

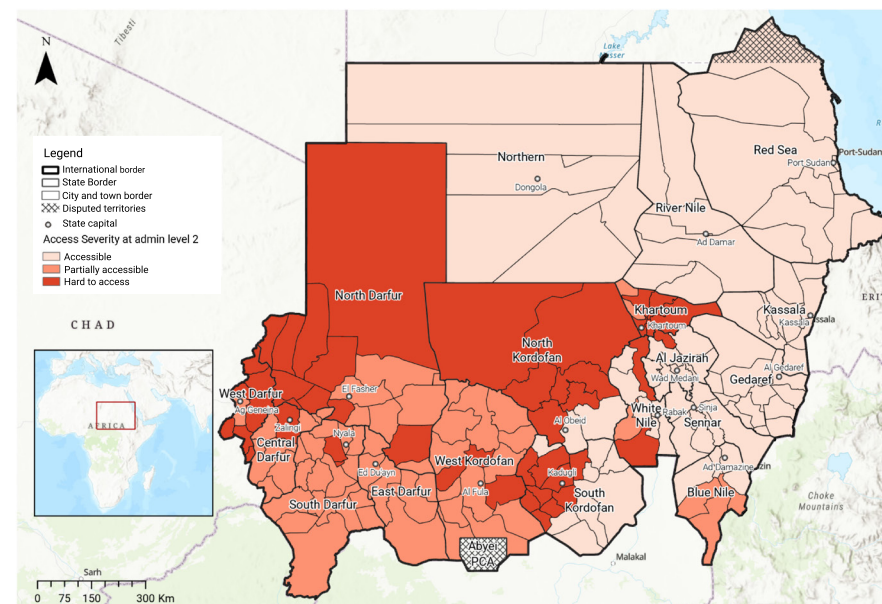
Humanitarian response by local, national actors and the diaspora

OVERVIEW

Local humanitarian responders, especially grassroots organisations, have been at the frontline of delivering life-saving and life-sustaining support at a time when international humanitarian organisations are grappling with access constraints (TNH 02/06/2023). These new pathways of aid coordination and structure in Sudan, which are more local-led and context-sensitive, have forced some INGOs and UN agencies to re-examine and re-imagine mutual aid as a potentially sustainable and effective means of aid planning and delivery (HPN 11/10/2023). The Grand Bargain commitments agreed upon in 2016 by a caucus of donors, INGOs, and UN agencies identified funding and inclusive partnerships in line with humanitarian principles as vital tools to enhance aid localisation globally (HPG/ODI 13/06/2023). Despite these commitments, however, with the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and the descent to military confrontations between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that erupted on 15 April 2023, efforts to localise aid within the mainstream aid mechanism remain largely inadequate (IASC 03/06/2016).

Humanitarian access constraints: as humanitarian needs increase, humanitarian interventions also face significant disruptions in areas such as Khartoum – the epicentre of the conflict – mainly because of insecurity, violence, and the artificial access restrictions imposed by both parties to the conflict. The operating environment is becoming increasingly hostile, forcing international humanitarian organisations to suspend operations and evacuate mostly international staff because of the frequent targeting of aid workers (WFP 16/04/2023; IRC 17/04/2023). As at 19 October, the conflict had killed or detained 45 humanitarian workers from international and national NGOs since the beginning of the conflict in April, an indication of the growing insecurity that humanitarian personnel are facing (OCHA 19/10/2023). The escalation of violence and suspension of humanitarian operations have consequently led to job losses for national aid workers. Those working for INGOs have either been displaced or dispersed with the violence-affected population, further minimising aid response (TNH 01/08/2023). At the same time, as international humanitarian organisations continue to struggle to scale up while managing insecurity, logistical difficulties, political interference, and other constraints imposed by the belligerents, many Sudanese civil society responders have re-organised in support of people in need (IAWG 19/09/2023; Sudan INGO Forum 23/07/2023). Despite the scale of humanitarian needs and the disruption of the traditional aid mechanism, new local responders have found innovative pathways to offer much-needed assistance to the affected population (CMI 2023).

Map 1. Humanitarian access classification



Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (08/01/2024). See full map on page 10.

Crisis background: armed confrontations between rival military factions SAF and RSF broke out on 15 April 2023 and triggered a new wave of humanitarian crisis in Sudan and across the region (ICG 20/04/2023). Prior to the recent hostilities in April, Sudan was already grappling with a politically unstable government, an economic impasse, and the lasting impact of past conflicts and natural hazards, including droughts and floods, which had increased the needs of the affected population (Concern USA 19/10/2023). As at 13 December, 9.4 million IDPs were recorded across the country, including 6.8 million displaced since April, making Sudan the country with the largest IDP population in the world (IOM 13/12/2023). As at 24 November, at least 12,000 people, mostly civilians, had lost their lives since April because of the violence and conflict (SHCC 14/12/2023; ACLED 01/12/2023). 17.7 million people were also projected to experience acute food insecurity – i.e. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels – between October 2023 and February 2024, worsening the humanitarian needs of the violence-affected population and increasing the threat of food insecurity (IPC 12/12/2023).

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About this report

ACAPS methodology: this report was developed through a review of publicly available information. It was further enriched by 16 in-depth key informant interviews in structured and semi-structured conversations between 30 October and 7 December 2023, with personnel representing various humanitarian stakeholders with knowledge of the Sudanese context, including INGOs, national NGOs (NNGOs), donors, grassroots initiatives, and the UN.

