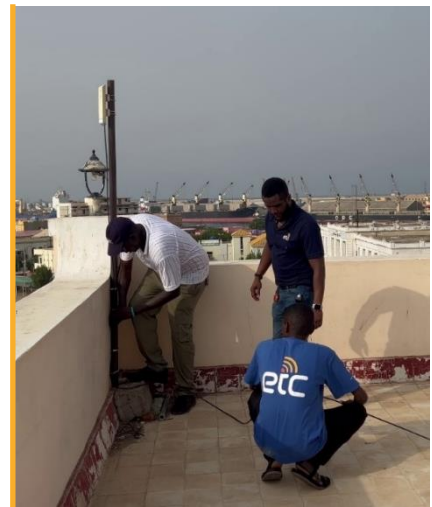# Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #14
Reporting period: 01/01/2024 to 31/01/2024

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated on 25 May 2023 to support the humanitarian response following the outbreak of conflict on 15 April. The ETC is led by WFP in Sudan. ETC Situation Reports (SitReps) are produced monthly.

Highlights

- Renewed fighting in Sudan in late 2023 and January 2024 has significantly impacted on the humanitarian situation. Humanitarian needs across Sudan are at record highs with 24.8 million people, or every second person, needing humanitarian assistance in 2024.

- Coordinating its response from Port Sudan, the ETC is working to continue providing critical communications services in Port Sudan, Kassala, Kosti, Al Gedaref, and Damazine to meet the growing needs of humanitarian responders. Due to the dire security situation in Wad Madani, ETC activities in this location have been put on hold and some services in Kosti are disrupted.

The ETC provides critical communications services in five locations. Photo: ETC/WFP

- To overcome the severe shortage of handheld radio devices to equip responders in the field, the ETC restored 21 VHF/HF vehicle radios which can be used to report to the Security Operations Centres (SOCs) in the absence of handheld devices.

Situation overview

Fighting between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) since 15 April 2023 has resulted in devastating consequences for civilians. About 10.7 million people are now displaced by the conflicts in Sudan, with 9 million inside the country, making Sudan the largest internal displacement crisis globally.

Renewed fighting and political unrest in Sudan in late 2023 and January 2024 have significantly impacted on the humanitarian situation, particularly in Wad Madani, which was seized by the RSF in December 2023. The city had taken in thousands of refugees who were once more required to flee during the forcible displacement of inhabitants.

Humanitarian needs across Sudan are at record highs with 24.8 million people, or every second person, needing humanitarian assistance in 2024.

Port Sudan continues as Sudan's temporary administrative capital since August 2023.

National telecommunications infrastructure

Since the outbreak of conflict on 15 April, Sudan's national communications infrastructure has been impacted by direct damage to telecommunications towers, and a deteriorated national power grid supply.

The extensive looting of communications assets across the country resulted in a need to rebuild and strengthen common humanitarian information and telecommunications technology infrastructure.

Telecommunications service providers in Sudan continue to be cut off sporadically across the country with large parts of Darfur experiencing months-long blackouts. The lack of reliable telecommunications infrastructure directly impacts humanitarian aid programs and limits the reach and ability to assist those in need within operational areas.

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

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC is adapting its strategy in response to the evolving and deteriorating situation on the ground by focusing on the key locations receiving displaced populations.

Coordinating its response from Port Sudan, the ETC is working to continue providing critical communications services in Port Sudan, Kassala, Kosti, Al Gedaref, and Damazine to meet the growing needs of humanitarian responders. Due to the dire security situation in Wad Madani, ETC activities in this location have been put on hold and some services in Kosti are disrupted (see ETC Dashboard for service locations).

In January, consultations were held with four local partners to foster greater participation in the Local ETC Working Group, which provides a crucial platform for all partners to convene, share insights, and collaboratively address the multifaceted ICT needs and challenges of the response.

Efforts to secure and transport telecommunications equipment continue to be a cluster priority, despite persistent importation challenges.

Humanitarian partners can request information, technical advice, and connectivity 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 connectivity services are provided in two common operational areas—Port Sudan and Kassala. Plans to scale up services in other operational areas are paused while the security situation remains volatile. The ETC's Wi-Fi hotspot service for humanitarians in Kosti is suspended due to ongoing hostilities.

In Port Sudan, the ETC is upgrading its network infrastructure across 28 sites to meet the increasing needs of the humanitarian community. A new design—which includes upgrades to the core access network and wireless infrastructure—is ready for installation to enhance network scalability and resolve current performance issues. These enhancements aim to ensure more efficient services.

Further, the successful implementation of the internet network separation between the ETC and WFP in Port Sudan which began in late 2023 has ensured uninterrupted services for ETC users, reinforcing the reliability of the network. An advanced firewall is being purchased to finalize the first stage of the network separation and to enhance security for users.

On 02 January, the ETC held a consultation call with the Port Sudan airport authorities to discuss proposed data connectivity services at the airport lounge, aiming to support humanitarian responders deploying to Sudan as well as community members.

Security communications

The Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Kosti is operational but unmanned due to the ongoing evacuation amid hostilities.

Although the security communications infrastructure (including the SOCs) in Port Sudan, Kassala, and El Gadaref remain intact in the wake of the recent renewed conflict, there remains an ongoing severe shortage of handheld radio devices to equip responders in the field. To address this, the ETC has restored 21 vehicle radios to comply with HF and VHF radio regulations, which can be used to report to the SOCs in the absence of handheld devices.

The ETC is working on enhancing radio check procedures and mechanisms to ensure more effective and reliable communications solutions and is engaging with the Telecommunications Security Standards {TESS+} to improve the security communications system in the country and address current challenges.

Services for communities

The ETC is coordinating with IOM and UNDSS to establish a presence in Wadi Halfa to address the needs of conflict-affected people attempting to reach Egypt. UNDSS is currently assessing the security implications before proceeding.

Further, the ETC is assessing the ICT needs of communities through discussions with local NGOs to leverage their active community involvement and insight, particularly in Port Sudan and Wadi Halfa. These partnerships aim to facilitate the delivery of crucial services and enhance the impact of humanitarian efforts on the ground.

Funding

The ETC requires US$6.3 million to deliver services in up to 10 common operational areas, including data connectivity, ICT helpdesk support, security communications services (radio programming and training), and platforms for the affected population to receive information and provide feedback to humanitarians.

As of January 2024, the ETC has secured 68% of the US$6.3 million required. Contributions received include EUR 250,000 (US$273,434) from the Government of Luxembourg, US$2 million from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA), and US$2 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Although the cluster is partially funded, additional funding is still required to continue to maintain and expand the common services.

The Government of Luxembourg has agreed to extend their grant for an additional six months until 30 June and the CERF grant has been extended until 01 May.

Challenges

Lengthy and complicated administrative processes to import telecommunications equipment into Sudan constitutes a significant challenge for the operation. These procedures were sustainable before the outbreak of violence in April 2023; however, they severely impact on the current urgent needs imposed by the crisis. The ETC is advocating for higher level management discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and/or Sudan's Telecommunications and Post Regulatory Authority (TPRA) to seek approval to import critical equipment already prepositioned in Nairobi for a duration of six months.

Travel and access are severely constrained across the country due to the security situation.

Dashboard

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

Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners Teleconference will take place on **13 February at 15:00 EAT**.

The next Local ETC Working Group meeting will take place on **08 February 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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