

Communication, community engagement and accountability in Sudan's regional response

Outcomes of the high-level meeting to discuss elevating collective CCEA in the regional Sudan conflict response

October 2023

Key takeaways

- ➔ Despite the strides made towards strengthening two-way communication and dialogue in the regional response to the Sudan crisis, there remain critical gaps inhibiting the effectiveness of collective efforts.
- ➔ The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the Regional Refugee Response Plan should allocate time, priority and resources to communication and engagement approaches which ensure investment in key communication, community engagement and accountability (CCEA) activities. This should include integrated CCEA activities in sectoral interventions and those led by local and diaspora humanitarian action.
- ➔ The information and engagement ecosystem is in constant flux in Sudan and neighbouring countries and maintaining a solid communications base requires a range of skills and analysis. As a priority for protection, forward planning must consider the skills needed.

Summary of recommended actions

1 Strengthen collective CCEA and cross-border information-sharing for a coherent regional coordination response

Recommendations: Dedicated funding, HR capacity and high-level endorsement for the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Groups in Sudan and the region, standardise CCEA practices, and strengthen links among in-country Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups (ICCGs), Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and the Regional Humanitarian Partnership Team (RHPT) in order to strengthen coordination, leadership, capacity-building and mainstreaming efforts.

2 Collectively advocate for CCEA funding for diverse and local response actors

Recommendations: Develop a well-informed, adequately funded strategy to foster genuine partnerships between international humanitarian organisations and local entities. Advocate for more direct and flexible funding from donors while simplifying reporting and due diligence procedures and increasing allocations from pooled funds to support local responders, addressing the current underrepresentation in fund allocations and decisions.

Introduction

In contexts of violence and displacement, information can be both a force for good and a driver of harm. The protection, safety and security of people affected by conflict or violence rely on the information they can access. But it is these same situations of conflict that present challenges to information access: trust erodes as communities disperse and are displaced, power dynamics change, communication channels shift, and a once-familiar information landscape is polluted by unreliable information sources.

Nearly six months into the current crisis in Sudan – the intensity and scale of which Sudan has never experienced before – the effectiveness of the response is being undermined by critical gaps in communication, information, community engagement and investment in local and diaspora humanitarian action. Severe funding gaps and the geographical and political spread of the response are impeding common communication and feedback mechanisms and the ability to communicate and engage coherently with affected people. In response, under-resourced humanitarian agencies, local actors, networks and the diaspora have developed alternative and often effective information-sharing platforms, needs analysis mechanisms and response programming.

Actions to strengthen and invest in collective CCEA

There is now an urgent need to galvanise specific attention and commitments to increase coordination and investments for CCEA in the Sudan response, particularly when collective programming and budgeting – including for the HRP, Regional Refugee Response Plan and agency-specific plans – are currently being designed for 2024.

On 27 September 2023, a multi-agency roundtable was convened with nearly 60 operational leaders, key partners and decision-makers from United Nations (UN) agencies, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, local, country, regional and global networks, media agencies and academia.¹ This outcomes summary focuses on two priority areas:² strengthening collective CCEA and increasing investment in CCEA led by diverse and local response actors.

1 Strengthen collective CCEA and cross-border information-sharing for a coherent regional coordination response

➔ **Allocate explicit dedicated budget and promote high-level endorsement in support of the AAP Working Group for Sudan.** The AAP Working Group has been actively coordinating collective CCEA and rolling out initiatives like training opportunities for members, coordination of mapping exercises and engagement with cross-border actors. While an action plan for the Working Group has been endorsed, the space for face-to-face community consultations, hotlines and preferred channels of communication and information has continued to dwindle since the start of the conflict. Funding must include support for the specific activities in the Working Group's plans and high-level commitments from the ICCG and HCT/RHPT.

1 The multi-agency roundtable was held online and in Nairobi, Kenya, and was co-convened by CDAC Network, Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination (DEMAC), Internews, OCHA, Sudan INGO Forum and UNICEF, as part of a project funded by the H2H Network's H2H Fund, which is supported by UK Aid from the UK government. The roundtable brought together technical experts, networks and leadership to identify primary barriers to funding for local action and regional CCEA collective action.

2 The priority areas are detailed in a [policy brief](#) published in August 2023 and developed by CDAC Network, DEMAC, Internews and regional actors.