Aim of the report: This report aims to highlight the roles, capacities, and challenges that Sudanese humanitarians face in responding to the needs of conflict-affected people. Since armed confrontations broke out, the local humanitarian landscape has evolved, but little is known and understood of local capacities.

Limitations of the study: considering the numerous national and local humanitarian responders operating in the country and the difficulty in accessing information and representatives from local responders, the report does not encapsulate all perspectives from present operational responders. Besides semi-structured civil society entities currently providing humanitarian assistance, there are also non-structured mubadarat or humanitarian initiatives providing support throughout Sudan. Information about these initiatives is both lacking and much needed.

KEY FINDINGS

- A myriad of Sudanese humanitarian responders, including Individuals, youth groups, women, students, professionals, and even professional bodies, have sprung up and begun collaborating to respond to the crisis (SCCU 23/10/2023). Much of this response is local-led, i.e. mostly funded locally and by the diaspora, and aims to address humanitarian needs with available resources despite the crisis deepening and assets dwindling.

- Despite their various political inclinations, ideologies, and ambitions, civic groups have broadened their roles to include responding to the current humanitarian crisis through calls for solidarity and local response modalities (TNH 21/06/2023).
- Resistance committees (RCs) and emergency response rooms (ERRs) have inaugurated a local-led and neighbourhood-based response to the crisis (AN 07/06/2023; Al Jazeera 22/04/2023). With commonly available resources, capacities, and local context knowledge, grassroots initiatives and affected communities have demonstrated that local responders have the capacity for a sustainable and long-term response (SCCU 30/11/2023). They have also shown that a community-led response is context-sensitive, appropriate, adaptive, and innovative in aid application.
- The Sudanese diaspora has stepped up its involvement in local aid efforts by mobilising resources and building local response capacity through targeted interventions. At the heart of their operations is resource mobilisation for the provision of critical services, such as medical aid, financing local programmes even as the financial system has nearly collapsed (SCCU 23/10/2023).
- The absence of government institutions and most international humanitarian stakeholders in areas experiencing intense conflict, such as Khartoum, has allowed grassroots initiatives to grow and complement current aid mechanisms (KII 30/10/2023; HPN 16/08/2023). Many of the grassroots initiatives are informal and not regulated but are able to spearhead local aid response.
- The funding allocation and distribution of financial resources for Sudan's response are disproportional between mainstream and local aid responders. The bulk of financial resources pooled for Sudan's response has consistently gone to international and not local responders, such as national and local NGOs. While international organisations battle against insecurity and the artificial access constraints imposed by conflict parties, NNGOs continue to get limited funding options for their response (HO 12/2023).
- Partnerships between the international aid community and national responders, especially NNGOs, have improved as a result of the relocation of most international stakeholders to safer areas and the need for local humanitarian responders to fill the gap, but much partnership continues to follow previous modalities of subcontracting and risk outsourcing (CSF 11/05/2023; KII 05/12/2023; Al Jazeera 16/06/2023).
- Access impediments resulting from security challenges and the obstruction of volunteers by the belligerents have allowed local responders to become more adaptive and innovative in bypassing barriers impeding effective aid delivery and effort coordination (KII 04/12/2023; KII 07/12/2023).

OPERATIONAL LANDSCAPE FOR SUDANESE HUMANITARIANS

This section looks into the existing operational landscape that local humanitarian responders have had to navigate both before and during the current conflict. In summary, the operating environment for local and national humanitarian stakeholders was very restrictive and regulated prior to the war. Following the outbreak of the war and the relocation of government apparatuses to SAF-controlled areas, however, these restrictions were no longer enforced in conflict areas. Consequently, local and national actors have since gained more humanitarian space.

A politicised regulatory framework

Legislation for national and local organisations acting in the humanitarian sphere in Sudan is designed to control humanitarian operations and organisations rather than facilitate the delivery of assistance. This is why the absence of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in some areas has expanded the humanitarian space for informal Sudanese humanitarian aid responders. While there exists a Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Law enacted in 2006 to regulate foreign and local NGOs, the HAC, Sudan's regulatory body, is fraught with state restrictions (Ahmed 17/08/2004; ACJPS accessed 31/10/2023). The Government of Sudan's deep distrust towards aid organisations with Western/foreign affiliations led to the establishment of the HAC, which is heavily linked to Sudan's security service, having an expanded role beyond NGO coordination to the monitoring and supervision of external aid stakeholders (TNH 29/06/2023; RD 13/02/2023; Al Jazeera 16/06/2023; Devex 15/04/2022). The former regime had enforced control mechanisms on NGOs operating within Sudan, whether local, national, or international, in exchange for access, permits, and licenses, failure to gain which led to their deregistration or suspension from operating in Sudan (TNH 29/06/2023; IWPR 09/04/2009). The situation also created concerns that state interference was threatening the international humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence among aid organisations (Devex 15/04/2022; HPN 06/08/2013). There is evidence to suggest that the HAC, driven by political and personal interests, would frequently engage in rent-seeking behaviour, further complicating humanitarian processes in the country (Al Jazeera 16/06/2023; Devex 15/04/2022). Since the conflict began in April 2023, however, the HAC has allowed national and international NGOs to operate in the country until March 2024 without having to renew their yearly operating licences (KII 27/12/2023; OCHA 25/09/2023). This change of policy is in part attributed to the fractured nature of the HAC, affecting its reach especially in territories where the RSF is predominantly based, such as Khartoum state and Darfur and Kordofan regions, and the transfer of government structures to Port Sudan (HO 12/2023). The diminishing power of the HAC in RSF-controlled areas has resulted in the RSF creating a parallel aid coordinating and regulatory structure named the Sudan Agency for Relief and Humanitarian Operations,

intended to replace the HAC while very much still embodying its tenets (RD 13/08/2023; HO 12/2023). This structure has not been effective in easing access constraints or eliminating prevailing artificial and structural barriers to humanitarian assistance (HO 12/2023). Agile, neighbourhood-based RCs, ERRs, and other informal community-based humanitarian initiatives have benefited from the absence of the HAC and other state security apparatuses in RSF controlled areas and have been able to operate locally to deliver humanitarian assistance where access restrictions continue to be an impediment to others.

