

UNHCR Sudan Country Strategy Evaluation

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Executive summary

Introduction, scope and methods

Purpose and scope of the study: The purpose of this strategic, learning-oriented Country Strategy Evaluation (CSE) is to inform UNHCR's multi-year strategic plan (MYSP) for Sudan from 2023, support programming during 2022, and strengthen UNHCR's adaptability to the dynamic political context in Sudan and the wider region. The objectives of the evaluation are to (i) evaluate the *relevance* of UNHCR's strategies and operation in Sudan (Section 4); (ii) assess the *effectiveness* of its performance (Section 5); and (iii) evaluate the *coherence* of its strategic engagement with partners to deliver its vision (Section 6).

The evaluation covers the entirety of UNHCR's portfolio from 2018 to 2021, focusing on the post-revolution period from 2019 to the end of December 2021. During this period there were a number of strategic reorientations in UNHCR's work in Sudan, including a greater focus on IDPs and host communities, and the pursuit of a longer-term more solution-oriented approach for refugees and IDPs alongside UNHCR's core business of emergency refugee response and protection.

Methods: The evaluation adopted a utilization-oriented and mixed methods approach. This involved review and analysis of secondary documentation, interviews with over 240 Key Informants, Focus Group Discussions with Persons of Concern (POCs) and host communities, mini-workshops with UNHCR staff at Sub-Office and Field Office levels, online surveys of UNHCR staff and UNHCR partners respectively, and observation. Findings were triangulated on an ongoing basis. The team carried out field missions in five states and covered two more remotely. Following the military coup on October 25th 2021 and change in political context, the evaluation approach was adapted to support UNHCR staff to reflect upon and adjust to the highly unstable and dynamic context, in the spirit of real-time learning, collectively developing three possible scenarios for the future trajectory of Sudan, exploring the implications of each for UNHCR's focus. A Theory of Change to guide the CSE was also constructed retrospectively (through a participatory process with the country office), and adapted during the main phase of the evaluation, including suggestions to feed into the MYSP for 2023 (see Annex 4). The main constraints the evaluation team faced were due to political instability and the military coup, which cut short data collection and key informant interviews in Khartoum and Khartoum state, and hampered collective team analysis.

Sudan context and UNHCR's operation

Sudan context: The period covered by the evaluation includes the end of the three-decade rule of President Bashir's totalitarian regime when a popular revolution overthrew the government in April 2019, following severe economic crisis in 2018-19. A new Transitional Government of Sudan (GoS), established in August 2019, inherited a legacy of decades of poor governance and economic mismanagement, and launched a political and economic reform process. Sudan was readmitted into the international financial system, and the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) was signed in October 2020. However, the economic crisis deepened: hyper-inflation took hold, poverty levels rose, and political volatility intensified. In the two years following the revolution violent conflict increased in parts of the country, including Darfur. UNAMID's withdrawal left a protection vacuum that UNITAMS cannot fill. Insecurity continued in the politically contested Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Lack of humanitarian access has been a major issue. Regionally, conflict and volatility in neighbouring countries has triggered new refugee influxes, particularly from the Tigray region of Ethiopia as well as South Sudan and Central African Republic. The military coup of October 25th 2021 dissolved the transitional government and Sudan's army chief appointed himself the head of a new ruling body, triggering large and recurrent waves of popular protest. International economic and development assistance has been suspended.

UNHCR's operation: UNHCR Sudan is one of the largest and most complex UNHCR operations in the world, with over 5 million IDPs, returnees and refugees spread across a large geographical area. Between 2018 and 2019, UNHCR's expenditure trebled. Following the strategic reset to step-up programming for IDPs, largely focussed on Darfur, the number of IDPs targeted by UNHCR increased by around 37%. However, in 2020 less than 20% of UNHCR's expenditure was spent on IDPs while almost 80% was spent on refugee programming, despite the greater number of the former.

