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Beyond the Reintegration: The Role of Women in Preventing CAAFAG in North Darfur

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Abstract

The recruitment of children into armed groups remains a critical yet under-researched issue in North Darfur, Sudan. While disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts have historically focused on post-recruitment responses, this study explores the overlooked role of women-led, community-based prevention strategies. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on interviews, focus group discussions, and written narratives from 112 participants, including displaced women, civil society actors, and children associated with armed groups. The findings highlight the pivotal role of traditional female mediators—particularly the Hakamate—as cultural influencers who use oral storytelling to discourage recruitment and foster social cohesion. Despite their contributions, these women are systematically excluded from formal DDR frameworks and face structural barriers such as lack of funding, political marginalization, and security threats. This paper argues for a paradigm shift in child protection strategies: from reactive reintegration to proactive prevention, anchored in local knowledge and gender-inclusive policies. The study concludes that recognizing and supporting women's preventive roles is essential for sustainable peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions like Darfur.

Keywords: Women-Led Prevention, Child Recruitment, CAAFAG, Darfur, DDR, Feminist Peacebuilding, Community-Based Strategies

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the Problem

The recruitment and re-recruitment of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG)¹ remains a persistent humanitarian and security crisis in Sudan, including Darfur, (UN, 2023).

Despite sustained international attention on DDR, most interventions remain focused on reintegration after the damage is done, rather than preventing recruitment in the first place. This study argues that the current emphasis

¹ As defined by the Paris Principles (2007), CAAFAG refers to “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, or for sexual purposes.

on reactive models overlooks the preventive work being conducted by women at the grassroots level—especially traditional mediators like Hakamate and women-led community organizations—whose roles remain largely undocumented and under-supported in policy and academic discourse.

Existing research and international frameworks, including the Paris Principles (2007), UNSCR 1325, and regional DDR strategies, have primarily addressed post-recruitment solutions, often through formal and state-centric lenses. While valuable, these approaches tend to marginalize informal, culturally grounded, and gender-responsive strategies that operate outside state institutions. This study builds on feminist critiques of DDR (Molloy, 2023), adding original field data from North Darfur to demonstrate how community-based female actors engage in proactive child protection—long before reintegration begins.

Originally conceptualized as a study of reintegration mechanisms for CAAFAG, the research evolved in response to the data collected during fieldwork from September 2023 to May 2024. Interviews and focus group discussions revealed that women were not just aiding reintegration, but actively preventing recruitment through traditional storytelling, negotiation, moral authority, and early identification of risks. This unexpected shift reshaped the study's objective: to analyze the preventive strategies led by women and the structural barriers they face, including exclusion from formal decision-making, limited funding, and security threats.

North Darfur presents a particularly critical case. The region has suffered from decades of armed violence, tribal conflicts, forced displacement, and entrenched patterns of marginalization. These dynamics have intensified child vulnerability and facilitated their recruitment by various armed factions (UNICEF, CHILDREN and Armed Conflict, Annual Report, 2023). While international peace agreements such as the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) have recognized the need for DDR (Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan, 2020), they often fail to integrate culturally grounded, gender-responsive prevention mechanisms that operate outside formal institutions.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how women-led initiatives contribute to the prevention of child recruitment in conflict-affected settings. A secondary objective is to examine why such efforts remain unrecognized in official DDR frameworks. These objectives are grounded in a feminist theoretical approach that values lived experience, cultural agency, and non-institutional forms of peacebuilding. The qualitative case study design is thus directly aligned with these objectives, allowing for an exploration of community-based narratives that are often excluded from security and child protection literature.

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they challenge dominant DDR paradigms that center male combatants and post-conflict institutions while putting less attention on localization and prevention actors. Practically, they call for the integration of culturally relevant, women-led strategies into both national and international policy frameworks. By shifting focus from reintegration to prevention, this study argues for a more sustainable, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach to child protection in armed conflict settings.

1.2. Importance of the Problem

The persistent recruitment of children into armed groups in North Darfur reflects a broader failure of international and national child protection frameworks to address root causes through preventive strategies (UN, 2023). While DDR programs have made strides in post-conflict reintegration, they often neglect culturally grounded, women-led interventions that operate before recruitment occurs. This gap is particularly urgent in contexts like Sudan, where state fragility, localized violence, and gender-based exclusion undermine formal responses (Turner, o.a., 2024). Current literature tends to sideline preventive models in favor of reactive ones, leaving a blind spot in both theory and practice. This study contributes to filling that void by analyzing community-rooted, female-led strategies that have received little academic or policy recognition. The purpose of this research is to advance the understanding of women's roles in protection and DDR policymaking in Darfur.

