Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #17
Reporting period: 01/04/2024 to 30/04/2024

Highlights

- New operational hubs are being established in Dongola and Wadi Halfa to assist the thousands of displaced people traveling through these areas on their way to Egypt.

The ETC supports connectivity for humanitarians across Port Sudan, Kassala, and Kosti. Photo: WFP/ETC

- In April, the ETC collaborated with WFP to obtain the importation approvals required for the 15 advanced connectivity kits needed to improve internet connectivity, which is essential for humanitarian activities in Sudan. So far, five of these kits have arrived in Nairobi for onward travel to Sudan. The ETC is meeting with the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) in early May to obtain the necessary approvals for this.

- Following the prepositioning of the recently arrived 250 handheld VHF devices in Sudan, the ETC has enhanced VHF radio communications capabilities by programming 78 of the handheld radios for WFP staff in Dongola and Port Sudan. Activating these radios for use by UN staff has improved the utilization of the VHF radio network in Sudan, a positive step forward in keeping responders in the field safer amid the evolving operational demands and security challenges in these regions.

Situation overview

Sudan is experiencing one of the most severe humanitarian crises in its history. The ongoing conflict that broke out in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has led to the displacement of over 8 million people, who have sought refuge fleeing either within Sudan or to neighbouring countries.

The situation is still volatile and unpredictable, as both the SAF and RSF continue strengthening their military presence in areas of control. Increased security checkpoints and movement screening of civilians and humanitarian responders across the country have further complicated the mobility needed for effective humanitarian response.

In early March 2024, the United Nations (UN) Security Council called for an immediate ceasefire during Ramadan and urged authorities to enable better access to humanitarian aid. However, the ceasefire was not realised due to disagreements between the warring sides.

Food insecurity has dramatically worsened due to the extended conflict. More than 18 million Sudanese are now facing acute food shortages—10 million more than at the same time in 2023. The lack of reliable telecommunications infrastructure further complicates efforts to deliver humanitarian aid and help people in need within the affected areas.

National telecommunications infrastructure

Much of Sudan is affected by the internet blackout which began on 07 February—national telecommunications services have been severely disrupted across the country and telecommunications infrastructure remains compromised. Partial restoration of services by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) Zain and Sudani has provided limited connectivity, however, these are frequently interrupted due to power cuts and infrastructure damage.

Starting on 05 March, the government of Sudan granted permission for the importation of telecommunications equipment into the country, which was previously a major challenge.

Efforts are currently underway to resume and stabilize some telecommunications services essential for the ongoing humanitarian operations.

See the Sudan **ICT Profile** for more information on national telecommunications infrastructure.

ETC Activities

Coordination

ETC continues to strengthen coordination efforts in Port Sudan, Kassala, and Kosti. New operational hubs are being set up in Dongola and Wadi Halfa, close to the border with Egypt where data connectivity services are critically needed for an effective humanitarian response. Partner WFP visited Dongola to undertake an assessment for the full establishment of the hub.

Humanitarian partners can request information, technical advice, and access to services to the ETC through the Sudan.ETC@wfp.org email address. A ticketing system has been established to manage the high volume of requests being received.

Data connectivity

ETC internet connectivity services are provided in three common operational areas—Port Sudan (32 sites), Kassala (eight sites) and Kosti (one site using the WFP office premises).

In April, the ETC collaborated with WFP to obtain the importation approvals required for the 15 advanced connectivity kits needed to improve internet connectivity, which is essential for humanitarian activities in Sudan. So far, five of these kits have arrived in Nairobi for onward travel to Sudan. The ETC is meeting with the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC)

in early May to obtain the necessary approvals for this. The remaining 10 kits will be purchased once importation approvals are received.

Also this month, a critical issue was addressed at the UNDSS office site in Port Sudan. The ETC successfully replaced a faulty Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) device that had caused brief data connectivity downtime. The new UPS installation ensures a continuous power supply to the network.

Security communications

As reported last month, a total of 250 VHF handheld devices from WFP FITTEST in the UAE arrived in Sudan in late March to support the planned scale-up of the response. The arrival of the radios was part of a lengthy importation procedure.

Following the prepositioning of the above devices in Sudan, the ETC has now enhanced VHF radio communications capabilities by programming 78 of the handheld radios for WFP staff in Dongola and Port Sudan. Activating these radios for use by UN staff has improved the utilization of the VHF radio network in Sudan, a positive step forward in keeping responders in the field safer amid the evolving operational demands and security challenges in these regions.

The Kassala Security Operations Centre (SOC) remains operational, while the SOC in Damazine experiences intermittent operations due to connectivity and power issues. In El Gadaref, a point-to-point connection has been established but technical issues have arisen—the team is currently working to resolve and activate this SOC.

Services for communities

Progress has been made in discussions with UNICEF and IOM on projects that aim to strengthen affected community services. These services focus on establishing data connectivity in areas such as Wadi Halfa, where internet service is crucial for displaced populations. The team is actively working to advance these projects, pending necessary governmental approvals.

The ETC will meet with Internews on 12 May to discuss potential collaboration on assessing the impact of a communications blackout on civilians and their reliance on connectivity and social media to meet essential needs.

Funding

In 2024, the ETC requires US$6.3 million to continue its provision and expansion of shared ICT services across Sudan in support of humanitarian operations.

In late March, the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) allocated GBP 500,000 for ETC activities in 2024. Once the FCDO funds are received, the ETC will be 10 percent funded out of the required US$6.3 million.

Challenges

Security concerns, restricted travel, and logistical constraints continue to create operational challenges.

Dashboard

The latest ETC Dashboard for the Sudan operation is available **here**.

Meetings

A Global ETC Partners Teleconference took place on **30 April**. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

A Local ETC Working Group meeting took place on **24 April at 15:00 EAT.**

Contacts

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

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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