Relevance

Alignment with global frameworks, regional strategies and national policies

Increased alignment globally, regionally and nationally: Since 2018 there has been increasing alignment between the main strategies guiding UNHCR's operations in Sudan, global refugee frameworks, UNHCR's corporate policies and strategies, regional strategies, and the emerging national policy context under the transitional government. This was facilitated by the GoS making nine broad aspirational pledges at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) at the end of 2019, with the support of UNHCR, in line with global refugee frameworks including the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR). The transitional government's emphasis on developmental interventions similarly enabled UNHCR in Sudan to align to the corporate shift in direction to take a longer-term solutions-oriented approach, working more closely with development actors. This more progressive national policy context was in marked contrast to the previous regime when even the most basic elements of protection were severely constrained, but the gap between progressive policy statements and operationalization of those statements is substantial, particularly in the changing political context.

As well as supporting GoS to implement its aspirational GRF pledges, UNHCR has engaged with the GoS National Plan for Protection of Civilians (NPPOC, which includes a component on addressing IDPs and refugees) and has begun to raise awareness at state level. UNHCR has provided substantial support to GoS at many different levels for the regional IGAD 'Solutions' initiative, and has supported GoS in developing a National Vision for Host Communities and Refugees, with reference to the JPA.

Alignment at the subnational level: There is an important role for UNHCR staff at Sub-Office level to play in supporting strategic thinking and the roll-out of national strategies at state level. At the Darfur level UNHCR is credited for its vision and approach in promoting integrated cross-UN ways of working in line with Resolution 2524; in practice, alignment has been constrained by the limited capacity of UNITAMS and slow progress in producing an integrated cross-UN strategy.

Expanded focus (IDPs and solutions): As UNHCR Sudan has aligned more closely with global, regional and national frameworks and policies, its portfolio has expanded considerably: 'stepping-up' its engagement with IDPs (most evident in Darfur), and pursuing longer-term and durable solutions for both refugees and IDPs. This has contributed to a sense of overload and stress for the CO and senior leadership, sometimes lacking prioritisation within the expanded portfolio. Operationalization of UNHCR Sudan's strategic reorientation to a more expansive portfolio is lagging and requires attention to be fully internalized.

Strategic and operational adaptation: UNHCR has demonstrated adaptive agility at the strategic level, appropriately and rapidly changing strategic direction and working more closely with government in the transitional phase, although it does not appear to have planned for different political scenarios if the positive trajectory of the transition did not materialize. Generally its contextual analysis is weak, especially at sub-national level with a few exceptions, although this is essential to understand local conflict dynamics and the protection implications, and to inform conflict sensitive programming. Constraints include lack of expertise amongst UNHCR staff and limited networking and engagement with local knowledge, although there are recent good practice examples of how strong contextual analysis can inform adaptive programming in response to instability and conflict: advocacy briefs produced by the protection cluster in Darfur, and the Protection of Civilians Incident Tracking tool (developed collaboratively with UNITAMS).

UNHCR appropriately adapted programming modalities in response to the economic crisis, including prioritizing in-kind distribution of humanitarian assistance over cash transfers, and it adapted plans and budgeting in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. UNHCR staff assess the organization to be 'reasonably adaptive'. However, a weak organizational monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) culture is a constraint to adaptive management.

Tailoring to the diverse needs and priorities of POCs and host communities: UNHCR's needs assessments are generally strong, implying it has good knowledge of the needs and priorities of POCs and host communities. But the record is mixed in terms of programming meeting those needs and priorities in all their diversity. Constraining factors include a) programming being overly driven by donor priorities and requirements; b) the need for stronger ongoing communication with POCs and host communities; and b) lack of access and inadequate financial resources.