1.3. Describe Relevant Scholarship

Extant literature on DDR Programs often foregrounds disarmament and reintegration while giving limited attention to community-based prevention—particularly the role of women (Papworth, 2024). Although the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 underscores women’s involvement in peacebuilding, implementation remains weak in localized child protection systems (Kaptan, 2020). Studies by Molloy (2023) and Abbas & Tønnessen (2022) highlight how feminist contributions are often sidelined in peace processes and reintegration planning.

The Paris Principles (2007) provide important guidelines for addressing the needs of CAAFAG, yet they fall short of accounting for gendered, pre-recruitment interventions. This gap highlights the need for more contextual frameworks that integrate traditional actors and women-led organizations. In addition, literature on traditional mediation in Sudan (Tubiana, Tanner, & Abdul-Jalil, 2012) supports the legitimacy of customary practices in community governance but rarely links them directly to child recruitment prevention.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on culturally embedded, women-led prevention mechanisms—an area largely neglected in both academic literature and policy discourse.

1.4. State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

This study is guided by the central research question: How do women-led community initiatives in North Darfur contribute to the prevention of child recruitment into armed groups? The primary hypothesis is that women in conflict-affected communities engage in culturally grounded, proactive strategies that significantly reduce the risk of child recruitment—despite lacking formal recognition and support. A secondary, exploratory hypothesis is that structural barriers—such as gender exclusion from decision-making, lack of funding, and security threats—undermine the effectiveness and visibility of these efforts.

These hypotheses are informed by feminist peacebuilding theory and critiques of DDR frameworks that center post-conflict reintegration over prevention. The study’s qualitative case study design, based on interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, is well-suited to capture community narratives, identify patterns of informal intervention, and explore the socio-political context in which these women operate. The design allows for in-depth inference, grounded in lived experiences, to assess the validity to the stated hypotheses and offer practical policy recommendations.

2. Method

The study employed a qualitative case study design and was conducted between September 2023 and May 2024. Due to the ongoing conflict in North Darfur, fieldwork was conducted remotely through digital interviews, voice calls, and secure messaging platforms. Participants included 112 individuals selected through purposive sampling: displaced women, community elders, youth leaders, ex-child soldiers, and representatives of civil society.

Data collection methods included:

- Documentary Review: DDR guidelines, UN publications, and relevant legal and policy frameworks;
- Focus Group discussions (FGDs): One with girls and their guardians; one with civil society actors;
- Written Narratives: Including the recall method and open-ended questionnaires.

Ethical approval and informed consent were secured, including assent and guardian consent for minors. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and participation was voluntary. The research was guided by feminist and intersectional ethics, emphasizing emotional safety and participant agency.

