



DEMAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

DIASPORA
HUMANITARIAN
ENGAGEMENT IN
SUDAN
REAL-TIME REVIEW

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CCEA	Communication, Community Engagement, and Accountability
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
DO	Diaspora Organization
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
FSP	Financial Service Provider
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HAC	Humanitarian Aid Commission
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KII	Key Informant Interview
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
RTR	Real-Time Review
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SAPA	Sudanese American Physicians Association
WHO	World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This real-time review is part of the Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination initiative (DEMAC) “Research study on diaspora humanitarian response and engagement”.

Since the outbreak of conflict in Sudan on April 15th, 2023, there has been a rapidly increasing humanitarian crisis in the country, particularly in the hard-hit areas of Khartoum, Darfur, and to some extent to Kordofan region. As international humanitarian organizations have scrambled to adapt to the new operating environment, the Sudanese diaspora has played a large role in sharing information, resources, and material aid to the country. However, there is little information about the composition and support provided by the Sudanese diaspora, as well as how diaspora actors and international actors could better coordinate to effectively address emerging humanitarian needs. To that end, Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) has commissioned a real-time-review (RTR) of diaspora engagement in Sudan.

Diaspora Composition and Responses

Sudan has long had an active diaspora, but the recent conflict has spurred the creation of a number of new, informal diaspora networks. From diaspora actors identified, a majority reside in the United States or United Kingdom, with also hubs in the Gulf states and Australia. About half are formally registered and have a governance structure, while the others are informal networks or diaspora individuals, many of whom formed in response to this conflict. Although many diaspora actors originate from Khartoum and have their most active networks in Khartoum and surrounding areas – particularly areas of transit in Sudan – there are some organizations that have operated in harder to reach areas such as Darfur due to their personal networks in the region.

The Sudanese diaspora response to the crisis has spanned most sectors and activity types although health has been particularly common. However, there has been a relatively distinct evolution of response activities from information-sharing to material support and now to longer-term aid, that has matched the evolution of the crisis. In the initial weeks of the conflict, the diaspora focused mainly on sharing resources, such as information on how to get medicine, transportation, or evacuation routes. This quickly led to an increase in more fundraising campaigns – primarily for medical and basic needs support, as well as evacuation funds – and advocacy efforts to encourage mediation attempts. Later on, as the conflict has seemingly become more protracted, some diaspora actors have shifted toward prioritizing longer-term support, including employment outside of Sudan, and providing educational opportunities for Sudanese refugees.

Fundraising

Fundraising has been a primary activity of diaspora actors in recent months. Over \$566,000 has been raised by the Sudanese diaspora, although this is likely an underestimation as it includes only funds recorded publicly. Funds are generally raised by either small and informal diaspora networks, or even individuals, who have personal networks inside Sudan that can support the movement of small-scale funds (less than \$5,000) into Sudan through hawala networks or mobile money applications; or they are raised by large, established diaspora organizations who are registered in third countries and have the capacity to obtain and spend large amounts of funds. However, organizations that receive large amounts of funds are largely based in North America or Europe, with many diaspora actors in the Gulf states reporting that restrictive fundraising regulations hinder their ability to receive or send funds to Sudan. Meanwhile, there is a notable gap of fundraising among either newly-formed or unregistered informal diaspora organizations who are either not able to legally receive funds, not understanding how to raise funds beyond crowdsourcing, or reporting that they do not have the internal capacity to absorb significant funds.

Coordination

There are strong personal networks among many diaspora actors who know each other from Sudan, either personally or professionally, that have facilitated a significant amount of intra-diaspora information-sharing and coordination. This includes diaspora actors who have partnered together on initiatives on education and employment for displaced Sudanese. At the same time, there are still many diaspora actors operating in relative “siloes”, in which they are not aware of what other organizations are operating, potentially leading to duplication of efforts. Though there has been some efforts to organize diaspora among themselves some warn that coordination for coordination’s sake may not be helpful for the response, and that any efforts to coordinate diaspora should be done at the behest of diaspora themselves and with a clear objective in mind.

Meanwhile, coordination among diaspora actors and international humanitarian actors has been lacking, either because they are not aware of each other’s work in the country or because of not knowing how and who to contact. Some diaspora reported reaching out to international humanitarian organizations and receiving no response. In the meanwhile, international humanitarian organizations argue that coordinating with the diaspora would be counterproductive amidst localization efforts. Instead, they prefer to send funds and partner with local organizations for implementation, acknowledging that diaspora organizations could be valuable in introducing them.

Communication, Community Engagement, and Accountability (CCEA)

Diaspora actors have been active since the start of the conflict sharing information and resources, primarily through social media. They have also been able to maintain online and offline communication with communities in need due to their personal connections inside Sudan, although most do state that internet connectivity impacted their ability to engage with communities. However, many diaspora actors interviewed still managed to conduct relatively robust “needs assessment”-type activities, as well as post-distribution monitoring, which contradicts the general perception that diaspora have less capacity to engage in monitoring and evaluation compared to international humanitarian organizations.

Despite relatively strong information-sharing and communication channels among diaspora actors and between diaspora and local communities, communication between the Sudanese diaspora and international actors has been significantly more challenging. Most diaspora actors interviewed for this study reported that they were not aware of any information-sharing mechanisms with the international humanitarian community and would not know how to access them. For diaspora actors who were aware of humanitarian cluster information-sharing mechanisms, this is primarily due to their personal or professional connections with humanitarian organizations, or because of the size of their organization.