Operationalisation of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus: The 'HDP nexus' is a new concept for most staff within UNHCR Sudan as it is for the wider aid sector. Nevertheless, UNHCR's strategic reorientation to promote a longer-term perspective in its emergency response, to incorporate durable solutions and to support the peacebuilding priorities of the transitional government indicates close alignment with nexus ways of thinking, whether or not they are labelled as such. UNHCR's performance in adopting nexus ways of working is weaker, for example lack of joint conflict analysis, excepting some good practice in its work on durable solutions.

Effectiveness

UNHCR's reporting on results and outcomes: Data and evidence gathering to assess performance are inadequate. Constraints include lack of investment and very limited human resources dedicated to MEL, and a cumbersome corporate RBM system. Lesson-learning processes appear to be *ad hoc* without documentation or follow-up, implying a weak learning culture that limits UNHCR's ability to take corrective action. The evaluation drew on this limited evidence base, supplementing it with data and evidence gathered during the evaluation process.

Effectiveness against Strategic Objectives at country level

SO1: Protection and essential humanitarian response: UNHCR has worked well to leverage its comparative advantage in strengthening national policy on protection, for example through promotion of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). But there are performance weaknesses in core areas of its protection mandate, including delivering on normative functions (setting standards and frameworks, and ensuring they are followed) related to coordination, advocacy and leadership to ensure essential protection systems and mechanisms are in place. Performance is patchy across the operation: for example shortcomings in addressing GBV and community protection in the refugee emergency in the east, and the protection implications of the economic crisis and inadequate basic services for protracted refugee caseloads and the stateless. There are also good practice examples to learn from, for example UNHCR's support to the Network of Women's Protection Committees in Darfur. As mixed migration is likely to increase as national and regional security deteriorates, associated with human smuggling and trafficking, a clear strategy and carefully chosen partnerships will be essential to address current scepticism that the various working groups in which UNHCR is involved, can contribute to transformative change.

SO2: Emergency Response and Preparedness: ¹ Aspects of UNHCR's strategic reorientation are apparent and appreciated in its recent emergency responses, including increased support to host communities and early engagement with government line ministries for service provision. But there have been fundamental shortcomings, including protection, staffing and leadership issues, and poor coordination in its response to the high-profile Ethiopian refugee emergency in the East, despite this

¹ See the briefing note prepared by the evaluation team for more detailed analysis and learning from UNHCR's response to three emergency responses in 2020-21, including the refugee response in the east.

being core UNHCR business that has occupied much senior management time. While UNHCR has improved its performance more remains to be done, particularly around protection. Other major emergencies have received less attention, particularly severe flooding that affected the protracted refugee caseload in White Nile State where the response has been underfunded and somewhat neglected, despite its annual occurrence. UNHCR has a mixed record in responding to conflict-related emergencies affecting IDPs where context analysis and conflict sensitive programming have lagged behind events. It has a key role to play in certain sectors (protection and shelter and NFIs), but this has not been given commensurate attention to refugee-related emergencies where UNHCR is held fully to account, despite the scale of some IDP emergencies.

SO3: Durable Solutions: At the policy level there has been progress in leveraging the peace dividends of the political transition, through leadership and collaboration in support of the IGAD Solutions Platform and the draft National Solutions Strategy. UNHCR expanded its focus from refugees to solutions for IDPs and returnees, contributing to an evidence base for solutions in Darfur through the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG), a positive example of cross-UN collaboration. Recent research by the DSWG demonstrates the importance of understanding contextual differences, why an area-based approach is entirely appropriate, and how more than one solution is likely to apply to IDPs simultaneously, thus moving beyond conventional approaches to solutions. But UNHCR does not currently have adequate capacity to support its ambition in durable solutions.

SO4: Catalysing development-oriented responses: There has been good initial progress in capacitating national social service systems towards refugee inclusion, particularly in the education sector, and to a lesser degree, health. With the World Bank, UNHCR did valuable groundwork towards GoS eligibility for funding under the IDA-19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR). There are a number of developmental programmes specifically targeting or inclusive of refugees and other POCs, supported by UNHCR. Until the coup opportunities for development programming and inclusion were opening up. However, factors that emerge as obstacles are both external: GoS and partner capacities and donor willingness to fund; and internal: UNHCR capacity and influence.

