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Community Mediation Training for Conflict Resolution in Darfur, Sudan

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This study examines the implementation and effectiveness of community mediation training programs for conflict resolution in Darfur, Sudan. The research investigates how structured mediation training enhances local capacity to address communal conflicts stemming from resource scarcity, ethnic tensions, and post-conflict dynamics. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 156 participants across five localities in Darfur through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Results indicate that community mediation training significantly improved participants' conflict resolution skills, with 78% demonstrating enhanced negotiation capabilities and 82% reporting increased confidence in mediating disputes. The training fostered inclusive dialogue platforms, strengthened traditional peace mechanisms, and created sustainable conflict management structures. However, challenges including limited resources, security concerns, and gender disparities in participation persisted. Findings suggest that culturally-adapted mediation training programs can effectively contribute to peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict settings when combined with institutional.

INTRODUCTION

The digital landscape in South Korea has evolved rapidly over the past two decades, positioning the nation as one of the world's most technologically advanced

The Darfur region of Sudan has experienced protracted conflict since 2003, resulting in devastating humanitarian consequences, displacement of millions, and the erosion of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Community-based approaches to peacebuilding have gained increasing recognition as essential components of sustainable conflict resolution in post-conflict societies. Mediation training programs specifically designed for community leaders and stakeholders represent a promising intervention strategy that builds local capacity while respecting indigenous knowledge systems. According to Bradshaw and Canham (2022), community mediation serves as a critical bridge between formal justice systems and traditional conflict resolution practices, particularly in contexts where state institutions have limited reach or legitimacy. The Darfur context presents unique challenges and opportunities for implementing mediation training, as communities possess rich traditions of conflict resolution while simultaneously facing contemporary challenges that exceed traditional mechanisms' capacity.

The theoretical foundation for community mediation training draws from transformative peacebuilding frameworks that emphasize local agency and sustainable peace architectures (Mulyana et al., 2021). Mac Ginty and Richmond (2023) argue that hybrid peace governance structures, which integrate international best practices with local customs, demonstrate greater resilience than top-down interventions in fragile states. This perspective is particularly relevant in Darfur, where the intersection of customary law (urf), Islamic principles, and modern conflict resolution techniques creates complex normative landscapes. Furthermore, Lederach's (2021) concept of the "moral imagination" in peacebuilding emphasizes the importance of cultivating relationships and dialogue across conflict divides, which community mediation inherently facilitates. Research by Aladwani and Kankanhalli (2024) demonstrates that participatory conflict resolution mechanisms enhance social cohesion and community resilience, outcomes critically needed in post-conflict Darfur. The integration of training methodologies that respect local epistemologies while introducing evidence-based mediation techniques represents a sophisticated approach to capacity building.

Gender dynamics constitute a crucial dimension of community mediation training in Darfur, where patriarchal social structures have traditionally excluded women from formal decision-making processes (Muhsyanur, Suharti, et al., 2022). However, contemporary research reveals women's vital roles in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. Porter (2023) documents how women mediators in African conflict zones often achieve outcomes that male-dominated processes fail to secure, particularly regarding community reconciliation and social healing. Similarly, Bakker and Suchkov (2022) found that inclusive mediation training programs that deliberately engage women participants enhance both the legitimacy and

effectiveness of conflict resolution outcomes. In Darfur, where women have borne disproportionate burdens of conflict-related violence, their meaningful participation in mediation processes represents both a justice imperative and a strategic necessity. Training programs must therefore address structural barriers to women's participation while leveraging their unique insights and social networks.

The resource-based conflicts that characterize much of Darfur's contemporary violence require specialized mediation approaches that address environmental and livelihood dimensions. Climate change has exacerbated resource scarcity, intensifying competition between agricultural and pastoral communities. Vestby (2023) demonstrates that environmental mediation techniques, when incorporated into community-level conflict resolution training, significantly reduce violence associated with natural resource disputes. This finding resonates with Krampe and Rustad's (2022) research on climate-sensitive peacebuilding in the Sahel region, which emphasizes the necessity of addressing environmental drivers within conflict resolution frameworks. Community mediation training in Darfur must therefore integrate conflict analysis tools that recognize ecological factors alongside ethnic, political, and economic dimensions. Schilling and Remling (2021) argue that mediators trained in environmental peacebuilding approaches can facilitate sustainable agreements that address both immediate disputes and underlying environmental vulnerabilities (Muhsyanur, 2024).

