For Immediate Release

New Shabaka research report highlights vital role of local responders in Darfur crisis response

London – 17th September 2024

- Shabaka's latest research into Sudan's humanitarian crisis explores the role played by local responders in providing vital assistance to affected populations in Darfur, despite facing numerous challenges and significant protection risks.

- The conflict in Sudan continues to hinder humanitarian access to the country. It has caused significant disruption to the country's infrastructure and economy, particularly the agricultural sector, leading to **approximately 18 million people facing acute food insecurity**, including famine in some areas (FAO, 2024). On 01 August 2024, the Famine Review Committee of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) concluded that **famine conditions are prevalent in parts of North Darfur**, including the Zamzam camp south of El Fasher (IPC, 2024).

- Networks of local volunteers, community groups, and individuals in Darfur – known as **local responders** – play a critical role in the crisis response, providing essential services such as food, healthcare, and community support to communities affected by the conflict.

Image via Ayin Network

In Darfur, like elsewhere in the country, the escalation of conflict has necessitated a **swift operational pivot** for local responders**.** These groups, including local mutual aid groups, student-led initiatives, Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs), and local NGOs (among other structured efforts) have transitioned from their pre-conflict focus on education, community development, and the democratic transition to addressing the immediate needs of those affected by the crisis (HPN, 2023; Shabaka, 2023b).

Despite limited resources and organisational capacity, local responders are **providing a vital lifeline to communities affected by the crisis in Darfur**. However, local responders tend to be informally organised, and due to administrative and other barriers, many are unregistered. As **they typically operate outside or at the margins of formal humanitarian frameworks**, this also creates challenges in terms of coordination, accessing direct support from institutional humanitarian partners, and recognition of their humanitarian activities.

The research, based on key informant interviews with local responders operating in Darfur and neighbouring areas, calls for greater direct support for

local responders and greater protection for their members and volunteers to help address the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Such groups cannot provide the sustainable, large-scale assistance currently required **without additional support in terms of resources**, improved protection for volunteers and beneficiaries, communications, and capacity development. There is an **urgent need for a ceasefire that establishes humanitarian corridors** for life-saving aid and medicine to reach affected areas, and humanitarian organisations to reach communities in need of essential infrastructure repair, such as to water facilities and hospitals.

Quotes

Elvina Quaison, Interim CEO of Shabaka, says:

" The humanitarian situation in Darfur is grave, with affected communities facing violence and extreme food insecurity. Local responders are providing vital humanitarian services to local and displaced communities in the region, often at great risk to themselves. This timely report documents how their work is critical to the humanitarian response in Darfur and calls for increased direct support to local mutual aid groups. It also calls for additional training and resources to develop suitable communications, security, and protection strategies."

William Carter, Sudan Country Director at the Norwegian Refugee Council, says:

"Sudanese are helping each other survive, barely, with very little international support or safety. This must change; they must be supported – including in Darfur, the neglected epicentre of famine and atrocious abuse. This unique report outlines how to help grassroots responders there, and it is now up to the international community now to stand on the right side of history—there can be no more disastrous delays."

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Key Features of the Report

- This report is based on qualitative research, including **key informant interviews (KIIs) with local responders in Darfur** from April–July 2024.
- Despite extremely challenging conditions, local responders **are operating in parts of Darfur where other organisations have limited presence**.
- Some local responders are formally structured, but most are informal groups or networks run by local volunteers that **rely on philanthropy from other Sudanese and the diaspora.**
- The informal nature of such groups creates bureaucratic **barriers to accessing direct support** from international humanitarian partners, often due to limitations of institutional mandates and processes.
- Some local responders are having to **pause or close their operations due to a lack of sustainable funding** and other resources.
- Given the enormous humanitarian needs in Darfur, there is **an urgent need to scale up direct support to local responders** operating in the region.
- Institutional humanitarian partners should also provide assistance to local responders in terms of **technology (especially communications)** and **access to information**.
- There is an **urgent need for a ceasefire that establishes humanitarian corridors** for life-saving aid and medicine to reach affected areas.

Read the report in full here.

Notes to the editor

This Shabaka report was commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Founded in 2014, Shabaka is a research and consulting organisation committed to improving the lives of diaspora and migrant communities. Our mission is to enhance humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery efforts through innovative solutions, rigorous research, and strategic partnerships.

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