Challenges and Opportunities for Local Mediation:

The experience of the elders and mediation committee in El Fasher



Photo from social media

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

SAF Sudanese Armed Forces

RSF Rapid Support Forces

JFDMs Joint Forces of Darfur Movements/Signatories of Juba Peace Agreement

EMC Elders and Mediation Committee in El Fasher

SSDB Savings and Social Development Bank

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

JEM Justice and Equality Movement

SLM Sudan Liberation Movement

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Introduction

In early November 2023, approximately seven months after the outbreak of war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) stood on the brink of a major battle for control of El Fasher, the historical capital of the Greater Darfur region and the capital of the current North Darfur State. This looming possibility raised international concern, as evidenced by warnings issued by the United Nations and the United States government, cautioning that the anticipated attack by the RSF on the Sixth Infantry Division of the SAF in the heart of El Fasher would lead to significant human casualties and trigger new waves of displacement of both the city's residents and hundreds of thousands of displaced persons who had sought refuge in the city since the 2003 genocide.

Fortunately, the attack did not occur. This was due primarily thanks to the efforts of a local mediation committee formed by the dignitaries of El Fasher, including leaders of civil administration, professionals, civil society organizations, and associations of women and youth. The committee successfully brokered a ceasefire between the warring parties, providing the city with relative calm, despite numerous violations of the ceasefire by both parties. The committee's efforts to maintain a balanced position towards all armed factions and prioritize the protection of civilians over the military ambitions of these factions, El Fasher now appears as the only stage amidst Sudan's destructive war where three armed parties, i.e., SAF, RSF, and the signatories of Juba Peace Agreement 2020, now known as the Joint Forces of Darfur Movements (JFDMs), coexist.

Local mediation efforts like that in El Fasher have presented a glimmer of hope for peace in Sudan even as national efforts with regional support founder. This paper documents the unique experience of the Elders and Mediation Committee (EMC) in El Fasher and North Darfur State, with a view to exploring what has, and has not, worked. This offers lessons both for similar local mediation initiatives that have proliferated to encompass all other states of Darfur as well as West and North Kordofan and more broadly.

The security and social contexts

The security situation in El Fasher has been characterized by fragility, with the city witnessing recurring security tensions. Hardly a week passes without an incident, such as disputes between herders and farmers in adjacent rural areas during the agricultural season. Previously, these disputes were simple and could be resolved through civil mechanisms for conflict resolution. However, interventions by RSF forces in favor of the herders, and interventions by Juba Peace Agreement forces in favor of the farmers, have led to an increase in the frequency and violence of local clashes due to the possession of weapons by various groups.

For example, security incidents occurred in the Kolgi area on December 7, 2022, the Tawila area on February 14, 2023, and the Zamzam camp for displaced persons in the last week of February 2023. These incidents shared a common root cause, conflict over land and resource use arising from the nomadic movement of Arab tribes for grazing, leading to friction with settled African farmers. When farmers attempt to keep cattle off their farms, friction ensues, which may escalate to violence and even the use of weapons. Amidst these confrontations, multiple violations occur, including killings, theft, and injuries.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war, on April 6, 2023, four employees of the Savings and Social Development Bank (SSDB) were killed in the town of Al Kuma, located 80 kilometers east of El Fasher. The incident occurred when an armed group intercepted an SSDB car transporting cash from the main branch in El Fasher to the Al Kuma branch. Subsequently, a group of the victims' relatives blocked the national highway that links El Fasher and Khartoum, accusing individuals affiliated with RSF of killing their relatives.

In addition, it is essential to highlight the presence of numerous armed forces within El Fasher, including the armed forces of five armed rebel movements, signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement, alongside the SAF and the RSF. These diverse forces lack unified leadership and coordination. The proliferation of various types of weapons is a common sight within El Fasher. It is noteworthy that SAF troops are stationed in the western part of the city, the RSF is stationed in the east, and the forces of the armed movements in the far west of the city, in the former headquarters of the joint United Nations and African Union mission (UNAMID).