Recommendations

For diaspora actors

Develop sectorial focus to sustain engagement beyond emergency response. Given the emergency nature of the response, diaspora actors often address emerging needs across various sectors. However, institutional donors are less likely to provide funding that do not fit within their sectors. As a result, diaspora actors that seek funding or support beyond an emergency setting should consider concentrating significant portion of their response efforts within a specific category, such as “livelihoods” or “protection” to align with sectors of international support.

Establish coordination mechanisms within the diaspora space. A remaining challenge in Sudan is that many diaspora and international organizations are working in siloes lacking awareness of other vital actors. To increase awareness among diaspora and in the international humanitarian community, diaspora actors should collaborate to develop coordination mechanisms on sectoral or other key criteria.

Consider non-humanitarian funding opportunities. Recognizing that the international humanitarian funding model may not favor organizations not present on the ground, diaspora can explore alternative funding avenues such as seeking support from civil society units within development agencies, tapping into the private sector and foundation funding, or applying for funding as an “individual consultant.” These often offer less bureaucratic and more flexible funding opportunities, including the possibility of funding for unregistered entities in their country of residence.

Consider expanding hubs of information- and resource-sharing on collaborative platforms. Diaspora actors should promote and share “resource pages” on their websites that consolidate critical information and resources for affected communities. Expand these efforts to include data from individual needs assessments. Recognize the importance of physical distribution in areas with limited internet access and ensure that diaspora organizations on the ground actively spread these resources to maximize their impact.

Utilize information and resources publicly available from the international humanitarian community to inform response efforts. A number of international humanitarian actors have begun publishing regular updates and needs snapshots across many regions in Sudan. Diaspora actors should use these existing resources to inform their programming when relevant to avoid duplicating needs assessments or similar activities.

Recommendations

For international humanitarian actors

Consider hosting “co-design” workshops with diaspora to collaborate on aid initiatives.

International organizations should consider hosting periodic “co-design” workshops with diaspora to brainstorm approaches to challenging issues in the response particularly on communication with hard-to-reach communities, provide a space where diaspora actors can get support on how to better establish their efforts and receive resources from the international community, and improve collaboration.

Allocate funding for specific diaspora initiatives. If the international humanitarian community faces barriers to providing longer-term support to diaspora actors for operational expenses, they should consider allocating funds to diaspora actors for their contributions to addressing specific operational challenges such as “innovation challenges” could be introduced that fund projects that address critical barriers.

Encourage more active diaspora engagement units. The lack of awareness among responding actors, as well as the limited responses that some Sudanese diaspora have received when reaching out to INGOs indicates that significant progress still needs to be made in encouraging existing internal “diaspora engagement units” to be more proactive in developing collaborations with diaspora actors and more concretely coordinate on-the-ground aid efforts.

Proactively reach out to diaspora actors to inform needs assessments or situational updates.

Diaspora actors have demonstrated that they relatively regularly conduct needs assessments and other data collection activities in their areas of intervention in Sudan, including in hard-to-reach areas. To prevent duplication of efforts and facilitate efficient communication, humanitarian actors should proactively seek out information collected by diaspora organizations, ideally with focal points for each sector.



1. INTRODUCTION

On April 15th, 2023, long-standing tensions between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted into a sudden and widespread conflict that began in Khartoum and has since spread throughout many of the country's southern states. The resulting damage has led to a large-scale humanitarian crisis, as significant proportions of the population are internally displaced or have fled to neighboring countries. As international humanitarian organizations have been slow to respond due to operational constraints, there has been a robust local crisis response effort, focused on information-sharing and provision of basic supplies through local groups, such as Resistance Committees and Emergency Response Rooms.

Throughout the conflict, the Sudanese diaspora has also been actively responding to the growing humanitarian crisis by sharing information, providing resources, and working with local actors to deliver aid across the country. Some of these diaspora actors have been active for at least a decade; however, many others were formed after the start of the war and remain relatively informal and decentralized. In particular, Sudanese that fled the country in the first weeks of the war have now formed many networks and groups of new 'diaspora' to rally support and resources for recent refugees and those still inside the country.

Due to the rapid outbreak of conflict and pressing humanitarian and other needs, there has been little focused effort on understanding how the Sudanese diaspora actors have supported recent crisis responses. Initial research by Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) has indicated that there have been a number of active diaspora groups involved in crisis response, but there is little information on how they have been able to coordinate with other local and international humanitarian actors.

In response to the growing need for information on the diaspora response to the crisis in Sudan and the importance of the integration of diaspora groups and individuals in international humanitarian efforts, Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) has commissioned a real-time-review (RTR) of diaspora engagement in Sudan since April 15th, 2023. The objective of this RTR is to both identify active diaspora organizations and networks in Sudan, as well as better understand the opportunities and challenges for diaspora organizations to operate independently or engage in partnerships with international humanitarian organizations supporting crisis relief efforts across Sudan.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research engagement approached the above research questions using a primarily qualitative approach consisting of a mapping of diaspora organizations active in the current crisis in Sudan and a series of key informant interviews (KIIs). The primary qualitative data collected was then supplemented by a thorough desk review of resources on the Sudanese diaspora response and a social media review of targeted diaspora actors.

Eleven key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted for this study, including interviews with diaspora organization representatives, diaspora individuals, international humanitarian organization representatives, and local NGO representatives. This included nine diaspora actors, one international humanitarian organization, and one local NGO.

