

Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit

Publication # 9

THE SITUATION OF NATIONAL NGOS IN LIGHT OF THE SUDAN CRISIS

November 2023

Author: Mohammad Ashraf,
Governance Programming Overseas



SCCU publications

SCCU publications are concise and informative documents that provide an overview of Sudan's complex and evolving humanitarian situation. The SCCU publications also offer practical and evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and humanitarian responders on addressing Sudan's most pressing issues and needs.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply thankful to the many individuals who shared their knowledge, experience, and perspectives for this publication. Their generous and courageous contributions made this work possible, especially in the context of Sudan's ongoing conflict. We appreciate their trust in and collaboration with us.

Disclaimer

This report is the result of the work of the Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (SCCU). The opinions, findings and recommendations expressed herein are time-sensitive and reflect the views of a group of local responders.

Summary

The humanitarian crisis in Sudan has affected the work of national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs), which face challenges such as lack of resources, communication, coordination, and safe access.

The Sudanese conflict has worsened the humanitarian crisis and the capacity of national NGOs to respond. They face challenges in communication, coordination, funding, safe access and bureaucratic hurdles. Many NNGOs staff and volunteers have been displaced or have joined local emergency response teams. NNGOs have also lost contact and support from international organizations. They rely on donations from Sudanese abroad, but this is not enough. They need more support and synergy to help the affected people.

Recommendations

International funders should adjust their funding methods and support to NNGOs in conflict zones, considering the economic crisis and the digital transfer system. They should also provide governance and financial oversight tools, as well as equipment for communication and coordination.

NNGOs need to review their strategies, adapt to the changing context, improve their humanitarian response, and restructure their internal systems. They also need to train their staff and volunteers in various humanitarian skills and standards, and document their lessons and models.

Local groups and ERRS should work together to ensure safe access, better coordination, and quality standards in humanitarian operations. They should also receive equipment and training to improve their performance and resilience.

Introduction

This publication presents an assessment of the main national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) that are involved in the humanitarian response to the ongoing crisis in Sudan. The assessment examined the scope, achievements, constraints, opportunities, and influence of these organisations in the various areas affected by the conflict. Furthermore, the publication provides specific recommendations to NNGOs, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), governments and donors on how to enhance the effectiveness and coordination of the humanitarian action in Sudan.

Methodology

This research aimed to explore the role and challenges of national NGOs in Sudan in humanitarian response. To achieve this objective, the research used a mixed-methods approach that included three data sources:

- Questionnaire tool that was distributed to active local organisation members to collect their views on the gaps and obstacles they face in their work.
- Document analysis that examined the literature and previous experience of national NGOs in Sudan in responding to humanitarian crises, such as conflict, displacement, and natural disasters.
- Primary data collection that involved surveys and interviews with 10 key informants from civil society in Sudan, such as NGO leaders, activists, and experts, to gain insights into their perspectives and recommendations.

Background

On 15 April 2023, armed conflict erupted in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces. This conflict has devastated the country and displaced millions of people, especially in Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan. People moved to other states seeking security, food, health care and shelter. This conflict situation caused one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the country. According to UNHCR, over 4.6 million people were internally displaced, with the majority living in camps in Darfur ([UNHCR 2023](#)). Another 1.17m Sudanese are now ¹⁰⁶neighbouring countries such as Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia.

MSF reported that millions of people in Khartoum could not access healthcare due to the closure of 'most of the city's health facilities, with only 16% operating ([MSF 2023](#)). An estimated 50,000 acutely malnourished children can no longer receive treatment due to the conflict. Electricity, fresh water, and telecommunication infrastructure have been damaged in the states where conflict is undergoing, making peoples' lives more difficult and putting them in great danger of losing their lives. Violence, bureaucratic impediments, poor network and phone connectivity problems, banking and cash problems, and the dearth of technical and humanitarian staff on the ground have been affecting the delivery of humanitarian assistance in much of the country.

