

SURVIVING IN THE CHAOS

Stories from Darfur





If everybody has heard about Darfur, it is very difficult to imagine what the situation is like today for the populations living in this region.

Ten Darfuris have accepted to describe their everyday life and what they have gone through over the past years. From these individual stories emerge both contrasting and common situations, such as the search for safety, the feeling of confinement and the lack of ability to imagine a future.

Several questions and answers come with these portraits, which are in a complex and volatile context. The war continues in Darfur, the four dimensions of the conflict all have consequences on civilians. Darfur is today the biggest humanitarian operation in the world and the health indicators--in the accessible areas--remain below the emergency levels. But the NGOs are decreasing their operations even as needs are increasing.

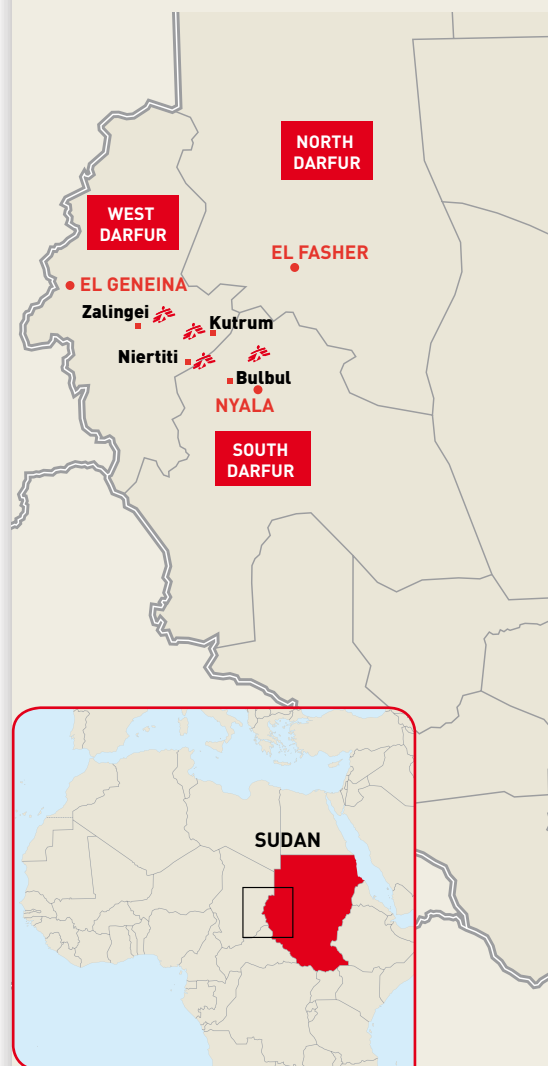
A third of Darfuris live in displaced camps, which means about 2.5 millions people. *"The main worry is security. And food,"* say women who have fled from the same village, four years ago. Since then, they have lived in a camp in Zalingei. Living conditions can be very different from one camp to another. Kaltuma, an elder, waited for two months before getting enough money to go to Zalingei see a doctor, as in the camp she lives in *"there's nothing there"*. Radia, a mother of three, flees for the second time, arriving in another displaced person's camps with the hope of finding more protection.

Some were farmers, others herders. Umtaso, another elder, belongs to a cattle herder tribe. She lives now in a displaced-persons' camp, after a conflict with other nomadic tribes. *"We lived alongside each other. Now they live in our place. They moved into the village and we are here."* Displaced as well, Kaltam does not live in a camp. The members of her tribe have gathered altogether in the same place in order to defend themselves better. *"There were more and more problems. The camel breeders attacked us. Ten men from one family were killed. So we had to leave, too,"* says the young woman. But the older are categorical: *"If we go back, they'll kill us."*

Some of the Darfur population, although decreasing every day, still live in villages in rural areas. This is the case of Asha. Her village has been burnt but they stay there. *"We are in the same place but living in tents, with nothing,"* tells the young woman, who tried several times, without success, to reach a displaced-person's camp. Awa too lives in her village, in the mountainous, rebel-controlled, Djebbel Marra. *"I've heard people talk about the war and I know that it is a bad thing,"* says the teenager, war still being a theoretical notion for her even if her village has been attacked twice. *"I might have been afraid, but what's the point? It happens and there's nothing you can do about it"*.

These stories have been heard too in a range of settings, including MSF health facilities (the pediatric department of the Zalingei hospital and clinics in Niertiti and Kutrum) and displaced persons' camps in Zalingei as well as in Bulbul, in southern Darfur. ■

THE PLACES WHERE WERE COLLECTED THESE NARRATIVES



PORTRAITS OF SUDAN

WOMEN FROM THE VILLAGE OF OURR HAMEDIA CAMP, ZALINGEI

"We arrived here four years ago with nothing. We had just enough time to grab the babies before we left! We had our land, a few cows and our houses, but we were attacked. All the houses were burned and there's nothing left. The entire village of Ourr came directly to Zalingei and we're staying here. It's difficult to leave the camp because of the problems outside. We're not safe there, but we have to gather firewood for cooking. The main worry is security. And food."



