

Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #1

Reporting period: 25/05/2023 to 26/05/2023

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated on 25 May 2023 to support the humanitarian response following the outbreak of conflict on 15 May. The ETC is led by WFP in Sudan.

Highlights

- Sudan's telecommunications infrastructure has severely deteriorated since the outbreak of conflict on 15 April, as a result of damage to the power grid and telecommunications towers, and congestion on the one remaining mobile network still operating.
- Humanitarians are facing serious communications challenges as they work to scale up their operations in the country. WFP, as the lead agency of the ETC, has been sharing connectivity with humanitarians in Port Sudan since 24 April.
- The ETC was activated on 25 May to support the needs for common ICT services as organisations scale up their operations in the country. WFP's TEC team in Sudan has been engaging in inter-agency coordination and assessments in Port Sudan since 14 May and the cluster is now mobilising resources to establish ETC services across the country.



WFP IT specialists conduct an assessment at the UNDSS office in Port Sudan in support of efforts to extend inter-agency connectivity to new sites.

Photo: WFP/Ernest Wambari

Situation overview

Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed hundreds, forced more than 250,000 to flee across borders, and displaced over 840,000 people internally since the start of the conflict according to the [latest estimate](#) by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Prior to the recent outbreak of violence, a third of the population was already in need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, the conflict has dramatically constrained access to food, water, fuel, cash and health care.

In the revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) it is now estimated that the number of people in need of assistance is 24.7 million – a 57 per cent increase from before the crisis.

Telecommunications infrastructure

Since the outbreak of conflict on 15 April, Sudan's communications infrastructure has been heavily impacted as a result of direct damage to telecommunications towers, as well as indirectly through the rapid deterioration of the national power grid.

Two of the country's three Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are no longer operational. Congestion on the one remaining MNO network is worsened by the concentration of internally displaced people (IDPs) in safer areas away from the active fighting.

UNDSS maintains a VHF radio network that remains operational in most locations across the country, with the exception of El Geneina and Nyala, which were affected by looting.

The extensive looting of communications assets across the country means that there is a clear need to rebuild and strengthen common information and telecommunication technology infrastructure to enable a swift and coordinated response to the crisis.

See the Sudan [ICT Profile](#) for more information on national telecommunications infrastructure.

ETC Activities

Coordination

A WFP IT emergency coordinator deployed in Port Sudan since 14 May has been filling the inter-agency ICT coordination role in anticipation of the activation of the cluster. Three more WFP IT and Telecommunications Specialists deployed to Port Sudan on 21 and 23 May to support the provision of WFP and inter-agency ICT services.

The ETC's request for activation and budget requirements were published in the revised Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) on 17 May, and on 25 May cluster activation was officially endorsed.

Meanwhile the Global ETC has been engaging with its partners and gathering information on their needs and capacities to support the ICT response. The ETC held a coordination call with UNHCR's Refugee Emergency Telecommunications Sector (RETS) and partner organizations on 17 May to discuss ICT needs and capacity in Sudan as well as the surrounding countries of Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

Internet connectivity

The ability to communicate in an emergency is paramount, not only to facilitate the response and ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those who need it most, but also to support the safety and security of humanitarians. The deterioration of connectivity infrastructure across the country since the outbreak of fighting has made communication a major challenge for humanitarians.

WFP, as the lead agency of the ETC, has been sharing connectivity with humanitarian in Port Sudan throughout the crisis. Approximately 12 UN Agencies and I/NGOs are currently using shared connectivity services through WFP in three different sites in the city.

The ETC is planning to take over the provision of inter-agency connectivity services in Port Sudan and establish data connectivity centres in three other priority locations identified as hubs for humanitarian activities: Kassala, Gedaref, and Wad Madani. Leveraging existing telecommunications assets in these locations, ETC will link shared humanitarian offices to data connectivity services, enabling the provision of life-saving assistance.

The ETC plans to extend connectivity services to a total of 10 common operational locations across the country.

Security communications

Prior to the crisis, VHF radio networks were operational in 14 locations across the country. The VHF networks and Security Operations Centres (SOCs) in El Geneina and Nyala were damaged in the fighting and looting and are no longer operational.

In Khartoum, the main SOC was evacuated due to heavy fighting in the capital. In a collaborative effort between WFP's Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergencies and Support Team (FITTEST), Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+}, and WFP's regional and country TEC teams, a Remote SOC solution was quickly deployed in Nairobi and handed over to UNDSS on 05 May. The RSOC is connected to Port Sudan, Kassala, Damazine, Kosti, El Obeid, El Fula, El Fasher, Ed Daein, Zalingei, and Kadugli. The VHF network in Khartoum is operational but is not monitored or connected to the RSOC.

The ETC will continue to engage with UNDSS to ensure the provision of security communications services, including radio programming and training in up to 10 common operational locations across the country.

Services for communities

The ETC is exploring the needs to establish platforms to access information or for communication between humanitarian and the affected population, such as a Chatbot or an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM). The ETC has deployed Chatbots in other emergencies as a means for humanitarian to disseminate information to the affected population about their rights and aid and services available to them.

A CFM would provide a channel for two-way communication between the affected community and humanitarian organisations, empowering them to register their feedback and complaints. The information received through a CFM can also enhance decision-making by putting affected communities and their needs and preferences at the centre of the humanitarian response.

Funding

The total requirement for ETC operations in Sudan is US\$6.3 million to deliver services in up to 10 common operational areas, including data connectivity and ICT helpdesk support,

security communications services – radio programming and training – and platforms for the affected population to receive information and provide feedback to humanitarians.

The ETC is seeking initial funding of US\$1.5 million to enable the rapid establishment of ETC services in five common operational locations.

Challenges

Difficulties obtaining approvals from the authorities are preventing the importation of telecommunications equipment to the country. Compounded with the looting of pre-existing telecommunications assets in-country, a lack of equipment is a major challenge for the operation.

As a result of the security situation, travel and access is severely constrained across the country.

Further information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

<https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/sudan-conflict>

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

Sudan.ETC@wfp.org