Socially, Darfur is rich with a deeply rooted social heritage. Since the era of the Sultanate of Darfur, the region's social cohesion has been reinforced by economic interdependence and intermarriage between tribes. The region also boasts traditional mechanisms for resolving disputes among its inhabitants, with the community leaning towards resolving conflicts through friendly means and mediation. One of the prominent forms of grassroots social organization related to conflict resolution is the traditional "Judea Committees," typically consisting of local dignitaries and civil administrators, relied upon to resolve disputes, with their decisions being respected by the disputing parties. As conflicts evolved, so did the committees, expanding to take the form of "Reconciliation Conferences." These committees and reconciliation conferences helped to contain numerous conflicts. This community heritage in conflict resolution has provided a strong foundation for enhancing the work of the EMC in El Fasher and North Darfur.

El Fasher is known for its social cohesion. But also, El Fasher populations have social extensions in surrounding rural areas in terms of ethnicity and tribe. Therefore, the conflicts in

the surrounding villages and other cities of North Darfur have negatively affected social cohesion and peace in El Fasher.

The formation and organization of the EMC

The formation of the EMC

When the April 15 war began in Khartoum, El Fasher was the second site of fighting which broke out less than an hour after hostilities began in Khartoum. The fighting began within the Joint Sudanese Armed Forces Command in El Fasher, where the RSF initiated an attack on the SAF headquarters in an attempt to control it and the SAF command refused to surrender to them. This was followed by skirmishes and heavy gunfire in the west, east, and center of El Fasher. Casualties occurred on both sides. As the battles were fought amidst civilians, more than 60 civilians were killed or injured on the first day of the war.

The second day witnessed a continuation of the fighting, although direct clashes receded. However, the SAF remained stationed in their positions in the west of the city, while the RSF concentrated in the east. Both sides exchanged indiscriminate shelling without regard for the populated civilian areas located between their positions. This increased civilian casualties and bodies spread throughout the city, exposing residents to further violations and deteriorating humanitarian conditions. Hospitals and health centers in the city closed, except for the southern hospital, which continued to operate thanks to the efforts of young volunteers, despite the difficulty of access due to the ongoing shelling.

The ongoing fighting between the two sides caused great suffering for civilians, including damage from stray bullets and the disruption of essential health and other vital services. On the third day of the war, April 17, several dignitaries and members of the civil administration of El Fasher formed a committee (the Elders and Mediation Committee in El Fasher, EMC) to coordinate with health committees to address the potential health threat of corpses in the city, seeking to bury them, especially in the relatively safe areas and assist civilians struggling to receive medical treatment at the only functioning hospital in the city. Considering these dire circumstances, the committee proposed an initiative to communicate with the belligerents to reach a ceasefire. The committee agreed on the importance of contacting the leadership of the SAF, the RSF, and the executive government of North Darfur State. In a significant development, Nimr Mohammed Abdelrahman, the Governor of North Darfur State, endorsed the committee's initiative, committing to facilitating its work to end fighting between the parties within the city of El Fasher.

The first meeting between the EMC and the SAF leadership in El Fasher took place on April 18, 2023. The SAF commander in El Fasher committed to a ceasefire and halting hostilities in civilian areas, pledging to stay in their positions in western El Fasher. Additionally, SAF committed not to initiate combat unless provoked, to enable the EMC to ensure that bodies could be buried and the wounded could access hospitals. On the same day, communication was established with the RSF leadership in El Fasher, and a meeting was held with them. They also agreed to a ceasefire, allowing the burial of bodies and the transportation of civilians wounded to the hospital. RSF also agreed to remain in their designated area to the east of El Fasher. Both parties that the committee would oversee the implementation of the agreement

and ceasefire and consented to the deployment of police forces along a demarcation line in the city center. As a result of this agreement, the shelling effectively ceased. Following this significant achievement, the committee members, who initially numbered 12, agreed on the necessity of convening to organize the committee's work, and distribute tasks and adopted the name "Elders Mediation Committee in El Fasher".

The organization of the EMC

In the first meeting of the Committee after the ceasefire, the group drew in five additional members from among lawyers, academics, civil society activists, and women representatives, bringing the committee to 17 members. Additionally, the name of the committee was modified to become the Elders and Mediators Committee (EMC) for North Darfur State, encompassing all cities and villages of North Darfur State in its activities. This consideration was made due to the understanding that any fighting in any area of the state would have a direct impact on the ceasefire, given the social connections with the state.