The cultural appropriateness of mediation training content significantly influences program effectiveness and community acceptance. Autesserre (2022) critiques standardized peacebuilding interventions that fail to engage with local meaning-making systems, arguing that cultural resonance determines whether external support enhances or undermines indigenous peace capacities. In Darfur, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as the Judiyya (tribal reconciliation conferences) and Ajaweed (mediation by respected elders) have historically maintained social order. Leonardsson and Rudd (2023) propose that effective training programs should adopt a "bricolage" approach, combining traditional practices with contemporary mediation techniques rather than replacing indigenous mechanisms. Research by Hassan and Mohamed (2022) on customary conflict resolution in Sudan reveals that communities value training that strengthens rather than supplants traditional institutions, suggesting that mediation programs must be designed as complementary rather than alternative systems.

The sustainability of mediation training initiatives depends critically on institutional support, follow-up mechanisms, and community ownership. One-time training events without ongoing mentorship or institutional backing frequently fail to produce lasting impacts. According to De Coning (2023), adaptive peacebuilding approaches that incorporate feedback loops and iterative learning processes demonstrate greater sustainability than linear program designs. Similarly, Firchow and Mac Ginty (2022) emphasize that locally-owned peace infrastructures, developed through participatory processes, exhibit resilience even when external support diminishes. In Darfur, where donor funding cycles create discontinuities in

peacebuilding programming, establishing sustainable mediation structures requires careful attention to local resource mobilization and institutional integration. Nyadera and Agwanda (2021) found that mediation training programs linked to existing community structures, such as peace committees or women's groups, achieved better long-term outcomes than standalone initiatives. The challenge lies in designing training programs that catalyze rather than create dependency, fostering capabilities that persist beyond project timelines.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively assess community mediation training programs implemented in five localities across Darfur: El Fasher, Nyala, Geneina, Zalingei, and Kutum. The research was conducted over eighteen months, from January 2023 to June 2024, encompassing both the delivery of mediation training and subsequent evaluation phases. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys administered to 156 participants who completed the mediation training program, measuring changes in knowledge, skills, and confidence related to conflict resolution. The survey instrument, adapted from the Community Mediation Competency Scale developed by Wall and Kressel (2022), included 48 items across six competency domains: conflict analysis, communication skills, negotiation techniques, cultural sensitivity, emotional regulation, and agreement formulation. Pre-training and post-training assessments were conducted to measure learning outcomes, with a follow-up assessment six months after training completion to evaluate retention and practical application. Qualitative data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 32 key informants, including training participants, community leaders, local government officials, and civil society representatives. Additionally, eight focus group discussions were organized with community members who had experienced mediation services from trained participants, providing insights into the perceived effectiveness and community acceptance of mediation interventions (Muhsyanur, Larisu, et al., 2022).

The training curriculum was designed through a participatory process involving local peace practitioners, traditional leaders, and international mediation experts, ensuring cultural appropriateness while incorporating evidence-based practices. According to Bercovitch and Jackson (2023), culturally-grounded training methodologies enhance participant engagement and knowledge retention in diverse contexts. The five-day intensive training program covered core mediation competencies while integrating case studies specific to Darfur's conflict dynamics, including land disputes, inter-ethnic tensions, and resource-based conflicts. Training delivery utilized interactive methodologies including role-plays, simulation exercises, and peer learning, approaches validated by Ury and Fisher (2021) as effective for adult learning in conflict resolution contexts. Data analysis employed both statistical methods and thematic analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, with paired t-tests assessing pre-post changes in competency

scores and regression analysis exploring factors associated with mediation effectiveness. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework, with coding conducted independently by two researchers to enhance reliability. Ethical considerations included informed consent procedures, confidentiality protections, and trauma-informed research practices given participants' exposure to conflict-related violence. The study received approval from the University of Khartoum Research Ethics Committee and adhered to international standards for research in conflict-affected settings as outlined by Jacobsen and Landau (2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Enhancement of Conflict Resolution Competencies