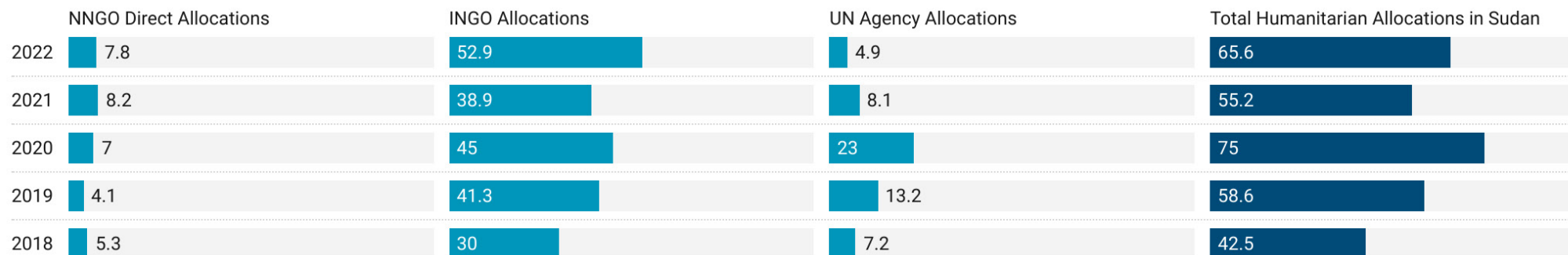
Challenges for local Sudanese organisations and initiatives in receiving direct funding

Local and national humanitarian stakeholders in Sudan responding to the crisis continue to face challenges with access to quality, direct, and adequate funding. Overall, persistent financial inequalities hinged on longstanding procedural and perception issues have slowed NNGOs' access to funding. Stringent requirements lock out national entities that lack the capacity to develop quality proposals (KII 02/11/2023). Consequently, few NNGOs competitively apply for direct funding, instead indirectly being granted allocations from INGO funding. At the same time, donor fatigue and shrinking resources as a result of multiple protracted and emerging crises have led to inadequate funding for Sudan despite a strong correlation between quality funding and adequate response.

As at 28 December, the revised 2023 Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan was 39.6% funded, while the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF) had attained USD 80.3 million as at 11 September (OCHA 28/12/2023 and 11/09/2023). SHF funding for local counterparts in Sudan continues to show that INGOs still enjoy more funding opportunities compared to Sudanese NNGOs. In 2023, 4% (USD 1.98 million) of SHF allocations directly funded NNGOs, while 84% (USD 40.90 million) was allocated to INGOs and 12% (USD 5.58 million) to UN agencies (OCHA 11/09/2023).

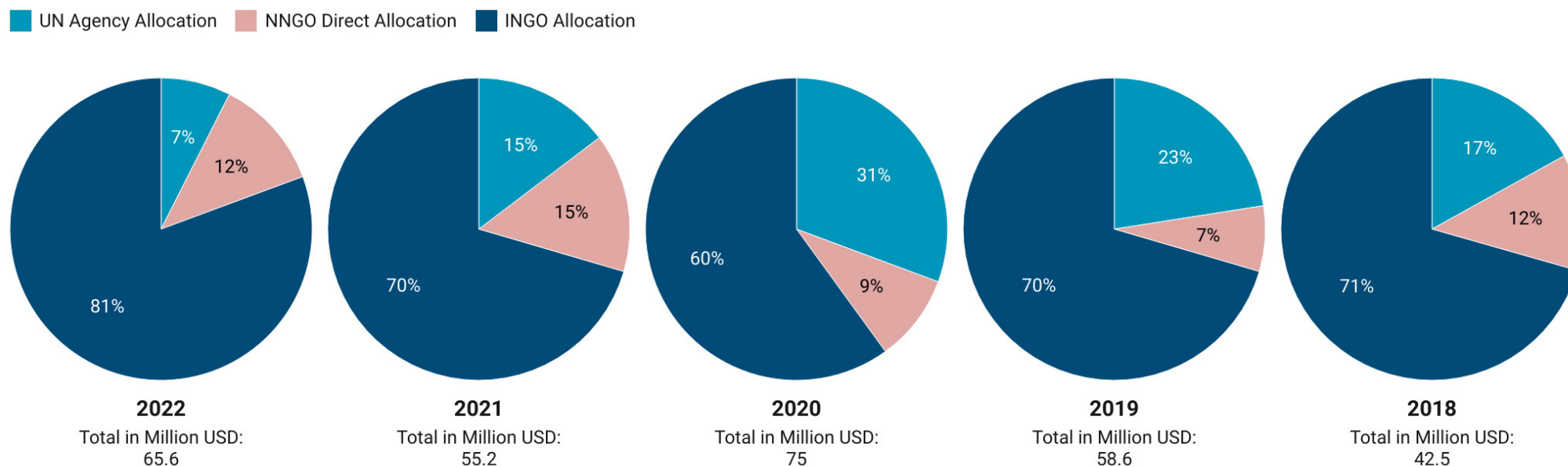
Despite the gradual increase of funds allocated to NNGO initiatives over the past five years, evidently, NNGOs have in the past three SHF cycles received less direct funding even though they have the capacity to receive more and broaden their operational scope. In fact, much of the funding NNGOs have received is from indirect INGO allocations. While increased indirect funding indicates an increase in partnership opportunities between local, national, and international stakeholders, it also signifies that international organisations continue to subcontract local and national responders and outsource operational risks. For comparison, NNGOs in 2022 received 12% of the SHF in direct allocations and 6% in indirect allocations, while INGOs received 80.7% in direct allocations (OCHA 24/10/2023).

