The Standby Partnership Network Joint Monitoring Mission Report – Sudan Crisis Response

2024

Summary Report

SBP
Standby Partnership

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Acronym list

CO – Country Office

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

IASC – Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IOM – International Organization for Migration

JMM – Joint Monitoring Mission

MEAL – Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

MSB – Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency

QDA – Qualitative Data Analysis

SBP – Standby Partnership Network

SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

UN – United Nations

UN OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNDSS – United Nations Department of Safety and Scurity

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WFP – World Food Program

WHO – World Health Organization

ZIF – Center for International Peace Operations

The Standby Partnership Network and the Joint Monitoring Mission

The Standby Partnership (SBP)

The SBP Network (https://www.standbypartnership.org/partners) comprises 55 deploying organisations (Standby Partner organizations) and 16 UN agencies working together through bilateral agreements. The SBP mechanism provides surge capacity support to United Nations (UN) Agencies responding to humanitarian emergencies through the secondment of gratis/in-kind "experts on mission" by deploying organisations. The SBP mechanism function through a series of bilateral agreements between participating UN Agencies, Funds, Offices and Programmes and deploying organisations that are composed of a diverse group of NGOs, government agencies, donors, private sector organisations, foundations and intergovernmental bodies. Each Standby Partner maintains its own roster of humanitarian experts who are called upon to fill staffing needs in UN operations.

The Standby Partnership emerged in response to the increasing prevalence of global humanitarian crises which required the UN to rapidly expand its human resource capability at short notice.

Joint Monitoring Mission Objectives

The objective of the Sudan Joint Monitoring and Assessment Mission was to assess the extent to which the SBP Network has enhanced the capacity of UN operations to address humanitarian challenges in Sudan from January 2023 to October 2024. In response to the significant deterioration of the humanitarian situation, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) activated a Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up on 29 August 2023 for an initial six-month period, which was extended until 31 December 2024.

The monitoring mission evaluated the extent to which the SBP mechanism and Network, as a whole, have supported the humanitarian response in Sudan, cross-border operations, and neighbouring countries, both prior to and after the activation of the System-Wide Scale-Up. Given the protracted nature of this emergency, the mission also assessed future needs for the ongoing response.

Joint Monitoring Mission Scope

Thematic Scope: The review has two key areas of focus:

- **Impact and sustainability:** In this area, the following aspects were analyzed: 1° The extent to which the SBP were able to meet the needs of the UN in Sudan prior to and after the activation of the IASC System Wide Scale up (January 2023 – to date); and 2° The extent to which the deployees' contributions have been sustained within the host organisation or the broader response, and how these deployments could further enhance localization.

- **Future needs:** In this area, the monitoring analyzed current and future needs for expertise/deployments within UN operations that could contribute to immediate personnel requirements as well as national system strengthening and localization.

Geographical scope: The review focused on the SBP Mechanism support in Sudan, cross-border operations, and neighbouring countries - Chad (Farchana, Abeche, Iriba) and South Sudan (Renk).

Chronological scope: The review tried to capture the essence of SBP Mechanism support to the humanitarian response in Sudan from January 2023 to December 2024. In addition, the review also compared the situation before the activation of the Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up to the situation after the activation.

Methodology

The monitoring mission process was participatory and inclusive. This approach involves the participation of all key stakeholders in the process so that the findings are informed by their experiences, thoughts, knowledge and suggestions. The monitoring mission used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis
(See in annex 1 more details on methodology, sampling, ethical standards and limitations).

ETC Assessment Mission in Darfur, 2023, WFP

Executive summary

Since April 2023, Sudan has endured an unprecedented humanitarian crisis due to the ongoing devastating conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Over half the population now needs urgent humanitarian and protection assistance, including 16 million children. Acute food insecurity has reached historic levels, with famine conditions confirmed in parts of North Darfur and millions at immediate risk of famine, particularly in conflict-affected regions of Darfur, Khartoum, and Kordofan.

More than 8 million[1] people have been displaced internally since the conflict, making Sudan the world's largest internal displacement crisis, while over 3 million have fled to neighboring countries. Basic services have collapsed, vaccination rates have plummeted, and violence—including sexual and gender-based violence—has reached horrifying levels. Women and children are disproportionately affected, with millions out of school and experiencing or at grave risk of abuse and exploitation.

Since January 2023, the Standby Partnership (SBP) mechanism has supported United Nations (UN) agencies in addressing humanitarian challenges in Sudan and neighboring countries (Chad and South Sudan) via the deployment of in-kind personnel. At the end of the second year, the SBP mechanism conducted this Joint Monitoring Mission to assess the extent to which the SBP mechanism has enhanced the capacity of UN operations to address humanitarian challenges in Sudan and neighboring countries from January 2023 to date. Using mixed methods, the monitoring mission collected and analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data, and below are presented key findings.