The committee consists of the president, vice president, rapporteur/communication and coordination officer, spokesperson, complaints coordinator, media office, and members. The coordination and communication tasks fall within the purview of the rapporteur, who, in turn, contacts other parties at the EMC's request for meetings or to address ceasefire violations. The committee also adopted, in its first meeting, the general principles governing its work, tasks, and responsibilities, as follows:

- neutrality, independence, and transparency, and refraining from favoring any party to the conflict;
- the committee's primary task is to protect civilians, irrespective of their ethnic, political, or ideological affiliations;
- the ongoing war was defined as a "conflict between the SAF and the RSF." It should not be characterized as a civil war, and no party should be allowed to involve civilians in the conflict or drag the region into a civil war;
- the committee's top priorities are maintaining the ceasefire and ending the fighting, which necessitates monitoring each party's compliance with its designated position in the city,
- community support, engaging all segments of society, and creating the broadest popular bloc to support its endeavors to end the war in El Fasher and North Darfur State is needed to support the work of the EMC.
- the committee must assist in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian, relief, and healthcare aid, facilitating the operation of hospitals and healthcare centers, and accommodating displaced persons in shelters in North Darfur State.

The EMC's methods of working

On the fifth day after the outbreak of the war, at the beginning of the EMC work, RSF from across Darfur began their journey to Khartoum. When the committee learned that these forces planned to attack El Fasher before continuing their advance to the capital, it met with the RSF leadership in El Fasher and requested their commitment to the ceasefire and preventing these forces from entering the city. Members of the committee moved towards the northern gate of El Fasher and remained there for about four hours until the RSF convoys passed. Thus, the EMC succeeded in preventing an attack on El Fasher.

To carry out its designated tasks, the EMC relies on direct and frequent meetings with the warring parties. During the first two months of armed clashes, meetings were held every two days. The committee adopted a policy of continuous communication with the warring parties to emphasize a sustained ceasefire. Often, when information reaches the committee about a potential breach of the agreement, it immediately proceeds to meet with the parties to ensure the ceasefire's continuity, prevent violations, and confront the party responsible for the breaches. For example, the committee received information about an RSF unit arriving in El Fasher from Nyala after the latter fell under their control. Immediately, the committee requested a meeting with the RSF leadership to confirm their commitment to the ceasefire and whether they intended to breach it and attack El Fasher. The RSF leadership in El Fasher reaffirmed their commitment to the ceasefire.

In another incident, information reached the committee about the movement of a SAF unit towards the RSF deployment area. In this case, the EMC contacted the SAF leadership in the city, and the situation was contained. EMC obtains most of its information from citizens and sometimes directly from the warring parties. In one case, the EMC received information about a ceasefire violation indicating the presence of eight bodies of the RSF soldiers found on the road north of El Fasher. The EMC immediately contacted the relevant parties to ensure the burial of the bodies by the health authorities. RSF leadership insisted on receiving the bodies,

threatening to take them forcibly. EMC intervened and facilitated the handover of the bodies to RSF through the health committees **EMC** members. This response prevented the parties from slipping into armed confrontations.

In the final week of June 2023, two months after the



El Fasher, photo from social media

establishment of the EMC, the committee submitted a request to the JFDMs to incorporate members from their ranks into the committee. The request was granted, resulting in the addition of five new members representing the JFDMs within the EMC. By July 2023, the JFDMs units were deployed in the city center to delineate between the conflicting parties, safeguard the headquarters of humanitarian organizations, and protect commercial convoys. The JFDMs largely succeeded in fulfilling these responsibilities.

The regular EMC activities include:

- convening regular meetings with citizens, receiving grievances, and mobilizing a popular bloc aimed at exerting pressure on the warring factions to uphold the ceasefire.
- disseminating information to citizens through its official spokesperson or by hosting committee members on El Fasher Radio, telling them about developments and urging the maintenance of social cohesion and refraining from civil conflict.
- seeking assistance from religious leaders, civil authorities, and influential figures capable of influencing the warring factions to intervene in specific situations and communicate with them to halt hostilities, particularly during ceasefire breaches.
- maintaining communication with humanitarian and health organizations, as well as volunteer committees in hospitals and shelters, to facilitate their continued operation.
- liaising and meeting with the executive authority represented by the Governor of North Darfur State and various executive committees concerned with emergencies, providing counsel and consultation to facilitate their duties.
- organizing regular meetings with dignitaries, youth, and women in various neighborhoods of El Fasher and outlying localities where conflicts between the warring factions are present, such as Kabkabiya, Kutum, and Tawila. Through these efforts, the committee has established subcommittees in El Fasher neighborhoods and conflict-affected localities to monitor the ceasefire and shield civilians from violations. The EMC assigned members to travel to localities and other cities outside El Fasher and corresponded and convened with committees from other Darfur states to share experiences. For instance, a local mediation committee was established in cities like Kabkabiya, Kutum, and Tawila following the deployment of EMC members and assistance in forming subcommittees. In addition, the EMC maintained contact with members of the South Darfur State Committee.
- participating in broadcasts on El Fasher Radio to disseminate information about its activities and significant developments, while encouraging citizens to abstain from involvement in the ongoing conflict or alignment with any of its factions.
- conducting visits to the families of civilians killed or injured in clashes between the warring factions and monitoring the condition of the wounded in hospitals to facilitate their access to medical services.
- arranging periodic visits to shelters, hospitals, and health centers to identify challenges, facilitate service access, and present pertinent recommendations to the executive authority.



El Fasher, photo by DarfurFollowUps

- activating youth engagement through its media office and social media platforms, to denounce the war, urge the parties to cease hostilities against civilians, advocate for the families of the wounded and deceased, and engage with the international and regional communities to pressure the warring factions to halt fighting among civilians.
- participating in cultural and sports events promoting a culture of peace, condemning war, and
- urging warring factions to refrain from civilian violations.
- engaging with imams and the representatives of the Catholic Church in El Fasher to propagate a culture of peace and urge parties to cease fighting.
- responding to complaints received from citizens by mediating for the release of civilians detained by the warring factions. Mediation efforts have resulted in the release of several detained civilians, facilitating their return to their families.

The challenges faced by the EMC

Frequent challenges

The EMC faced a variety of challenges. The most significant are the violations committed by both parties. These violations lead to renewed clashes and civilian casualties. The EMC faces significant difficulty in restoring the ceasefire through communication with the warring parties, holding meetings with them, and confronting them with the violations that have occurred. The committee's tasks in this regard are complicated by its lack of robust monitoring mechanisms. Some additional challenges include:

- A lack of clarity regarding decision-makers within the warring parties and their plurality.
 Decision-making in El Fasher is closely linked to events in Khartoum and the decisions issued by the central leadership of the parties.
- Repeated violations perpetrated by elements of the parties against civilians in the
 areas they control in El Fasher, ranging from theft and threats to murder. These
 violations are reflected in the continuous complaints received by the EMC from
 citizens, particularly in the areas under RSF control.
- Disruptions in food supplies, healthcare services, and the numerous requests submitted to the EMC to facilitate humanitarian and health services.
- Daily complaints received by the EMC regarding the arrest of civilians by the warring parties and requests for intervention to mediate their release, especially amidst the

scarcity of confirmation or information on the circumstances of the arrest. While the EMC has enjoyed cooperation resulting in the release of detained civilians in some cases, these limited successes have followed prolonged communications with the parties. At times, the EMC faces difficulty in convincing the parties that such civilian arrests actually occurred. In most cases, the detained civilians were accused of acting as spies and intelligence operatives for the other party. Despite these complexities, the committee has managed to mediate the release of several civilians due to the warring parties' responsiveness.

- Doubts from within the ranks of the parties regarding the neutrality of the EMC, accusing it of bias towards one party or the other, especially when the EMC confronts the parties with violations and breaches reported to it.
- Weak technical and logistical capacities, as the EMC is a voluntary body and lacks consistent logistical support, in addition to the relative weakness in negotiation and mediation skills and capabilities.
- Repeated attempts by individuals affiliated with the parties or parties with vested interests, such as remnants of the previous regime, to turn the war into a civil war or to involve the JFDMs in fighting within El Fasher.
- Exacerbation of difficulties in facilitating humanitarian convoys to El Fasher, especially after some of the armed rebel movements withdrew from neutrality.
- Security threats faced by committee members. This includes both being exposed to
 ongoing fighting and threats from individuals affiliated with the warring parties, as well
 as other parties unwilling to cease the war in El Fasher and North Darfur.

For example, during a meeting between the committee and some of the concerned parties, a sudden clash occurred between the SAF and the RSF. Fighting erupted near the EMC meeting venue. A private car belonging to one of the committee members was stolen, while the rest barely escaped from the combat site.