Several women sit in front of a brick shelter, next to a straw overhang. Tea heats on the hearth. Water jugs have been carried back from one of the manual pumps installed in the camp. The women from this village arrived some time ago and, unlike more recent arrivals who must build their shelter on the periphery, far from existing services, they live in the center of the camp. A sheet metal door has been assembled from tin cans from supplies provided by international aid. The youngest children run about freely, while clusters of children in uniforms head towards the school. The head of the family works as a day laborer in Zalingei.

This young woman has had two children while here in Hamedia camp, in Zalingei. The other woman in the household has also had two babies. These four additional mouths to feed make a total of nine, while they receive rations for five.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS THE CONTEXT

1/ **Continuing war in Darfur?**

The deadliest period of the Darfur conflict occurred in 2003-2004, with sources estimating the number of deaths at between 9,000 and 400,000. The most frequently cited figures refer to 200,000 people dead and 2.2 million displaced. The vast majority of deaths, linked directly or indirectly to the violence, occurred prior to 2005, during large-scale massacres and before the arrival of humanitarian aid. Still, violence continues, although at a lower level. In 2007, the United Nations recorded fewer than 3,000 violent deaths (including combatants, civilians and foreigners). Overall, all the actors in the conflict are experiencing internal divisions. The situation has become chaotic, with clashes occurring between pro- and anti-government forces but also between themselves inside rebel movements as well as nomadic tribes. Former allies battle one another, former enemies fight on the same side-and everything shifts rapidly. It is particularly difficult for international aid organizations to work in such a volatile setting.

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONFLICT

The first aspect of this war, which has lasted five years, is the conflict between the central government of Sudan and rebel movements in Darfur.

The second is the one between Sudan and Chad, which for the last three years has taken the form of a proxy conflict. Currently, the Chad and Sudanese governments need all the support they can muster, including from armed groups in the neighboring country. The two countries signed a new agreement in March 2008, which seems already to have already followed the same pattern of failure as previous accords.

An MSF "home visitor" monitoring the situation in the camps visits the household. If necessary, she refers the displaced persons to MSF's nutrition clinic or to the hospital. Using a circumference armband, she assesses a child's nutritional status and notes that he is suffering from acute malnutrition. The mother receives a referral to the nutrition center and the child will be treated at MSF's refeeding program. Another child is referred, too. A few minutes earlier, the visitor arranged transportation for an elderly man who had been beaten while gathering wood around the camp and was unable to walk.

"What we miss most is freedom and the life we had before," the mother explains, listing what are now only memories. *"The good milk our cows gave, the tomatoes, onions, meat and all the vegetables."* Another woman interrupts the nostalgic account. *"We expect to go home one day, but no one has returned yet. It's too dangerous. Maybe the people who attacked us will be disarmed and we'll be able to return."*

RADIA - [HAMEDIA] CAMP

Radia arrived at the Hamedia camp six days ago with her three children, ages 8, 5 and 4. She left her village several years ago, joining the ranks of Darfur's two million displaced persons, and spent four years in another camp in Serif Umra. It is not unusual for people to move from one displaced persons' camp to another, hoping to find improved security and aid. The situation may differ by camp depending on size, population and the presence of international organizations. In Serif Umra, for example, serious security problems led the MSF team working there to evacuate the international staff for a year, until July 2007.



"I stayed in Serif Umra for four years, but I had to leave," she says. *"There were food problems and sometimes there were no distributions. I tried to farm because I'm from a farming family and I know what to do. But the cows always destroyed what I*

The third aspect is internal among armed Darfuri groups. In May 2006, some rebel groups participated to a peace process with the government, which led to the signature of a peace agreement in Abuja. Other groups refused. The process of fragmentation that began then has continued among the rebel movement for those last two years. At the same time, militias that had rallied to support the government at the outset of the conflict have splintered too.

Last, the fourth element pits nomadic militias against each other for control of land. This kind of conflict is not new, but the consequences are heightened because so many groups are now heavily armed. Inter-clan clashes in southern Darfur led to several hundred deaths in 2007. Many nomadic groups try to protect themselves by setting up sanctuaries, secure territory where they gather to ensure their defense.

SEVERAL INTERWOVEN CONFLICTS

These four aspects are closely interwoven. For example, the major battles that took

MSF ACTIVITIES

ZALINGEI

In Zalingei, where 100,000 displaced people are living, the aid provided by international agencies does not evolve whereas thousands of new displaced people arrive every month for two years. MSF is now working in three of the hospital departments: emergency care (performing 1100 consultations per month), paediatrics (with 235 admissions per month) and surgical care (with 200 interventions per month). In 2007 there was a sharp increase in the number of severe malnutrition cases admitted to the hospital's nutrition centre (700 children compared to 419 in 2006). In response, MSF opened two ambulatory nutritional centres in two displaced persons' camps (80 000 people for both) to take care of hundreds of children every week. At the beginning of 2008, as there were important medical needs not covered by the existing facilities, MSF opened a new mother and child clinic in one of the camp. ■

tried to grow so I gave up. I didn't have anything-water containers or blankets-because everything given to me was stolen. They took it all and beat me, too, two years ago. I have no husband at home and I can't work, so I have nothing. There were many problems at Serif Umra so I left for Zalingei. I feel safer here. I was welcomed and people shared with me."