Delivery of commitments on UNHCR's Age, Gender, Diversity (AGD) policy: UNHCR staff have a high awareness of this policy, and a good start has been made implementing aspects of it, such as assessments. There is some way to go, however, to realise the spirit of the policy, requiring a considerable culture shift to allow the voices of POCs to drive strategy. The pay-off could be an improvement in donor relations once evidence of robust feedback loops are in place. Data from UNHCR's annual participatory assessments are disaggregated by gender, age and people with specific needs (PSN), but could be strengthened with insights on contextual factors that impact vulnerability, such as ethnicity and livelihood. Disaggregated data on needs does not necessarily translate into the needs of different groups being met, with examples of some groups being overlooked (eg children and youth in the recent refugee emergency in the east). Women are generally well-represented in committee structures but it is not clear that they are meaningfully engaged in decision-making: separate committee structures for men and women may work better.

Enabling and constraining factors for effectiveness: The engagement of UNHCR staff in reflective exercises during the course of the evaluation is itself an enabling factor. Constraints include low technical capacity; skillsets of staff not suited to changes in strategic direction; aspects of human resource systems regarded as demotivating, especially for national staff; and the slow and cumbersome nature of some UNHCR systems such as procurement and MEL. Barriers external to the organisation can inform theory of change and scenario planning exercises as multi-year strategies are created.

Sustainability: Achieving sustainability is implicit rather than explicit in UNHCR Sudan's approach. Given its importance, UNHCR Sudan would benefit from adopting a robust working definition of, and approach to sustainability, ensuring this is embedded within its overall country strategy.

Coherence – Partnership strategic engagement ²

Strategic approach: The growing importance of partnerships to UNHCR globally, to deliver on its mandate, is evident in Sudan. Efforts have been made to focus on multiple forms of partnership around its strategic objectives. The time-consuming nature of partnership work means further strategic prioritisation is needed.

Partnership with GoS: There has been good progress in high-level policy engagement with GoS, particularly around the Whole-of-Government approach, cross-government policy and steps towards inclusion in government service delivery. The consequences of the military coup may require a recalibration of UNHCR's relations with GoS, adapting to a changed political and policy landscape.

UNHCR's partnership with the Commission of Refugees (COR) requires ongoing effort to move beyond a transactional, funding-focused relationship to a more transformational partnership focused on the wider GoS policy agenda, with UNHCR able to be a critical friend, for example addressing issues raised in internal audit reports. Weak capacity of government ministries delivering social services at local level is a major constraint to their ability to extend services to POCs. UNHCR has provided capacity development at different levels, but in a relatively ad hoc manner, not yet guided by an overarching strategy and approach.

Partnerships and coordination at federal and state level: In the absence of clear government-led national planning processes, UNHCR is utilizing multiple interagency coordination structures related to its mandate and strategic objectives, but without systematic assessment of results. The effectiveness of UNHCR's coordination role on refugees, IDPs and other POCs is mixed: positives include the launch of the first comprehensive Country Refugee Response Plan (CRRP) through the Refugee Consultation Forum (RCF) in 2020, while interagency coordination needs to be stepped up to address duplication of effort.

Policy partnerships: UNHCR is utilising a range of mechanisms to coordinate progress towards its four strategic objectives. Policy-oriented partnerships are in place for protection, emergency response and solutions, but not yet to the same extent for peacebuilding or development. Mechanisms are frequently fragmented, their effectiveness not yet optimal, and lacking systematic assessment of results.