Limitations

Largely due to the severity of the ongoing crisis in Sudan and the rapid process of this RTR, there are several limitations that had an impact on the process and results of this study. These limitations include a relatively small sample size of primary qualitative interviews, the lack of access to many informal response efforts organized over private messaging channels, and the inclusion criteria of diaspora organizations who are active online.



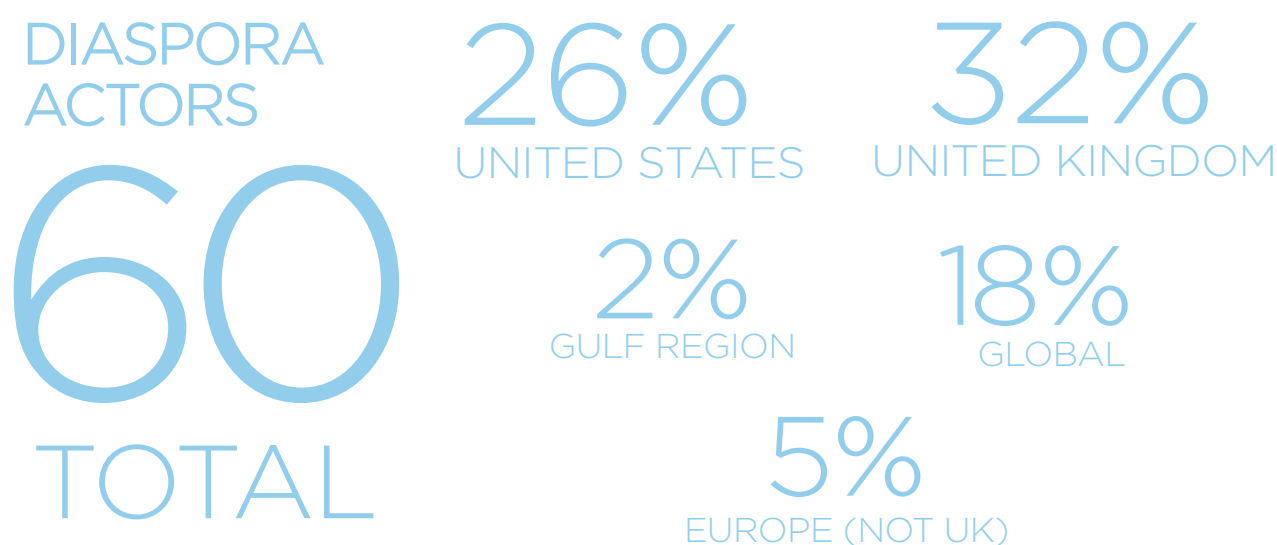
3. DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Sudan that began in April 2023 has spurred a large-scale wave of response from Sudan's diaspora community. This study identified 60 diaspora actors that have been active online in their response efforts since April, which likely only represents some of the Sudanese diaspora actors involved in the response.

The diaspora actors identified were split relatively evenly among diaspora organizations that were formally established and registered to varying extents in their country of residence, and diaspora actors that were more informal networks, mostly not registered, and staffed primarily by volunteers. Among diaspora actors that were more informal, about 20% of the diaspora actors identified in the mapping had only been formed after the outbreak of conflict in April. Although these actors are a minority of the total diaspora identified, they were often the most active actors in the response efforts in recent months.

A majority of diaspora actors identified (57%) were located in the United States or United Kingdom, followed by 18% classified as “global” (with no clear headquarters location). Notably, although there is a significant Sudanese diaspora population in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, there are relatively few Gulf regional diaspora organizations, which confirms that diaspora organizations in the Gulf are less active in political affairs, whereas diaspora organizations in North America and Europe are more likely to be registered and engage in higher profile activities.

Sudanese Diaspora Mapped



Although there has been a relatively broad geographic reach of support from diaspora across Sudan and in countries that are now hosting displaced Sudanese, Khartoum as an epicenter of the conflict – and the location of origin of many diaspora – has been the focus of many response efforts, with additional hubs of support in areas with high proportions of displaced individuals, such as Wadi Halfa, Dongola (both in the Northern State) and Wad Medani (in Al Jazirah State).¹ There has also been significant conflict impacts in areas such as Darfur despite the fewer diaspora response efforts in that region, largely due to access and security constraints that hinder the delivery of aid and/or funding.² However, there are some diaspora organizations that have been able to work in Darfur or in the border area between Darfur and Chad, largely due to their connections in the border areas. Outside of Sudan, there have also been a number of response efforts focused on Sudanese refugees in Egypt and South Sudan, where there has been a large influx of refugees from Khartoum particularly.

Although most diaspora actors identified engaged in a number of different sectoral responses, Sudanese diaspora actors were clustered in several key thematic areas. The primary area of intervention for diaspora was health, both through medical professional associations and diaspora who identified health as a primary need for affected communities.³ This included support to local emergency rooms and funds raised that were often reported to be spent on purchasing medicine and/or other health-related supplies. Outside of the health sector, there was also a notable focus on longer-term economic development support for IDPs and refugees. As the crisis becomes seemingly more protracted, diaspora initiatives have focused on identifying employment or education opportunities for displaced individuals.⁴

¹ KII 1.6, diaspora actor.

² Ibid.

³ KII, 1.4, diaspora actor.

⁴ This includes initiatives such as Ensaniya and Jobs4Sudan (detailed in the case studies below).