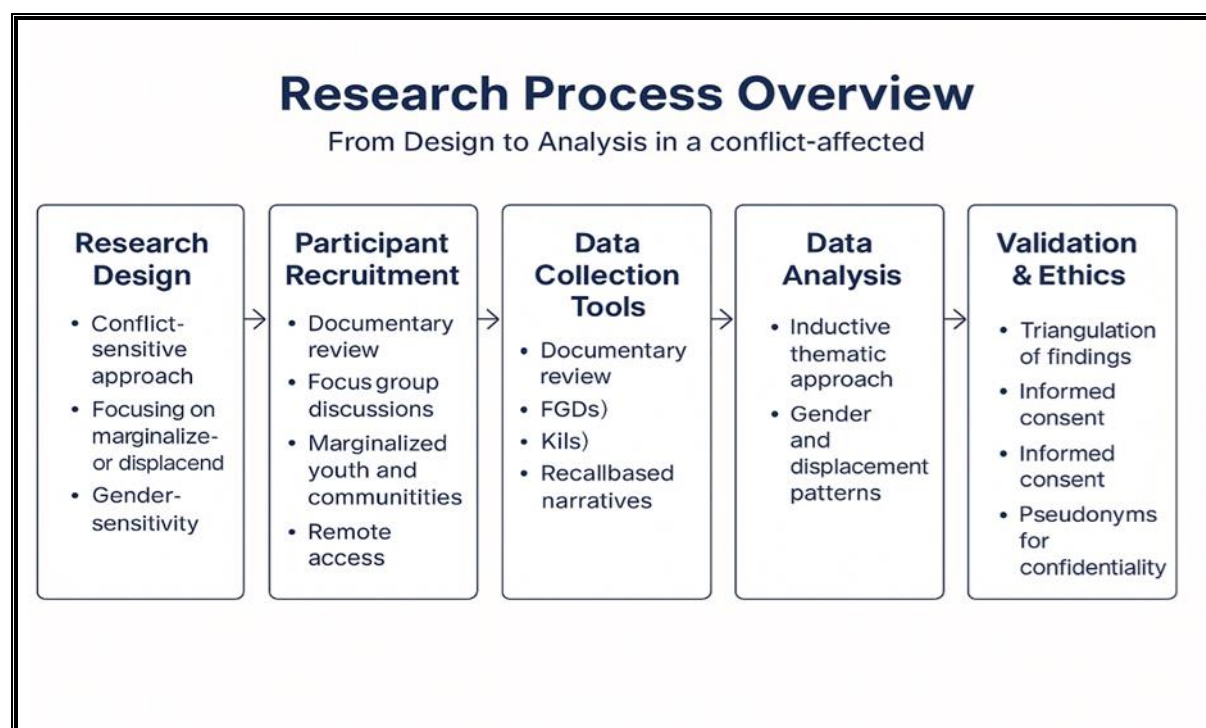


Figure 1: The Key qualitative research steps with gender focus and remote access in conflict settings.

2.1. Identify Subsections

To ensure credibility, the study employed multiple strategies adapted to the challenges of remote fieldwork. Triangulation was achieved through the use of diverse data sources, including document review, written narratives, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires. Cross-validation was carried out by comparing responses across different participant categories such as displaced women, civil society actors, and ex-child soldiers. Thematic consistency and recurrence across data sets contributed to the reliability of the findings.

Dependability was reinforced by maintaining a detailed log of all interviews, communications, and field notes, as well as by documenting methodological decisions throughout the research process. Confirmability was supported by grounding the findings in direct participant accounts, avoiding speculative interpretations, and allowing the data to speak for itself.

2.2. Participant Characteristics

A total of 112 participants were engaged in the study using purposive sampling. Eligibility criteria focused on individuals and groups with direct experiences as victims, witnesses, or community responders to the phenomenon of CAAFAG. The sample included women-led organizations, youth networks, guardians, local experts, civil society actors, and children associated with armed groups. Both internally displaced persons and cross-border refugees were included.

Participants were drawn from across Sudan, with 37 individuals from North Darfur and 75 from other regions of Darfur and major Sudanese cities. Among the North Darfur participants, 68% were women. Of those from other areas, 29% identified as women. Recruitment ensured a mix of age, gender, and social roles to reflect the diversity of experiences in conflict-affected communities. No explicit exclusion criteria were applied, aside from the requirement that participants be over 15 years old and have direct or community-level experience with CAAFAG dynamics.

2.3. Sampling Procedures

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with firsthand experience of CAAFAG-related dynamics, including prevention, response, or lived experience. The study reached out to approximately 130 individuals, of whom 112 agreed to participate, resulting in an 86% participation rate. All participants were recruited voluntarily; no financial incentives were offered. Data were collected remotely—through secure voice calls, digital interviews, and written responses—due to security and access constraints in conflict-affected areas. Locations included North Darfur and other Darfuri and Sudanese cities where displaced or affected populations reside. The study adhered to feminist, intersectional, and culturally sensitive research ethics.

2.4. Sample Size, power, and Precision

The target sample size was set at approximately 100 participants to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. The final sample of 112 met and exceeded this target. The participants reflected a broad spectrum of demographics and roles; however, the sample may slightly overrepresent women in North Darfur due to their stronger engagement in prevention initiatives. While the study does not aim to generalize statistically, the sample offers strong qualitative depth suited for thematic and interpretive analysis.

2.5. Measures and Covariates

Data were collected through three primary methods: 1) documentary review of DDR policies and UN frameworks, 2) focus group discussion (one with girls and guardians, one with civil society actors), and 3) written narratives using open-ended questionnaires and the recall method. These tools were designed to capture participants' lived experiences and perceptions of community-based prevention. To enhance credibility and consistency, data collection instruments were reviewed by local experts for contextual and cultural relevance. Multiple sources were conducted in Arabic.

2.6. Research Design

A qualitative case study approach was employed to investigate the lived experiences and community-based strategies used to prevent child recruitment in North Darfur. The design was naturalistic and non-experimental, with no conditions manipulated or assigned. Participants were observed and engaged in their natural contexts through interviews, focus groups, and written narratives. No random assignment or experimental grouping was used, and the study did not involve between-subject or within-subject comparisons. This approach was selected to allow an in-depth understanding of community dynamics and culturally embedded practices, particularly in a conflict setting where formal DDR processes are often inaccessible or ineffective. The design was grounded in principles of child protection and feminist methodology, emphasizing participant agency and local knowledge.