Optimising collaboration with UN partners: Recent changes in UNHCR leadership have strengthened UNHCR's overall relations within the UN in Sudan, bilaterally and jointly, although relationships remain weaker at state level. Building a stronger interface with the UN's sustainable development planning agenda in Sudan is still work-in-progress and needs to be given higher priority going forward, as part of UNHCR's overall approach to build the UN system response, particularly if the context becomes more conducive. Some long-standing bilateral partnerships are robust, for example with UNICEF and WFP, based on good synergy, complementarity and use of comparative advantage. Others need effort to maximize comparative advantage, for example on the protection agenda with IoM and UNFPA, and peacebuilding and development with UNDP. Integration and leveraging the efforts of others will reduce stretch and overload for UNHCR and help build sustainability. Joint working with UNITAMS is improving, particularly around the protection agenda in Darfur, but is constrained by UNITAMS capacity and the absence of coordination architecture for the JPA, both in Darfur and the Two Areas.

Partnerships with other national, regional and international actors: There is mixed progress in collaboration with other national, regional, and international players to leverage protection, solutions, and implementation of GCR pledges. The effectiveness of implementing partner relationships could be enhanced if they are more rounded and jointly add value, requiring changes to the Project Partnership

² This is a summary of an in-depth partnership assessment conducted as a 'deep dive' within the overall evaluation.

Agreement (PPA) system.³ There is good preliminary progress in longer-term development partnerships and private sector engagement. Engagement with donors needs to be stepped up, as strategic partners and not just funders, requiring strengthened UNHCR capacity; also with regional actors as partners for Solutions; and with local and national actors to strengthen local context analysis and context-sensitive approaches.

Key themes and lessons learned on partnerships: Partnership with UNHCR creates added value for partners and overall benefits outweigh the costs. However, almost all partnerships can be developed to become more transformational and less transactional, with better use of comparative advantage. A number of obstacles to partnership working are internal to UNHCR and can be addressed through building internal capacities and systems (including MEL), as well as UNHCR's partnership ethos building on principles of good partnership.

Conclusions and recommendations

UNHCR has become an increasingly high profile and influential actor in Sudan in the last three years as it stepped into the space that opened after the revolution in 2019.

Conclusion 1 – Strategic positioning in the Sudan context: UNHCR appropriately exploited its strategic position in advising and supporting the transitional government to develop progressive policies for refugees and IDPs, and strategic alignment between UNHCR Sudan's strategies, global frameworks and the national policy context in Sudan has strengthened. However, recent political developments underline the fragility of policy gains and underscore the importance of a robust government engagement and capacity development strategy, guided by an in-depth understanding of the political context.

Conclusion 2 – Context and conflict sensitivity: UNHCR successfully adapted to the opportunities in the political context post-revolution, but its record in preparing for more negative changes in the political and security context has been constrained by inadequate context analysis, especially at sub-national level, hampering its strategic resilience. At best this has resulted in an overly optimistic expectation of the political trajectory in Sudan; at worst, this has risked conflict insensitive programming that could fuel tensions.

→ ***Recommendation 1: UNHCR should strengthen its adaptability to Sudan's dynamic political context to remain relevant, and especially its contextual analysis to inform how it should continue to support GoS in developing and rolling out progressive policies for refugees, IDPs and host communities in line with global and regional frameworks, and in close coordination with other UN agencies.***

Conclusion 3 – Strategic prioritisation: UNHCR has substantially expanded its portfolio and POC caseload, making good progress and providing leadership in some newer areas of work, at policy level in search of regional durable solutions and in catalysing development-oriented responses. Insufficient strategic prioritisation has, however, resulted in overload and stress for staff at all levels, sometimes compromising the quality of programming as there is little space for analysis and reflection. Programming risks being spread too thinly and lacks adequate analysis of the respective comparative advantage of UNHCR vis-a-vis its partners. As the security situation deteriorates UNHCR has to place most emphasis on its first two strategic objectives: protection and humanitarian assistance, and responding to emergencies. It must also give equal attention to IDP emergencies and the sectors where UNHCR is leading, as to refugee emergencies.

