with an emphasis on women; the promotion of community participation; and the involvement of vulnerable families in project activities. This involvement appears to have had a positive influence on the project beneficiaries' livelihoods and resilience to future shocks, implying that affected communities have increased their ability to cope and become more robust. The results indicate that communities in the project's focus areas are keen to learn new skills. The results indicated that agricultural productivity improved while livestock mortality dropped. For instance, the community saw an increase in nutritional quality and the cessation of open defecation. All of this is due to the community's cultural acceptance of beneficial health habits.

**Key-Words:** - Resilience, Poverty Reduction, West Darfur State, Disadvantaged and Marginalized, Rural Population, West Darfur State, Sustainable Development.

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## 1 Introduction

The main goal of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the United Nations has established is to eradicate poverty in all of its forms by the year 2030. Throughout human history since the Second World War, countries have cooperated resolutely to take national actions aimed at

eliminating poverty. These actions include providing necessities to reduce hunger and malnutrition, ensuring food security, education, primary healthcare, safe drinking water, and sanitation. Additionally, efforts have been made to increase employment opportunities and prevent unemployment. Gender balance and equity in

decision-making processes at all levels have been promoted, along with expanding women's political, economic, social, and cultural opportunities, independence, and empowerment, [1]. The Irish Aid Fund Program (IAFP), an international NGO called CONCERN globally, along with its local partner SAWA, implemented a five-year (Jan 2017–Dec 2021) program called Building Resilience for Poverty Reduction (BRPR) in the West Darfur State of Sudan.

The research intended to contact 115,970 people, 59% of whom are female and 41% of whom are male. The project activities specify that over a five-year period, they will target 22 clusters of villages in the Mornei (14) and El Geneina (8) areas. The project's intended purpose is to help alleviate the high rate of poverty in specific locations. These communities, especially those of internally displaced people (IDPs), are plagued by problems like food insecurity, disease, high infant mortality, lack of sanitation, lack of knowledge on how to cope with natural disasters like drought, and a general lack of resources. Due to their lower labor capacity and long-standing gender inequality, HHs headed by women experience a disproportionate impact.

Community resilience is central to the project concept, which aims to help the poorest and most vulnerable families while also acknowledging that community-level interventions are necessary for long-term success, especially in terms of participation in and ownership of development initiatives. Its development drew on experiences with other initiatives in the same field, such as the former IAPF program, BRACED, and the EU Food Security initiatives. The Irish Aid Fund Program (IAFP) provided the initiative with a total of 5 million euros in funding. While SAWA National is the local partner, CONCERN Worldwide is the main implementer. The project's operations took place from January 2017 to March 2022.

The overarching objective is to improve the quality of life for the intended recipients by making it easier for them to "increase or maintain their level of well-being" by better coping with and surviving natural disasters. Agriculture, health, and nutrition, as well as WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), were the primary areas of emphasis in the BRPR projects' integrated strategies.

The Darfur crisis has had a devastating impact on the project area. Discord and violence broke out among the many indigenous communities as a result of this, ripping the social fabric from its foundations. Responding to urgent demands brought on by the protracted conflict, the project was also

developed to ensure that the neediest in both urban and rural areas have access to food on an annual basis. After the economic downturn and subsequent tribal conflicts forced thousands of people to flee rural areas for urban settlements, particularly in the El Geneina locale, inadequate government funding has remained a barrier to accessing services. We assessed the project outcomes using six OECD/DAC criteria: relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency, impact, and connectedness-sustainability. This study's primary objective was to do just that. We structure the remaining portion of the paper as follows: Section II provides a summary of relevant literature, followed by an examination of study methods in Section III. Section (IV) provides a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the results, while the final section (V) offers concluding remarks and recommendations.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Concept of Resilience