Impact

Since January 2023, SBP deployees filled critical needs in supporting UN operations in Sudan, Chad and South Sudan:

The SBP mechanism deployed 117 experts (76 males and 40 Females; 68 in Sudan, 10 in South Sudan, 25 in Chad, 2 in Egypt, 7 in Ethiopia and 5 in Kenya) for a total of 18039 days from January 2023 to October 2024. Compared to previous responses, the Sudan response is the second largest in terms of size with 117 deployments after Ukraine and neighboring countries (128 deployments) and before Türkiye and Syria (63 deployments).

Prior to the activation of the System-Wide Scale-Up, 71 requests were made in 8 months (January – August 2023), or an average of about 9 requests per month. After the activation, 102 requests were made in 14 months (September 2023 – October 2024), or an average of 7 requests per month.

From January 2023 to October 2024, the majority of needs (68%) were met, few were not met (23%), were pending (9%), or were cancelled (1%). The minimum deployment duration was 14 days, the maximum was 652 days, the average was 145, while the median was 180 days. Timeframes were suitable but may need to be longer as the response goes on (change in context and needs). As per the speed of deployment, a few deployment processes (27%) took one month or less, the others took more than 30 days. The average lead time is 68.7 days, the median is 46.5 days. The speed was objectively slower than what is needed by deploying organisations but receiving offices consider the SBP mechanism fast. All UN CO respondents (100%) think that SBP mechanism deploys people "very fast" (40%) or "fast" (60%).

The main implementation challenges include visa, hotel/accommodation, finding the right profiles, travel/security, limitation in funding to support longer term deployments, onboarding/hand-over notes, limitation in profiles submitted to UN agencies, slowness in UN selection decision-making, remote/home-based deployment, integration of deployees to UN system, and language.

SBP mechanism largely met the needs asked for. SBP deployees filled critical roles and had a high impact. They contributed to enhance UN operations by supporting Country Offices on emergency responses programming and coordination; providing technical guidance on their respective areas of expertise; supporting actors in providing lifesaving services and monitoring the implementation of emergency responses; filling the gap of human resources and maintaining the UN presence in the field; enhancing the capacity of the interagency sub sectors at the field level and leading regular coordination meetings among sub sector actors; strengthening the capacity of national staff, local actors and partners. Receiving offices appreciate and value on the results achieved by deployees. In fact, the majority of receiving offices' respondents (87%) think that SBP deployments contributed to a large extent to UN operations on the ground, while few (13%) think that SBP deployments contributed to a medium extent.

Considering the findings on the "impact" of SBP support, the judgment made by the joint monitoring mission is "Highly Satisfactory".

Consultation meeting with the State ministry of Health and the social security department and UN agencies and MHPSS actors in Red Sea (12 of Dec 2024)

Sustainability and Localization

SBP deployees' contributions have been sustained to a medium extent through strengthening of national staff capacity, recruitment of national staff to replace SBP deployees at the end of their deployment, and partnering and networking with local actors. It is important to mention that in Sudan a lot of UN national staff left the country due to the war and this negatively affected the sustainability of deployees contributions. Sustainability was acceptable but hampered. Opportunities to utilize new SBP deployments to strengthen national systems and promote localization include deploying SBP deployees within national and local systems and structures, deploying national staff/experts, partnering and networking with local actors, and community engagement.

Future Needs

Humanitarian Coordination, M&E and Reporting, Information Management, Food Security and Livelihood, Localization & Social Cohesion, and Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus are in the top six highest priority needs for UN agencies for the next twelve months. Most profiles are needed for specific agencies. Some profiles are needed for Interagency responses (Health cluster coordination) and Transitional programming (Food security and livelihood, localization and social cohesion, Humanitarian, Development and Peacebuilding Nexus, Civil engineer, Sexual and Reproductive Health). Due to the intensification of fighting in December 2024 and the protracted nature of the Sudan crisis, most needs require a rapid scale up to address increasing humanitarian needs in Sudan, Chad, and South Sudan. The appropriate timeframe for deploying SBP support, from request to start, ranges from 72 hours to 3 weeks. For long-term deployments, the timeframe for deploying SBP support ranges from 3 to 6 weeks to identify suitable profiles in relation to the contexts.