3.1. Response Modalities and Results

The Sudanese diaspora response to the crisis has spanned most sectors and activity types, largely due to the fact that the diaspora itself is extremely diverse in its areas of focus, professional backgrounds, and connections inside Sudan. One notable aspect of the diaspora response to the humanitarian crisis in Sudan has been its evolution of response modalities to match the current stage of the conflict and its corresponding needs.

Figure 1: Evolution of diaspora response efforts



In the initial weeks of the conflict, much of the diaspora activity stayed online and focused on sharing information, resources, and updates for those inside Sudan, particularly in Khartoum by connecting people on the ground with support such as pharmacies and hospitals, which was an emerging need at the time.⁵ As the conflict worsened, diaspora efforts began to shift to raising funds to support citizens to evacuate Khartoum, either to a third country or to another city inside Sudan.⁶ At this point, generally three to four weeks after the war started, a number of the diaspora-led fundraising initiatives were established, but they were primarily still hosted online with diaspora sending funds through mobile banking applications.

After the initial waves of evacuation, support from the diaspora generally shifted to providing material aid to those who did not have the resources to evacuate Khartoum, as well as those internally displaced inside Sudan. However, those who were able to deliver material aid at that time - in the first two months of the conflict - were largely diaspora organizations that were established prior to the start of the conflict and those already with formed relationships with local authorities, due to the challenges in delivering aid into Sudan at that time. Other, less formal diaspora actors had also begun working with local partners and organizations by June 2023, particularly fundraising and monitoring the delivery of aid to areas with high concentrations of IDPs. Priority material aid at the time - in addition to medical supplies - included food supplies and fuel.

⁵ KII 1.6, diaspora actor.

⁶ Ibid.

Advocacy also became an important response effort for the Sudanese diaspora after the initial weeks of the war. Advocacy efforts were largely focused on political pressure on the international community – particularly countries involved in mediation efforts, such as the US, UK, and the Gulf states – to strengthen mediation efforts, as well as advocacy to allow for visa-free safe passage and asylum for Sudanese leaving the country. This included the organization of in-person political rallies, as well as online advocacy sharing viral posts about the challenges that Sudanese faced in terms of crossing borders.

As it has become clearer in recent months that the conflict in Sudan will likely become a protracted crisis, more diaspora actors have begun to shift their response efforts to longer-term support for IDPs and Sudanese displaced abroad. This included employment matching initiatives (such as Jobs4Sudan), as well as diaspora-led initiatives such as Ensaniya working with education ministries in Egypt and South Sudan to allow Sudanese students to complete their educations, receive credentials that will be recognized outside of Sudan, and enroll in schools as displaced individuals. This shift in response activities mirrors how many have begun to perceive the longevity and impact of the war in Sudan, namely that humanitarian aid is necessary, but there should also begin to be a forward-looking strategy for how to support Sudanese in the coming months and years.

“We can’t just say that we’ll do development later – these people need employment and education now.” – KII, diaspora actor



3.2. Fundraising

Fundraising – either formally or informally – has been a primary activity of Sudanese diaspora organizations since the start of the war. The Sudanese diaspora has raised at least \$566,000 for relief efforts in Sudan since April 2023 according to publicly available information online.⁷ Fundraising efforts from diaspora identified in this study generally originate from two types of diaspora actors: 1) larger, more established diaspora organizations; or 2) informal community fundraising efforts, either virtually or through in-person, local events. Larger diaspora organizations, such as the Sudanese American Physicians Association (SAPA) or Hadreen (a registered NGO that also operates in the diaspora), typically fundraise through their website or establish crowdfunding campaigns that are directly linked to their website. Meanwhile, more informal, community-based efforts led by individuals or loose coalitions of diaspora actors in a particular location have led smaller fundraising initiatives of between \$5,000 and \$50,000. These are either organized through platforms such as GoFundMe and shared widely by diaspora online, or are in-person events held in third countries.⁸ However, some diaspora actors have noted in recent months that they have seen a significant decline in donations in recent months, after a spike in the initial month of the war, stating that “people have returned to their normal lives.”⁹

In order to transfer funds raised, diaspora have used both direct and indirect methods of delivery. Although some bank branches inside Sudan have reopened after initial infrastructure damage, many individuals outside of Sudan continue to rely on informal Financial Service Providers (FSPs) to transfer funds into Sudan, such as individual money transfer agents and hawala networks.¹⁰ However, moving funds in amounts greater than \$5,000 often requires more complex methods, generally with diaspora relying on networks of trust friends and acquaintances inside Sudan.¹¹ For example, one diaspora fundraising campaign stated that their volunteers would transfer amounts from their personal accounts and then be reimbursed, or they engage volunteers they know inside Sudan to pick up funds from a Western Union or through their Bankak mobile application who are then responsible for delivering those funds to final recipient.¹²

⁷ This includes fundraising efforts identified online that share the total collected to date publicly. This likely is an underestimation of fundraising efforts undertaken by the diaspora.

⁸ <https://www.gofundme.com/f/HelpingSudanOrg>; <https://www.gofundme.com/f/sdsdpw-sudan-emergency-appeal>

⁹ KII 4.2, diaspora actor.

¹⁰ Hawala networks is an umbrella term to refer to the informal transfer of funds through third party agents that charge a commission for transfers.

¹¹ KII 1.2, diaspora actor.

¹² KII 4.2, diaspora actor.