In addition, several committee members have been directly threatened or subjected to abuse by the warring parties and, at times, by citizens who perceive the EMC as having divided the city or failed to provide solutions. In response to these allegations, the committee asserts its neutrality and strives to prevent fighting among civilians and avoid military confrontations within the city. The EMC has clarified that it did not divide the city among the armed factions; it merely asked them to limit themselves to the areas where they were when it began its intervention to minimize the risk of clashes. The deployment of the JFDMs and the police in the city center aimed to protect the market and separate the warring factions.

Relationships with the SAF and RSF

In the initial stages of the EMC's communication with the warring parties, it found full trust and support from both sides. The committee relied on the ethical commitment of the parties, and meetings with them were conducted smoothly. However, after four months of work, challenges arose in coordinating and communicating with the parties. As noted above, questions about neutrality and accusations of bias surfaced. Consequently, the relationship between the EMC and the warring parties became unstable, oscillating between a desire for communication at

times and avoidance at other times, according to the committee's opinion on violations. These problems continued to occur intermittently, especially when the parties were confronted about violations up to the time of writing.

To overcome these obstacles, the EMC tasked new members from armed movements with communicating with the SAF and RSF regarding security challenges. In August 2023, coordinating bodies were established between the JFDMs and the SAF on one side, and the RSF on the other. The JFDMs assumed the role of separating the warring parties. This practically meant that any conflict between the warring factions would endanger the JFDMs as well as civilians. This coordination succeeded in reducing violence and facilitated the passage of humanitarian and commercial convoys to El Fasher.

Organization of trade and relief convoys

Upon the arrival of the first commercial and relief convoy in El Fasher in July 2023, members of the EMC were tasked with going to the entrance of the city to facilitate its arrival and avoid tensions between the JFDMs and the RSF. Indeed, members of the committee witnessed severe tensions between the two parties that almost sparked clashes between them. To avoid this, the committee took on the task of receiving the convoy without the involvement of any armed party, solved the problem, avoided conflict, and prevented damage to the convoy, which consisted of approximately one thousand trucks carrying relief materials, commercial goods, and fuel.

The EMC undertook the role of organizing the entry of commercial and relief convoys into El Fasher and other locations within the Darfur region as follows:

- At the outset of the war, the EMC requested that the JFDMs protect the premises of international and local organizations, most of which are located west of El Fasher where the JFDMs are deployed.
- The EMC facilitated the transportation of all shelter materials belonging to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in El Fasher from UNHCR warehouses in RSF areas. The EMC also assisted in distributing these materials to displaced persons and refugees.
- The EMC facilitated the transport of medicine from Sudanese Medical Supply warehouses in RSF areas to hospitals and health centers in El Fasher and other localities in North Darfur.
- After members of the JFDMs joined the EMC, the latter coordinated with SAF and RSF to facilitate the passage of trade and relief convoys to El Fasher and other cities in Darfur.
- To ensure the steadiness of trade and relief convoys, the EMC formed a joint chamber consisting of five members of the committee, ten from the JFDMs, and ten from the RSF. The task of the joint chamber is to facilitate the access of trade and relief convoys to El Fasher. The efforts of the chamber succeeded until the arrival of the last convoy on October 20, 2023, before some of the JFDMs ended their neutrality in the war. It is worth mentioning that trade and relief convoys pass through RSF areas along the route from Kosti to El Fasher, and coordination is made to facilitate their movement.

Trade convoys are protected by the JFDMs in coordination with both SAF and RSF.

Some JFDM members abandon neutrality

After the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) led by Jibril Ibrahim and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) led by Minni Minawi announced the end of their neutrality towards the warring parties and their alignment with the SAF at a press conference held in Port Sudan on November 17, 2023, the insecurity in North Darfur increased significantly. RSF threats to attack El Fasher, which has become a refuge for a large and growing number of displaced persons from other parts of Darfur, increased. The announcement split among armed movements between neutrality and fighting raised concerns about the fragmentation of the JFDMs. These developments led JFDMs to stop accompanying and protecting trade and relief convoys, ending the role of the EMC in facilitating and overseeing the distribution of relief materials. From then to the time of writing, no trade or relief convoy has moved to El Fasher or other cities in Darfur, negatively impacting the humanitarian situation of citizens, especially displaced persons, due to the scarcity and rising cost of essential goods, including relief goods and medical supplies. Most international and local humanitarian organizations have ceased to function.