In its most recent situation report on Sudan, issued on 31 October 2023, OCHA notes that Sudan today constitutes the largest internal displacement crisis in the world ([OCHA 2023](#)):

- An estimated 5.8 million people have been displaced within and outside Sudan
- About 1.18 million people have crossed into neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Sudan
- Those displaced are from eight states, with 69 per cent of all internally displaced originally from Khartoum.

Current Situation of NNGOs operating in Sudan

Some of the national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) and local initiatives have begun to respond to the humanitarian situation, but they still lack resources to properly provide needed services. These NGOs mainly face problems of repositioning themselves and their capacities, shortage in medical and fuel supplies, obstacles of securing safe corridors for their movement and the lack of financial liquidity.

National Sudanese NGOs are furthermore affected by the situation of conflict and displacement of the people within Sudan to other states. Almost all national organizations have lost communication with many of their members and volunteers, which has hindered, amongst other things, their ability to assess the situation. Some of their staff and volunteers began to work with the Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs)¹ in their neighbouring communities, because it was easier to reach out to affected people nearby, and to avoid the problem of movement to far places.

The lack of safe corridors for movement of staff and volunteers from national civil society organisations has become one of the major obstacles to an effective (or any) response to the crisis, and the situation has not improved since the early days following the outbreak of conflict. There is little coordination at present between national civil society organisations, and a near complete absence of communication channels. The loss of offices and facilities has been an added complicating factor, one that has made it difficult to respond to human suffering. This has been compounded by the shortage of human resources due to the displacement of NNGO staff and volunteers internally and as refugees to neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Chad, South Sudan, and Uganda.

National non-governmental organisations have in addition lost many of their channels of communication and connection with international organisations, and hence, have lost some coordination mechanisms and resources, especially funding. The armed conflict itself has impacted the economy and financial resources as it is difficult for NNGOs to sustain their economic resources while the conflict is escalating and affecting all people's lives who are searching for food, health, transportation, and shelter.

¹ Emergency Response Rooms are local civil society groups and networks set up to respond to the current crisis in Sudan. They evolved out of existing grassroots civil society networks such as the Neighbourhood Committees and (Popular) Resistance Committees ([Shabaka 2023](#))

The innovative economic idea adopted by ERRs to rely on direct donations from Sudanese immigrants around the world and Sudanese expatriates in the Gulf region, saved the economic situation of the humanitarian response but still this limited resource cannot be sustained for a long time as far as the conflict is escalating. Even people in safe states soon will not be able afford food, health, and shelter for long time.

As the Sudan armed conflict is escalating, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. More innocent people are affected, and national organizations need support to face their own obstacles in terms of coordination between them for more synergy of work and improved capacities.

Key Findings

Lack of safe access

The situation in Sudan is dire for both the people and the organizations that are trying to help them. The ongoing conflict and violence have made it impossible for NNGOs and local groups to assess the needs of the IDPs and to provide them with essential services. The infrastructure and facilities that were already weak before the 15 April have been further damaged or destroyed, leaving NNGOs with no resources, equipment, or offices to operate from.

Moreover, their staff are also affected by displacement and insecurity. In addition, the health sector is facing a severe crisis, as many medical facilities have been attacked, health workers have been arrested, and medicines are scarce. Therefore, NNGOs have to prioritise health care in their planning, but they face many challenges and risks in doing so.

The situation of protection in Darfur, Khartoum, and North Kordofan is very serious, and the NNGOs working in these areas face many risks and challenges to ensure the safety and well-being of their staff and volunteers. There is a lack of adequate support and resources from the international community and the government to help the NNGOs cope with the threats and violence they encounter on a daily basis.

Damage to communication infrastructure

The ongoing crisis has severely damaged the telecommunication and internet infrastructure, which has affected the ability of NNGOs to coordinate and communicate effectively. Many NNGOs rely on timely information sharing and organization to deliver humanitarian aid and services to the displaced people.