Figure 1. SHF allocations from 2018–2022 (in million USD)



Sources: ACAPS using data from OCHA (11/09/2023; 24/10/2023 and 28/12/2023)

Figure 2. SHF allocations in percentages, 2018–2022



Sources: ACAPS using data from OCHA (11/09/2023; 24/10/2023 and 28/12/2023)

The same power dynamics and inequalities that plague NNGOs and INGOs in accessing funds are characteristic of the power dynamics between NNGOs and grassroots initiatives. As per a key informant, red tape hinders NNGOs from financially supporting grassroots initiatives. Instead, much of the support is rendered in the form of capacity building or the provision of non-cash items, to be supplied by grassroots initiatives to the people in need (KII 05/12/2023). The hierarchical setup that characterises conventional aid mechanisms has inadvertently resulted in a transactional relationship between well-resourced stakeholders, such as external aid organisations, and less-resourced stakeholders, such as national and local responders (CSF 11/05/2023).

Sudanese responders have turned to mutual aid and a solidarity economy to respond to the needs of the crisis-affected populations (TNH 19/10/2023). Different local responders have adopted innovative funding models, such as crowdsourcing and community donations, to continue mutual aid and keep assistance alive as much as possible. At the same time, the donor community and aid organisations are exploring direct funding mechanisms for local responders, such as ERRs, despite most of them being informal (HPN 11/10/2023; KII 30/10/2023; KII 01/11/2023; HO 12/2023).

Partnership opportunities

The NGO Act of Sudan stipulates for INGOs to partner with local NGOs to be permitted to operate in Sudan (IFRC accessed 06/11/2023). International organisations see the law as an attempt by the HAC to monitor relief organisations and even institute state interference, especially in Sudan, where aid has traditionally been politicised (Al Jazeera 16/06/2023; KII 02/11/2023).

Donors and aid organisations have become more receptive towards engaging local counterparts in terms of project implementation (Al Jazeera 16/06/2023; TNH 21/06/2023). Much of this renewed partnership is born out of the restricted access confronting the bulk of international humanitarian organisations. Some reports suggest that more donors are bypassing traditional aid structures and getting into partnerships directly with grassroots, local, and community-based responders, such as ERRs (KII 30/10/2023; TNH 19/10/2023; HO 12/2023). RCs' and ERRs' knowledge of local contexts, proximity to the community, and ability to quickly respond to and evolve with a crisis are acknowledged as vital elements of aid programming and implementation (HPN 11/10/2023). Despite progress, local responders express the need to scale up this model with international organisations into an inclusive, equitable, and longstanding partnership (CSIS 15/06/2023).

When it comes to the localisation of aid and humanitarian response, inclusive partnerships between local and international stakeholders have been envisioned to be the best

pathway towards meaningful localisation (ActionAid et al. 21/10/2019). Despite the hype around partnerships in aid localisation, however, the transition to equity and longstanding partnerships between international aid responders and local stakeholders continues to face barriers, such as the restrictions imposed by the authorities and humanitarian stakeholders alike (USIP 19/10/2023). At the same time, more international organisations have become risk-averse and opted to outsource risk to local and national NGOs (CSF 11/05/2023; KII 05/12/2023; Al Jazeera 16/06/2023). The situation resembles the implementing partner debate between UN agencies and INGOs and does not promote inclusive and equal partnerships.

Alternative coordination mechanisms in the face of a restricted operational environment

In Sudan's context, localisation has taken shape through the unlikely scenario of local responders coordinating efforts among themselves and bringing in new players in proximity to the crisis (KII 30/10/2023). For instance, the coordination modalities employed by ERRs may seem different compared to the UN's, but they are still very functional, effective, and fit for their purpose. In Khartoum, much like clusters and sectors, ERRs consider the community's sensitivities and priority needs to set up dedicated response rooms, such as rooms catering specifically to women and girls, child safety spaces, and soup kitchens to cater to emergency food needs (KII 30/10/2023; Khartoum ERR accessed 31/10/2023; HPN 11/10/2023). Although minimally resourced, the localised coordination framework continues to meet the needs of conflict-affected people.

The advent of these grassroots-level stakeholders in Sudan has brought to light new perspectives around humanitarian coordination structures that do not necessarily align with mainstream systems. UN agencies and INGOs have had to contend with a non-conformist, decentralised coordination approach led by grassroots groups responding to the community's humanitarian needs (KII 30/10/2023). While UN agencies and INGOs benefit from longstanding coordination and management structures and systems, as evidenced by a robust system of clusters, coordination with local responders is loose and lacks homogeneity. This is in part because they are highly localised and have varying degrees of priorities based on the needs of the communities they serve (HPN 11/10/2023). The collapse of critical communication infrastructure and cellular networks has further limited communication channels and coordination between RCs, ERRs, and other community-based efforts, at the same time affecting coordination between local humanitarian responders and the wider humanitarian community. Despite connectivity challenges, OCHA has made efforts to create channels where INGOs, UN agencies, and local humanitarian stakeholders can interface regularly to improve overall coordination (TNH 19/10/2023).