Almost all UN CO respondents (89%) indicated that a deployment of 6 months is sufficient. They also indicated that a deployment of 3 months is not sufficient to make an impactful contribution as the learning phase can take up to two months. Few (11%) reported that a deployment of 3-6 months is not sufficient for long-term planning and for some areas (Public health, Health cluster coordination, MHPSS, Cash transfer and Voucher, Information Management, etc.). All UN CO respondents (100%) reported that longer-term deployments are needed to create relationships with government representatives and other stakeholders, strengthen the capacity of national systems, and ensure sustainability, especially in the following technical expertise: Public health, Health cluster coordination, MHPSS, Cash transfer and Voucher, Information Management, etc.

Findings & Recommendations

This monitoring mission was conducted using mixed methods. This approach allowed the monitoring mission to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data. To ensure the credibility of findings and conclusions, the monitoring mission triangulated data from different methods and sources. The monitoring findings provide information on the SBP support impact and sustainability and its contributions to localization efforts. At the end of each aspect (impact, sustainability and localization), the monitoring made a judgement based on findings using the following scale: *1° Highly satisfactory, 2° Satisfactory, 3° Moderately satisfactory, 4° Moderately unsatisfactory, 5° Unsatisfactory, 6° Highly unsatisfactory.*

Below is a summary of evaluation key findings:

Impact

Since January 2023, SBP deployees filled critical needs in supporting UN operations in Sudan, Chad and South Sudan. From January 2023 to October 2024, SBP mechanism deployed **117 experts** (76 males and 40 Females; 68 in Sudan, 10 in South Sudan, 25 in Chad, 2 in Egypt, 7 in Ethiopia and 5 in Kenya) for a total of 18039 days.

Experts were deployed to the following agencies: UNFPA (25), UNICEF (21), UNHCR (21), IOM (15), OCHA (13), WHO (12), WFP (5), FAO (2), UN Women (2), and UNDSS (1).
Thirteen organizations deployed experts including CANADEM (32), DRC (8), France Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1), Government of the Netherlands (8), Help.NGO (1), IMMAP Inc. (12), Irish Aid (6), Luxembourg Aid and Development (3), NORCAP (16), RedR Australia (4), MSB (19), SDC (4), and Veolia Foundation (2). Top broad profiles include Information Management (30), Gender Based Violence (18), Humanitarian Coordination (15), WASH (11), Protection (9), Health (8) Shelter (7) and Logistics (5).

Profiles required were almost the same prior to and after the activation of the System-Wide Scale-up. Information Management, Humanitarian Coordination, Health, Gender Based Vioence, WASH, Logistics, Protection, and Shelter remain in the top ten of profiles required prior to and after the activation of the System-Wide Scale-Up. Prior to the activation of the System-Wide Scale-Up, 71 requests were made in 8 months (January – August 2023), or an average of about 9 requests per month. After the activation, 102 requests were made in 14 months (September 2023 – October 2024), or an average of 7 requests per month. This result shows a decrease of about 2 requests per month after the activation. The decrease after the activation is explained by the high number of requests made by UN agencies in June and July 2023 after the start of the war in Sudan and prior to the activation of the System-Wide Scale-Up as for some UN agencies, internal scale up/declarations were issued before the IASC System Wide Scale up. This finding suggests that after the activation, requests were made mainly to cover the gap observed after the major mobilization of experts prior to the activation (June and July 2023).

A few deployment processes (27%) took one month or less, the others took more than 30 days. The average lead time is 68.7 days, the median is 46.5 days. The speed was objectively slower than what is needed by deploying organisations but receiving offices consider SBP mechanism fast as all UN CO respondents (100%) think that SBP mechanism deploys people "very fast" (40%) or "fast" (60%). It is important to mention that the contradictory results between the high number days of the lead time showing delays and the high percentage of UN CO staff who think that SBP mechanism deploy people "very fast" or "fast" is explained by the fact that most of deployment delays are due to visa issues.

From January 2023 to October 2024, the majority of needs (68%) were met, few were not met (23%), were pending (9%), or were cancelled (1%). Reasons explaining unmet needs include language requirements, and the rarity of some profiles (epidemiologist, civil-military coordination, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, etc.) that cannot be found easily.

The minimum deployment duration was 14 days, the maximum was 652 days, the average was 145, while the median was 180 days. Timeframes were suitable but may need to be longer as the response goes on (change in context and needs).

SBP mechanism largely met the needs asked for. SBP deployees filled critical roles and had a high impact. They contributed to enhance UN operations by supporting Country Offices on emergency responses programming and coordination; providing technical guidance on their respective areas of expertise; supporting actors in providing lifesaving services and monitoring the implementation of emergency responses; filling the gap of human resources and maintaining the UN presence in the field; enhancing the capacity of the interagency sub sectors at the field level and leading regular coordination meetings among sub sector actors; strengthening the capacity of national staff, local actors and partners. Receiving offices have a high opinion and value on the results achieved by deployees. In fact, the majority of receiving offices' respondents (87%) think that SBP deployments contributed to a large extent to UN operations on the ground, while a few (13%) think that SBP deployments contributed to a medium extent.