There is, however, a noticeable gap in fundraising efforts among smaller diaspora actors, including groups that have formed since the war and have not yet registered in their current country of residence. Diaspora actors interviewed stated that this was largely due to one of the three following reasons.

- First, fundraising and disbursement regulations vary significantly by country and region where diaspora organizations are located. Diaspora actors in the GCC states, for example, face strict fundraising regulations if they are not registered and significant barriers to transferring funds to Sudan through formal channels – such as bank transfers – even if they are.¹³
- Additionally, some smaller diaspora organizations have stated that they are unfamiliar with how to fundraise outside of community donations, namely submitting formal grant proposals or collaborating with donors.¹⁴
- Finally, there were several diaspora actors – primarily organizations that have formed since April 2023 – that have stated that, although they would require funding to scale up their current activities, they are currently not actively seeking external funds because they do not believe that they have the internal capacity to manage large grants.¹⁵

However, despite these challenges, a number of key informants stated that their ability to raise funds is essential because the primary issue that they are facing is workload and organizational capacity. As a result, a primary need for some of these organizations is funding streams dedicated for internal operations and overhead costs, which will allow them to pay full-time or part-time staff and build internal capacity to manage larger grants.

¹³ KII 1.5, diaspora actor; KII 1.6, diaspora actor; KII 4.2, diaspora actor.

¹⁴ KII 1.5, diaspora actor.

¹⁵ KII 3.2, diaspora actor; KII 1.6, diaspora actor.



3.3. Coordination

Due to the sudden outbreak of conflict in Sudan and the exponential growth of both international and diaspora efforts to address the humanitarian crisis, coordination among all actors remains a challenge. Most diaspora actors, even those established in recent months, have strong networks and connections with their diaspora peers due to their strong personal and professional relationships.¹⁶ For example, two diaspora organizations – one located in the UAE and one in South Sudan – who are both working on job placement and employment for displaced Sudanese have established a strong working relationship and share technical assistance and resources with each other.¹⁷ However, despite numerous coordination efforts among diaspora actors in recent months, some key informants stated that coordination remains relatively fragmented and ad hoc.¹⁸

“Lots of [diaspora] organizations are targeting the same problems and the same people. There is lots of duplication of efforts. Some efforts are also happening in siloes.” – KII, diaspora actor

For example, diaspora actors will often work bilaterally with other diaspora organizations that they know through their personal networks because they may not be aware of all diaspora organizations currently operating. As a result of this challenge, there have been some efforts to organize diaspora responses. Initiatives such as Ensaniya are attempting to create a real-time mapping of diaspora actors, what they are working on, and where they are operating to support collaboration efforts. Shabaka also specifically launched its Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit to improve information and map diaspora responses, especially who has been providing assistance and where they have been coordinating with international humanitarian organizations.

¹⁶ KII 1.3, diaspora actor; KII 3.2, diaspora actor; KII 1.5, diaspora actor.

¹⁷ KII 3.2, diaspora actor; KII 1.6, diaspora actor.

¹⁸ KII 1.2, diaspora actor.

Despite this challenge, some key informants questioned whether formalized coordination efforts among diaspora would be effective if they were created in the interest of international donors. If initiatives were top-down, it may not reflect the priorities of the diaspora themselves and may only include a select group of diaspora actors.

In addition to intra-diaspora coordination, there have also been examples of diaspora actors coordinating closely with local organizations and informal community groups inside Sudan to overcome operational barriers and deliver aid or programming more effectively. For example, although diaspora actors may be able to raise funds for domestic aid or identify communities in need of support, they will often state that they are partnering with local NGOs or medical facilities to actually deliver aid. One diaspora actor based in the UAE, but not officially registered either in the UAE or in Sudan, reported that they have partnered with local organizations in Sudan and in Egypt in order to legally fundraise and deliver aid.¹⁹

The largest coordination-related barrier reported by diaspora actors right now is coordination between diaspora actors and international organizations operating in Sudan. Although some larger, established diaspora organizations have been able to work with international humanitarian actors to access humanitarian clusters, these instances are relative infrequent. Several diaspora actors interviewed for this study have reported reaching out to international humanitarian organizations operating in their area, but have not received positive responses.²⁰

“It feels like [diaspora] are not getting enough support from international organizations. I reached out to contacts a UN agency in Egypt and I remember it was just a simple ask. I was asking for help to review some organizational documents because neither me nor anyone on my team has NGO experience...The response I got was that UN agency was not looking to support on-the-ground organizations.” – KII, diaspora actor

¹⁹ KII 1.6, diaspora organization.

²⁰ KII 1.4, diaspora actor; KII 1.6, diaspora actor; KII 3.2, diaspora actor.

