

Crisis response: Sudan

Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation (CCHN)



Humanitarian negotiations for a timely and principled humanitarian response to the Sudan crisis

Sudan has been grappling with a devastating conflict since April 2023 – displacing millions and deepening an already dire humanitarian crisis. Widespread violence has led to severe food insecurity, the collapse of essential services, and restricted humanitarian access, leaving countless civilians without life-saving aid and exposing them to grave protection risks. Many areas – including Khartoum, Darfur, and Kordofan – remain highly volatile, with ongoing clashes preventing safe movement.

In this challenging environment, humanitarian workers must negotiate access to affected populations with a range of actors, including armed groups and local authorities. These negotiations cover critical aspects such as security guarantees, movement permissions, and the delivery of urgent aid. However, access is increasingly constrained by shifting frontlines, bureaucratic hurdles, and threats to humanitarian personnel.

Gaining the trust and acceptance of all parties is essential, yet complex power dynamics and fragmented control make this particularly difficult. Negotiators often face challenges securing safe humanitarian corridors, overcoming administrative barriers, and ensuring aid reaches those in need without interference. In such protracted crises, effective humanitarian negotiation requires adaptability, persistence, and a nuanced understanding of the conflict landscape.

The CCHN response

The CCHN has been supporting those engaging in negotiations in the country by providing advice, guidance

and negotiation capacity-building since the outbreak of the conflict.

As of early 2025, the CCHN has trained and established a network of more than 150 Sudan-based frontline negotiators and has connected them to a wider community of over 8,300 humanitarian practitioners operating in different contexts worldwide. The CCHN established a robust strategy to meet the needs of humanitarian workers and organisations as they scale up efforts in this complex environment.

1. Enhancing the negotiation capacity of frontline humanitarian workers

a. In-person workshops on humanitarian negotiation

During 2024, the CCHN organised four in-person humanitarian negotiation workshops in Port Sudan and Adis Ababa. 150 professionals from different humanitarian agencies working on the Sudan response were trained to plan and conduct negotiations in a professional, systematic manner. These events were designed not only to equip participants with strategic negotiation tools and methods but also a safe space to exchange negotiation experiences and share their learning. A series of similar workshops are planned to take place in 2025, including in hard to reach and border areas.

Recognizing the critical role that the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement play in assistance and protection efforts in Sudan, the CCHN has been providing dedicated support to these partners. In August 2024, the CCHN organized a dedicated training to enhance the negotiation capacity of the Sudanese Red Crescent staff; in April 2025, the same was done for a broader group of movement partners operating in Sudan, including the International Committee of the Red Cross.

b. Tailored training opportunities on protection, health and bureaucratic impediments

In July 2024, the CCHN hosted a negotiation workshop focused on protection efforts. Participants explored common protection challenges and learned how to best prepare a negotiation strategy to address them; the training also strengthened their ability to navigate sensitive conversations and communicate effectively.

In collaboration with the Health Cluster and the World Health Organization, the CCHN delivered a briefing session for healthcare actors. Participants included staff from Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, UNDP, and UNICEF, as well as national actors such as the Sustainable Development Organization (SuDRO) and Dar for Community Development.

Building on the insights from this session, the CCHN tailored a three-day negotiation workshop for healthcare staff, held in Port Sudan in February 2025. The workshop featured case-based discussions and peer exchange, drawing on the CCHN's research to support deeper, context-specific learning for humanitarian professionals working in health.

c. Application of negotiation tools to real-life case studies

The CCHN supports humanitarian agencies and field teams by advising them on negotiating access and protection matters based on our analytical tools and policy work. In Sudan, the CCHN offered tailored guidance to navigate complex humanitarian scenarios and helped field teams apply CCHN's strategic tools to their local challenges, in particular in Gedaref and Kosti.

2. Strategic engagement with country-level humanitarian leadership

The CCHN works closely with its strategic partners, providing capacity-building opportunities for staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN World Food Programme.

a. Strengthening collective negotiation efforts in Sudan

In collaboration with the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the Sudan International NGO Forum, the CCHN facilitated a three-day workshop focused on enhancing collective negotiation capacities. Bringing together around 30 NGO Country Directors, Deputy Directors, and Area Coordinators operating in Sudan, the workshop explored strategies for developing common negotiation positions, shaping effective negotiation approaches, and reviewing current engagement practices with relevant stakeholders and authorities. Participants also worked on streamlining conditionalities related to cross-border access from Chad.

b. Advisory services for senior humanitarian leaders, including the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)

The CCHN continued to provide confidential advice and guidance to various humanitarian leaders focusing on the Sudan Crisis.

3. Strategic engagement with States

The CCHN continued its efforts to consult with different stakeholders on how frontline challenges can become actionable steps at a diplomatic level.

In the context of the famine response, the CCHN delivered an Operational Access Workshop that brought together over 50 humanitarian professionals from around 20 organisations, including national and international NGOs, UN agencies, and others.

The workshop provided key findings that the participant organisations could then translate into actionable requests for States to support humanitarian operations in Sudan.

Looking ahead: Our engagement in Sudan – in 2025 and beyond

Building on its work to date, the CCHN will continue supporting the humanitarian response in Sudan through a multi-layered strategy to strengthen negotiation capacity. In 2025, we will launch operational research to identify negotiation trends, challenges, and opportunities, which will inform the development of tailored cases and learning materials. We will expand our activities to include Advanced Humanitarian Negotiation Workshops, Training of Facilitators, and dedicated sessions for senior humanitarian leadership. In parallel, we will offer workshops focused on soft skills and pressure management to support frontline staff in high-stress environments. Continued advisory support for humanitarian organizations and engagement through humanitarian diplomacy channels will ensure sustained, context-sensitive accompaniment.

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