The main implementation challenges for effective and impactful deployments include visa, hotel/accommodation, finding the right profiles, travel/Security, limitation in funding to support longer term deployments, onboarding/hand-over note, limitation in profiles submitted to UN agencies, slowness in UN selection decision-making, remote/home-based deployment, integration of deployees to UN system, language.

Monitoring findings show that the effectiveness and added value of remote/home-based deployments to the response were very limited due to time zone difference, lack of understanding of the context to adapt the support and Internet issues. Considering these findings, remote/home-based deployments should be considered for specific roles like "Advisor" roles.

Sustainability and Localization

SBP deployees' contributions have been sustained to a medium extent through strengthening of national staff capacity, recruitment of national staff to replace SBP deployees at the end of their deployment, and partnering and networking with local actors. It is important to mention that in Sudan a lot of UN national staff left the country due to the war and this negatively affected the sustainability. Sustainability was acceptable but hampered by different factors including the lack of national staff with the minimum capacity in Sudan (as many left), short-term deployments with focus on providing lifesaving services, etc. Opportunities to utilize new SBP deployments to strengthen national systems and promote localization include deploying SBP deployees within national and local systems and structures, deploying national staff/experts, partnering and networking with local actors, and community engagement.

Future needs

Humanitarian Coordination, M&E and Reporting, Information Management, Food Security and Livelihood, Localization & Social Cohesion, and Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus are in the top six highest priority needs for UN agencies for the next twelve months. Most needs require a rapid scale up to address increasing emergency needs in Sudan, Chad, South Sudan.

For UN CO respondents, the appropriate timeframe ranges from 72 hours to 3 weeks. Almost all UN CO respondents (89%) indicated that a deployment of 6 months is sufficient. They also indicated that a deployment of 3 months is not sufficient to make an impactful contribution as the learning phase can take up to two months. A few (11%) reported that a deployment of 3-6 months is not sufficient for long-term planning and for some areas (Public health, Health cluster coordination, MHPSS, Cash transfer and Voucher, Information Management, etc.). All UN CO respondents (100%) reported that longer-term deployments are needed to create relationships with government representatives and other stakeholders, strengthen the capacity of national systems, and ensure sustainability, especially in the following technical expertise: Public health, Health cluster coordination, MHPSS, Cash transfer and Voucher, Information Management, etc. In the "acute" phase more short-term deployments were required to provide immediate assistance to affected populations while longer-term deployments are among future needs due to change in context and in needs requiring a transition in the programming (from emergency programming to resilience programming).

Needs assessment mission to the new wave of IDPs in Kassala. 5th of November 2024

Recommendations

This monitoring provides evidence that will inform decision making, as well as strategies and approaches of SBP support. Considering the findings, the monitoring makes the following recommendations:

Strategic level

- Continue to provide easy, flexible, fast and reliable support in the framework of SBP mechanism to enhance UN operations in addressing emergency issues in Sudan and globally. Monitoring findings showed that the SBP mechanism is a reliable mechanism that enhanced UN operations in Sudan and neighboring countries (Chad and South Sudan) because of its flexibility (duty station, contract extension, speed, etc.). The mechanism helped at a crucial time when national staff had fled abroad. (**Donors and deploying organisations**).

- Develop a longer-term plan of SBP support, advocate with donors to mobilize resources in support of UN operations, and sensitize them on the change in context and needs in the Sudan crisis (protracted crisis and transitional programming - from emergency to resilience programming) and the need for supporting longer-term deployments (12 months or more). As the Sudan crisis is becoming a protracted crisis and in the perspective of transitional programming, UN agencies should continue to operate to provide lifesaving services to affected populations and communities. Monitoring findings showed that UN agencies request 6 months' deployments and at the end they send many extension requests (**Deploying organisations**).

- Expand deploying organisations' pool of experts in different areas ensuring a diversity of language, geographical experience, etc. This can be supported by a recruitment campaign to select new experts and expand the pool of experts. Monitoring findings showed that it is difficult for deploying organisations to find the right profiles meeting all requirements including technical expertise, experience in emergency situations, experience in similar contexts, language, etc. It is also difficult for SBP deploying organisations to find some rare profiles including Access and Civil-Military Coordination, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), Epidemiologist, etc. In addition, data showed that for some positions, profiles (CVs) submitted to UN agencies were very limited in terms of quantity (only 2 or 3 CVs) and quality (limited qualifications) (**Deploying organisations, UN agencies, SBPN**).

