

Sudan, conflict

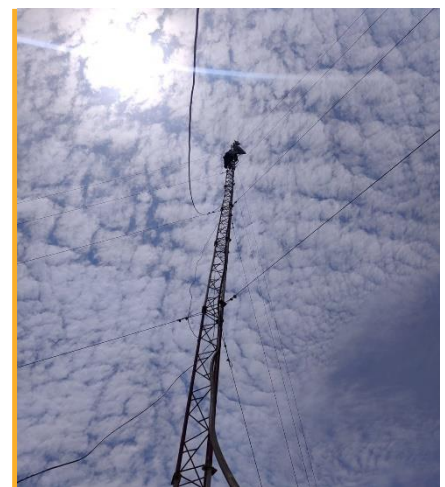
ETC Situation Report #7

Reporting period: 07/07/2023 to 20/07/2023

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

- The ETC connected the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) and UNOCHA's offices to satellite internet services in Port Sudan. This brings the total number of sites connected to the ETC network to 11, serving approximately 290 humanitarian users.
- As part of efforts to improve and expand the ETC network in Port Sudan, the team reconfigured the network to improve the speed of UNHCR's connection and conducted a technical assessment for the extension of services to UNMAS' new office.
- The cluster is working to secure the necessary equipment to extend ETC services to new locations in Sudan. Site assessments are underway for the expansion of ETC services in Wad Madani and Kosti.



A WFP IT specialist installs an outdoor cable to enhance the ETC data connectivity network in Port Sudan.

Photo: WFP

Situation overview

Conflict

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has continued from mid-April for around three months now and killed hundreds, forced more than 732,823 to flee across borders, and displaced over 2,414,625 people internally since the start of the conflict to 16 July 2023 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

Requests for information, technical advice, and connectivity services can be submitted to the ETC 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

The ETC connected the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) and UNOCHA's offices to satellite internet services in Port Sudan. This brings the total number of sites connected to the ETC network to 11, serving approximately 290 humanitarian users from 18 UN Agencies and 12 I/NGOs.

The cluster is working to connect four further sites in Port Sudan in response to requests for support from UN agencies and I/NGOs. A technical assessment was undertaken of UNMAS' new office as part of these efforts.

Further, the team in Port Sudan successfully improved the speed of the data connection at UNHCR's office by changing the configuration of the network.

The cluster is working to obtain the necessary equipment to extend services to new locations across Sudan. Satellite infrastructure has already been deployed in Al Gedarif, Kassala, and Wad Madani, however additional equipment is required to begin establishing

point-to-point links with humanitarian workspaces in these locations, along the same model as the ETC network in Port Sudan. In the meantime the cluster is assessing requests for connectivity support in Kassala, and site assessments are underway for the expansion of ETC services in Wad Madani and Kosti.

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, Zalingei, 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 ETC is working with UNDSS to improve the security communications infrastructure across the country. In Port Sudan, the ETC team installed a new antenna to improve HF radio coverage and is planning further work to enhance the VHF radio network.

The cluster is also 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.

Difficulties in obtaining visas for travel to Sudan are restricting the ability of the ETC to mobilize the required staff to deploy critical communication services for the humanitarian community.

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