



UN Volunteer Newton Mutunga handing over goods to women to start their own small-scale businesses. The women receive training in basic bookkeeping and financial literacy from local non-governmental organizations.

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Enabling ex-combatants to transition to peaceful civilian life in Darfur

Meet Newton Mutunga (Kenya), a former UN Volunteer who served with the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Sudan. His task was counseling the ex-combatants on their transition into civilian life, after years of war. Some of them were child soldiers.

The [African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur \(UNAMID\)](#) is transitioning from peacekeeping projects to peacebuilding and development. Through its [Governance and Community Stabilization Section \(GCSS\)](#), UNAMID is supporting Darfuri civilians with a wide number of projects aimed at increasing security and reduce violence.

Newton Mutunga served as a UN Volunteer Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Officer in Darfur. Recruited in 2015, he was posted in the Marra Mountains (Jebel Marra), where armed conflict persists and increasing numbers of people

have been forced to leave their homes.

Newton and his team visited them to ensure humanitarian aid is delivered, constantly liaising with local authorities, non-governmental organizations and UNAMID staff.

“ By engaging with the community and offering solutions to their daily problems, we give them hope for a better future. --Newton Mutunga, former UN Volunteer DDR Officer with UNAMID

This includes supporting ex-combatants. "We worked with the Government of Sudan to counsel the ex-combatants on their transition into civilian life, after years away from their families," says Newton.

"Some chose to work for the Sudan Armed Forces or Sudan Police Force; others received training in small-business start-ups or enrolled in technical and vocational training programmes. With support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), child soldiers were reunited with their families and enrolled in schools."

[The establishment of a temporary operating base in Central Jebel Marra](#) is in line with the mission's protection of civilians mandate. Fully-functioning facilities and infrastructure are expected soon, although periodic flooding during the rainy season often cuts off access to the town and to supplies.

Future projects include building schools, community centers, police stations, rural and district judicial courts, training centers and other facilities.

"Proper schools give families hope for the future of their children, enhancing government institutions supports basic service delivery, and constructing police outposts deters criminal activities. In the long run, all of these projects will improve the lives of community members and bring durable peace to Darfur," Newton explains.

“ Seeing newly displaced persons melts my heart. Serving as a UN Volunteer reminded me of the things we all take for granted, like having water to drink, bathing facilities, and a decent meal. That's why I made a point of joining the UNAMID trucks as they delivered drinking water to displaced persons, to remind me not to take life for granted. --Newton Mutunga

Being a UN Volunteer was a dream come true for Newton, who holds a degree in computer studies and has extensive experience in logistics and fleet management. Orphaned at the young age of seven, he became inspired by a graduation speech on helping the less fortunate.

"Human suffering breaks my heart, and especially women, children, and the elderly," Newton says. "Serving in Darfur as a UN Volunteer was my way of serving my fellow human beings."

Last year Newton gathered his UNV colleagues to bring books, recreation equipment, and writing materials to a school for internally displaced children in Zalingei, Central Darfur, for [International Volunteer Day \(IVD\)](#).

“ The smiles on the faces of pupils and teachers gave me immense joy, and reminded me of myself 30 years ago, when I also had no hope but was helped by others. --Newton Mutunga

This article was prepared with the kind assistance of [Online Volunteer Leah De Hoet](#).

 Arab States

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