The disruption of telecommunication and internet services also has economic implications, as it hampers the digital cash flow and money transactions between the displaced people and their relatives in Sudan who support them financially. NNGOs face major challenges in accessing banking and cash flow solutions due to the crisis.

Lack of cash, and high costs

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has disrupted the banking system, especially in the regions of Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, where violence is escalating. This has left many refugees and displaced people without access to formal financial services, and dependent on digital money transfer systems to receive external assistance.

However, these systems are often unreliable, insecure, and expensive. Moreover, the displaced people face economic hardships in their new locations, such as high transportation costs, exorbitant rents and inflation of food and living expenses. These challenges pose serious threats to their livelihoods and well-being.

Funding gaps

The impact of the April 2023 crisis on the work of national NGOs (NNGOs) in Sudan was severe and multifaceted. Many NNGOs had to halt or postpone their planned projects as their funding sources were suspended or redirected to emergency response. This left them with limited resources to address the growing needs of the affected communities.

Many NNGOs faced challenges in accessing and engaging with the local communities, especially in the areas where new local initiatives emerged. While some NNGOs established partnerships with these initiatives, there was a lack of systematic learning and sharing of best practices, especially on issues related to project management and ethical standards. Furthermore, many NNGOs staff suffered from financial and psychological stress as they lost their income and faced uncertainty about their future.

Bureaucratic challenges

The registration of all registered NGOs has been extended until March 2024 by the Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC), without any conditions or requirements. However, the future of these organisations after that date remains uncertain. Moreover, the registration process for new or expired NGOs is very challenging and demanding. HAC also imposes state-level registration for NGOs operating in areas with high numbers of IDPs, such as Al Gazira.

Recommendations

International Organisations and donors

- Rethink funding modalities and processes to reflect the current economic situation and the near collapse of the banking system in states where conflict rages, international funders.
- Find ways of adapting to the digital transfer system, especially as the crisis is deepening. Systems must be developed to transfer funds to NNGOs working on the ground more efficiently and quickly.
- Put in place governance and financial oversight tools that are suited to digital transfer systems.
- Build in support for projects and NNGO partnerships budgets for equipment, such as smart cell phones, tablets and laptops, office machines and stationery, to replace equipment lost or damaged during conflict in order to enhance communication, coordination, and information-sharing.

NNGOs

- Undertake strategic reviews to:
 - Understand how best to adapt to the rapid changes in the context of their operations, and how best to respond better to the worsening humanitarian situation.
 - Reposition themselves within the humanitarian map vis a vis INGOs and local initiatives.
 - Develop planning mechanisms and work flows more suited to humanitarian response.
 - Reorganise and strengthen internal structures and systems.
 - Safeguard - and where needed, relocate - remaining staff and resources
- Seek opportunities and support to train their own staff and volunteers in humanitarian standards, humanitarian operations, and emergency response, organisational management, and strategic planning, as well as in specific key humanitarian clusters.
- Invest more in documenting lessons and models being developed, for example how to work with local initiatives.

Local initiatives & ERR bodies

- Adapt their advocacy programmes to secure safe corridors for themselves and for other humanitarian workers in conflict zones.
- Strengthen communication and coordination between local groups and ERRS, NNGOs, and international organisations. A focus on improved coordination reflects operational needs and can be aligned to any future funding mechanisms.
- Train their members and activists in the standard of humanitarian operations, governance principles and values, organization management (Planning, monitoring & evaluation, Financial and procurement procedures control, report writing and data analysis).
- Be supported with equipment such as smart cell phones, tablets, and laptops, to restore the loss of their personal properties during conflict to enhance their level of communication, coordination, and information share.

Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit

About the SCCU

The Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (SCCU) aims to facilitate the coordination of resources and efforts among various groups and networks, including diaspora organisations, humanitarian aid agencies, local civil society organisations, and government agencies.

For further details, please visit: <https://sudancu.org>