
OUR EDUCATION
OUR FUTURE
Stories from Child Researchers in Sudan
Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

Our Vision

A world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

Our Mission

To inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. We will stay true to our values of accountability, ambition, collaboration, creativity and integrity.

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Photos: Save the Children

Background

As part of the 'Integrating Child Protection within the African Peace and Security Architecture' (ICPAPSA) project, one of the key objectives being child participation, child-led research was conducted in Sudan on the issue of 'education under attack'. The research was conducted in two areas of Sudan: El Fasher, North Darfur and Zalingei, Central Darfur. During the research, child researchers collected data on how conflict has impacted the education of children living in these areas, how they cope with the effects, their experiences and needs while living in conflict, and also share their recommendations on how access to education can be improved. The research was designed to encourage children affected by armed conflict to share their experiences and recommendations at local, national and regional levels.

Child participation is one of Save the Children's thematic areas in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), as well as Articles 4 and 7 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which recognise that children have a right to have their views heard and considered. This implies that children have a right to be informed and involved in decisions and actions which concern them, and that their points of view are taken into account. The ICPAPSA project was conceptualised, with child participation as a key objective and indispensable to the effective delivery of the project.

The project is being implemented in Mali, South Sudan, Somalia, and Sudan in East and West Africa.

By the end of 2019, it is hoped that through the child participation work, boys and girls affected by armed conflict will influence decisions and processes at the African Union, Regional Bodies and Mechanisms, and Member States. The objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to prevent and address violence against children.

Child-Led Research in Sudan

To better understand the lives of children and the problems they face, Save the Children has invested in child-led research. With directional support from technical staff, children carry out a research activity of their own choosing. Child-led research is a participatory project that aims to engage with children and young people to conduct pieces of research on related issues that matter to them. This methodology provides opportunities for children and young people to amplify their voices and contribute their views and results of their research, as well as influence decision-making by using their findings to put pressure on stakeholders and decision-makers on issues that are relevant to them.

The child-led research work in Sudan focused on education under attack. Sudan has experienced chronic conflict and related insecurity which, in some regions, has lasted for more than 15 years. Conflict in the western region of Darfur broke out in 2003. Parties to the conflict have included, on the one hand: the Government's Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF); the police; government-supported paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and armed community groups. On the other hand are anti-government non-state armed groups — including, the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army currently with splinter groups. The United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been intervening to keep the peace. The conflict in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei states began in 2011 after the secession of South Sudan. It has largely involved Government forces and an armed opposition group active in South Kordofan and Blue Nile — the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-North). There are also inter-tribal conflicts at play in Darfur and the three states mentioned above.

The many years of conflict have had direct and indirect negative effects on education. Students, teachers and schools have experienced devastating attacks from the above conflict actors in their attempts to gain control. According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education Under Attack (GCPEA), there were all types of threats and actual attacks against students, teachers, education personnel, educational facilities and materials during the 2003 – 2017 reporting period.

40 children (20 children from each area) were trained for 2 days in November 2019 on collecting data through child-friendly participatory tools. The child researchers were also trained on the do's and don'ts of a good researcher, how to deal with difficult situations, and identifying risks while conducting the research. With the support of adult mentors who mobilized the respondents, the child researchers then collected data in different schools in El Fasher and Zalingei where they took the lead in asking their peers about their experiences while living in conflict, and how conflict has affected their education.

Here are the stories of selected child researchers who took part in the training and data collection:

Name: *Abdirahim
Age:15 years

He wants to master four languages fluently: English, Swahili, Chinese and Arabic.

Arabic, he is already good at. He is also trying to be good at English - he made sure he addressed the group in English. Chinese - well, not sure why. Swahili is definitely work in progress.

His desire to master these languages is so that he can fulfill his hopes to be multilingual when he joins the police force.

He wants to be a policeman in the near future.

Abdirahim's exact words were: *"I want to become a policeman so that I can fight for children's rights."*

He is super active and vocal, you can see it in him – the policeman. He comes from El Fasher, the capital city of North Darfur state. In 2003 El Fasher experienced the worst form of military attack and as a result, a lot of families were separated - fathers from their families, mothers from their children.

Some of the attacks happened in schools where the armed groups from the previous regime would attack schools and kidnap children. Abdirahim and his friends were victims of these school attacks. Some of his friends disappeared during the attacks never to be seen again. Others were indoctrinated by the armed groups to become child soldiers.

Name changed for protection of identity


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Having undergone the training on child-led research by Save the Children, his resolve to help children grew even more.

"While in the field carrying out my research, I have met children who were severely affected by the war. They live in IDP camps far away from their homes. They have experienced a long period of being out of school due to lack of fees and basic amenities like school uniform and books. Some of them lost both their parents."

Abdirahim lost some friends, whom he says he witnessed getting shot by an armed group. He cannot believe that he met children who have gone through worse experiences.

"I feel guilty for the life I live. I am lucky to have a roof over my head, food to eat and I get to attend school freely."

Why a policeman? One may ask. Well, Abdirahim wants to be a policeman who doesn't carry a gun, but carries a pen. This pen will help him change the legislations that govern the army and police in his country.

"I look forward to a time when I will walk the streets and all the children will be in school uniform and not military uniform. When all children will feel safe to attend school without fear of any pending attacks. When children will get to actually enjoy their childhood and focus on their education."

Name: *Jamilah
Age: 15 Years

For Jamilah Saad, her first experience of an attack was when she was in primary school.