Since its adoption in the 1960s, the term resilience has made its way into development discourse, where it has gained prominence, especially in the context of the Climate Resilient Development discussion that has ensued since the Paris Climate Accords of 2015 [2] and [3]. The term "resilience" can signify several things in the field of development. One common definition is "bouncing back and returning to a previous state after a disturbance." Another definition is "the capacity for transformation" (ibid). A wide variety of academic fields frequently employ the idea of resilience in their studies, including economics, psychology, materials science and engineering, sociology, and environmental research, [4]. Authors in [5] and [6] looked at the dynamics of global poverty and showed that between 1990 and 2015, the global poverty center moved from South Asia to Africa. In the fight against poverty, Sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a key front. Political unrest and local conflicts, economic exclusion, rural deterioration, natural disasters, and climate change have all emerged as companions to the fight against poverty on a global scale, and they are all having an outsized effect on the world's least developed regions. Therefore, [7] analyzed the impact of debts on economic development and international affairs; they suggested that while economic help is necessary, excessive use can lead to negative consequences. Understanding the consequences and making necessary moves is crucial for optimizing debt management.

A social-ecological definition of resilience is the ability of socioeconomic systems (e.g., households) to absorb, adapt, and convert shocks, [8]. Researchers have used the concept of resilience to study how social and economic systems might become more resilient to shocks. Few conceptual studies have focused on resilience in food systems and those that do tend to be broad. A few resilience theorists have recently taken an evolutionary approach to non-equilibrium systems and their continual change. Here, resilience is an ongoing process, not a rebound to a stable equilibrium condition. This alters the theoretical examination of how resilient an economy is to how it adapts to different stressors over time.

Resilience is the ability of a system to remain stable or adapt to a new situation without catastrophic changes in its basic functioning, according to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Thus, resilience is the ability of individuals, households, communities, and countries to survive drought shocks and stresses without sacrificing their long-term living standards through livelihood and ecosystem management. In fields including ecology, adaptation to climate change, and urban planning, resilience has emerged as a key concept. Its usage is on the rise among international development agencies and policymakers as well. In the context of development [9], evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of resilience. Resilience does not solely apply to or help the poor; hence, it cannot be considered a pro-poor idea. Therefore, reducing poverty must take precedence over building resilience.

## 2.2 Concept of Vulnerability

When we talk about vulnerability, we mean the likelihood or risk of currently being poor or falling into deeper poverty in the future. It is an important measure of well-being because people may be less willing to invest in productive assets (like human capital) and liquid assets (like savings) if they are worried about sudden and drastic fluctuations in their income, [10].

Another way to look at vulnerability is as a weakened ability to protect oneself, one's community, or both from the effects of natural or man-made disasters. Poverty makes people more vulnerable, but loneliness, uncertainty, and the inability to protect themselves from danger, trauma, or stress can also affect them. Accordingly, low-income and near-poor people frequently have trouble meeting their consumption and investment demands while still meeting their income and agricultural output goals (feedthefuture.gov). In

rural agricultural settings, for instance, weather shocks, pests and diseases of crops and animals, abrupt changes in prices, changes in policies and governance, and, in some cases, political unrest and conflict can all wreak havoc on the seasonal production and harvest cycles, as well as the sales that follow (ibid.). Idiosyncratic shocks like accidents and illnesses can unexpectedly strain household livelihood choices, income creation, and expenditure habits. Gender dynamics and marginalization affect both the possibilities and the limitations of livelihood systems. Social standards that restrict women's mobility, decision-making authority, and social and professional networks, as well as devalue women's labor, perpetuate gender disparities in livelihood choices and labor force participation. There may be pressure to participate in less desirable or less productive forms of employment for marginalized or disadvantaged groups who are disproportionately impacted by poverty. This includes young people, who have additional obstacles when trying to access resources and who constitute a large fraction of the working poor. In the new paradigm that governs frameworks for managing the risks of natural disasters, vulnerability and resilience are central. The relationship between socioeconomic resilience, poverty, and vulnerability is poorly understood empirically. An empirical study on catastrophe resilience focused on a community in Bangladesh that is vulnerable to tropical cyclones, as reported in [11]. They showed that the community suffered losses due to the storm in question, especially in the areas of income, employment, and the availability of safe drinking water and sanitation. Livelihood diversification is a crucial strategy for resilience, but the relationship between livelihood diversification, poverty escape pathways, and resilience requires careful consideration. The author in [12] identified several factors contributing to Aceh's poverty, including limited job opportunities, inadequate government support, poor infrastructure, low-income, lack of political participation, and corruption. Furthermore, [13] and [14] showed a significant positive impact of the economic and financial green finance development dimensions on poverty reduction. Based on that, green finance has a significant and positive impact on poverty reduction.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Project Background