3. Results

3.1. Recruitment

Participant recruitment and data collection were conducted between September 2023 and May 2024. Due to security concerns and access limitations in North Darfur, recruitment was carried out remotely using digital platforms, including secure messaging and voice calls. Participants were identified through purposive sampling, with primary sources including local civil society organizations, women-led networks, youth associations, and children associated with armed groups.

3.2. Statistics and Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of this study, data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by feminist and community-centered frameworks. Thematic analysis offers a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Clarke & Braun, 2008). Transcripts from interviews, focus group discussions, and written narratives were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring patterns and categories related

to community-based prevention of CAAFAG recruitment. Coding was conducted manually and organized into key themes such as:

- Cultural influence of the Hakamate
- Women-led early intervention strategies
- Structural marginalization in DDR processes

Analytic rigor was ensured through triangulation of data sources and reflexive memoing to minimize researcher bias and enhance trustworthiness—two critical strategies in qualitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Direct participant quotes were selected to reflect the depth, contradiction, and nuance of lived experiences. Findings are presented thematically to offer clear and contextually grounded insights into the data.

3.3. *Ancillary Analyses*

Several limitations affected the scope and depth of the data:

- Inaccessibility of field sites in North Darfur due to ongoing armed conflict.
- Security risks for participants, including fear of surveillance or retaliation.
- Difficulty accessing refugee populations without stable internet or communication.
- Limited ability to engage with girls associated with armed groups due to trauma, stigma, and protection concerns, in accordance with ethical standards set by international guidelines for working with CAAFAG (UNICEF, The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, 2021).

Despite these challenges, the study gathered substantial data through persistent outreach, adaptation of tools, and collaboration with trusted networks.

3.4. *Baseline Data*

The study involved 112 participants from across Sudan, including 37 from North Darfur and 75 from other regions. Of the North Darfur participants, 68% were women; among those from other areas, 29% were women. Participants were categorized into women-led organizations, community elders, youth networks, guardians, civil society actors, and children associated with armed groups. 100% of the participants were internally displaced or refugees, with varying levels of access to DDR-related processes or formal mechanisms.

3.5. *Women-Led Community Strategies In Preventing CAAFAG Recruitment*

Women across North Darfur play a subtle yet under-recognized role in preventing the recruitment of CAAFAG, drawing from community-based knowledge, informal networks not typically captured by state-led DDR models (UNDDR, 2023). This section presents three key areas where women's leadership is most visible: through cultural influence, grassroots protection mechanisms, and their struggle for structural inclusion.

3.5.1. *Cultural Capital of the Hakamate*

The Hakamate were repeatedly described as central figures in discouraging child recruitment through oral performances. Their songs challenge tribal divisions, condemn violence, and encourage peaceful behavior (El Fangry, 2016). A Participant from El-Fasher stated, "When the Hakamate sing, people listen. Their words stay with you."

This dual role of the Hakamate emerged strongly in the data. On one hand, they can escalate conflict by glorifying violence or tribal loyalty; on the other, they are powerful peace influencers. Their impact stems from their oral storytelling and performative songs, which serve as moral commentaries. As one participant noted, "The Hakamate influence young men...when they sing for peace, people lay down their arms."

Culturally, the Hakamate are seen as “mothers of the community voice,” bearing informal but potent social capital. Their endorsement or condemnation through song carries intergenerational influence. This gives them a unique position to be transmuted into structured community peace agents (Her Words Slayed Dragons: Sudan’s Hakkamaat. Women’s Literacy in Sudan, 2021), especially with proper training and inclusion in reintegration programs.

However, risks exist. If they remain outside formal DDR strategies, their influence can be co-opted for divisive agendas. Their participation in peacebuilding should be intentional and supported to avoid reinforcing patriarchal or tribal divisions.

The data also revealed ambivalent perceptions of the Hakamate. While approximately 41% of participants from North Darfur viewed them as peacebuilders, 50% of participants from other regions expressed similar support. However, a notable portion of participants remained critical, highlighting the potential for manipulation. For example, Umaima described the Hakamate as essential in encouraging tribes to resolve disputes and act as moral guides. In contrast, Ihsan warned that their songs can also incite violence, especially when driven by financial or political incentives.

This contrasting view underscores their deep political and cultural embeddedness. It highlights the need for ethical and accountable engagement when including the Hakamate in peacebuilding frameworks.