When asked what the barriers are to increased collaboration, the most practical response is often the lack of visibility of diaspora actors among international organizations, or the lack of understanding by diaspora actors of the international humanitarian system.²¹ However, some key informants indicated that the challenge may be more pervasive than just the visibility of diaspora actors. There are some reported perceptions of diaspora among international humanitarian organizations that they are only “meddlesome amateurs” or that they only can be “cash machines or beneficiaries”, rather than constructive partners.²²

Meanwhile, international humanitarian organizations and international NGOs (INGOs) report that funding or support is prioritized for local organizations, rather than diaspora, at this time.²³ Although diaspora initiatives are Sudanese-led, for INGOs to provide funding to those initiatives, it would mean that funds are moving between multiple “international organizations” (i.e. donor to INGO to diaspora group), and then going to Sudan, rather than funds directly going from international organizations into Sudan, which they perceive as less efficient, as well as more difficult to justify to institutional donors.²⁴

Despite these barriers, most diaspora actors state that increased coordination between diaspora actors and international humanitarian organizations would be beneficial to both actors. For example, while international organizations have the financial means and capacity to conduct large-scale humanitarian operations, diaspora actors have significantly better access to real-time security information and are able to communicate more directly with communities in need.²⁵

Finally, although most discussion around coordination in the Sudanese humanitarian response focuses on intra-diaspora coordination or collaboration between diaspora actors and international actors, this excludes potential coordination with other critical actors, namely the private sector and local government officials. Operationally, cooperation with local government officials can be required or may provide access to, for example, state-run health facilities.²⁶ Meanwhile, a number of key informants emphasized the importance of collaboration with private sector actors, particularly in relation to job creation and industry for displaced Sudanese.²⁷

²¹ KII 1.2, diaspora actor; KII 1.3, diaspora actor.

²² KII 1.3, diaspora actor.

²³ KII 2.1, INGO representative.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ KII 1.5, diaspora actor; KII 1.7, diaspora actor.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ KII 1.2, diaspora actor; KII 3.2, diaspora actor.



3.4. Communication, Community Engagement, and Accountability

The use of social media and other informal communication channels has been a hallmark of the diaspora response in Sudan. During the initial weeks of the conflict, the most common “response activity” among diaspora was connecting people on the ground with resources. Diaspora in particular were able to use social media to identify community needs and provide information quickly to a wider audience inside Sudan.²⁸ A common, informal method to facilitate communication and needs sharing between communities inside Sudan and those with resources to support was the widespread use of a handful of hashtags. For example, if there was a household that needed a particular medicine or other item, it would be posted on Twitter with the hashtag “immediate need”, and those outside Sudan could search Twitter using that hashtag to identify needs and amplify calls for support.

The ability of Sudanese diaspora to remain in contact with affected communities has also allowed them to gauge humanitarian needs and conduct monitoring of aid or funds delivered inside Sudan. In fact, four out of the nine diaspora organizations interviewed for this study stated that they had conducted a formal needs assessment or monitoring mechanism in relation to their activities. This included a needs assessment survey in a refugee camp in South Sudan and online polls of jobs skills gaps. However, there were also a number of diaspora actors interviewed who did not provide details about community engagement efforts before deciding what type of aid to provide and stated that they were “following the situation” and “knew what people needed.”²⁹

²⁸ KII 1.2, diaspora actor.

²⁹ KII 1.5, diaspora actor.

Some diaspora organizations, such as Home Tax Sudan, conducted relatively robust monitoring of funds and material aid disbursement. This runs relatively contradictory to the general perception that diaspora actors, particularly informal actors, would be less likely or have lower capacity to conduct community engagement or monitoring activities, in comparison to international humanitarian organizations.

Communication between the Sudanese diaspora and international actors has been significantly more challenging. Most diaspora actors interviewed for this study reported that they were not aware of any information-sharing mechanisms with the international humanitarian community and would not know how to access them. For diaspora actors who could access them – primarily due to their personal or professional connections – they stated that there remain significant gaps to their effectiveness. Meanwhile, international humanitarian organizations and INGOs report that there could be an opportunity for diaspora to share important information and data collected on emerging needs at these cluster meetings, but that it should be provided at reliable intervals, rather than on a “one-off” basis.³⁰

³⁰ KII 2.1, INGO representative.



4. STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF THE DIASPORA RESPONSE



Strengths of the diaspora response

The rapid and widespread mobilization of the Sudanese diaspora after the start of the war in April 2023 demonstrates that diaspora actors have been able to respond quickly and effectively to Sudan's growing humanitarian crisis.

- **Effective communication with local communities.** Most diaspora actors interviewed for this study stated that the most important strength of the diaspora response was their ability to communicate effectively and efficiently with communities inside Sudan, through social media and personal networks.
- **Diaspora actors have found innovative ways to overcome operational barriers** commonly faced by international humanitarian organizations in crisis response efforts. They have leveraged their expertise in utilizing hawala networks, informal transfer methods, and collaborations with contacts within Sudan to establish intricate mobile money transfer systems as an illustrative example.
- **Mobilizing volunteers on the ground,** in Sudan and in neighboring countries, has proven effective for diaspora actors, enabling swift responses to emerging needs. This could offer valuable support to international humanitarian organizations, especially when dealing with staffing or bureaucratic challenges, facilitating expansion into hard-to-reach areas.



Challenges facing the diaspora response

Despite a number of strengths of the diaspora response to the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, diaspora actors also face challenges in how they operate and what they are able to achieve in particular sectors.

- **Diaspora organizations often encounter hurdles related to their capacity and legal prerequisites for receiving funding.** This issue of limited funding avenues or difficulties in receiving and managing funds has led some diaspora groups to personally cover a significant portion of the operational expenses incurred by their volunteers.
- **Many diaspora actors experience a common challenge of experiencing substantial overwork and mental and emotional strain due to the crisis in Sudan.** This includes dealing with both primary and secondary trauma from witnessing the war's devastating effects and its potential personal consequences and having been stretched thin by supporting evacuations of friends and family from Sudan, juggling their employment in their country of residence, and coordinating diaspora response efforts.
- **Political divisions within the diaspora response to Sudan's conflict, driven by the conflict's political nature, present challenges.** Diaspora actors may struggle to uphold strict political neutrality due to their origins in political upheaval. Some maintain ties to the Sudanese government, impacting aid distribution, while others avoid certain groups like the RSF. Additionally, some diaspora actors suggested that political divisions among diaspora organizations may hinder their effective collaboration.



