Sudan has for decades been the site of protracted violent conflict and routine abuses of international humanitarian law by conflicting parties. A civil war with the south led to the secession of South Sudan in 2011, and conflicts in Darfur, and in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the “Two Areas”, continue, driving displacement and acute humanitarian need. Its president, Omar Al-Bashir, remains the subject of an outstanding arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide in Darfur.\(^1\) Sudan has recently gained attention as a transit hub for human trafficking, smuggling and migration to Europe.

Sudan’s crisis in numbers\(^2\)

- 4.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (out of a population of 39.6 million).
- 4 million long-term displaced people\(^3\)
- Sudan’s humanitarian response plan for 2017 is only 25% funded\(^4\)
- 3.6 million people are currently suffering from crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, and 2.2 million children are suffering from acute malnutrition.\(^5\)

Woman in her temporary home in the Sudanese mountains, located in caves as shelter from aerial bombardments © Samantha Hudson/HART
Key challenges

Humanitarian access

Humanitarian agencies live in the shadow of an en masse expulsion of aid agencies by President Bashir following his 2009 ICC indictment, as well as individual ejections afterwards, usually in the months preceding “dry season” offensives. The issue of humanitarian access has recently come to dominate and potentially derail the peace process between conflicting parties, notably a disagreement about cross-border provision of aid to the Two Areas.

In Darfur, provision of humanitarian aid is tied to the operations of the region’s hybrid UN - African Union peacekeeping mission, UNAMID. The mission has long suffered routine violations of its agreement with the Government of Sudan, including on gaining access to conflict areas, such as the Jebel Marra region that was the site of heightened violence in 2016. In June 2017 the UN Security Council made the decision to close parts of the mission and reduce the military and police components by almost a half and a third respectively. Concerns have been raised about the ability of Sudanese state bodies or the UN country team to replace this lost capacity, especially given long-standing shortages in funding. This will severely impact humanitarian service delivery moving forward.

A January 2017 decision taken by the United States to partially lift 20-year sanctions against Sudan was in part tied to progress on humanitarian access. This, as well as guidelines on directives and procedures for humanitarian action issued in December 2016 by the country’s Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), have been credited with the easing of bureaucratic impediments to the delivery of aid. However, the gains are marginal, and unfettered access, as well as sustained and sustainable service delivery, remains a distant reality.

Displacement and migration

Conflict has driven waves of displacement from and within Sudan, with particularly high levels of internal displacement, as well as long-term displaced populations living in neighbouring countries. Many are repeatedly displaced, so although upwards of 200,000 individuals are classed as returnees over the last three years, these groups remain vulnerable to further displacement. Many also cite fears that their homes and land have been distributed to groups held in favour by the government, with the aim being to demographically change the region, particularly Darfur.

Recently, Sudan has been of renewed interest to the international community as a transit country for Horn of Africa refugees and migrants on their way to Europe, and also as a host country for large numbers of people fleeing the conflict in South Sudan. Development assistance is increasingly tied to migration outcomes. In the European Union (EU) this takes the form of the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative, or “Khartoum Process”, with a €100 million development pot repackaged as a plan to improve livelihoods to reduce migration “push factors”, as well as other funds totalling €46 million for use in improving security and border control measures. There are concerns that the Khartoum Process fails to take into account the needs and wishes of vulnerable migrant populations living in Sudan, as well as those who are forced to flee the country, and may actually worsen their situation given that promised funds may embolden security actors.

Against this backdrop, the UK is uniquely placed to improve the situation on the ground in Sudan because of a “Strategic Dialogue” currently underway between government officials from both countries. This affords an opportunity to address shared issues of concern, including improvements to humanitarian access and delivery, and commitments to a responsible approach to forced displacement, migration and mobility.
Recommendations

We urge the UK government to:

• Use the opportunity afforded by the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue to push for rigorous, enforceable benchmarks on humanitarian access.

• Decouple discussions about humanitarian access from political dialogue between conflicting parties, leading to an inclusive and comprehensive peace.

• Prioritise the needs of vulnerable populations in engagement on migration, and the establishment of safe, legal migration pathways for those for whom leaving the country is the only option.

• As the penholder on Darfur in the Security Council, the UK should continue to push for UNAMID to have a strong protection of civilians mandate, and ensure it is adequately resourced to undertake it. Now that the mission has been repurposed with a peacebuilding mandate, it needs to be ensured that their existing vital programmes, and the populations they support, are not simply abandoned.

• As a substantial donor to humanitarian efforts in Sudan, the UK should keep a watchful eye on Sudan’s implementation of new HAC directives and procedures to ensure that they fully remove bureaucratic impediments, and result in actual aid delivery.

Case study

Dialogues for peace in Abyei

In the past year, the Abyei area has seen the peaceful resumption of pastoral migration, in part achieved through the work of Concordis International. Last year, a joint pastoralists’ meeting was held in Amiet, where 63 participants from both Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities discussed the challenges to the February 2016 Peace Agreement.

They paid particular attention to practical measures around the seasonal movement of people and their livestock to new pastures, which often caused tensions and sometimes violence between pastoralists and local communities.

Peace, reconciliation and forgiveness have resulted in an undisrupted farming season and the opening of Amiet market, as well as the resumption of migration routes and strengthening Ngok Dinka-Misseriya relations.

The Joint Pastoralists’ meeting is the latest in a series of inter-community dialogues organised by Concordis to address the challenges facing specific groups, including youth, women and traders.

For further information, please contact the Sudan Working Group chair, Maddy Crowther maddy.crowther@wagingpeace.info