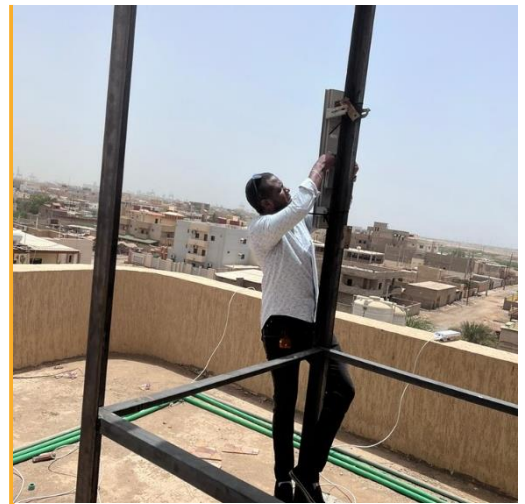# Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #6
Reporting period: 24/06/2023 to 06/07/2023

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

- Technical assessments are underway in Al Gedarif for the expansion of ETC connectivity services. The cluster is receiving requests from UN agencies and I/NGOs for connectivity support in Al Gedarif, Kassala, and Wad Madani, where satellite infrastructure has been installed.

- The ETC team installed a new broadband antenna to support UNDSS in enhancing the coverage of the HF network in Port Sudan. The improvements will enable the use of HF radio in vehicles for long-distance communications during field missions.

- The ETC has received 3.6% of its funding needs in Sudan, thanks to a contribution of EUR 250,000 from the Government of Luxembourg. The cluster urgently requires additional funding to be able to maintain and expand services.

A WFP IT specialist connects UNHCR's office in Port Sudan to ETC data connectivity.

Photo: WFP

Situation overview

Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed hundreds, forced more than 630,000 to flee across borders, and displaced over 2,152,000 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.

The revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) published on 17 May estimates 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. 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 third local ETC Working Group Meeting was held on 03 July. During the meeting a number of requests were received from humanitarian organizations for connectivity support in the ETC's new planned locations – Al Gedarif, Kassala, and Wad Madani.

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 clearances for the importation of telecommunications equipment to meet the needs of the response.

Internet Connectivity

Three satellite connectivity kits have been installed in Al Gedarif, Kassala, and Wad Madani in preparation for the expansion of ETC connectivity services to the new locations. After replacing a faulty kit in Al Gedarif, technical assessments are underway for the extension of point-to-point links with organisations that have requested connectivity support in the new location – UNHCR, ACTED and Danish Refugee Council.

www.ETCluster.org

Despite funding and equipment challenges, the ETC continues to provide connectivity services in nine sites across Port Sudan. The cluster is now providing connectivity to all 17 UN agencies present in Port Sudan, as well as 12 I/NGOs – over 236 individual users.

The cluster is also assessing possibilities to extend connectivity to more sites in Port Sudan – including the offices of WHO, UN Women, and the Sudanese Red Crescent.

Security communications

The ETC team installed a new broadband antenna on the roof of the WFP office to support UNDSS in enhancing the coverage of the HF network in Port Sudan. The improvements will enable the use of HF radio in vehicles for long-distance communications during field missions.

Additionally, the ETC is planning to install a telescopic mast to boost the VHF network in Port Sudan. The ETC is working with UNDSS on a plan to erect a tower as a more permanent solution to improve the VHF network.

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 radio network is also monitored remotely from Nairobi, where the Remote SOC was transferred after the evacuation of the Khartoum SOC.

The cluster is supporting UNDSS to identify bulk messaging solutions to disseminate security alerts to staff in Sudan.

Services for communities

The ETC is exploring the possibility of establishing 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), given the serious deterioration of the communications infrastructure across the country. A CFM taskforce has been established by OCHA with participation from UNICEF, WFP, and UNHCR.

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 received 3.6% of its funding needs in Sudan, thanks to a contribution of EUR 250,000 from the Government of Luxembourg. The cluster urgently requires additional funding to be able to maintain and expand services.

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