Adaptation and innovative approaches used to navigate aid delivery barriers

Innovation and adaptation are the hallmarks of the localised aid response advanced by local humanitarian entities in Sudan. The move by humanitarian organisations to transfer their operations to **safer parts of the country**, which experienced relative calm and had some semblance of governance, encouraged local humanitarian stakeholders to find alternative solutions to supply relief items. Cognizant of the numerous challenges that have impeded mainstream relief efforts from reaching people in need, local humanitarian practitioners made strides in establishing alternative aid coordination and delivery mechanisms, such as facilitating crossline relief efforts. This was in part because of the security, restrictions imposed by the authorities and logistical challenges of moving relief items from Port Sudan to areas such as Khartoum and the regions of Darfur and Kordofan and the increasing risk of aid interference and the instrumentalisation of humanitarian organisations by the authorities (HO 20/12/2023).

Accounts from key informant interviews also pointed out that military checkpoints along key routes were major barriers to supplying aid items. To navigate access challenges, local humanitarian responders reached localised arrangements with the conflict parties (The Star 11/12/2023). The use of animal-drawn carriages, such as donkey carts, to evade checkpoints, as opposed to the use of humanitarian-branded trucks, has become the norm, especially in areas under RSF control. While effective at outmanoeuvring armed parties and in aid delivery, these methods remain tedious and, above all, impose a burden of risk to the humanitarian personnel carrying out such operations (KII 07/12/2023).

The use of social media by local capacities to coordinate the response in the face of an increasingly fragmented geography in Sudan also demonstrated their inventiveness and the adaptability of locally available resources (KII 04/12/2023; SCCU 23/10/2023). Despite major communication channels being disrupted, local stakeholders have adopted the use of social media platforms to document their needs, fundraise, request resources such as water and food, and even guide displaced people towards safe routes out of conflict zones (Al Jazeera 16/06/2023). Pushed by necessity and the constant need to survive and be resourceful, local humanitarian responders constantly require creative thinking to meet needs (KII 07/12/2023).

SUDANESE HUMANITARIANS

There are a range of Sudanese organisations, entities, and initiatives providing life-saving and life-sustaining support in the current Sudanese crisis. Some formal and registered organisations, including local and national NGOs and Sudanese diaspora organisations, have been operational for decades as part of the broader humanitarian response (SCCU 23/10/2023). Other groups, which are informal and not regulated by Sudan's HAC, have adapted as needs changed. As the crisis consumed the country, Sudanese diaspora communities have also rallied to support their kin and communities, providing extension support and essential assistance (HPN 11/10/2023).

National and local LNGOs

As a result of the long history of crises driven by conflicts, political instability, and natural hazards in the country, there is a diversity of humanitarian stakeholders, including national and local NGOs, operating in the broader context of the Sudanese humanitarian crisis. As humanitarian needs persisted throughout protracted and successive crises, national and local NGOs have evolved and adapted to the nature and context of each crisis (OCHA 26/02/2023). National and local NGOs are coordinated and represented by the Sudan NNGOs Forum, established in 2020 in the wake of policy reforms in the humanitarian sector after the end of former President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's regime (USAID 18/12/2019). This forum also acts as a platform to bring NNGOs and other civil society organisations together, positioning itself as the focal point with the Government of Sudan, Sudan INGO Forum, INGOs, and UN agencies. As at 27 December, there were 90 NNGOs operationally present across all states of Sudan (OCHA accessed 27/12/2023).

NNGOs have scaled up their efforts by continuing operations in response to the worsening humanitarian situation despite operational challenges and the present humanitarian landscape. With the humanitarian community relocated to safer areas in Sudan, national and local NGOs have continued the programmes and operations initially carried out by international responders. NNGOs have been successful at delivering aid in areas with hard access, in some cases delivering aid across frontline settings amid complex security challenges (TNH 21/06/2023; ODI-HPN 17/08/2023). Such efforts have continued despite the looting of NNGO premises, their lack of adequate capacity, and insufficient funding to support their response (SCCU 06/11/2023).

NNGOs have continued to be the primary focal points between aid responders and aid efforts with most humanitarians operating from Port Sudan. Their intermediary role allows international stakeholders to indirectly offer assistance (through material aid and funds) as implementing partners to conflict-affected communities (KII 02/11/2023). This is because

unlike grassroots organisations, national and local NGOs are regulated, have a formal structure, are deemed to be professional outfits, and are subject to accountability and transparency thresholds (KII 01/11/2023; KII 02/11/2023; OCHA accessed 15/11/2023).

Strengths

- **Intermediary capacity:** national and local NGOs are better placed to access material and financial support from donors, UN agencies, and INGOs compared to grassroots initiatives. This support is, in turn, distributed to the conflict-affected communities in cooperation with grassroots initiatives (KII 05/12/2023).
- **Access to areas with hard access:** because of their strong operational presence in the country and close working relationship with grassroots initiatives, NNGOs have an extended reach, including in areas with hard access (ODI-HPN 17/08/2023; KII 04/12/2023; KII 05/12/2023). As such, they have the ability to access and respond to the needs of more affected people.