→ ***Recommendation 2: UNHCR should prioritise within its expanded portfolio, according to its comparative advantage in playing a critical normative role, (for example, leaving service delivery to others), and prioritising amongst its strategic objectives according to the***

³ Building on changes to the PPA system, which UNHCR is implementing globally

evolving context in Sudan (see scenario-specific recommendations), to address the current sense of overload and to provide clearer strategic direction to staff, especially at sub-national level.

Conclusion 4 – Strategic partnerships: Partnership working and leveraging the efforts of other actors is a top priority for UNHCR. Considerable efforts have been made to build strategic partnership and coordination structures, although the effectiveness of these, and GoS participation and leadership in particular, remain patchy, particularly at state level. Duplication and high transaction costs in terms of staff time are a challenge, as are aspects of the internal organisational system and culture. All UNHCR partners would like more open, two-way partnerships, which create shared value and are less transactional.

→ ***Recommendation 3: UNHCR should develop a strategic approach to partnership-working and strengthen its related internal functions, capabilities, incentives, and systems towards this end.***

→ ***Recommendation 4: UNHCR should enhance effectiveness and gains of its partnerships by reducing transaction costs (both for UNHCR and others) through harmonisation and streamlining of coordination structures and identifying and better utilising the comparative advantage of other agencies.***

Conclusion 5 – POC accountability and responsiveness: UNHCR's programming has tended to be driven more by upwards accountability to funders than by downwards accountability to POCs and host communities, a constraint to UNHCR's responsiveness to the latter, and to effective programming. Means of sustaining ongoing and two-way communication are currently lacking between UNHCR and its implementing partners with those the agency is mandated to serve. Although UNHCR's needs assessments are broadly comprehensive, data and monitoring do not yet systematically address all aspects of vulnerability.

→ ***Recommendation 5: UNHCR should improve its downwards accountability by improving its responsiveness to the priorities and needs of POCs and host communities in line with the AGD policy.***

Conclusion 6 – Organisational effectiveness: Key aspects of UNHCR's core business systems emerge as a barrier to effectiveness and a source of frustration for those working at all levels of the organisation. A business transformation process is underway in line with global organisational reforms, but it is not evident that this will adequately address all of the country-specific concerns. Key priorities include: shifting the locus of decision-making close to the response, ensuring staffing is fit-for purpose with the right skill sets and contextual understanding, more timely procurement and release of budgets, more efficient contracting (PPA) systems, and stronger results management.

→ ***Recommendation 6: UNHCR should address organisational barriers to its programming effectiveness to create a more enabling environment, with an emphasis on HR, management issues including support to senior leadership, aspects of business transformation, and strengthened and more collaborative contingency planning.***

Conclusion 7 – Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: UNHCR's current MEL systems are inadequate to support strategic decision-making and a constraint to effective and responsive programming, due to a combination of insufficient investment in MEL and a results-based management system that fails to report on outcomes and impact and therefore assess effectiveness. A stronger learning culture within the organisation is essential to improving effectiveness.

→ ***Recommendation 7: UNHCR should develop and invest in a MEL system that is truly 'fit for purpose' and adequately staffed to support strategic decision-making***

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Briefing Note: Analysis and Learning from UNHCR’s main emergency responses in 2020/21