Radia has neither family nor friends to help her and there is no structure in place to greet new arrivals. However, internal solidarity exists among the displaced persons. The Cheikh, the leader of the camp's displaced persons, asked another family to move to a different house for a few days and leave her their shelter. He assigned her a site on which to build her own and gave her a half-bag of cereal. After each distribution, the Cheikh asks every member of the community who has received food aid to tithe a portion of his or her ration so that they can put some aside in case of need. The reserves allow them to help the new arrivals, who may have to wait several months before being registered for food distributions.

Radia lived in Habila before fleeing to Serif Umra. "My house was not big but it was mine and I lived there with my husband. In the beginning, when the problems started, more than four years ago, we were frightened. They came at night and entered the house and terrorized us. One day, men on horseback arrived. They shot into the air and all the men ran off. They looted my house and beat us-my mother and me. I have had pain in my neck and back since then. I fled with nothing. I haven't seen my husband and I don't know where he is."

UMTASO - TAIBA CAMP

"I don't know how old I am!" says Umtaso, seated near the fire under a shelter in Taiba camp, Zalingei, in western Darfur "I'm probably around 70. My mother, who's over there, must be 100. I've lived here for three years, since the fighting in Nyangadula started between the camel breeders and our tribe, the Hutia. The camel breeders attacked us and many people died. My son, my brother and his three sons died. So we came here-my mother, the nine children and me."

Thousands of people arrived around the same time, creating a fourth displaced persons' camp in the town of Zalingei in late 2005. While the population of other camps includes primarily members of the Fur tribe, most of the people living here are nomadic cattle breeders. Several animals are visible near the shelters in this camp, which are more set apart.

Two 50-kg bags of cereal sit on the ground next to her, contributed



place in western Darfur in late-2007 and early 2008 occurred at a regional, national, and international context. Prior to deployment of the European Eufor force, major military movements occurred in the border area, north of El Geneina. All sides sought to strengthen their positions while they could still move back and forth across the border. The armed forces present include Darfuri rebel movements supported by Chad, and Chadian rebel movements supported by Sudan. Both the Chadian and Sudanese air force have bombed the region. When Chad rebel movements led the offensive against N'Djamena, one of the rebel Darfuri movements came to the aid of the Chadian government and weakened rebel positions northwest of Darfur. The Sudanese government then launched a forceful counterstrike, conducting massive attacks against several villages and causing major population displacements. The government resumed attacks involving violence against civilians reminiscent of the outset of the conflict.

DEPLOYMENT OF INTERNATIONAL FORCES

A race against time began when the UNAMID (UN-African Union Mission in Darfur), whose forces ultimately will number 20,000 soldiers and 6,000 police officers, began to deploy in Darfur. International soldiers in this region are increasingly present: the UNMIS (United Nations Mission in Sudan), with 10,000 soldiers, had been in southern Sudan since April 2005, following the peace accord between northern and southern Sudan. The EUFOR (European Union Force, 3,700 soldiers) began in 2008 a mission in Chad and Central African Republic. Unlike the UNMIS, whose mission is to monitor and verify implementation of the ceasefire agreement, UNAMID and Eufor did not emerge from a credible peace process. Eufor's mandate is to protect Darfuri refugees in eastern Chad (241,000 people) and northeastern Central African Republic (3,000), as well as displaced persons in

by the World Food Program. The ration is 300 grams per person/day. However, her daughter has joined them in the camp, with her four children, and she isn't registered for food aid. She will be there until her husband, who went to Khartoum, returns. During that temporary but indefinite period, they must share.

This family still owns several animals, including a horse, cow, two goats and their kids, two sheep and two hens. "Before, we had a large herd of cows," Umtaso recalls. "The men would take them to graze, but the women would stay in Delej and farm a little. The camel breeders were in the same area. We didn't have any contact with them. We didn't trade or marry, but we didn't have any conflicts, either. We lived alongside each other. Now they live in our place. They moved into the village and we are here."

KALTAM - BULBUL

Kaltam is no more than 20, but already has two children who are 5 and 2. She now lives in Bulbul, in southern Darfur, with her husband, children and two brothers. She has been responsible for her brothers since their mother died long ago. "I arrived last June," she says. "We all came together. There were at least 30 families. We are from Azum, east of Zalingei." Asked why she left, Kaltam offers the common, laconic response: "Because of the war."