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

There has been a notably robust response from the Sudanese diaspora community since the start of the conflict, much of which seems to be developing into a more long-term response effort considering the increasingly protracted projection of the crisis. At the same time, there still seems to be a significant gap in knowledge – among both diaspora actors and the international humanitarian community – around which diaspora actors are operating where and what their organizational objectives are. To address these challenges, as well as some of the other opportunities and challenges presented in this report, we present the following recommendations:

For diaspora actors:

- 1. Develop sectorial focus to sustain engagement beyond emergency response.** Due to the emergency nature of the response, efforts from diaspora have often been spread across different sectors as they respond to what they perceive are the emerging needs inside the country. Despite the strengths that this model has in terms of flexibility to respond to different needs, institutional donors are less likely to provide funding or other support that do not fit within one of their “units”. As a result, diaspora actors that seek funding or support beyond an emergency setting should consider focusing a bulk of the response efforts in one category (for example, “livelihoods” or “protection”) to facilitate their ability to be streamlined into a particular pillar of support in the international community.
- 2. Establish coordination mechanisms within the diaspora space.** A remaining challenge in the response to the crisis in Sudan is the fact that many organizations – diaspora and international – are working in siloes with a lack of understanding of who other important actors are in the response. To increase awareness among diaspora and in the international humanitarian community, diaspora actors should collaborate to develop coordination mechanisms on sectoral or other important lines. This would also support in establishing key points of contact for international actors to contact within the diaspora if, for example, they require assistance in providing medical support inside Sudan.
- 3. Consider non-humanitarian funding opportunities.** Although many diaspora actors have been engaging in providing humanitarian support inside Sudan due to the emergency nature of the ongoing crisis, the international humanitarian funding model is not necessarily structured to provide resources to “international” organizations that are not directly located on the ground. To mitigate some of these challenges, an alternate avenue for potential funding opportunities for diaspora initiatives may be in “civil society” support units of development agencies, seeking funding from the private sectors and foundations that may propose less laborious and flexible funding opportunities, or applying to fundings as an “individual consultant which often comes with fewer regulations in terms of, for example, whether a grantee is registered in their country of residence.

- 4. Consider expanding hubs of information- and resource-sharing on collaborative platforms.** Diaspora actors have played a significant role in sharing critical information and resources with affected communities, primarily through social media, and have now attempted to create “resource pages” on their websites to consolidate this information. This should be further promoted and shared among affected communities as a way to organize important information, as well as to combat potential misinformation. Furthermore, this can be expanded to organize information collected from individual needs assessments conducted by diaspora actors. Although this can largely be done online, diaspora organizations working on the ground should consider how they can spread these resources physically on a regular basis considering the relative disparities in internet access among some affected communities.
- 5. Utilize information and resources publicly available from the international humanitarian community to inform response efforts.** A number of international humanitarian actors have begun publishing regular updates and needs snapshots across many regions in Sudan. Diaspora actors should use these existing resources to inform their programming when relevant to avoid duplicating needs assessments or similar activities.

For international humanitarian actors:

- 1. Consider hosting “co-design” workshops with diaspora to collaborate on aid initiatives.** To both gather insights and perspectives from the diaspora community, as well as to support newly-formed diaspora organizations to develop their objectives, international humanitarian and development organizations should consider hosting semi-regular “co-design” workshops with diaspora to brainstorm approaches to challenging issues in the response, provide a space where diaspora actors can get support from international organizations on how to better establish their efforts and receive resources from the international community, and improve collaboration.
- 2. Allocate funding for specific diaspora initiatives.** If the international humanitarian community faces barriers to providing longer-term support to diaspora actors for operational expenses, they should consider allocating funds to diaspora actors for their contributions to addressing specific operational challenges. For example, “innovation challenges” could be introduced that fund projects – either in the diaspora or otherwise – that address critical barriers. These projects could include, as many have already begun among the diaspora, to create reliable mobile banking solutions to ease the transfer of funds into Sudan, or to establish platforms that improve job placement opportunities for displaced Sudanese.

- 3. Encourage more active diaspora engagement units.** The lack of awareness among responding actors, as well as the limited responses that some Sudanese diaspora have received when reaching out to INGOs indicates that significant progress still needs to be made in encouraging existing internal “diaspora engagement units” to be more proactive in developing collaborations with diaspora actors. Developing diaspora engagement points of contact at international humanitarian organizations would be particularly helpful to more concretely coordinate on-the-ground aid efforts. For example, establishing a point of contact within a refugee organization’s South Sudan country office that can communicate with diaspora groups would be helpful in that it would provide a concrete touch point for diaspora groups to reach out, and would streamline their communications with international humanitarian organizations.
- 4. Proactively reach out to diaspora actors to inform needs assessments or situational updates.** Diaspora actors have demonstrated that they relatively regularly conduct needs assessments and other data collection activities in their areas of intervention in Sudan, including in areas where they may have more access than international humanitarian actors. To prevent duplication of efforts, international humanitarian actors should proactively seek out information collected by diaspora organizations. Ideally, efforts in each sector would be coordinated among diaspora actors with focal points (see previous recommendations), which could facilitate efficient communication between international humanitarian actors and diaspora actors.