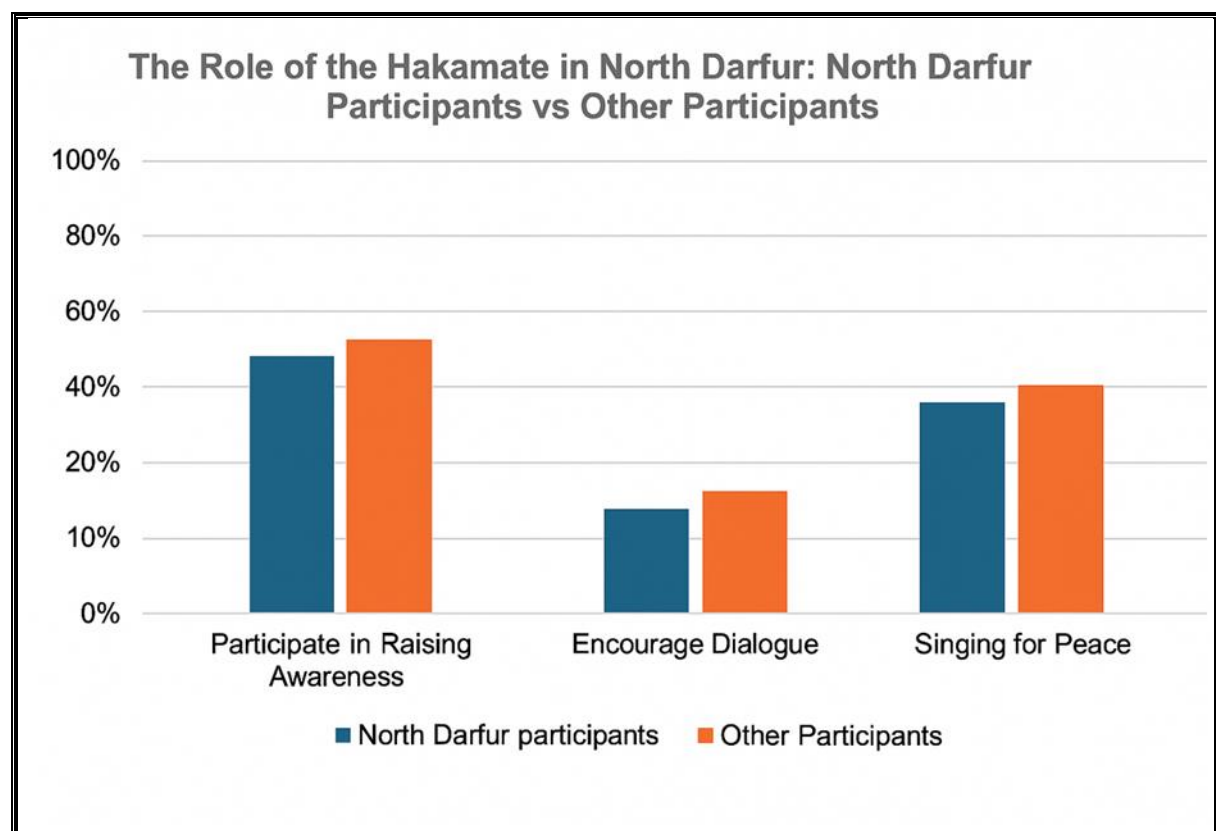


Figure 2: Perceptions of the Hakamate’s peace role by region, showing similar support across participant groups.

3.5.2. Women as Intermediaries and First Responders

Women-led organizations frequently mediate between families and local leaders when early signs of potential child recruitment emerge. These grassroots interventions often take the form of household visits, informal counseling, and awareness sessions tailored to the local context (O’Kane & Moore, 2012). In the absence of

external funding or formal recognition, women continue to operate as trusted figures, relied upon for their proximity to at-risk families and their intuitive knowledge of community dynamics.

Participants noted that these women act as de facto early warning systems, identifying subtle behavioral changes or household stressors that signal vulnerability to recruitment. One respondent explained, “They hear things before anyone else does because people trust them.” Their work is both preventive and responsive, filling a protection gap often overlooked by formal child protection actors (Save the Children, 2024).

Furthermore, women-led organizations and youth groups are also act as the first responders to recognize signs of vulnerability among children, especially in displacement settings. They mediate between families and local leaders through household visits, awareness sessions, and informal psychosocial support. These networks, though largely unfunded and operating outside formal structures, are trusted by communities and serve as frontline actors in local early warning systems. Their efforts may not always be labeled as “prevention” in policy frameworks, both they play a critical role in building community resilience and mitigating the risks that lead recruitment. By monitoring at-risk families and responding to emerging tensions, these informal actors contribute significantly to long-term protection outcomes for children.