Thousands of families from Kaltam's tribe, the Terjems, took refuge in Bulbul after several attacks in the areas where they lived in western and southern Darfur. "The camel breeders told us to leave," Kaltam explains. "They took six cows from my husband's family. Those were all their cows so now they have nothing."

Today, 25,000 people live in Bulbul. A single distribution (basic supplies) occurred in June. Many families who arrived in July/August have received nothing. No food aid has been distributed and until MSF installed four water stations and several distribution ramps, there were only three manual water pumps. The area was declared a security risk and NGOs do not go there. However, the region is accessible if drivers do not travel in large ATVs what's an ATV?, which are very desirable. Kaltam finds the isolation difficult. "I planted onions," she says. "I managed to make a little money. But I don't know how to earn money here. There's nothing to do! My husband goes to the market



Chad (179,000) and in the Central African Republic (20,000). UNMIS is to protect civilian populations throughout Darfur. For now, however, only 9,000 international soldiers are deployed there-- in an area the size of France--so change has been limited so far. The soldiers already present under the auspices of the African Union mission simply traded their green berets for blue helmets. Extremely limited resources restrict their ability to protect civilians. As a matter of fact, UNMIS did not stop the Sudanese authorities from using the same pattern of violence, beginning of 2008, as in 2003-2004.

2/What kind of violence has the population experienced?

A third of Darfur's population has been displaced since the beginning of the conflict, which means that 2.4 millions people have lost everything. Widespread insecurity and continuing clashes are still provoking population displacement. According to statistics from OCHA (the U.N. humanitarian coordination agency), 250,000 additional people have driven from their homes last year, and 80,000 more during the first semester of 2008. That figure does not include secondary displacements; that is, families who move from one camp to another. One of the primary causes of displacement is general insecurity in rural areas and small displaced persons' camps. The larger camps are more secure, to a certain degree, although they are extremely politicized and exposed to forms of urban insecurity linked to high population densities.

ATTACKS ON VILLAGES AND TRIBES

The Darfuris' statements include descriptions of events that occurred between 2003 and 2004, characterized by massive fighting involving aerial bombing and armed men traveling on horses and camels as well as in vehicles. In many cases, villages were looted and burned

in the morning and comes back at night. But that's all-he doesn't find work. He's had only one day of work! I don't want to stay here. I want to go home." Hearing these words, the other women nearby react sharply. *"OK, go ahead and you'll see what will happen!" "If we go back, they'll kill us."*

In the area where Kalma lives, the shelters are close together. Everyone in her group moved in at the same time and set up close together. The others accuse Kalma of failing to understand the situation. However, she explains. *"The conflict began a few years ago. We had good relationships with the other tribes in our area but gradually, it became a matter of origins, of race. Each tribe began to protect itself and the camel breeders said, 'This is our territory. You have to leave.' Some tribes, particularly the Fur, had already left before we did. There were more and more problems. The camel breeders attacked us. Ten men from one family were killed. So we had to leave, too."*

BABIKIR - BULBUL

Astride his donkey, Babikir is carrying a sack of grain to be ground. The women are waiting for the flour to prepare a marriage meal. In the shelter behind him, the bride, surrounded by the women of the family, is preparing to leave her house, visibly unhappy about the move. The feast will be held after the burials. In July, six family members were killed during what people refer to as "the Monday battle." Babikir's uncle was among the victims. Since then, he has housed his aunt and her children, in addition to his wife and their four children, a total of 10 people. Seven other men died during an earlier attack that occurred on the road as they were coming to seek refuge in Bulbul. Babikir also lost half of his herd of cows.



"The camel breeders attacked the Terjems," he recounts. *"We had to defend ourselves. But we're not safe here, either. There have been several attacks in Bulbul. More than 75 people died during one attack. They came from every direction. The fighting lasted from morning until night. We have the means to defend ourselves,*

and survivors sought refuge in nearby towns. During this period, the initial victims were mostly villagers living in rural areas. Later, these massive attacks became rarer.

However, the statements also refer to another kind of attack that began after 2005, involving attacks by one nomadic tribe against another to control territory or steal livestock. As a result, patchwork of small areas emerged, defended by tribal militias, resulting in additional deaths and population displacement. The losers in these battles were forced to enter displaced persons' camps, like Taiba camp in Zalingei, or leave their traditional grazing areas to seek protection from a larger tribal militia, settling in an area controlled by their tribe. The internal divisions among rebel movement can provoke violence inside the displaced persons' camps as well.

RECURRENT VIOLENCE

Populations have been subject to abuse by powerful forces. The fragmentation of armed groups has created an opening for widespread criminal activity.

The population and humanitarian groups are subject to attack and looting of cars, donkeys, money or wood. The areas surrounding the displaced persons' camps and near roads are particularly dangerous. All parties to the conflict and criminal gangs carry out a range of violent acts, including theft, beating and sexual assault.