ANNEX I: CASE STUDIES

Case Study I: Ensaniya

Location: Global

Website: sudancrisis.org

Ensaniya's Sudan Crisis Hub was established soon after the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in 2023 with the idea of creating a network of diaspora and other relevant actors to improve coordination and serve as a hub for support. As a self-funded and volunteer-led effort, Ensaniya has established six thematic task forces – health, finance, insurance, employment, youth engagement, and private sector engagement – to support collaboration among diaspora groups, international actors, and even government agencies and the private sector. These task forces seek to bring together actors working on the same thematic area to coordinate efforts and develop joint solutions to particularly prominent challenges. The finance task force, for example, has engaged the head of the United Capital Bank (UCB) to try to develop a direct bank-to-bank settlement system – similar to Zelle – around UCB and the Bank of Khartoum to facilitate easier funds transfers into Sudan.

Meanwhile, another critical aspect of Ensaniya's efforts is to serve as a "fiscal sponsor" to smaller diaspora-led initiatives in order to support them to identify funding opportunities and manage the due diligence and other required paperwork.

Finally, Ensaniya has begun developing a stakeholder mapping of all large and small diaspora-led efforts working on the humanitarian response in Sudan to mitigate the challenge of actors not knowing what others are working on. Unlike other ongoing mapping efforts, Ensaniya hopes this is more than a single snapshot, but is instead a living database of organizations that is continuously updated.

Case Study II: Jobs4Sudan

Location: Global

Website: www.nasalsudan.com/jobs4sudan

In response to the high levels of displacement and unemployment among Sudanese, Jobs4Sudan was created by a diaspora individual abroad to connect job seekers with potential employment opportunities globally. Since its creation in May 2023, Jobs4Sudan has established a database of over 500 CVs, the majority of which are Sudanese refugees in Egypt or IDPs still in Sudan. Through its connections with organizations and recruiting companies abroad, Jobs4Sudan has led to 10 direct hires of job seekers and eight hires from job postings disseminated.

Beyond its employment database, Jobs4Sudan also provides remote skills training on a variety of topics. The organization has hosted 15 webinars, each with between 50 and 100 attendees, that focus on skills such as updating LinkedIn pages, resume-building, and interview skills.

Moving forward, Jobs4Sudan has developed partnerships with local NGOs in Egypt and Sudan to connect refugees and IDPs with training institutes and workshops focused on employment and professional skills.

Case Study III: Darfur Union UK

Location: United Kingdom

Website: darfurunionuk.wordpress.com

Established in 2003 in response to the genocide that occurred in Darfur, the Darfur Union UK has been a long-standing volunteer-led diaspora organization focused on raising awareness about the political and humanitarian situation in the region. Since the start of the war, and particularly after conflict spread into Darfur, the Darfur Union has been actively involved in coordinating the delivery of aid and documenting human rights abuses by both parties to the conflict.

Due to its extensive network of local contacts in Darfur and the operational challenges to accessing Darfur for most organizations, the Darfur Union has coordinated a number of aid delivery efforts. This includes amassing funds collected by diaspora medical professionals in the US, UK, and the Gulf to deliver to local pharmacies across Darfur. The organization has even supported UN agencies by providing information on safe routes for the delivery of aid from Chad into Darfur.

Beyond material aid, the Darfur Union has been active in compiling video and written evidence of human rights abuses in Darfur, and supporting in geolocating recorded material of violence. The organization has then submitted these files as evidence to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for any potential proceedings as a result of the ongoing conflict.

Case Study IV: Al Kebulan for Sudan Aid

Location: South Sudan

A diaspora individual living in Juba established Al Kebulan for Sudan Aid in response to the influx of Sudanese refugees into South Sudan since the start of the conflict. Officially registered in South Sudan, but self-funded and volunteer-run, Al Kebulan originally started with a focus on job placements for Sudanese refugees. They identified refugees living in camps who had professional experience in the oil and gas sector – the sector that the organization had connections with – and connected eight refugees with permanent jobs where they are now on their third payroll cycle as of September 2023.

The organization continues to work in job matching, hoping to expand its partnerships with private sector companies, but has now also started providing psychosocial services to Sudanese refugees in Juba. As the founder of the organization realized during their surveys in refugee camps, many displaced Sudanese required mental health support due to the trauma of the war before being able to being full-time work once again. In order to provide these services, Al Kebulan has formed partnerships with Sudanese psychologists in the diaspora who have offered to provide remote counseling services.

Case Study V: Shabaka

Location: United Kingdom

Website: shabaka.org

Shabaka is an organization working on diaspora engagement and has been focused on diaspora involvement in Sudan for over a decade. Since the start of the war in April 2023, Shabaka has formed a dedicated Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (SCCU) that is seeking to facilitate coordination among actors and provide support for forming effective partnerships and localized delivery of aid. They have been active in sharing resources, event invitations, and relevant trainings for Sudanese diaspora actors, as well as independently developing research briefs on topics such as avenues for cash transfers in Sudan and practical steps to create a localized response to the crisis.

Shabaka has also collaborated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to develop a research brief that maps Sudanese diaspora responses in the United Kingdom. The resulting mapping will seek to identify innovative ways in which the diaspora have responded and how they can be better supported in their response efforts.





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