The BRPR project was carried out in several locations: two internally displaced person camps in

the Mornei locality (Mornei and Sisi), four internally displaced person camps in the town of Geneina, twelve clusters in settled communities in the Mornei locality, and four clusters in the Geneina area. Communities and vulnerable households were to be strengthened through this comprehensive initiative. To maximize impact on household and community resilience, interventions in WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) and Health and Nutrition (WASH) are carried out simultaneously in the same communities. While some programs aim to help all members of the community, others zero in on helping the most disadvantaged families strengthen their financial situations. The initiative has three main objectives: The first outcome is that the target populations are better equipped to adjust their livelihood methods, health practices, and nutrition habits to withstand the strains and shocks caused by the weather.

Goal No. 2: Community members and families in the target area are better able to plan for and recover from unexpected challenges. Goal No. 3: Community members and households in the target area are starting to change gender dynamics for fairer decision-making at home and in the community.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The data collection comprised:

#### 3.2.1 Discussions in Focus Groups (FGD)

Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were held across six different locations, covering a broad spectrum of activities. Geilo and Sis explored the topics of WASH, livelihoods, health, and DRR, while Gandarni and Romalia focused on WASH, livelihoods, equality, and DRR. Morne and Corti also examined the topics of WASH, health, livelihoods, equality, and DRR.

The sample size for the focus group discussion (FGD) consisted of 57 individuals, comprising 32 males and 16 females, and the gender of nine participants was not documented. The focus group discussions used the authorized questionnaire format, and participants responded based on their activities.

#### 3.2.2 Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Key Informant Interviews (KII) were held. The primary objective of KIIs is to solicit the perspectives and input of well-informed internal and external stakeholders involved in the project. The primary emphasis of this initiative revolved around the CONCERN team, the implementing partner of the NNGO, and four local authorities.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Findings by Activity

#### 4.1.1 Target Population and Livelihood Strategies

Target populations have increased their capacity to adapt their livelihood strategies, health, and nutrition practices, enabling them to better absorb weather-related shocks and stresses. Beneficiaries received agricultural training and improved seeds for small-scale farmers and goats for vulnerable groups. We observed improvements in agricultural productivity. However, we have reduced the overall hunger gap target to 1.5 months, with only slight differences between households led by males and females. The number of months in which households struggled to meet their daily food requirements has decreased as shown in Figure 1.



Number of months households struggle to meet their minimum daily food requirements.

Fig. 1: livelihood strategies, health, and nutrition practices

#### 4.1.2 Target Populations have Access to Sustainable Water Resources

We implemented a WASH program to enhance the community's access to clean water, utilizing latrines, wells, pumps, and a solar-powered water network. Figure 2 illustrates the intervention increased water savings and improved potable water access, benefiting 16,750 people in Year 5. However, a slight reduction in female-led households' access to improved drinking water narrowly exceeded the planned target.

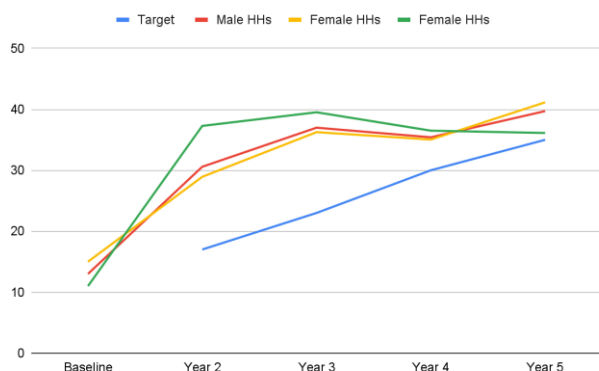


Fig. 2: Sustainable water resources

#### 4.1.3 Improve Beneficiaries' Hygiene Practices

CLTS activities trained beneficiaries in environmental health and hygiene practices to reduce illness spread. Six out of five villages met their targets, and by year five, ODF-related activities had exceeded 50%. This success was confirmed in FDGs and KIIs, with strong community motivation and project engagement as reported in Figure 3.