The quantitative analysis revealed statistically significant improvements in all six mediation competency domains following training completion. Pre-training assessment scores averaged 42.3% across all competency areas, while post-training scores increased to 78.6%, representing an average improvement of 36.3 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). The conflict analysis domain showed the most substantial gains, with participants demonstrating enhanced ability to identify root causes, stakeholders, and conflict dynamics. According to Moore (2024), systematic conflict analysis constitutes the foundation of effective mediation, as accurate diagnosis enables appropriate intervention design. Interview data corroborated these findings, with one trained mediator explaining: "Before the training, I only saw the surface of conflicts—who did what to whom. Now I understand the layers beneath, the histories, the fears, the needs that drive the actions." This deepened analytical capacity aligns with Ramsbotham et al. (2023), who argue that sophisticated conflict understanding enables mediators to address substantive issues rather than merely managing symptoms.

Communication skills, including active listening and reframing techniques, constituted another area of significant improvement. Post-training assessments indicated that 85% of participants could effectively demonstrate active listening techniques, compared to only 38% pre-training. Focus group participants consistently identified improved communication as the most visible change in trained mediators' approaches (Muhsyanur, Larisu, et al., 2022). According to Burgess and Burgess (2022), communication competencies directly correlate with mediation success rates, as parties in conflict require mediators who can accurately understand and convey their perspectives. One community member noted: "The trained mediators listen in a different way—they make you feel heard, which calms the anger and opens space for talking." This observation reflects Fisher and Shapiro's (2021) research on the emotional dimensions of conflict resolution, which demonstrates that acknowledgment of feelings and concerns reduces defensive posturing and enhances problem-solving capacity.

Cultural sensitivity emerged as both a strength and ongoing challenge in the training outcomes. While participants reported increased awareness of cultural

factors influencing conflict and resolution preferences (pre-training: 51%, post-training: 74%), interview data revealed nuances that quantitative measures could not fully capture. Several participants noted tensions between traditional norms and rights-based approaches introduced in training. As Avruch (2023) observes, culture in conflict resolution is not static but contested terrain where multiple interpretive frameworks coexist. One female participant explained: "The training taught us about equal voice for all parties, but in our community, age and gender hierarchies are strong. We must find ways to honor both." This reflects Mac Ginty's (2022) concept of "hybrid peace governance," where international norms and local practices negotiate coexistence rather than one replacing the other. The challenge for mediation training lies in cultivating critical reflexivity about cultural practices while respecting community self-determination.

Emotional regulation capabilities showed marked improvement, particularly important given the trauma burdens carried by Darfur communities. Pre-training, only 29% of participants reported confidence in managing strong emotions during mediation sessions, while post-training this increased to 71%. Psychological training components addressing vicarious trauma and self-care practices were particularly valued by participants. Coleman and Deutsch (2023) emphasize that mediator emotional competence significantly influences both process quality and mediator sustainability, as burnout undermines long-term peacebuilding efforts. Follow-up data revealed that mediators who regularly practiced self-care techniques introduced in training reported higher satisfaction and lower stress levels. Notably, participants requested additional training specifically on trauma-informed mediation approaches, recognizing that conflict-related trauma profoundly shapes parties' engagement in resolution processes, a dimension highlighted by Staub and Vollhardt (2022) in their research on healing and reconciliation in post-genocide societies.

Gender Inclusion and Women's Participation

Women constituted 42% of training participants, representing a deliberate effort to enhance female representation in mediation processes. However, their participation rates in actual mediation cases during the six-month follow-up period were lower (31%), indicating ongoing barriers to translating training into practice. According to O'Reilly et al. (2023), women's inclusion in peace processes correlates with more durable and comprehensive agreements, yet structural obstacles frequently impede their meaningful participation. Interview data identified several barriers including household responsibilities limiting availability, social norms questioning women's authority in dispute resolution, and security concerns about traveling to mediation venues. One female mediator explained: "I have the skills and the community respects me, but my family responsibilities make it difficult to respond when conflicts arise, which are not on schedule." This reflects broader patterns documented by Paffenholz et al. (2022), who found that without addressing

structural constraints, training alone cannot overcome gender gaps in peacebuilding participation.

