

Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #4

Reporting period: 10/06/2023 to 16/06/2023

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

- On 15 June, the ETC added two new sites to its data connectivity network in Port Sudan – UNHCR’s office and the Welthungerhilfe shared I/NGO office. Satellite internet services are being provided to humanitarian workers from 17 UN agencies and seven I/NGOs across eight sites in the city.
- Two satellite connectivity kits have been installed in Kassala and Al Gedarif in preparation for the expansion of ETC services to the new locations.
- In order to coordinate the provision of radio programming and training, the cluster is conducting an inventory of VHF handsets amongst UN agencies and I/NGOs in Port Sudan.



A WFP IT specialist connects the shared I/NGO office hosted by Welthungerhilfe to the ETC satellite connectivity network in Port Sudan.

Photo: WFP

Situation overview

Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed hundreds, forced more than 470,000 to flee across borders, and displaced over 1,670,000 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 next Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) working group meeting will be held on Monday 19 June. The membership of the group has been extended to all UN Agencies and I/NGOs present in Sudan and participants have been invited to join the ETC team in-person at the WFP port Sudan office.

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

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 eight shared humanitarian spaces in Port Sudan. The latest two sites, Welthungerhilfe and UNHCR's offices, were connected on 15 June. The shared Welthungerhilfe office hosts staff from Save the Children, Danish Refugee Council, Concern Worldwide, ActAid, Goal Global and Samaritan's Purse.

The cluster is now providing connectivity to all 17 UN agencies present in Port Sudan, as well as seven NGOs – over 180 individual users.

In response to requests from IOM and WHO for connectivity support, the cluster is conducting technical assessments at the two agencies' offices in Port Sudan.

Despite equipment importation challenges, the cluster was able to receive a small shipment of telecommunications equipment including satellite connectivity kits in Port Sudan. A WFP IT specialist brought three of the kits to Kassala and Al Gedaref where they have been installed at WFP's offices. The ETC plans to extend connectivity to the humanitarian community in these locations once the necessary equipment is in place.

Problems with the power supply at the UNDSS office, which is serving as a relay point for the ETC network, have caused disruptions of ETC services for users at the UNITAMS office. The ETC team installed an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) device at the UNDSS office to stabilise their power supply and is working with UNDSS on a permanent solution.

Security communications

As a part of a security communications needs assessment, the cluster is conducting an inventory of VHF handsets amongst UN agencies and I/NGOs in Port Sudan. The inventory will be used to coordinate the provision of radio programming and training.

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 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 ETC is working with UNDSS and {TESS+} to confirm the status of the VHF network, local SOCs, and RSOC connections across the country.

The ETC is also continuing to engage with UNDSS on plans to 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 humanitarians and the affected population, such as a Chatbot or an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM). A Chatbot could serve as a means for humanitarians to disseminate information about aid and services available, while a CFM would provide a channel for two-way communication, empowering the affected population to register their feedback and complaints.

However, due to the serious deterioration of the communications infrastructure across the country, the implementation of any such platforms will depend upon the cluster's ability to first establish reliable independent communications infrastructure.

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

The lack of funding received is constraining the ETC's ability to maintain and expand services.

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:

Sudan.ETC@wfp.org