MSF ACTIVITIES

BULBUL

Newly displaced families have been arriving in the Bulbul area during the first semester of 2007. They came from other locations in West and South Darfur, in search of security. There are now around 25,000 people living in Bulbul, mostly families from the Terjem tribe. An MSF team installed four water stations which will be able to provide around 500 cubic metres of clean water per day. MSF has also distributed some essential survival items such as soap and blankets. ■

but they have even more. They have cars, camels, horses and heavy weapons.” Armed men patrol in Bulbul, on foot. Some wear khaki military sweaters and camouflage vests. All the men carry a knife, slung over their arm in a leather holder.

Babikir arrived in Bulbul in September after the Terjems’ highest leader visited the tribes remaining in Azum, east of Zalingei. “*He told us that we had to leave because now each tribe had its own territory in Bulbul and if we didn’t want to occupy it, it would be given to others. We had lived in Azum for 20 years but it wasn’t our land. It belonged to the Fur but there hadn’t been any problems. Everything had been fine until they left. Now, here, in Bulbul, this is our land. There were other people before, but they left. But we don’t know where to farm here. We are barely getting by.*” There is a tremendous amount of work to be done. Bulbul was a truck stop along the road but was not set up to house 25,000 people overnight. The only clinic lacks medicine and MSF is setting up access to water.

OUMAR - KUTRUM

“I haven’t left Jebel Mara in six years,” says Oumar, seated on his bed in the MSF clinic in Kutrum, located in the Jebel Mara, in the rebel zone. *“I used to be a farmer but I went to Khartoum frequently. My father is originally from Jebel, but my mother was Egyptian and I was born in Egypt. I’m still moving, but now I don’t travel further than the Jebel mountains! My wife and two daughters are living in the northern camp for displaced persons, in Niertiti, 12 kilometers away, but I can’t go there. I haven’t seen them in two years. Women and children can leave but it’s impossible for us men.”*

Oumar’s wound was treated on site. Women with complicated medical problems may be transferred to Niertiti and then to the Zalingei hospital. The Kutrum team must do everything possible for male patients on site. They do not want to leave as they are certain to be arrested by security forces if they cross the front line to enter the government zone.

“My family left after the attack on our village, Um Haraz, in 2003,” Oumar says. *“It was a pretty big village, with about 2,000 people. There’s no one left now. We were surrounded by men on horseback and camelback and by other men in cars. Everyone fled when they heard the first shots but around 100 people died. The fighting lasted for two days. Many villages were attacked here, but people are still living in many others. The closer the village is to the road, the more dangerous it is. The remote places are the most protected. Because we are in the mountains, we can hide in the valleys and caves. Cars*



Displaced persons, residents and nomads compete fiercely to control the market in wood and forage. This economic rivalry is one of the reasons that women in the bush near the displaced persons’ camps and in villages are regularly attacked. Walls and trenches in some camps protect against incursion from the outside, including from other displaced persons. Internal violence also occurs, linked to political and/or economic issues. Distribution of food rations is a key issue. In Kalma, southern Darfur, thousands of displaced persons were evicted by other displaced persons in October 2007. Subsequent intervention by armed forces in the camp led to additional displacement. Today, rural populations not displaced by the conflict are also in a precarious situation, affected indirectly by the conflict. Police stations in rural areas are targeted for attack by militias that have turned against the government. This lack of restraint heightens the insecurity of the populations, who are harassed on an ongoing basis by the various armed groups.

CONFINEMENT

It is difficult for villagers who remain exposed to violence in rural areas to take refuge in displaced persons’ camps. Like the government, nomadic tribes oppose movement towards the large cities, so villagers may be stopped on the road. The government fears that the arrival of new families will strengthen the politicized camps, while the tribes realize that they need people in the villages to farm, sell and buy in the markets. Those living in the camps have little hope of leaving anytime soon. Their villages have been destroyed, other people may be living there and insecurity is still too intense for them to consider returning and rebuilding. Many express illusive hope that the international force will expel the Janjaweed and allow them to return home. Last, in areas secured either by rebels in the Jebel Mara or nomadic tribal militias in gathering sites like Bulbul, the populations must remain within those boundaries if they are to be protected.

can't get there and planes can't reach us. But there are problems there, too, especially because there are no doctors."

Perched on the top of a hill, the MSF clinic in Kutrum is the only health facility serving a population of approximately 50,000. The Ministry of Health has no facilities in this region, which is controlled by the SLA, but the Sudanese government has authorized MSF to work there and the health ministry is participating in vaccination campaigns. MSF's evaluation, conducted during a prior vaccination campaign, did not reveal alarming rates of malnutrition among children under 5. People living in the Jebel raise tomatoes, onions and oranges, but Oumar is relieved that his family is in Niertiti, rather than the Jebel Mara. "I think they would be safer here than in the Niertiti camp. I don't have any news but I heard that there were security problems in the camps. But at least they have something to eat there. They are receiving food aid. Here, there's no way to earn money. I don't have any more land to farm. I feel better knowing they are there."

