

Does disaggregation equal inclusion? Reflections on producing disaggregated analysis to ensure inclusive Durable Solutions.

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Introduction

The way people and communities experience displacement often differs individually and collectively depending on their age, sex, and other characteristics, such as their displacement status, tribal affiliation, and socio-economic situation. An effective and accountable response² needs a comprehensive understanding of these ‘intersecting personal characteristics.’ Adequate data disaggregation not only ensures a more tailored and thus impactful response, but also provides attention to at-risk groups including minorities and often under-represented groups, such as youth.³ **This article, however, argues that data disaggregation – while critical – is not enough on and by itself to ensure an analysis that is inclusive of the diversified experiences and perspectives of different displacement-affected communities and groups;** it specifically focuses on disaggregation by age and the inclusion of youth in displacement analyses.

Importantly, while disaggregating by age is important to understand some of the specificities of the situation of youth, the article holds that the analysis can be substantially enhanced and made more useful if it goes hand-in-hand with active engagement of youth from the outset of the process as **data users rather than mere beneficiaries**. The paper draws on insights from recent interagency studies on Durable Solutions conducted in Sudan,⁴ and highlights some critical reflections on how youths were included in the process and *why* youths’ perspectives were key to the Durable Solutions and peacebuilding analysis.

Insights on meaningful disaggregation

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² According to the IASC (2020) definition, ‘an accountable response is informed by and adapts to the views, perceptions and needs of affected populations’.

³ UNHCR, 2018. Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/72340.pdf>

⁴ These include a pilot Durable Solutions exercise in El Fasher (Darfur) led by the UN Country Team and the Government of Sudan in 2016-2019; a subsequent scale-up in 2020-2022 to eight localities across the five States of Darfur under the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in Sudan (implemented by UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, IOM, UN-Habitat and FAO), as well as an additional nine localities across Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan under the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF), led by UNHCR. The Durable Solutions Working Group in Sudan (DSWG) has been overseeing all the studies and requested JIPS to design the methodology approaches, including the joint analysis, community engagement, and action planning processes.

The 2030 Agenda, through its target 17.18, highlights the importance of disaggregated data for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In a similar vein, in its Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity,⁵ UNHCR emphasizes the relevance of accurate and disaggregated data for inclusive programming. It highlights the importance of data disaggregation by age, gender and other diversity characteristics for nuanced and contextually relevant analysis that can inform tailored protection responses, underpin monitoring of results, and ensure Accountability to Affected People. It equally stresses the need to actively and meaningfully engage affected people, in order to build on their capacities and to work **with** them to generate an in-depth understanding of their needs, protection risks and priorities.

An important first step to a disaggregated and inclusive analysis is **exploring the definition** of the disaggregation categories. While the standard age-based definition (15-24 years) is often used for statistical purposes, **'youth' is a construct that can change with economic and socio-cultural conditions and thus needs to be refined and adapted to each context to ensure the relevance of the subsequent analysis.** Youthhood is often seen as the transitional period from 'childhood dependence' to 'adulthood independence.' In some contexts, the socio-cultural defining factors include the completion of compulsory education, setting up separate households, and economic independence.⁶ For instance, the dire economic situation and increased unemployment rates in some countries can hinder youths' ability to be financially independent and make families on their own, which may result in prolonged 'youthhood' beyond the standard age group.⁷

In Sudan, the Durable Solutions (2020/21)⁸ household-based quantitative analysis relied on the standard definition of the youth age group (15-24 years); it was only through the qualitative methods aimed at validating the results – elaborated upon later in this article – that the age bracket was re-defined to better reflect the specificities of the Darfur context, where the category of youth includes persons up to 35 years of age. The adjusted age definition was then applied to a subsequent trends analysis and Action Plan development. Applying this contextualized category, data from the Durable Solutions studies across Darfur (2020/21)⁹ showed that youth make up a significant portion of the population, namely an estimated 35%.¹⁰