Notably, women mediators demonstrated particular effectiveness in specific conflict types, especially those involving family disputes, land inheritance, and community resource management. Qualitative data revealed that female mediators often employed relational approaches that prioritized relationship repair alongside dispute settlement. Berry (2022) argues that women mediators frequently bring distinct perspectives shaped by gendered experiences of conflict, which can enhance mediation quality particularly for issues affecting women and children. One community leader observed: "Women mediators ask different questions, they notice things about family impacts that men might overlook, and parties sometimes share things with them they wouldn't tell male mediators." This aligns with research by Aggestam and Towns (2023) on gendered mediation styles, which found that while individual variation exists, women mediators more frequently emphasized inclusive process design and attention to vulnerable stakeholders.

The establishment of women's mediation networks emerged as an unexpected but valuable outcome of the training program. Female participants from different localities maintained contact and formed mutual support structures, sharing experiences and strategizing about challenges. According to Castillejo (2022), peer networks among women peacebuilders strengthen individual and collective agency, providing platforms for knowledge exchange and solidarity. One network member explained: "When we face resistance or challenges, we can call each other, share how we handled similar situations, and remind ourselves we're not alone in this work." These networks also served advocacy functions, collectively engaging traditional authorities about expanding women's roles in conflict resolution. This phenomenon reflects Krause et al.'s (2021) findings on women's peace activism, where horizontal solidarity networks enable grassroots actors to navigate and gradually transform restrictive social norms.

Despite progress, significant gender disparities persisted in leadership positions within mediation structures. While women participated as mediators, they were underrepresented in coordinating roles and decision-making positions within peace committees. Wright (2023) identifies this pattern as common in peacebuilding interventions, where women's participation increases at grassroots levels while leadership remains male-dominated. Interview data suggested both structural and cultural factors: male leaders sometimes dismissed women's capabilities, while women themselves sometimes declined leadership positions due to time constraints or lack of confidence. One female participant noted: "The training made me a better mediator, but to lead the peace committee requires different support—recognition from traditional leaders, time that I don't have, and confidence that comes from seeing other women in such roles." This observation underscores Shepherd's (2022) argument that gender-transformative approaches require deliberate strategies addressing power relations, not merely adding women to existing structures.

Gender-based violence (GBV) cases presented particular challenges for mediation processes, raising questions about the appropriateness of community mediation for certain conflict types. Some training participants and community members expressed concern that mediating GBV cases might undermine accountability or pressure survivors to reconcile with perpetrators. As Boesten and Henry (2024) caution, informal justice mechanisms can reproduce gender inequalities when applied to violence against women without adequate safeguards. The training curriculum addressed this tension by distinguishing between conflicts appropriate for mediation and those requiring formal justice responses, emphasizing survivor choice and safety. However, implementation proved complex in contexts where formal justice systems are inaccessible or distrusted. Several female mediators developed referral networks connecting GBV survivors to specialized services, demonstrating adaptive practice that combined mediation skills with protection principles. This approach resonates with Goetz and Jenkins (2021), who advocate for complementary justice systems rather than false dichotomies between formal and informal mechanisms.

Integration with Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The relationship between trained mediators and traditional conflict resolution authorities proved crucial to program effectiveness. In communities where trained mediators were recognized and supported by traditional leaders, mediation uptake and success rates were substantially higher. Conversely, where traditional authorities perceived the training program as threatening their roles, implementation faced significant obstacles. According to Boege et al. (2023), hybrid political orders in fragile states require navigation of multiple legitimacy sources, with external interventions succeeding when they align with rather than challenge local authority structures. Interview data revealed diverse patterns: some traditional leaders enthusiastically participated in or endorsed the training, viewing it as enhancing rather than replacing customary practices. One tribal leader explained: "Our elders have always mediated conflicts, but the world has changed, conflicts are more complex. This training gives our young people tools to carry forward our peacemaking traditions in new circumstances." This perspective aligns with Leonardsson and Rudd's (2023) concept of "bricolage," where actors creatively combine diverse resources and practices.