- Improve deploying organisations' coordination to jointly address common challenges of SBP support - visa, deployees' accommodation, onboarding, etc. As an example, data showed that SBP deployees' accommodation is among the challenges. Due to limited accommodation options, cost of accommodation in Port Sudan, and difficult to find UNDSS cleared accommodation, some SBP deployees stayed in hotels for two months despite being is expensive. SBP deployees' accommodation issues affect the mental health and wellbeing of deployees and their ability to deliver and achieve their deployment objectives. Monitoring data showed that deploying organisations address these challenges in an isolated manner (**Deploying organisations and SBP mechanism secretariat**).

- Establish an annual compendium to share key information of potential and available profiles (thematic area expertise, language, geographic experience, etc.) This initiative would provide UN agencies with a clear overview of available profiles, facilitating better planning (**Deploying organisations and SBP mechanism secretariat**).

- Jointly advocate with the Sudanese national authorities on the importance and necessity of facilitating the granting of visas to SBP deployees. Timely and simplified issuance of visas for SBP deployees will facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations and communities affected by the crisis. In addition, UN agencies should continue to provide updated visa information and improve the support to visa processes. Monitoring findings showed that visa issues in Sudan affect the physical presence of SBP deployees in Sudan and limit the delivering and affect the quality of humanitarian assistance to affected communities and populations (**UN agencies in Sudan**).

Operational level

- Ensure structured onboarding and integration of SBP deployees (handover, understanding of UN policies, access to UN systems and tools, etc.) to support smooth transition and effective deployment. Monitoring data showed that for some deployments within some UN agencies, some deployees did not understand their role when they arrived and only understood it after a few months, and some SBP deployees did not find handover notes while others had delayed access to handover notes (**UN agencies**).

- Strengthen the localization agenda by prioritizing the identification and selection of national experts or experts from neighboring countries, and at the same time mitigate visa challenges (when possible as some deploying organisations are required to deploy international experts). Monitoring findings showed that continuous change in the Sudan crisis dynamic and needs did not allow UN agencies to effectively sustain SBP deployees' contribution and strengthen national systems and structures to contribute to localization efforts because UN operations focused on providing immediate services to affected population with SBP deployees' support (**Deploying organisations and UN agencies**).

- Limit remote/home-based deployments to "Advisor" roles and deploy national experts or neighboring countries' experts to overcome visa challenges. Monitoring findings showed that remote/home-based deployments were less effective than in-country deployments for different reasons including time zone difference, lack of understanding of the context to adapt the support and Internet issues (**Deploying organisations and UN agencies**).

- Improve the selection decision-making process by reducing the time needed for selecting a candidate for quick and timely deployments. Monitoring data showed that for some positions, the selection decision-making process was slow and delayed the deployments (**UN agencies**).
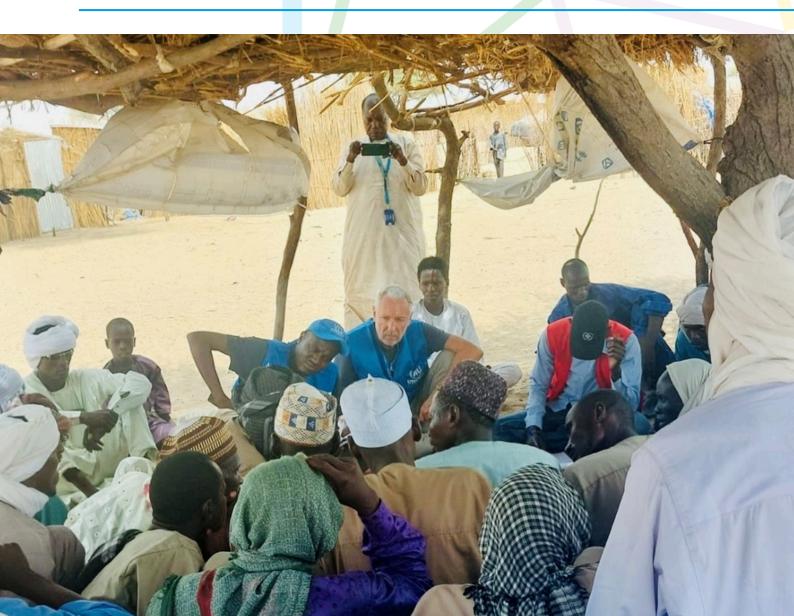
Acknowledgements

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