



DEMAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

DIASPORA
HUMANITARIAN
ENGAGEMENT IN
SUDAN
REAL-TIME REVIEW

h—h
H2H Network
Humanitarian
Action Support



Sida

DRU DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

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.



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