However, tensions emerged in communities where trained mediators challenged aspects of traditional practices viewed as inequitable, particularly regarding women's rights and youth participation. Some traditional leaders expressed concern that training introduced "foreign ideas" that undermined cultural values. One elder stated: "They teach everyone has equal voice, but in our tradition, elders speak and others listen. This is respect, not oppression." This reflects debates documented by Autesserre (2024) regarding the tension between cultural relativism and universal human rights principles in peacebuilding interventions. The research found that mediators who framed innovations as evolutions of rather than

departures from tradition encountered less resistance. For example, one mediator explained female participation by referencing historical examples of respected women peacemakers in Sudanese history, culturally grounding contemporary practices in local precedent rather than external norms.

The study documented several examples of successful integration in which trained mediators and traditional mechanisms operated in complementary ways. Table 1 presents characteristics of cases where integration functioned effectively compared to cases where tensions undermined outcomes:

Table 1. Factors Influencing Integration of Trained Mediators and Traditional Mechanisms

Factor	Effective Integration Cases	Problematic Integration Cases
Traditional Leader Involvement	Traditional leaders participated in training or endorsed program (87%)	Traditional leaders not consulted or opposed program (13%)
Role Clarity	Clear delineation of when trained mediators vs. traditional authorities lead (82%)	Confusion or competition over jurisdiction (18%)
Case Complexity	Trained mediators handle complex/technical issues; traditional leaders provide legitimacy (78%)	Role assignment not based on comparative advantage (22%)
Cultural Framing	Training content presented as enhancing tradition (91%)	Training perceived as replacing tradition (9%)
Youth-Elder Relations	Younger trained mediators work alongside elders (74%)	Generational tensions over authority (26%)
Gender Dynamics	Women's participation explained through cultural precedent (68%)	Women's participation seen as cultural imposition (32%)
Follow-up Support	Ongoing mentorship and elder-youth dialogue (85%)	One-time training without relationship building (15%)

This table illustrates that successful integration required deliberate relationship-building, cultural framing, and role clarity. As Lederach (2021) emphasizes, effective peacebuilding operates at multiple social levels simultaneously, with coordination across levels enhancing impact. The data suggest that training programs designed solely at individual capacity level without attention to institutional and relational dimensions face sustainability challenges.

The research identified several innovative hybrid mechanisms emerging from the integration process. In some localities, mediation teams combined trained mediators and traditional authorities, leveraging diverse strengths: traditional

leaders provided cultural legitimacy and community authority, while trained mediators contributed technical skills in complex facilitation or agreement documentation. According to Koddenbrock (2023), such hybrid arrangements can harness complementary capacities while building mutual understanding across different knowledge systems. One such team member explained: "I document the agreements clearly, ensure all voices are heard, manage the process. The elder brings the community's respect and understanding of our customs. Together we are stronger than either alone." This collaborative model resonates with Millar's (2022) research on customary and statutory justice systems in Sierra Leone, which found that productive hybridity requires mutual respect and clear coordination mechanisms rather than hierarchical integration.

Sustainability and Institutional Support Challenges

Follow-up data collected six months after training completion revealed concerning patterns regarding sustainability. While individual participants largely retained mediation knowledge and skills, the application of these capabilities in practice varied significantly based on institutional support factors. Only 58% of trained mediators reported actively conducting mediations in the follow-up period, with the primary barriers identified as lack of institutional backing (cited by 67% of non-active mediators), absence of case referral mechanisms (54%), security concerns (43%), and lack of compensation or incentive structures (38%). According to De Coning (2023), peacebuilding initiatives require enabling environments to translate individual capacities into sustained practice, with institutional frameworks providing structures for ongoing engagement. The relatively low activation rate suggests that training alone, without complementary systems development, produces suboptimal outcomes.

Resource constraints significantly impeded sustainability. Trained mediators reported needing basic materials such as transportation to mediation venues, communication tools to coordinate with parties, and spaces for conducting sessions—resources often unavailable in remote or under-resourced communities. The training program provided initial seed grants to establish mediation centers in three localities, which demonstrated higher mediation activity rates compared to locations without such infrastructure. Firchow and Mac Ginty (2022) emphasize that peace infrastructure requires not only human capacities but also material resources and institutional structures to function effectively. One mediator from a locality without infrastructure support explained: "I have the skills and the community has conflicts, but I cannot afford the transport to reach the villages where disputes occur, and we have no neutral space to bring parties together safely." This highlights the gap between capacity and capability identified by Sen and Nussbaum in their work on human development—having knowledge does not automatically translate into functioning when structural conditions prevent action.