3.5.3. Systemic Exclusion from Formal DDR Frameworks

Despite their pivotal role in preventing child recruitment, women-led initiatives in North Darfur remain structurally marginalized from formal DDR processes. Participants consistently highlighted the women, though actively engaged in early warning systems, community mediation, and psychosocial support, are often excluded from policy formulation and decision-making spaces (Palik & Salama, 2024). As one civil society leader emphasized, “We do the work, but we are never involved in the meetings.”

This exclusion is not only symbolic but has practical consequences. Community-based initiatives led by women and youth operate in isolation, without sustainable funding, protection mechanisms, or institutional backing. As a result, their intervention—though locally trusted and often effective—is rendered fragile, unsustainable, and difficult to scale, especially during periods of acute conflict or displacement. This disconnect between grassroots peacebuilding efforts and formal DDR systems reflects a broader pattern of failing to recognize the informal, gendered labor that sustains community resilience.

Closing this gap requires more than token participation. It necessitates intentional partnerships that acknowledge women not only as victims or caregivers, but as active agents in peacebuilding. Without integrating their voices and local knowledge into the design and implementation of DDR frameworks, prevention efforts risk remaining fragmented and ineffective in addressing the root causes of child recruitment.

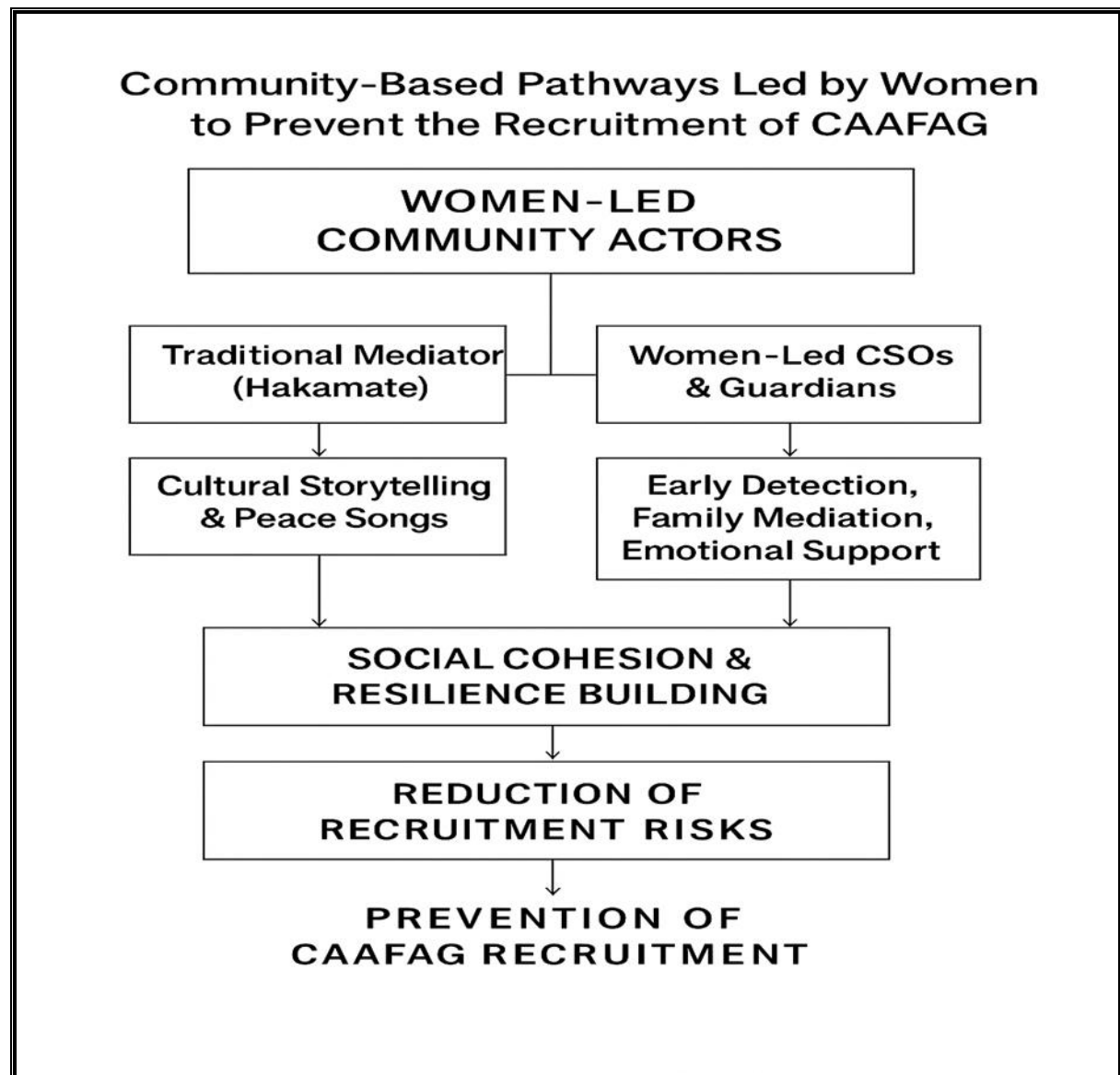


Figure 3: Community-based prevention model illustrating how women-led actions foster resilience and reduce CAAFAG recruitment risks.

4. Discussion

This study originally set out to explore the reintegration of CAAFAG in North Darfur. However, the data revealed a significant shift: community members, particularly women, are actively involved in preventing child recruitment long before reintegration becomes necessary. This unexpected insight led to a redefinition of the research focus, supporting the central hypothesis that informal, women-led practices form a critical yet under-recognized component of child protection.

The findings align with feminist critiques of peacebuilding and DDR frameworks, which highlight the systemic exclusion of women and non-state actors. The cultural authority of the Hakamate, for example, represents a powerful form of gender social capital that remains underutilized in formal peacebuilding strategies. These insights confirm that the informal mechanisms of community mediation, storytelling, and emotional support--largely led by women--constitute foundational elements of prevention.

A key theoretical implication lies in distinguishing between direct and indirect prevention. While women in North Darfur often lack formal institutional mandates to stop recruitment, their roles in strengthening social cohesion, resolving disputes, and supporting vulnerable families serve as indirect deterrents. These findings deepen our

understanding of how community resilience and localized peacebuilding operate outside state structures, advancing both feminist theory and conflict prevention models.