- **Prioritise the standardisation of regional CCEA efforts with robust cross-border coordination.** For many organisations, the Sudan response spans multiple regions – Middle East and North Africa, West and Central Africa, and East and Southern Africa – necessitating a regional coordination approach within and between agencies. The current regional coordination is convened by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)'s Regional Office for Southern and Eastern Africa (ROSEA). Prioritise the standardisation of CCEA efforts – including collective complaints and feedback mechanisms (CFMs) with clear referral pathways; two-way communication channels and cross-border information-sharing between agencies; and the provision of consistent, quality and reliable information to affected people across response countries – for a coherent regional approach.
- **Strengthen linkages between structures of in-country ICCGs, HCTs and RHPT.** Ensure all cluster coordinators have access to and disseminate relevant CCEA guidance to their clusters and raise awareness of commitments. Review and share aggregated results from CFMs to feed into and prioritise actions within the HC/HCT and RHPT level.

2 Collectively advocate for CCEA funding for diverse and local response actors

- **Broaden the focus of the response to include working with, investing in and supporting locally driven approaches.** In the ongoing Sudan crisis, the response is actively driven by existing and emerging local NGOs and community-based responders like neighbourhood and resistance committees and 'emergency response rooms' with access to and relationships with affected communities. Despite their critical role, current engagement and investment in diverse and local response actors is notional or at best ad-hoc and agency-specific. Adapt country and regional systems to invest in these local mechanisms and avoid undermining them.
- **Co-design a clear, informed and funded strategy to strengthen genuine partnerships** between the international humanitarian sector and national NGOs, community-based responders and diaspora networks across the country and regionally. Diaspora groups support many localised response efforts and must be better supported and engaged through diaspora co-design workshops for programme planning, allocated funding for specific diaspora initiatives and encouragement of active diaspora focal points or units. Echoing the Humanitarian Practice Network's recent 'call for action',³ the strategy should be agile in the way that support is provided, ensuring it does not contribute to current efforts to securitise or militarise civil society, or increase the risks many activists and local responders already face.
- **Foster dialogue with donors to encourage more direct and flexible funding to enhance access by diverse and local actors.** This should be coupled with simplifying reporting and due diligence procedures that currently act as key barriers.
- **Increase pooled funds allocations to local responders.** The country-based pooled funds for the regional Sudan response – including the Sudan and South Sudan Humanitarian Funds (SHF and SSSH) – currently allocate only 4% (of the \$55 million SHF and SSSH) directly to local responders, including NGO consortia, voluntary-based civil society, local and women-led organisations.⁴

3 HPN (2023) [Call for action to the international community: support for civil society in Sudan is urgent and crucial](#), 16 August.

4 OCHA (2023) [Pooled Funds at the forefront of humanitarian response to the Sudan crisis \(as of 11 September 2023\)](#).

Box 1 The role of local CCEA actors

The imperative to support civil society in Sudan in all its diversity – from national NGOs to ‘emergency response rooms’ – has never been greater. Community-based organisations, neighbourhood committees and local and national NGOs form a critical segment in any society and have proven crucial in Sudan’s recent history. In the current humanitarian crisis, where the international community is largely absent, they are the only frontline responders.

Case study 1. Listening in the Sudan crisis

According to an Internews assessment of Sudan’s current information ecosystem, local actors play a critical role in providing information on immediate services. Private neighbourhood groups provide hyper-local responses and resources, especially when formal services are inaccessible. People turn to local channels, particularly since the start of the conflict, with questions about safe movement, refugee and asylum procedures, living conditions and border closures.

Case study 2. Real-time research of Sudan diaspora

Research conducted by DEMAC calls for humanitarian actors to strengthen support to and engagement of diaspora initiatives. Diaspora agencies and networks were encouraged to develop cohesive organisational statements and objectives; establish coordination mechanisms among the diaspora actors; consider non-humanitarian funding opportunities; compile needs assessments to share with external actors; and consider expanding information- and resource-sharing hubs on collaborative platforms.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this brief aim to serve as a resource for continuing discussions, solutions and co-designed collective strategies to respond to the challenges in CCEA within Sudan and the regional response. The ongoing Sudan crisis amplifies the urgency to bridge communication gaps and support locally led humanitarian action, responses in bordering countries and the diaspora. The message is clear: refocusing on robust CCEA efforts and investing in local initiatives will help the response to be more effective, responsive and respectful of the rights and needs of affected people in Sudan and the region.

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