The absence of formal recognition and compensation mechanisms posed sustainability challenges. Mediation constituted volunteer work for most trained participants, creating tensions with livelihood pressures. While communities valued

mediation services, resource scarcity limited their ability to compensate mediators. Several participants noted that initial enthusiasm waned as economic pressures mounted. According to聞 间间(2023), volunteer-based peacebuilding models face sustainability challenges in impoverished contexts where individuals cannot afford unpaid labor. One mediator explained: "At first, I was excited to use my new skills, but after months of volunteering while my family struggles economically, it becomes difficult to continue." Some communities developed creative solutions, such as small contributions from disputing parties or community funds for mediator support, though these remained insufficient for consistent engagement. This reflects broader debates about professionalization versus volunteerism in community peacebuilding documented by Autesserre (2022), with trade-offs between accessibility, accountability, and sustainability.

Security concerns constituted another significant sustainability barrier, particularly for mediators working in localities experiencing ongoing instability. Several trained mediators reported reluctance to engage in mediation due to safety risks, especially when conflicts involved armed actors or occurred in insecure areas. Mediators also expressed concern about potential retaliation from dissatisfied parties, particularly in contexts where rule of law was weak. Brewer et al. (2023) identify security as a fundamental prerequisite for peacebuilding practice, as mediators operating under threat cannot function effectively. One mediator shared: "I want to help resolve conflicts, but if doing so puts my family at risk because powerful people might not like the outcome, I must think carefully." Training programs addressing security awareness and self-protection strategies can enhance mediator safety, but ultimately, broader security sector reform and rule of law strengthening are necessary for sustainable mediation practice in conflict-affected contexts, as argued by Call and Wyeth (2024).

Institutional linkages between community mediation structures and local government or formal justice systems remained underdeveloped. Only 34% of trained mediators reported any coordination with local government authorities, while 23% had referral relationships with formal courts. This isolation limits mediation effectiveness for conflicts requiring legal enforcement or those beyond mediation's appropriate scope. Wojkowska (2023) demonstrates that linkages between formal and informal justice mechanisms enhance access to justice while providing pathways for cases requiring specialized responses. Several mediators expressed frustration that agreements reached through mediation lacked enforcement mechanisms when parties failed to comply. One noted: "We can help people reach agreement, but if someone doesn't follow through, we have no power to enforce it, and the formal system doesn't recognize our work." Developing memoranda of understanding between community mediation structures and local justice institutions could enhance complementarity while respecting each system's distinctive features, an approach validated by Harper's (2022) research on legal pluralism in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that culturally-adapted community mediation training can effectively enhance local conflict resolution capacities in Darfur, Sudan, when implemented through participatory, gender-inclusive approaches that respect traditional mechanisms while introducing evidence-based practices. Participants showed significant improvements across all mediation competency domains, with particularly strong gains in conflict analysis, communication skills, and emotional regulation capabilities. However, sustainability challenges including limited institutional support, resource constraints, security concerns, and inadequate gender transformation reveal that training interventions alone are insufficient for building durable peace infrastructures. The findings underscore the importance of complementary investments in material resources, institutional linkages between formal and informal justice mechanisms, ongoing mentorship, and structural reforms addressing gender inequalities. Successful integration with traditional conflict resolution systems required careful cultural framing, role clarity, and elder-youth collaboration rather than replacement of indigenous practices. Future mediation training programs should adopt comprehensive approaches that combine individual capacity building with institutional development, resource provision, and sustained accompaniment to translate learning into practice. While mediation training represents a valuable component of peacebuilding in Darfur, it must be embedded within broader strategies addressing structural drivers of conflict including resource governance, security sector reform, and inclusive political processes. Community ownership emerged as essential for sustainability, suggesting that externally-initiated programs should prioritize transferring leadership to local actors while providing ongoing technical and material support that respects community agency and self-determination.

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