However, the results also reveal limitations. The dual perception of the Hakamate underscores their embeddedness within local political systems. While their influence can foster peace, it can also reinforce tribal divisions if left unregulated or politically manipulated. Additionally, methodological constraints—including the need for remote data collection due to insecurity, and the reliance on purposive sampling—may limit the generalizability of the findings. The exclusion of male perspectives and formal state actors from the sample further narrows the scope of insights.

Despite these limitations, the study offers strong implications for practice. Institutions and NGOs should approach traditional mediators like the Hakamate through ethical, inclusive partnerships that amplify their peacebuilding roles while safeguarding against bias or co-option. Similarly, support for women-led initiatives must move beyond tokenism to structural inclusion in DDR design, funding, and implementation.

Ultimately, This research highlights a critical gap in DDR and child protection policy: the neglect of community-rooted, gender-responsive prevention mechanisms. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing women not only as caregivers or reintegration actors but as first-line defenders against recruitment. By elevating grassroots voices and integrating them into formal processes, stakeholders can build more sustainable, ethical, and locally legitimate peacebuilding systems.

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that women in North Darfur are already performing the vital work of preventing child recruitment—work that is culturally resonant, community-rooted, and cost-effective. Their interventions, from the public performances of the Hakamate to household mediation and psychosocial care, are deeply embedded in the social fabric of communities under strain.

However, their efforts remain underfunded, under-recognized, and institutionally excluded. Prevention cannot be treated as an afterthought in DDR programming—it must be centered as a strategic pillar. To strengthen these efforts, the following actions are recommended, each drawn directly from the study's findings:

- Formally recognize women-led prevention strategies in such as early warning systems, household mediation, and psychosocial support. Within national and international child protection and DDR frameworks, these informal efforts were shown to effectively identify and respond to recruitment risks;
- Provide flexible funding and institutional support to grassroots organizations and cultural actors like the Hakamate. As the study demonstrates, the Hakamate hold significant influence through oral storytelling and performative peace narratives. Their peace-promoting role must be resourced and safeguarded to avoid political co-option or loss of legitimacy;
- Ensure meaningful participation of women in the design and implementation of DDR and child protection policies. Despite their demonstrated leadership, especially in displacement contexts, women remain sidelined from official decision-making; Elevating their voices would close the gap between policy and local protection realities.;
- Address structural drivers of recruitment, such as displacement, poverty, and gender-based exclusion, through locally informed and gender-responsive strategies. Findings revealed that child vulnerability is deeply tied to these factors, which women-led initiatives are already working to mitigate on the ground.