Acknowledging the role of youths' agency as active contributors to the present and future of their communities, this insight is critical for more effective policies and programmes that deliver on the pledge to 'leave no one behind' as per the Sustainable Development Goals. Although youth in Sudan make up around one third of the country's population, and despite their leading role in the country's uprising in 2019 and the subsequent sweeping change of the political landscape – including the continuous political instability and the recent coup attempt in 2021¹¹ ¹²–Darfuri youth are traditionally not included in decision making forums. Findings suggest that youth are perceived to be lacking experience to be included in conflict resolution structures, mechanisms concerned with natural resources management and peacebuilding processes, leaving such key decisions to be taken primarily by the male population above 35 years of age.¹³

Recognizing the critical role youth can play in regards to longer-term development, solutions and peacebuilding, their meaningful engagement should be considered essential. **This, however, necessitates a critical change in mindsets that treats youths not as mere 'beneficiaires' but instead as 'data users' and agents of their own lives,** alongside other key stakeholders who participate in defining objectives, methodologies and implementation plans. Inclusion in monitoring and evaluation activities is also key to ensure sustainable outcomes from national development processes.

⁵ UNHCR, 2018. 'Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity.' <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/72340.pdf>

⁶ United Nations. 'Definition of Youth.' <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

⁷ Chr. Michelin Institute (2020). 'After the uprising: Including Sudanese youth.'

⁸ Sudan, Peacebuilding Fund Durable Solutions Analysis Survey (dataset) - Darfur (2020/21). <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/unhcr-jips-sdn-2021-pbfprofiling-v2-1>

⁹ Eight localities were included in this study across West, Central, East and North Darfur: Tawila, Jebel Moon, Nertiti, Um Dukhun, Gereida, Sheiria, Assalaya and Yassin.

¹⁰ The 2020 demographic data published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs confirm that the proportion of persons aged 15-35 years of age make up an estimated 35% of the Sudan population. <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>

¹¹ Chr. Michelin Institute (2020). 'After the uprising: Including Sudanese youth.'

¹² Geopolitical Intelligence Services AG (2021). 'Sudan: Youth fight against military rule.'

¹³ PBF Sudan, DSWG Sudan, UNHCR, JIPS (2021). 'Thematic Brief: Strengthening the Rule of Law and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms.'

Insights on how youths were engaged in the recent Durable Solutions exercise in Darfur, at different stages, the challenges encountered and limitations are shared below.

Empirical reflections on *how to move beyond disaggregated data to disaggregated analysis*

Disaggregation is not a ‘box-ticking’ and standard exercise, but rather a critical and context-specific element of the profiling methodology. To allow for disaggregation, survey questions need to be answered by, or on behalf of, each household member, which among other challenges, significantly increases the length, the resources of the study and the likelihood of survey fatigue. Therefore, it is essential to critically think through the objectives of disaggregation in the early stages of planning, and accordingly include the indicators – or by proxy, survey questions – that *can* or *should* be disaggregated in a given context. Disaggregated data deemed useful in a certain context, may not bring about an analytical value in other contexts. For example, the findings of the disaggregated quantitative data around youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) by sex is often key for targeted response; however, in Darfur, the NEET disaggregation by sex per se did not bring about disaggregated analysis reflective of the lived realities, due to the lack of youth inclusion in the outset confirming or challenging the relevance of such measure. The qualitative follow up on the household survey revealed that in rural areas in particular, young men and women engage with their families in unpaid work, either through household domestic responsibilities or through farming land. However, the disaggregated data of the household surveys suggested that the female youth responsible for the household care work were reported as part of the NEET group, while the male youth supporting the household’s farming were not counted in the NEET group; and hence, this common yet out-of-context disaggregation gave the false impression of young women being more inactive than young men.

Current survey approaches applied in displacement situations are often administered with one respondent, the head of the household in most cases or another adult member of the household. While this allows for the collection of ‘objective’ data on the household level, it falls short of generating a deeper understanding of the individual-level perceptions. Accordingly, youths are often ‘spoken for’ by the head of the household – as proxy respondent – but their individual experiences, perspectives, and future plans are rarely captured directly. Consequently, there are significant limitations for the resulting data and analysis to effectively inform tailored responses, even when disaggregated by age or other diversity criteria.