The armed movements' abandonment of neutrality also led to significant insecurity and increased tension among the warring parties and armed movements, negatively affecting the overall work of the committee.

The committee contacted the leadership of the JFDMs and urged them not to engage in military confrontations in civilian areas. The armed movements responded positively to this request, but on the condition that the RSF refrain from attacking El Fasher. The committee also contacted the leadership of the RSF, up to the time of writing has stopped threatening to attack El Fasher. The committee is currently seeking a way to resume humanitarian convoys despite the challenges. With all these developments, the security situation is now more tense than ever and requires interventions that may exceed the capabilities of the committee.

El Fasher: current situation and prospects

Recent tensions resulting from the armed movements' abandonment of neutrality have led to the mobilization of forces, including those now aligned with the SAF and those that remained neutral. This has resulted in a balance of power among the RSF, the JFDMs, and the SAF. This balance of power has led to relative calm in the city of El Fasher and North Darfur and prevented the resumption of fighting up to the time of writing.

The current situation in El Fasher is one of cautious calm and tinged with tension as grievances accumulate armed forces spread and weapons proliferate. All this increases the fragility of the security situation, especially since El Fasher has become home to a large number of internally displaced persons elsewhere in Darfur, including those displaced from within the city itself. Consequently, any collapse of the ceasefire would have dire consequences, and it is difficult to imagine the situation if the ceasefire were to completely collapse.

The committee aims, in the future, to engage with the relevant parties to prevent the resurgence of fighting and to find solutions that would allow commercial convoys to reach El Fasher. The

humanitarian situation is catastrophic, exacerbated by the cessation of all provision of humanitarian aid by international organizations.

Prospects and EMC recommendations

The committee hopes that international and regional interventions can bring the warring parties to a fruitful ceasefire negotiation and eventually end the war. In the meantime, the EMC needs technical and logistical support. It also calls on all parties to draw inspiration from its experience and benefit from it in seeking solutions to the challenges facing Sudan.

The committee urges the warring parties to adhere to the commitments they signed in the "Jeddah Declaration," which is a preliminary agreement to refrain from any military attack that could cause harm to civilians. The declaration emphasizes "the protection of civilians" and pledges to deliver humanitarian aid to them without obstacles. Both warring parties have committed to respecting international humanitarian law and human rights. Under the agreement, the parties should allow civilians to leave conflict areas and ensure their basic needs, protect all private and public facilities, and refrain from using them for military purposes.

In addition, the EMC calls for a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis with international and regional intervention.

The EMC urges all international and regional parties engaged in mediation efforts to end the war in Sudan to provide technical and logistical support to the EMC and all civil committees engaged in mediation efforts between the warring parties at the local level in the war-affected regions.

STPT recommendations

STPT calls for:

- the leadership of the SAF and the RSF to reach an immediate ceasefire. Local solutions, while important, do not achieve sustainable comprehensive peace. The EMC began its work in El Fasher but quickly decided to expand its scope to include North Darfur at large, considering that any fighting in any part of the state would directly impact the ceasefire in El Fasher, due to the social ties between the region's components. This logic applies to the broader scene of war in Sudan.
- communities to draw inspiration from the experience of the EMC, which was based on
 maximizing social capital and respecting social networks and customs, providing a
 good ground for devising new solutions to the challenges facing local communities.
 Local communities have a greater ability to understand and analyze conflicts, actors,
 and interests, and possess a vast reservoir of local sensitivity that is difficult for
 external parties to match. This reservoir itself constitutes a crucial asset for mediation
 efforts and conflict resolution.
- the warring parties to respect leaders who have the trust of the community as an
 important tool for building mutual trust. The experience of the EMC has proven that
 the community trusts it, and thus, the warring parties also placed their trust in it.

- local mediation committees and parties to the conflict engaged in local ceasefire initiatives to maintain regular communication channels and exchange information.
- local leadership involved in mediation efforts between the warring parties to maintain continuous communication with their communities and a high degree of transparency. Mediation efforts entail real risks to the participants, but mitigating these risks is contingent upon the protection provided by the community. Therefore, it is critically important to review all steps of mediation work in terms of their inclusiveness and involvement of communities to reinforce legitimacy, and through it, protection.