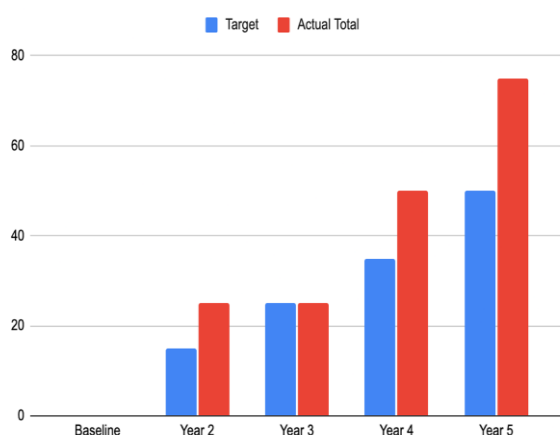


Fig. 3: Improve beneficiaries' hygiene practices

#### 4.1.4 Women Skills and HH Community Decision

Women gain the skills and confidence to better negotiate in HH and community decisions on key aspects of health care, use of income, and food: These projects, are designed to promote gender equality among the benefited communities, specifically targeted women. Women have been able to gain more freedom and become more involved in many aspects of community life, according to respondents, thanks to the targeted

training and engagement of men and women across intervention areas. Program statistics and KII input indicate that additional work is required to accomplish gender mainstreaming targets; hence, many targets were not fulfilled by Year 5. Women learned how to handle gender-based abuse, household decision-making, and other difficulties through general life skills training. We also highlighted that mothers who participated in lactation and child nutrition programs received instruction on gender concerns. In addition to their traditional roles in the home, women were actively involved in community-level decision-making from the beginning by serving on development, DRR, and water committees. Respondents cited education, the provision of cattle and seeds for farming, and livestock raising as means of economic empowerment, which in turn created jobs and possibilities for women-led HHs and widows. Community members still adhere to gender-based social norms and practices, even though respondents acknowledged that gender-focused training had a beneficial impact. The statistics regarding the proportion of housework that women report doing clearly demonstrate this. Despite a goal of 60%, data collected from HH surveys by year 5 indicated that women continue to make up a large share of HH labor (75.66% in total, including both male and female-run HHs). Figure 4 shows that most of a woman's responsibilities revolve around caring for others and earning a living. As was the case in other instances, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, safety concerns limited the project's scope. Notably, both the overall and location-specific outcomes associated with female decision-making in the HH, including those pertaining to the health of women and children, did not meet targets. In year 5, just 57% of women had decision-making power over their health and 52% over their children's health, according to HH surveys conducted by Concern. These numbers fall short of the 68% and 70% targets, respectively. According to the data collected at the beginning of the study, the percentage of women who had a say in decisions about their child's health decreased by 7%. The reports from Concern and the input from KII both point to the rigidity of gender roles that have their roots in long-standing religious and cultural practices as the main cause of this stagnation.

The Concern project supported five community-based organizations with 59% female representation. However, Figure 5 represents that year five failed to meet the female inclusivity targets, despite a high of 70%-15% female participation across all areas. This share varied

between locations, with the lowest in Mornei Villages (53.3%) and the highest in Geneina Camps (100%). Despite an 18% increase since baseline, some locations struggled to sustain the gains, with Geneina Villages experiencing a decline in female membership percentage.