Challenges

- **Control by the government apparatus:** national and local NGOs operate in a highly controlled environment as they are regulated and registered by the HAC (SCCU 06/11/2023). Previously, the HAC has deregistered and revoked the licenses of some NNGOs. The HAC has also imposed additional regulations in some areas, affecting how NNGOs respond to crises (TNH 29/06/2023; RD 13/02/2023; Al Jazeera 16/06/2023; Devex 15/04/2022).
- **Security threats:** security concerns challenge safe access to operational areas. National and local NGOs and their facilities have been targeted and attacked in the past and continue to face security threats (SCCU 06/11/2023). NNGO staff have also been displaced by fighting in Khartoum state, Darfur and Kordofan regions, and, most recently, Gezirah.

Civic movements and initiatives

Civilian movements and societies are woven into the fabric of Sudanese society. They have been at the forefront of championing transformation in governance, economic policies, and the protection of civil and human rights (CMI 2021; USIP 18/05/2023). Sudanese civic movements and initiatives comprise a wide group of individuals and groups, such as university youth groups; community volunteers; civil groups and organisations, such as RCs and ERRs; and professional bodies (TNH 02/06/2023).

Resistance committees

RCs, also referred to as neighbourhood committees, predate the current conflict (CMI 2021; TNH 14/12/2021). RCs comprise youths, volunteer groups, and women-led initiatives in various

neighbourhoods. The groups are decentralised and non-hierarchical to ensure consensus in decision-making and coordination (TNH 02/08/2023). While established earlier, they re-emerged in 2019 during the pro-democracy calls that sought to bring an end to the thirty-year rule of al-Bashir (ICG 26/07/2023; Al Jazeera 22/04/2023). After the escalation of hostilities between the SAF and the RSF, RCs have redirected their efforts towards humanitarian assistance. With the conflict breaking out, insecurity, access restrictions, and the subsequent relocation of humanitarian staff to Port Sudan have hampered the humanitarian response in frontline areas such as Khartoum state and Darfur and Kordofan regions, leaving other areas with minimal and limited response capacity (REDRESS 27/09/2023; TNH 15/05/2023; RD 26/09/2023). To fill this gap, RCs have harmonised efforts to provide real-time assistance, such as the relocation of displaced people to safer areas, emergency medical aid, and shelter and food supply provision to the community and displaced people (AN 07/06/2023; Al Jazeera 22/04/2023). Local and national NGOs have also tapped into the resourcefulness of RCs for aid distribution and delivery and the mobilisation of people in need in the community for a targeted response. Recognising the impact and effectiveness of RCs, NNGOs have instituted capacity-building modalities through training and various sensitisation initiatives to strengthen and enhance their responsiveness (KII 05/12/2023).

Besides providing relief operations, RCs have also engaged in information crowdsourcing and dissemination through various media, notably through social media platforms (Internews 04/10/2023). Much of this information is vital in informing frontline responders of the needs and gaps in the response in crisis-affected communities (HPN 11/10/2023). RCs have also leveraged information crowdsourcing as a tool to inform displaced people of safer routes and for calls for resources, including material aid and technical capacities, such as engineers, technicians, and medical professionals, to render services to their communities (CSIS 15/06/2023; TNH 02/06/2023). RCs capitalise on their knowledge of the local situation and being in touch with the community in need to offer context-specific assistance (TNH 02/06/2023). This modality of assistance is agile and timely, allowing for aid delivery to where and when it is needed, and more successful at bypassing the obstacles imposed by conflict parties that humanitarian organisations face (TNH 19/10/2023).

Emergency response rooms

ERRs are local volunteer groups from the community. They emerged after the onset of the current conflict, originating from neighbourhood RCs. ERRs have positioned themselves at the frontline of relief efforts and aid delivery across multiple states, although they have been more active and successful in Khartoum, where the intensity of the conflict has persisted (SCCU 30/11/2023; HPN 11/10/2023). The popularity and effectiveness of ERRs stem from the fact that local aid responders use ERRs as a convergence platform to increase aid application at the community level (SCCU 30/11/2023). It is reported that in some areas where government structures have become ineffective, ERRs have taken over state services, such as by

establishing electricity connections, resourcing hospitals, and even allocating settlement spaces for conflict-displaced people (TNH 02/08/2023). ERRs are based on a reformist and decentralised community-led aid structure. Their pioneers are voluntary groups that prioritise the needs of affected communities by ensuring that they are placed at the centre of resource mobilisation and aid implementation (TNH 02/06/2023; HPN 11/10/2023). Although new and relatively different in terms of aid coordination from conventional humanitarian operations, the model pursued by ERRs has indeed shown that communities at the heart of a crisis can be effective humanitarian responders (CMI 2023).

Using their ingenuity and close bond with the community, ERRs have been able to deliver aid swiftly where needed, including in areas with difficult access, despite the scarcity of resources and security challenges (HO 12/2023). They have been successful at mobilising resources at the community level, such as medical supplies, food, and water, to address immediate. By assessing local needs to understand the impact of the conflict on their communities, ERRs have been able to design much-needed services. Such services include the setting up of women's rooms for a gender-sensitive response, community soup kitchens to address nutritional needs, and establishing vendor cooperatives to guarantee access to essential supplies and the flow of the much-needed money to sustain their activities (SCCU 30/11/2023; TNH 02/08/2023). Despite the innovativeness displayed by ERRs, their capacity to continue with aid response may face significant hurdles as resources within the community dwindle. Donors and INGOs have expressed willingness to tap into the local-led response by building capacity and offering material aid to grassroots initiatives such as ERRs, albeit without defining the terms and timelines for the full operationalisation of such partnerships (SCCU 30/11/2023; BBC 22/06/2023; KII 30/10/2023).