AWA - KUTRUM

Awa's simplicity is disconcerting. At 15, her primary concern is her husband. She married a year ago but still lives with her mother while her husband assembles the dowry. He has not yet managed to obtain a bed, mattress and the clothes he must give her so that she will come live with him. But Awa is not in a hurry. "All I want is to be able to eat and to stay with my mother. I hope that he will divorce me. I don't want to be married to him. He is too poor. Afterwards, I can have another husband, a better one." Her other concern—the one that brought her to the Kutrum clinic—is a goiter that disfigures her throat, the sign of a lack of iodine during childhood and quite common here.



War seems to be a mysterious word for her. "I've heard people talk about the war and I know that it is a bad thing. But I don't have any problems and neither do the people around me, except for some who are sick." The girl lives in the village of Saneh, in a family of farmers. They grow and dry tomatoes, which they sell at the market. Despite her father's absence and lack of news of him for seven years, her family is getting by. Awa has never been to school. She helps her mother in the fields. "We used to have animals, too—eight cows, a camel and five goats, but we only have two goats now," she says. When asked what happened, she mentions, in passing, that her village was attacked and burned in 2005.

Finally, she explains. "It was the middle of the day. My mother, two sisters, brother and I were coming back from the fields. My grandmother told us that the village was under attack. There were men

3/What are the issues facing humanitarian organizations in Darfur?

Darfur represents currently the biggest humanitarian operation in the world, with a budget of more than \$850 million, 80 organizations and close to 15000 humanitarian aid workers in the field, among whom some 2000 from MSF. Part of the Darfur population remains cut off from internal aid, inaccessible for security reasons or because of isolation. Another part survives thanks to an infusion of international aid, whose considerable resources have ensured health indicators below the emergency levels. Accessible areas do not currently appear to be in a state of medical emergency. However, the situation remains very fragile. At this point, several years after the acute emergency has eased, international organizations are cutting back their efforts, yet needs increase. For example, food aid is increasingly restrictive, while across Darfur, the global malnutrition rate has exceeded the warning level of 15%. The situation is worsening in certain areas and rigidities and constraints on the operation of humanitarian aid sometimes restrict the ability to properly evaluate and respond quickly to needs. Moreover, the NGOs are tolerated by the Sudanese authorities as long as their action fits into the limit of some of the government's objectives, noticeably the development of

MSF ACTIVITIES

KUTRUM

From Niertiti, MSF manage a health post since March 2006, in the rebel rebel held area, in Djebel Mara. MSF staff perform around 1,900 consultations every month and refer emergency cases to Zalingei hospital. A polio and measles vaccination campaign in September and October was conducted in 2007 in this area. In 2008, MSF launched a vaccination campaign even more ambitious as the target population should get eight antigen. ■

on horseback and camelback and others in cars. We hid in the caves and stayed there for four days. There was a stream and we had sorghum that we had brought for the donkeys. When we came back, we saw that they had taken away, destroyed or burned everything we had." Was she afraid it might happen again? Awa shrugs her shoulders and responds, laconically, "It's already happened. And besides, there isn't anything left to take, so..." Two weeks after the first attack, other men on horseback and riding camels looted the village again. Awa was in the bush with the goats. "I might have been afraid, but what's the point? It happens and there's nothing you can do about it," she says, shrugging her shoulders again. Everyone rebuilt their home.

MASTORA - NIERTITI. THERAPEUTIC FEEDING CENTER

The bed assigned to Mastora and her daughter is the one closest to the exit in the intensive nutrition unit at MSF's clinic in Niertiti. This random assignment suits the young woman, who is about 30. "I never stay in one place. I am a nomad and I move from one area to another." But Mastora has been in the hospital for a week seeking treatment for her fourth child, a one year-old girl who is severely malnourished. "Alnotta has always been weak, since she was born," her mother says. "Now I'm feeding her with goat's milk. We have plenty. She has gained back some weight, but not a lot. This baby doesn't put on weight." Now a year old, the child weighs 3.5 kilos, the same as an average newborn in France.



Mastora had been living temporarily with her tribe in Beshara Tai, north of Niertiti. "We move with the seasons, so we pass through this place regularly. It isn't a village, it's a 'ferrik,' an encampment, with tents made of wood and fabric. There are other nomadic tribes not far away." The dry season is starting and the nomadic tribes are heading towards southern Darfur. "We have many camels-I don't know how many-and we often change location to find water and grass," she explains. "The men find a spot and then they come to get us, the women and children. When the men decide it's time to go, we go." Her uncle is with her. He remains at the entrance to the nutrition unit. Her baby will probably need several weeks to recover a healthy weight but Mastora does not know when she will leave.

"Usually, during the day, I cook and wash," she explains. "I don't farm. I buy what I need at the market. We sell our goats and buy food and clothing. And when we are sick, we go to the nearest health center." Her tribe lives a small distance from town, but it

services in rural areas. The door is shut as soon as NGOs could become a problem.

