

Community-Led Resilience Amid Conflict and Displacement in Sudan and South Sudan

Sudan and South Sudan | Duration: August 2022 - November 2024 | Implementing partners: Near East Foundation (NEF), Centre for Emergency and Development Support (CEDS), Global Aid Hand (GAH)

The Challenge

Communities in Sudan and South Sudan face acute displacement pressures due to conflict and climate-related shocks. The war that erupted in Sudan in April 2023, followed by renewed violence in Al Jazirah and Abyei, triggered mass displacements, forcing humanitarian actors to evacuate and disrupting service delivery. Communications blackouts, road closures, and financial system collapse further compounded the crisis, limiting access to essential services for displaced and host populations alike. Influxes into northern South Sudan stretched local resources and placed significant pressure on host communities. Meanwhile, insecurity and flooding in several regions impeded movement and delayed programming.

In this volatile environment, reaching displacement-affected people with basic services and livelihoods support required creative, locally rooted solutions that could withstand rapid shifts in the operating context.

The Solution

This project established and strengthened community associations in Sudan and South Sudan to deliver integrated basic services in conflict-affected settings. By investing in decentralized, community-led structures, the project maintained service delivery through crisis periods, even when NGO staff were unable to access project sites. Using a flexible, hybrid implementation model, local associations led frontline service delivery, with remote support from partners.

Geographic pivoting ensured continuity of operations: the project relocated from Khartoum to Al Jazirah and later to White Nile State, while programming in Abyei shifted to the Ruweng Administrative Area. Throughout, service delivery continued through empowered community members trained in technical areas including WASH, protection, vocational skills, and financial services.

What Made This a Promising Practice?

This project stands out for its adaptive, community-led implementation during one of the world's most volatile displacement crises, investing in local structures that enabled service continuity when traditional models collapsed while maintaining flexibility through the Lives in Dignity Grant Facility for geographic and operational shifts. The emphasis on localization proved highly effective as community associations became vital civil society actors leading service delivery and demonstrating decentralized governance value in fragile contexts. Innovations in financial delivery mechanisms ensured cash and livelihood access in banking deserts through tailored grants and loans, while vocational training enhanced employability, and locally embedded protection systems for SGBV survivors sustained operations during reduced external presence, offering a replicable model for conflict-prone regions.

The Response

The project was severely tested by the outbreak of war in Sudan and subsequent insecurity across multiple regions. Initial plans for direct service delivery became unfeasible as staff evacuated and movement was restricted. Additionally, the collapse of financial institutions and infrastructure disruptions hindered implementation. Severe flooding in South Sudan further delayed programming.

These challenges were met with agility and foresight. The team implemented geographic pivoting, shifting operations to safer areas while maintaining contact with the original communities. A hybrid model of remote and local implementation enabled continuity of activities, even during communication blackouts. Community associations were upskilled to manage services independently and gather monitoring data in inaccessible locations. Alternative financial mechanisms—including the use of mobile cash providers and in-kind support—were devised to replace formal banking systems. Coordination was maintained through digital platforms and regular virtual meetings.

Lessons Learned

The project highlighted the value of decentralized, community-led structures in fragile environments, with community associations proving resilient actors capable of maintaining service delivery through conflict and displacement due to their embeddedness in local networks. Training community members in technical skills improved service quality and self-reliance, while flexible funding through the LiD Facility enabled geographic and programmatic shifts in response to evolving threats, providing context-specific grants and loans for both urgent and long-term needs. Communication infrastructure like WhatsApp groups proved essential during isolation periods, though gender-sensitive approaches require more deliberate inclusion of women and youth in decision-making, ultimately demonstrating that empowered community-led structures can deliver integrated services and drive resilience in challenging displacement environments.

Key Results

Community-Led Service Delivery:

- Established and supported community associations and sub-committees on WASH, protection, food security, and conflict mitigation
- Trained 44 water user committees as handpump mechanics for sustainable maintenance
- Established 49 village savings groups to strengthen economic resilience

Geographic Pivoting and Remote Implementation:

- Relocated programming across conflict zones while maintaining continuity of support
- Adopted hybrid implementation models combining remote support with local delivery
- Trained community members to collect data, implement activities, and coordinate in the absence of NGO staff

Technical Capacity Building:

- Trained 7,056 people in vocational skills, including tailoring, masonry, and entrepreneurship
- Delivered protection training and established referral systems supporting 81 survivors of SGBV
- Rehabilitated 121 WASH facilities, including handpumps, latrines, and handwashing stations

Financial Service Innovation:

- Developed alternative cash transfer mechanisms amid banking collapse
- Provided a mix of grants and loans to 3,693 households, adapting to local market conditions



LiD Lives in Dignity GRANT FACILITY

The Lives in Dignity (LiD) Grant Facility was an EU-funded initiative managed by UNOPS that promoted development-oriented approaches in forced displacement settings. With €24 million allocated between 2021–2025, the Facility supported 14 innovative, multi-stakeholder projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its flexible funding model empowered local actors, strengthened partnerships, and fostered integrated programming across five key areas: livelihoods, service delivery, housing and spatial planning, protection, and disaster- and climate-related mobility. The Facility prioritized community-led solutions, localization, and social cohesion, advancing sustainable development for both displaced populations and host communities. **Find out more at** https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/lives-dignity-grant-facility_en