Strengths

- **Adaptiveness and knowledge of local context:** grassroots initiatives capitalise on their knowledge of the local situation and being in touch with the community in need to offer context-specific assistance (TNH 02/06/2023). Much of this information is vital to inform responders on the needs and gaps in the response for crisis-affected communities (CSIS 15/06/2023).
- **Trusted networks:** close and trusted networks between people and peers reinforced by shared beliefs and solidarity (nafeer) have been integral in resource mobilisation, information gathering and sharing, and response coordination (HPN 11/10/2023; SCCU 30/11/2023). The majority of frontline responders associated with grassroots initiatives originate from the communities they serve and have established personal or peer networks through their common struggles for democracy prior to the conflict. They rely on these networks to respond to the current conflict crisis.

- **Localised aid application:** aid response by RCs and ERRs is localised and unique to the needs of the conflict-affected community where the initiatives are domiciled and operate from (SCCU 30/11/2023). This attribute has enabled RCs and ERRs to focus and prioritise the response as informed by the needs of the targeted population in the face of limited resources and capacities.
- **Agility:** frontline responders drawn from the crisis-affected communities are able to deliver assistance much quicker and more effectively because of their knowledge of local contexts and innovative approaches to humanitarian assistance (SCCU 30/11/2023; BBC 22/06/2023). Unlike mainstream relief operations that are time-intensive and require massive resources, planning, and coordination, RCs and ERRs deliver spontaneous assistance and evolve with the situation, remaining practical and effective.

Gaps and challenges

- **Limited capacity:** community-based frontline aid responders largely operate in environments that are not well resourced materially and financially and that do not have adequate technical capacity, such as for the management of financial resources and reporting requirements (KII 07/12/2023; SCCU 30/11/2023). The paucity of capacity in Sudan's contexts has resulted in a limited scope of intervention by grassroots initiatives and the absence of homogeneous aid response in regions affected by the crisis.
- **Security risks:** operating in territories controlled by various warring parties puts volunteers at risk (HPN 11/10/2023; TNH 02/08/2023). The need for communication and negotiation within communities often results in them being labelled as supporting one side or another (Al Jazeera 09/05/2023). ERR volunteers have also been targeted, leading to arrests, detention, interrogation, and forced disappearance, posing a threat to those involved in community-driven responses (Al Jazeera 09/05/2023; SCCU 30/11/2023).
- **Funding challenges (informal and inconsistent funding streams):** limited available funds and funding options have stymied the operational capacities of grassroots initiatives such as RCs and ERRs. They majorly rely on donations and crowdfunding campaigns to raise funds, but these funding streams are neither consistent nor formal. ERRs and RCs also pose accountability risks for donors as they lack risk mitigation, accountability, and transparency frameworks. For this reason, stringent donor requirements limit direct engagement and financial support. In the absence of continuous funding for ERRs and RCs, some initiatives have been forced to shut down operations or take on debts to sustain their efforts in the face of limited resources (SCCU 30/11/2023).

Diaspora organisations

Several diaspora organisations have existed even before the current conflict, but hundreds, if not thousands, have emerged following the eruption of the war in April 2023. Sudanese diaspora organisations have leaned into their resourcefulness in providing vital assistance to conflict-affected populations. Such groups include the Sudan American Physicians Association, Sudan American Medical Association, Sudan Next Gen, and many more. Prior to the current conflict, diaspora organisations with links to Sudan were supporting the Sudanese community and local civic organisations to drive change in the country (SCCU 23/10/2023; DEMAC 01/08/2023). Much of this support came in the form of capacity building, material aid, and financial remittance as a response to past crises in the country. Primarily, the current efforts of the diaspora community are coordinated or realised through operational aid responders in the country and local civic movements and societies, such as RCs and ERRs (KII 04/12/2023). Millions of Sudanese live outside Sudan, making up the diaspora community, but Sudanese diaspora presence has increased as people flee from Sudan to other countries (SCCU 23/10/2023; DEMAC 01/08/2023).

As at September 2023, there were about 60 formal and informal Sudanese diaspora organisations actively providing humanitarian assistance in the form of material aid, skilled volunteerism, and financial remittances (SCCU 23/10/2023; DEMAC 24/10/2023). Despite most diaspora organisations being formed along professional lines, the scope of their response in Sudan cuts across all sectors of humanitarian needs. Through their networks, diaspora communities acquire funding via crowdsourcing initiatives, with the funds repatriated back to Sudan to fund relief efforts at the grassroots level (TWP 29/09/2023).

As at September, diaspora communities had crowdfunded USD 566,000 to facilitate humanitarian assistance both inside Sudan and to Sudanese refugee communities hosted in neighbouring countries (DEMAC 24/10/2023; Shabaka 27/06/2023). As at 1 November, two GoFundMe campaigns for Sudan had raised about GBP 40,000 or USD 48,000 at the current exchange rate (GoFundMe accessed 01/11/2023 and 01/11/2023 b). Increasingly, UN agencies and INGOs have become more receptive to partnerships with diaspora organisations in Sudan in part to leverage their longstanding commitment to localisation efforts and the demonstration of the capacity of diaspora organisations to respond to a crisis as complex as Sudan's (USAID 10/05/2023; Shabaka 02/08/2023; SCCU 23/10/2023).