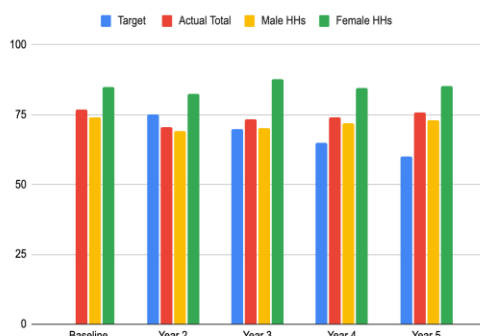


Fig. 4: HH and Community Decisions by Gender

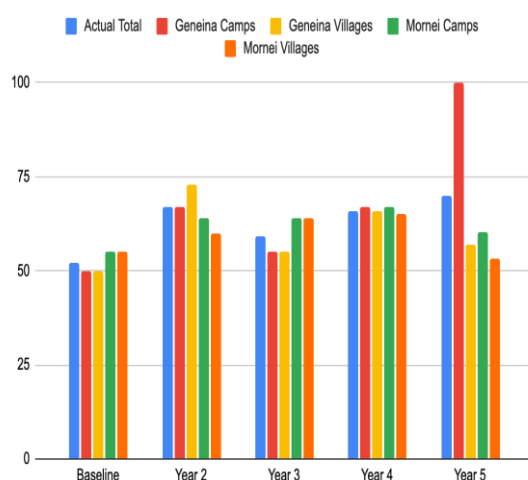


Fig. 5: HH and community decisions by Location

## 4.2 Findings by OECD/DAC Criteria

### 4.2.1 Relevance

The project focused on addressing livelihoods, coping with shocks, and gender equality in vulnerable communities. However, challenges like government changes, security changes, and currency devaluation impacted the project and stakeholders. The project targeted women and vulnerable members, but behavioral change for gender equality was a long-term agenda. The project's strength was its integration of activities and geographical distribution, including villages and displacement camps. It included complementary approaches to

meet the needs of beneficiaries in challenging humanitarian contexts. Overall, the project introduced complementary components to meet the needs of the beneficiary population.

### 4.2.2 Coherence

The project faced challenges due to the 2019 government change, which abandoned previous strategies and required new relationships. These circumstances led to slow project implementation, tensions between the implementing agency and new ministry representatives, and concerns about beneficiary buy-in. Despite this, feedback from governmental ministries and authorities showed positive alignment and coherence between them and the implementing agency.

### 4.2.3 Effectiveness

The project successfully implemented development approaches in a humanitarian context, establishing Village Development Associations and providing agricultural training to targeted beneficiaries. Women constituted 75% of the targeted 800 persons. A comprehensive WASH program was implemented, improving clean water access and improving nutrition. Vulnerability criteria were considered, including women, pregnant women, lactating women, and children, selected through local development committees. The project successfully addressed cultural and safety concerns.

### 4.2.4 Efficiency

The implementing agency faced challenges due to government changes and economic instability, including currency devaluation, procurement delays, and civilian movements. Despite these challenges, resources were efficiently used, monitoring was conducted, and the project was completed under the allocated budget, despite currency fluctuations and high inflation costs.

### 4.2.5 Impact

The project in Sudan has had a positive impact on various aspects, including improved nutrition, health, and household income. It has also led to the cessation of open-air defecation, increased income from new seed varieties, and the sale of goats' milk for basic household needs and education. Livestock care education and vaccination services have reduced goat mortality, while health education and nutrition have reduced illness and child and maternal mortality. However, the project has faced challenges in conservative communities due to behavioral norms.



#### 4.2.6 Sustainability

The sustainability of a project in Sudan's challenging humanitarian context requires continued donor funding and external support. The quality of community infrastructure projects is good, but the longer-term sustainability of toilets and water systems may require external support. Knowledge transfer from communities and individuals should be considered sustainable, but emigration and population movements dilute this value. The project has the potential for sustainability, especially if it coordinates with government ministries and strengthens institutional capacity among partners. It could be considered an exit strategy from humanitarian assistance to a sustainable development approach, supported by state government agencies, local NGOs, and community-based committees.

## 5 Conclusion & Recommendations

The research reveals that the BRPR project in West Darfur has been successful in forming VDAs and VSL groups, particularly for women, and promoting community participation. These initiatives have positively impacted livelihood situations and the ability to mitigate future shocks. The local implementing partner, SAWA Sudan, has successfully implemented BRPR activities, resulting in improved agricultural productivity and reduced livestock mortality.

The community has also adopted beneficial health practices and improved nutrition status. The evaluation recommends further consultations and engagement with community members and leaders in program design and beneficiary targeting. The establishment of community-based institutions, such as VSL, has enhanced savings mobilization and improved household incomes. We also recommend training in small enterprise management and providing small grants to successful groups. We need future donor support to sustain the positive outcomes related to peacebuilding in West Darfur. Future projects should involve local authorities in capacity development programs and establish the legitimacy of local committees to influence decision-making. The legitimacy of local committees should be established with governmental agencies to ensure continuity and sustainability.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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