To collect detailed information on a certain group – youth in this case –, the sampling approach could be adjusted to include individual-level sampling, instead of or in addition to household-level sampling, thus allowing for interviews with the head of household as well as other household members, including youths. Another approach would be to ensure variation in the selection of respondents, making sure that both men and women as well as different age groups respond to household surveys. This allows for adding questions pertaining to subjective perspectives of certain groups within the household, which would only be answered when respondents of the group in concern are interviewed, in this case youth. Such data collection and sampling techniques allow capturing disaggregated perspectives on topics such as future intentions and participation, even through household surveys.

Need for qualitative data to ensure inclusion of perspectives: In order to ensure disaggregated analyses rather than simply disaggregated data, more attention should be brought to qualitative methods. Qualitative approaches can provide information on youths’ and other groups’ specific perceptions and views, such as on their inclusion and participation in decision making in areas of displacement or their views and plans on the future. This also enables diverse groups to participate in the interpretation of the findings and contribute to the formulation of subsequent recommendations, enriching these based on their perspectives and experiences.

Disaggregated analysis in Sudan: The recent Durable Solutions exercises in Darfur utilized household surveys that involved analytical components around the youth situation such as education and employment that were mainly reported by the head of the household on the behalf of the household youth members. A meaningful interpretation of these results, though, was only feasible with the inclusion of the youths’ perspectives through qualitative approaches.

The household survey data suggested that the majority of the displaced households residing in camps (86%)¹⁴ prefer to go back to their place of origin mainly because of the reported lack of economic opportunities – livelihood sources in Darfur primarily depend on agriculture. However, the youths participating in community engagement sessions, designed for the validation of the results, showed that youths’ preferences in some cases diverted from the findings of the survey. Youths in some cases prefer to stay in their places of displacement as their access to work in agriculture on land around the camp is better than their perceived accessibility to land in their place of origin. **These very important differences between youth and older household members regarding livelihood aspirations were not adequately captured in the disaggregated data of the survey, but required the qualitative component** in order to be captured and thus ‘correct’ or nuance the survey results, allowing for youths’ perspectives to be better reflected.

Building on the results of the Durable Solution profiling exercise in Darfur, and based on the sessions conducted with communities to identify their priorities for solutions, workshops were organized to provide a platform for discussion across the relevant international, political and social structures in Darfur, and ensured the inclusion of youth participants to brainstorm and craft plans for their localities, based on the community-identified priorities, and to explore synergies for advocacy, implementation and dissemination of the jointly suggested activities. Although in Sudan they are culturally deemed too inexperienced to participate in such events and despite the fact that their presence in the workshop was relatively light in terms of representation, most of the jointly crafted planning suggest building the capacity with young people and actively including them in the implementation of the development activities. In almost all the action plans across all localities, the participants repeatedly referred to ‘youth’ as ‘the available resource to be invested in, and should be given a meaningful role when it comes to development in Darfur’. While this could be influenced by the youth representatives and the group brainstorming, it also suggests that the communities want to address the issue of ‘lack of experienced youths’.

Concluding remarks

Collecting disaggregated data by sex, age and other relevant characteristics is a core element of understanding a population group’s diverse characteristics. It is a key component of measuring progress towards Durable Solutions, alongside an analysis of the perceptions and future plans among the displacement-affected population groups.

While disaggregated data is important, ‘disaggregation’ by itself does not ensure diversity representation. Thus, disaggregated analysis is key and requires strategic inclusion of relevant groups at the early stages of the exercise conceptualisation. This requires critical reflection on the reasons and methods of disaggregation, i.e. critical selection of indicators to be disaggregated and by which categories in a given context, and accordingly adjust the sampling approaches and qualitative methods.

In his interview conducted in September 2021 upon the completion of the joint planning workshop in East Darfur, the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports further reflected on the Durable Solutions findings that were shared with them and emphasized that “while the data reflects to a great extent the lived realities of the communities in East Darfur [Assalaya, Sheiria and Yassin localities], findings could have highlighted the youths’ aspirations and priorities in a better and more accurate way if youth had been included in the process early on – including the inception phase when the project kicked off. Youths are not often included in the strategic practical planning. We participated in [the Durable Solutions] workshop to ensure solutions for youths are included.”

¹⁴ PBF Sudan, DSWG Sudan, UNHCR, JIPS (2021). Durable Solutions & Baseline Analysis: Key Obstacles to Durable Solutions and Peacebuilding for the Displacement- Affected Communities in Tawila Locality, North Darfur.

