23rd September 2024

Solidarity without boundaries:

Centering mutual aid in humanitarian action

As the world's attention turns to the United Nations General Assembly and the Summit of the Future this September, a critical conversation is unfolding about the ongoing crisis in Sudan. Amidst the diplomatic discussions and policy debates, we must shine a spotlight on the unsung heroes of this humanitarian emergency: Sudan's local mutual aid groups and their diaspora partners.

The Power of Local Response

In the face of overwhelming challenges, these grassroots organisations have emerged as the backbone of humanitarian efforts in Sudan. While international aid agencies grapple with access and security issues, local groups have been on the frontlines since the start of the Sudan crisis in April last year, providing essential services and support to those in need. Their strength lies in their deep understanding of local contexts, agility, and unwavering commitment to their communities.

These groups operate remarkably efficiently, unburdened by rigid hierarchies and bureaucratic red tape. Their informal structure allows them to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, ensuring that aid reaches those most in need. However, this vital work comes at significant personal risk to the dedicated individuals involved.

A Call for Direct and Flexible Support

The severity of the Sudan crisis has stretched local resources to their limits. Despite the generous efforts of Sudanese people at home and abroad, more support is urgently needed. We must advocate for scaling up direct, flexible funding to these local mutual aid groups, as every moment counts in this crisis. The prospect of millions of deaths from starvation this year without massive scaling up of assistance should be a ‘never again’ moment for the international community.

Traditional funding models often involve bureaucratic hurdles that can slow down aid delivery. In a rapidly evolving crisis like Sudan's, we need funding mechanisms as agile and adaptive as the groups they support. By minimizing red tape and allowing for swift, flexible funding, we can ensure that resources are deployed where they are needed most when needed most. This is why direct and flexible support is crucial in crises.

Beyond Individual Aid: Empowering Communities

As we rethink our approach to humanitarian assistance in Sudan, we must shift our focus from top-down aid to community-driven initiatives. Programs like communal kitchens and women's cooperatives provide immediate relief and foster long-term resilience and social cohesion. We can create a more comprehensive and sustainable impact by supporting these collective efforts.

Bridging Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding

The lines between humanitarian assistance, human rights advocacy, and peacebuilding are blurred in Sudan. The same networks providing vital aid are often deeply rooted in Sudan's rich history of civic engagement, promoting human rights and representative governance. These mutual aid groups are not just addressing immediate needs; they act as peacebuilders in their local communities, providing impartial assistance that helps bridge divides. They play a vital role in the current crisis response and will play a central role in future peace and reconstruction efforts / in rebuilding Sudan.

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A Call for International Action

While local efforts are crucial, they cannot succeed in a vacuum. The international community must exert continuous pressure for peace and stability in Sudan and the broader region. We must explore new models for inclusive political negotiations that go beyond the warring parties and reflect civilian perspectives.

As we convene around the Summit for the Future, UNGA and CGI, let us amplify these messages:

1 Empowering The Frontlines

- **Mutual aid is the new lifeline: Community initiatives are outpacing traditional aid**
- **Local leaders, global impact: Invest in grassroots expertise and cultural know-how**

2 Revolutionise Aid Delivery

- **From subcontractors to equal partners: Embrace solidarity-based models**
- **Cut the red tape, amplify the action: Streamline reporting, boost protection**

3 Unleash Agile Funding

- **Speed saves lives: Implement rapid-response financial mechanisms**
- **Trust local judgment: Put funding decisions in grassroots hands**

4 Borderless Solutions

- **Regional synergies: Harness cross-border partnerships for maximum reach**
- **Tap diaspora potential: Bridge local needs with global resources**

The path to peace and stability in Sudan is long and challenging, but we can make a lasting difference by empowering local actors and fostering community-driven solutions. As global citizens, it is our responsibility to stand in solidarity with the people of Sudan and support their journey towards a more stable and prosperous future.

To learn more about Shabaka's work with local mutual aid groups in Sudan, please visit our website: https://shabaka.org/

The Shabaka Team will be in New York during UNGA from September 23-27, 2024. You can contact them via:
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