Strengths

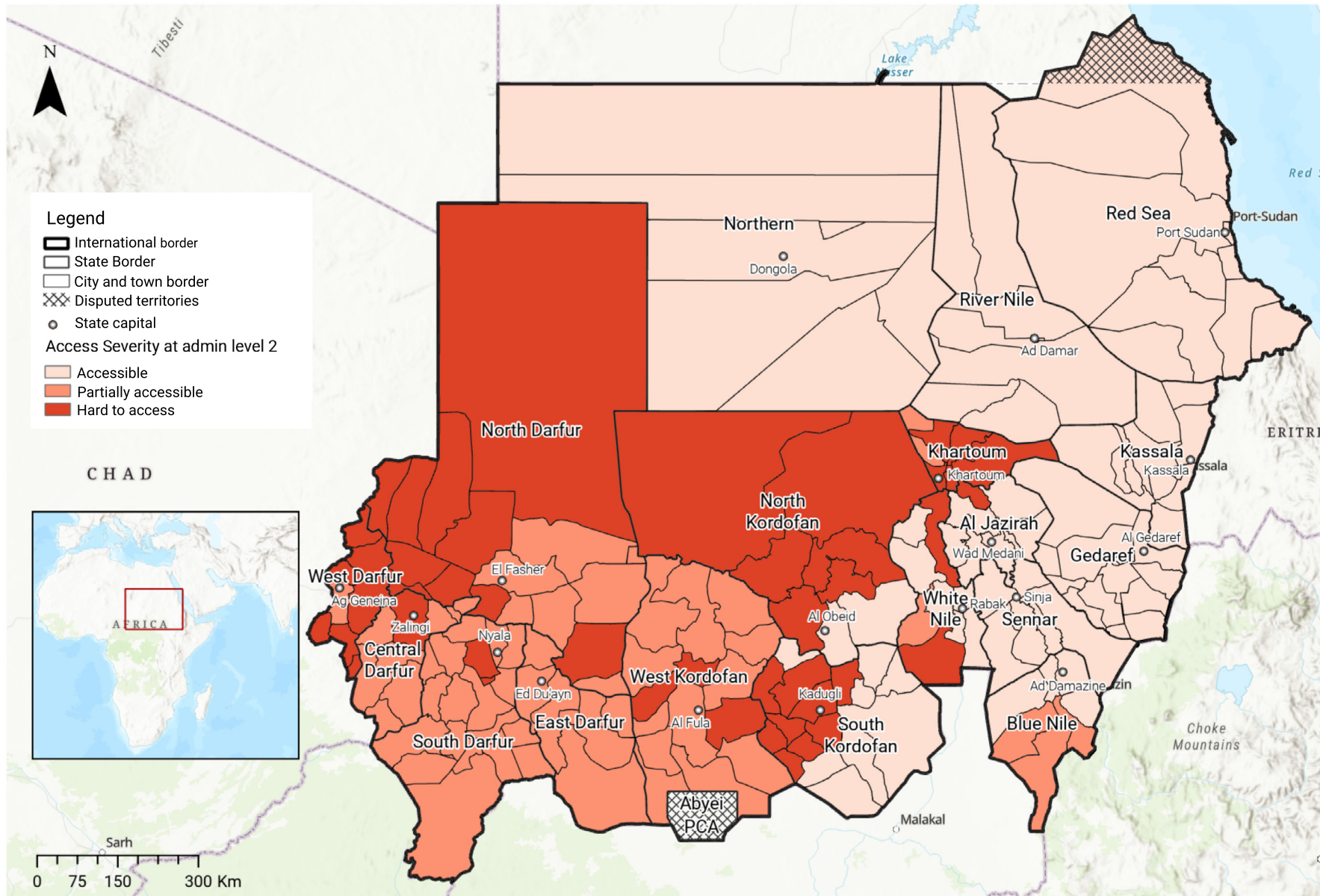
- **Response flexibility:** by tapping into the resourcefulness of local and diaspora networks, diaspora organisations can mobilise resources and coordinate aid response in a timely and flexible fashion (SCCU 23/10/2023; DEMAC 01/08/2023).

- **Sustaining technical skills and capacities:** most diaspora organisations are organised around workers from professional bodies that have expanded their roles to humanitarian assistance. Recognising this fact means that diaspora organisations are well placed to build the capacity of frontline responders in their respective communities through training in specific areas, such as primary healthcare (SCCU 23/10/2023; KII 04/12/2023). In this regard, technical skills and knowledge are transferred, building a layer of resilience in the community.

Gaps and challenges

- **Duplication of efforts:** the duplication of the efforts of diaspora initiatives and groups by various organisations within Sudan and abroad hinders the effective mobilisation and allocation of resources, as well as the dissemination of important information (SCCU 23/10/2023).
- **Financial capacity:** limited financial resources available to diaspora organisations restrict their ability to provide substantial support (SCCU 23/10/2023).
- **Sustainability:** considering that the bulk of diaspora assistance comes in the form of financial and material resources, sustaining the current humanitarian effort over an extended period is a challenge (SCCU 23/10/2023). Limited financial resources, global inflationary pressures, and overlapping priorities limit their capacity to consistently and sustainably deliver assistance. Individuals from the Sudanese diaspora have also been financially supporting displaced, host, and refugee communities for almost nine months, and this support may not be sustainable for much longer.

MAP 1. HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CLASSIFICATION



Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (08/01/2024).