OBSTACLES TO REACHING THE POPULATIONS

In West and South Darfur, areas that used to be accessible are not any more. Humanitarian agencies keep being the target of serious violence. The toll for the first three months of 2008 published by OCHA (the U.N. humanitarian coordination agency) is 3 deaths, 9 physical/sexual aggressions, 84 kidnapping, 3 arrests, more than 75 cars robbed and 4 convoys attacked. Deployment of humanitarian aid depends, in part, on the evaluation of security conditions, which is conducted by the United Nations. Areas that have been declared «no-go» zones are cut off from aid. However, the situation changes quickly in the field while evaluations do not keep pace. MSF's challenge is to evaluate the possibilities on an ongoing basis and take advantage, to the extent possible, of any margin for action. For example, MSF is working in an area near Nyala, in Bulbul, classified as «inaccessible.» MSF decided to travel to that area in taxis, which are less attractive than large vehicles. MSF and other organizations have also tried using trucks instead of ATVs to reduce the risk of attack and theft. Administrative authorizations may slow or block aid deployment. In western Darfur, MSF's requests for access to the area north of El Geneina has been rejected since mid-December. In November 2007, the MSF team working in Sakali, near Nyala in South Darfur, was prevented from contacting people who had set up makeshift shelters when violence in the Kalma camp forced some displaced persons to find refuge elsewhere. That year, MSF was also unable to obtain authorization to work in Kass, in southern Darfur, despite very troubling indicators regarding the nutritional situation there. When the government wants to relocate dozens of thousands of displaced persons living in Kass or Kalma camps, in South Darfur, the NGOs face numerous administrative blockades to work there.

is only two hours by donkey and they need to trade regularly, especially at the market, with residents in the places where they stop. "Things have changed in the last few years," Mastora says. "There's fighting. I hope there will be peace one day, that everyone will be able to live in peace."

KALTUMA - NIERTITI, MEDICAL VISITS OUTSIDE THE CLINIC

A cane in each hand, Kaltuma, 58, moves with difficulty. She looks closer to 80. Although it takes her several minutes to walk a few feet, this grandmother has come from Kass, a distant location, to be seen at the MSF clinic in Niertiti. "I wanted to come for two months but I had to find the money," she explains. "It costs



10 pounds for my daughter and me and that's a lot. We're not rich. Yesterday, we finally managed to come but we waited all day at the station along the side of the road and not a single car passed by! We came back this morning and we finally found someone around noon. It's two hours by road from Kass." An international NGO funds a clinic there. "They never have any medicine-never!" Kaltuma says. "That's why we have to come to Niertiti to be treated." She tells the medical assistant about her long list of ailments—a poorly-set broken hip, back pain, burning sensation in her feet and intestinal problems—and holds a prescription tightly in her hand.

Kaltuma has lived with her family in Kass, in a displaced persons' camp, for almost four years. They are 22 in all, spread over four generations. Each family has cleared a little space, one next to the other. They survive thanks to the food aid distributed by the World Food Program, but not all family members are benefiting. Issa, the daughter who came with her, joined the others several months later, after the registration was completed. Despite her efforts to obtain food cards, she has been waiting for three years. "I think we had cards for my husband, our six children and me," she says. "But there were problems later on among the leaders in the displaced persons' camps. I don't know what happened, but I didn't

DISCRIMINATION AND LACK OF RESPONSIVE AID

Aid organizations cannot provide quick and efficient aid to newly displaced persons, whether in camps or at gathering sites. With the population of displaced persons growing in some camps, existing services face strong pressures, but aid is decreasing rather than increasing. The international organizations that took over after the first emergency phase now find it difficult to finance and maintain major activities. This has consequences on the quality of the aid. For example, despite an existing nutritional program set up in Kass, malnutrition was still quite high among children under five. But the only presence of this program has been used as an argument to refuse the intervention of an MSF team. The functioning of the aid system, with planning, task repartition and lack of qualitative evaluation can sometime hamper a pertinent response. In displaced persons' camps, there is a selection process, which involves separating those who deserve assistance from the others. The newly displaced persons are suspected of having come for economic reasons—for access to assistance—and as a result, find it very difficult to obtain food aid. The nature of the violence they have experienced determines whether they are considered legitimate victims. Someone who was attacked and whose village was destroyed

MSF ACTIVITIES

NIERTITI

At the foot of the Jebel Mara, Niertiti is a place where different nomad and sedentary communities meet and the front line between armed forces and rebels. MSF is the only medical actor in this town of approximately 33,000 people, among whom there are around 23,000 displaced people. Activities in the hospital, which began in March 2004, have far increased in 2007. MSF teams performed an average of 5,500 consultations and 333 hospital admissions per month. Malnutrition raised during the 2007 summer. ■

have the cards. But the family is sharing with us, so we get a little. And we earn a little money carrying bricks so we can buy food at the market. When there's no work, we eat just one meal a day."

