

Sudan, conflict

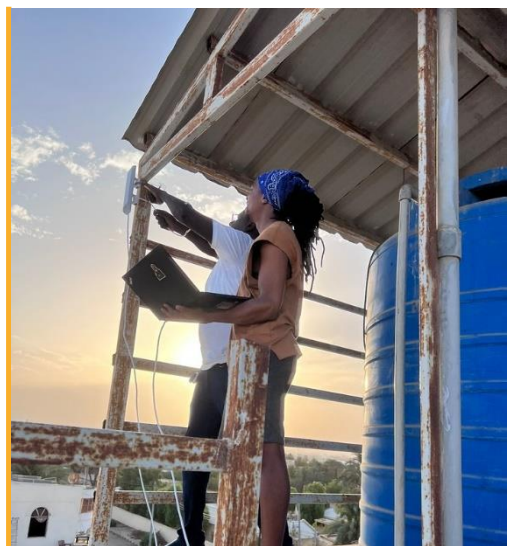
ETC Situation Report #3

Reporting period: 03/06/2023 to 09/06/2023

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

- The ETC is working to expand the shared connectivity services established by WFP, the lead agency of the cluster in Sudan. Leveraging WFP satellite infrastructure, the ETC extended connectivity to the shared UNICEF office and UN residence in Port Sudan. Services are being provided to 181 humanitarians across six sites in the city.
- In support of its efforts to meet the communications needs of the NGO community, the ETC attended a meeting of the Sudan INGO forum and conducted a technical assessment of Welthungerhilfe's shared office in Port Sudan on 08 June.
- The cluster is deploying mobile satellite connectivity kits to Kassala, Gedaref, and Wad Madani in order to extend interagency data services to new locations.



WFP IT specialists connect a UN residence in Port Sudan to satellite internet services.

Photo: WFP

Situation overview

Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed hundreds, forced more than 459,000 to flee across borders, and displaced over 1,420,000 people internally since the start of the conflict according to the [UNHCR's operational data portal](#).

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. On 04 June, there was a prolonged outage of the one functioning Mobile Network Operator (MNO) in Port Sudan. Two of the major internet service providers (ISPs) are also no longer functioning, and local VSAT services are unreliable.

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 humanitarian 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

The first local Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) working group was held on 05 June and was attended by ICT focal points from UN agencies present in Port Sudan who were members of the pre-existing UN ICT Working Group. As a part of the transition to the ETC Working Group, the membership of the group is being extended to I/NGOs present in Port Sudan. The next ETC working group meeting will be held on 19 June.

In support of its efforts to extend further services to the NGO community, the ETC attended a meeting of the Sudan INGO forum in Port Sudan on 07 June. A number of requests for connectivity services were received from the member organisations.

The ETC is accepting requests for information, technical advice, and connectivity services through the Sudan.ETC@wfp.org email address. A ticketing system has been established to handle the high volume of requests received.

The ETC is continuing to engage with the authorities to obtain clearance for the importation of telecommunications equipment to meet the needs of the response.

Internet Connectivity

On 04 June, there was a prolonged outage of the one functioning Mobile Network Operator (MNO) in Port Sudan. Thanks to the reliable satellite internet services provided by the cluster, humanitarian workers from ETC connectivity sites in the city were able to continue working throughout the blackout.

The ETC is working to expand the shared connectivity services established by WFP, the lead agency of the cluster in Sudan. Leveraging WFP satellite infrastructure, the ETC has extended connectivity to six shared humanitarian spaces in Port Sudan. The UNICEF office, which also hosts staff from UNDSS, UNDP, IOM, and UNFPA, was connected by a point-to-point link on 06 June. The latest site, a common UN residence, was connected on 07 June.

The cluster is now providing connectivity to all 17 UN agencies present in Port Sudan, as well as four NGOs – a total of 181 individual users.

Following engagement with the Sudan INGO forum, the cluster conducted a technical assessment of the German INGO Welthungerhilfe's shared office in Port Sudan. The ETC is planning to connect the office, which serves several NGOs, to satellite connectivity services.

Despite equipment importation challenges, the cluster was able to receive a small shipment of telecommunications equipment on 04 June. The shipment included satellite connectivity kits that will be sent to Kassala, Gedaref, and Wad Madani to begin to establish services in those locations. Ongoing challenges in obtaining networking equipment will limit the cluster's ability to extend connectivity to multiple UN and INGO sites in those locations.

Security communications

The local Security Operations Centres (SOCs) in Port Sudan and Kassala are staffed and fully operational 12 hours per day. Apart from the SOCs in Nyala, El Geneina, Zalinguei, and Ed Daein, which were looted, the remaining SOCs across the country are intermittently active, depending on the availability of staff, electrical power, and internet connectivity.

The VHF network remains operational in all locations except El Geneina and Nyala, and is being monitored remotely from Nairobi, where the Remote Security Operations Centre (RSOC) solution was transferred after the Khartoum SOC was evacuated. The RSOC was handed over to UNDSS after it was set up 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.

The ETC is continuing to engage with UNDSS on plans to further enhance the resilience of the security communications infrastructure in the country.

Services for communities

The ETC is exploring the needs to establish platforms to access information or for communication between humanitarian workers 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 workers 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 has yet to receive any donor contributions towards its requirements. WFP provided the cluster with an advance to initiate the provision of critical services until funding is secured.

Challenges

Difficulties importing telecommunications equipment, compounded with the looting of pre-existing telecommunications assets in-country has meant that 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:

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