Prevention is not only about avoiding harm; it is about investing in those who are already building peace from the ground up. Women in North Darfur embody this resilience and innovation. Their work is not theoretical—it is practical, moral, and long overdue for institutional backing.

At the sometime, more work is needed to document and strengthen local preventive models. Future research should focus on:

- Evaluating the long-term impact of women-led prevention in high-risk settings;
- Exploring the role of traditional actors like the Hakamate across different regions;
- Identifying how informal prevention mechanisms can be meaningfully integrated into formal child protection systems;
- Investigating how international actors can support—not—local leadership.

By building on existing community knowledge and centering women's roles in both policy and research, it is possible to move toward a more sustainable, locally grounded strategy for preventing child recruitment.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest. This study was self-funded. No external funding sponsors were involved in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

Informed Consent Statement/Ethics Approval: All participants gave their informed consent before taking part in the study. For minors, informed assent was obtained in addition to guardian consent. The study followed ethical principles appropriate for conflict-affected populations, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and emotional safety. Ethical approval was not obtained from a formal institutional review board, as the research was conducted independently and outside the framework of a university or funded project. All measures were taken to uphold internationally recognized ethical standards for research involving vulnerable populations.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and protection concerns for participants in conflict-affected settings. Anonymized excerpts may be shared upon reasonable request and subject to ethical review.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies: This study has not used any generative AI tools or technologies in the preparation of this manuscript.

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NOTES 1

The researcher identifies as a Sudanese woman with lived experiences of conflict and displacement, which influenced both the choice of topic and interpretive lens. While efforts were made to remain analytically rigorous, the intersection of personal proximity and academic inquiry may have shaped the depth of engagement and trust built with participants. This positionality should be considered in interpreting the study's findings.

NOTES 2

The term Hakamate refers to traditional female oral poets in Darfur who wield significant influence through song and storytelling. While their cultural roles vary across communities, in this study the term reflects both their functions in promoting peace and their potential role in escalating conflict and increasing war tendencies, as described by participants. This duality is essential for understanding their embedded role in informal strategies to prevent child recruitment.

APPENDIX A

Thematic Interview Guide Used for Data Collection

The following thematic guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with community members, civil society actors, and local leaders in north Darfur. The aim was to explore community perceptions, roles of women, and informal mechanisms in preventing the recruitment of CAAFAG.

Section 1: Community understanding of Recruitment Risks

- What are the main reasons children are recruited into armed groups in your area?
- Are there any groups or individuals in your community who help protect children from being recruited?

Section 2: Role of Women in Community Protection

- In what ways do women contribute to reducing recruitment risks?
- Can you describe the work of any women-led organizations or networks that support children or families?
- How are women viewed when they speak out about violence or recruitment?

Section 3: Cultural Influences – The role of the Hakamate

- What influence do the Hakamate have in your community?
- Have you heard songs or stories from the Hakamate that encourage peace or discourage fighting?
- Can the Hakamate influence young people's decisions to join or avoid armed groups?

Section 4: Informal Warning and Support Mechanisms

- Are there early signs when a child may be at risk of being recruited?
- How does the community respond to these warning signs?
- Who usually acts first to protect or intervene?

Section 5: Institutional and Policy Gaps

- Are women or youth included in decision-making about DDR?
- What kind of support do informal community efforts receive from government or NGOs?
- What would make local peacebuilding and prevention efforts more effective?

Section 6: Personal Reflections

- Do you have a personal story about a child or family affected by recruitment?

APPENDIX B

Sample Guiding Questions Used in Interviews and FGDs

A sample of the open-ended questions used during the qualitative data collection phase. The questions were adapted based on participant roles (e.g., community leaders, women's groups, Hakamate) and aimed to explore informal strategies preventing child recruitment in North Darfur.

A. General community Perceptions

- How would you describe the current risks facing children in your community regarding recruitment by armed groups?
- What are some signs or indicators that a child is at risk of being recruited?

B. Women's Role in Prevention

- Can you describe how women in your community contribute to preventing children from joining armed groups?

C. The Role of the Hakamate

- How are the Hakamate perceived in your community—as peacebuilders or otherwise?
- Can you recall any situations where a Hakamate's song or message influenced community behavior?

D. Interaction with Formal Structures

- Do these community efforts ever connect with government programs or NGOs? If not, why?
- What support do you think is needed to strengthen these informal prevention strategies?