"The armed militia stormed our school and destroyed the infrastructure, while we were running all over the place trying to look for somewhere to hide. Some of the teachers and classmates were taken during the chaos."

The constant attacks in school have brought about a lot of homeless children in the region. Children who were separated from their families and have been rendered homeless for years on end.

"Whenever I am walking to school every day, I find young children sleeping on the streets. It saddens me to think about everything they have or are going through."

Jamilah is one of the children who undertook the training on child led research in Zalingei, Central Darfur. Her main interest is to learn how she can help the children who have been rendered homeless because of constant attacks in their schools and homes.

"From this research I have actually learnt what children in my community are going through, we were able to speak to children both in IDP camps and those who are homeless. Stories about their experiences have made me understand their plight even more."

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Jamilah is outspoken and bold, that is the first thing you learn about her. A few minutes into the training, she was already asking questions and trying to understand how this research will quench her thirst to get all the children in the IDP camps back in school.

She was able to connect with her respondents and get all the information that she needed from them.

"Some of the children I spoke to have lost hope of ever going back to school and that broke my heart. I came to this training not sure what to expect. After carrying out my research, I have been able to learn and practice ways in which I can help the children that are not as lucky as I am."


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Name: *Khadiija
Age: 13 years old

The one thing that sticks out in El Fasher, North Darfur, other than the sweet oranges and mangoes, is the heavy military presence driving around town. They mean no harm now, but that wasn't the case one year ago.

Armed forces and groups from the previous regime were responsible for most of the attacks in the state, especially those in the schools.

Khadiija's father was in the army, but he was killed as a martyr when she was only 7 years old. The fondest memory she has of her father is how he would come home with children he had rescued and make sure they are back in school and reunited with their families.

When he died, she kept wondering what became of the children rescued and those he would not be able to rescue ever again.

"I could not wait to grow up and continue with my father's good deeds."

"When I found out that I was going to participate in this training on child led research, I was more than excited. It is the closest I have come to being able to continue my father's work - helping children."

At only 13 years old, Khadiija already knows that children are indeed the future and that future needs to be secured. What she doesn't understand is why the leaders in her country do not take that future seriously by continuing to allow children to suffer.

Name changed for protection of identity

"While carrying out the research I have spoken to children who have been in and out of different schools because their families had to flee from different regions that were constantly under attack. I feel bad that they have to suffer so much."

She doesn't want to join the army or be in Government to effect change, she wants to do it differently;Interact with the children where they are.

"I cannot wait to travel across the country talking and encouraging children, giving them a voice and being able to work with organizations to make sure that each child is educated."

"I am the future but I have to pass over this baton. To not only one child, but several children."


“I cannot wait to travel across the country talking and encouraging children, giving them a voice and being able to work with organizations to make sure that each child is educated.”


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Name: *Abshir
Age: 20 years

He currently lives at the Zamzam IDP camp in Abudile North Darfur state. He has no idea where his birth parents or half of his family is, all he remembers is the day they were separated. His mother was crying and yelling for him, but the armed group did not want to hear none of it.

That was 8 years ago.

In the previous regime, armed groups attacked their school, they took him and a couple of his friends, leaving chaos and damage in their wake. Scared and in the back of the armoured truck, they were forced to take the armed militia to their homes.

His was first.

They ambushed the family and immediately started burning down the house and beating up his father, who was home at the time. That was the last day he saw any of his family members.

Presently, Abshir Dawud is doing odd jobs such as tilling people's farms and helping to carry water jerrycans to various homes in and around the IDP camp.

"The last time I was in a classroom was 8 years ago. When I settled in the IDP camp, I tried to attend one of the schools but due to lack of school fees, uniform and other necessities, I was forced to discontinue after one month."

Abshir is soft spoken, and looking at him you can tell he has been through much, but he wears a brave face.

Name changed for protection of identity


"I am excited about the prospect of going back to school and continuing with my education. I feel like education will unlock what the future holds for me."

"I miss my family, my brothers and sisters, my friends, I miss them all."

It is hard to imagine being separated from your family in such a cruel manner and not to be able to see them or know where they are. It is unbearable to say the least.

Him and some of the displaced people at the camp tried to go back home one time, but the armed group had taken over most of the area. Upon hearing of their return, the armed group forced them out and they went back to the camps.

"When we tried to go home, the militia from the previous regime tried to kill us. They made it very clear we were not welcome and forced us out. They warned us about trying to return to the place we had called home for many years."

He is here at the Zamzam IDP camp as one of the respondents for the child-led research. His life is complicated, but he is hopeful that the tide will change soon. He is due to go back to school in a few months. Abshir is just one of the many children who participated in the research process, detailing exactly how badly the attacks in schools have affected the state, causing irrefutable harm.

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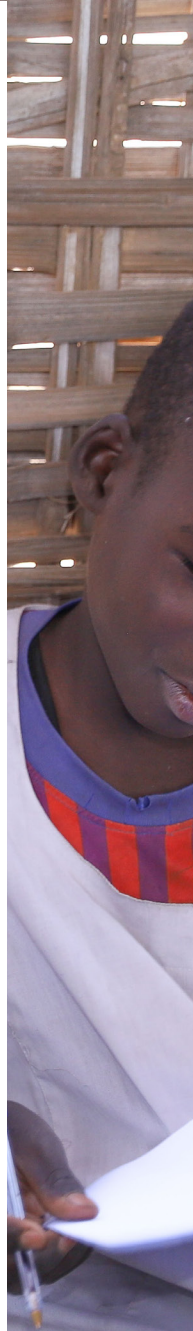




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