Kaltuma and her family arrived in the Kass displaced persons' camp after an attack. The story is so commonplace that she doesn't see much point in telling it. "That's war." They were farmers in the village of Haliba. It was burned and five members of the family, women and children, died during the attack. "The men who attacked us were armed," Kaltuma explains. "They came by car, on camels and horses and even on donkey and by foot! We left for Jemeza, nearby. We couldn't go far because we didn't even have any clothes! But they attacked Jemeza, too, a few days later so we came to Kass. It's O.K. there, I feel safe, but there's nothing there." Kaltuma picks up her canes again, goes to the pharmacy for her medications and is dropped off in front of the station along the road. Perhaps she'll find a car to take her back to Kass that same day.

ASHA - NIERTITI - MSF CLINIC

"There is a school and a water pump, built by an NGO, where I live," explains Asha, stretched out on a bed in the MSF clinic in Niertiti, where she has come to be treated for gynecological problems. "But there's no health center and no doctors-nothing. And there haven't been any food distributions for two years." Her village, Saga Dirr, is two hours away by road, in a rural area. "We



received food rations for about a year, or a little more. I still have the card. But they don't come anymore. I think it's because of the security. They had problems along the road so they stopped coming." Asha's family are farmers. They continue to harvest sorghum but the field is small and the rainy season is short, so they can produce only enough for four months. At 25, Asha has four children. The oldest is 10 and the youngest is 1. The family also includes her mother, four aunts and brothers.

"We had animals, too--10 cows, some 50 goats and sheep-but they were all taken and now we don't have any," she says. "The village

may receive food rations, but a person who has experienced ongoing violence and theft may not. As a group, the nomadic populations have long been associated with the Janjaweed and receive little humanitarian aid.

If the health indicators stay globally correct, the trend is worrying. In Zalingei, access to medical care is limited in the camps and we are treating displaced persons at the hospital whose health status has worsened because they did not receive necessary care on a timely basis. Malnutrition in the camps has risen sharply in one year. Between September and December 2007, one child in 10 was treated in MSF's nutritional program.

INDEPENDENCE

Aid groups are working in a very difficult context. It is further complicated by the fact that political and armed groups often try to use humanitarian actors to further their own goals.

The Sudanese authorities want to downsize the biggest camps and send back the families to their villages. They need also to develop services in the areas where nomadic tribes more or less close the government do settle. Khartoum's objective is then to limit the aid in the camps and to direct it in the rural areas. The Sudanese Commission for the Coordination of humanitarian aid (HAC) maintain a strict control over the NGOs' activity to remain between the scope of its own interests and limit the risks of disturbing testimonies. The access to population has been refused to United Nations and NGOs when the Sudanese army, backed by militias, has lead a massive intervention in the corridor close to the Chadian border, from El Geneina to Djebel Moon, in February 2008. The official protests from UN and MSF did not change anything. Security is an efficient argument to put aside humanitarian actors during the time of a military or police operation, to avoid having direct witnesses. And when, despite all, humanitarian actors are directly witnessing violence, risks for the security of their team or fear

was attacked and burned twice. My uncles died. We didn't rebuild. An organization gave us some tents. We are in the same place but living in tents, with nothing. To buy food, we have to leave the village and gather grass and wood to sell. But when we leave, there is no security, no one protects us and we are beaten."

About a year ago, the rural areas came under the control of bandits, former paramilitary and deserters, who extort the remaining local population. The pressure on villagers and displaced persons tends to increase because many of the police stations in rural areas have closed. These isolated, fragile stations could no longer deal with the bandits and rebels who criss-crossed the countryside.

Pain keeps Asha in her bed. She continues to speak within hearing distance of the other patients who are often accompanied by their husbands. The clinic treats patients from all tribes and armed forces. Within the medical facility, everyone lives together without conflict. *"What you must never do is bring back large quantities,"* Asha murmurs. *"As soon as you have a little, you come back and then you leave again. When you don't have much, there is less risk of being attacked and robbed."*

"If I had a choice, I'd go to Niertiti. My older sister lives in the southern camp and my dream is to join her. I've already tried six or seven times, but they stopped us every time. Once they see the baggage, they tell us to go back home. It's impossible to go on. They catch you on the road and you have to get down and return to the village. But I'm going to try again. If there were food distributions here in the camp, I wouldn't have to go looking for grass and wood so often. And I don't sleep because they beat us at night, too. I'm tired. I don't feel safe here anymore." ■

of expulsion can block all speaking out. On its side, UNAMID suggests working jointly with international humanitarian organizations to implement projects that will have a rapid impact. Some organizations accept, and even solicit, such collaboration, which contributes to confusion between the parties' roles. One is there to provide aid and the other, to protect civilian populations by the use of force, if necessary. Similarly, police and military forces offer assistance to humanitarian groups to provide security for their travels and operations. In the large displaced persons' camp in Kalma, south Darfur, for example, one NGO conducted a census with the support of government armed forces. ■