List of acronyms

AFDB	African Development Bank	JPA	Juba Peace Agreement
AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity	KI	key informant
BaNVA	Basic Needs and Vulnerability Assessment	KII	Key Informant Interview
BPRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration	LNAs	Local and National Actors
CBIs	Cash-Based Interventions	LoU /MoU	Letter of Understanding/ Memorandum of Understanding
CAR	Central African Republic	MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
CCA	Common Country Analysis	MoCA	Ministry of Cabinet Affairs
CO	Country Office	MYSP	multi-year strategic plan
COR	Commission of Refugees	(S)NFIs	(Shelter &) Non-Food Items
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework	NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence	NPPOC	National Plan for Protection of Civilians
CSE	Country Strategy Evaluation	OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development/ Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	PPA	Project Partnership Agreement
DSWG	Durable Solutions Working Group	PSE	Private Sector Engagement
ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations	POC	Person of Concern
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group	RB	Regional Bureau
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the UN)	RCF	Refugee Consultation Forum
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	RCM	Refugee Coordination Model
FO	Field Office	RRR	Recovery, Return & Reintegration
FSL	Food Security & Livelihoods	RWG	Refugee Working Group
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees	SO	Strategic Objective
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für international Zusammenarbeit	SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
GoS	Government of Sudan	SSTL	State-Sponsored Terrorism List
GRF	Global Refugee Forum	TAGs	Technical Advisory Groups
HAC	Humanitarian Aid Commission	TOR	Terms of Reference
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team	UN	United Nations
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace	UNAMID	United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries	UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
HLP	Housing, Land & Property	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
HQ	Headquarters	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IDPRC	IDP and Refugees Commission	UNITAMS	United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
IFC	International Finance Corporation	UNSCR	United National Security Council Resolution
ILO	International Labour Organization	UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
IMC	Inter-ministerial Committee	WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations	WFP	World Food Programme
IOM	International Organisation for Migration	WG	Working Group
IP	implementing partner	WHR	Window for Host Communities and Refugees
IPMC	Implementing Partner Management Committee		
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency		
JIPS	Joint IDP Profiling Service		

1. Introduction

This country strategy evaluation (CSE) was requested by UNHCR's Representative in Sudan, with the purpose of informing UNHCR's multi-year strategic plan (MYSP) for Sudan from 2023. It is a formative learning-oriented evaluation with a strong forward-looking orientation. The evaluation is also intended to inform and support programming during 2022, and to strengthen UNHCR's adaptability to the dynamic political context in Sudan and in the wider region. The principal intended users of the evaluation are UNHCR staff in Sudan, especially senior management, as well as the UNHCR Regional Bureau.⁴

The objectives of the evaluation – drawing on the Terms of Reference (TOR) (see Annex 1) and its three high-level evaluation questions, marginally amended during the inception phase⁵ - are as follows:

- (1) Evaluate the relevance of UNHCR's strategies and operation in Sudan, in relation to the wider policy context, needs and rights of POCs and host communities, and in relation to its partners (chapter 4)
- (2) Assess UNHCR's performance in contributing to strategic and operational outcomes – its effectiveness (chapter 5)
- (3) Evaluate UNHCR's strategic engagement with partners to deliver its vision – coherence (chapter 6, which summarises a longer, standalone analysis of UNHCR's strategic partnerships)
- (4) Provide forward-looking strategic and operational recommendations to inform prioritization and strategic direction in the intermediate and longer-term including the 2023 MYSP (chapter 7)

2. Scope of the evaluation, and methods

2.1. Evaluation scope

Timescale

The CSE covers the period 2018 to 2021, during which time there have been very significant political changes in Sudan as well as in the wider region, described in Chapter 4 below. The evaluation particularly focuses on the period following the revolution in Sudan in 2019, through the Transition phase to the end of December 2021, following the military coup on October 25th, 2021. However, its findings are informed by the pre-revolution period, particularly in terms of how UNHCR's strategy and operations have evolved and the legacy of the pre-revolution period.

UNHCR portfolio

While the evaluation covers the entirety of UNHCR's portfolio (see Section 3.2 for a description of the portfolio), it has focused particularly on the following strategic issues⁶:

- Reorientation of the portfolio to follow UNHCR's global strategic reorientation, for example with a greater focus on IDPs and host communities
- Reorientation to focus on durable solutions, and the challenges of balancing a longer-term solution-oriented approach for refugees and IDPs with the continued ability to respond to emergencies, including refugee influxes and conflict-induced internal displacement, and issues of statelessness
- UNHCR positioning in a shifting landscape, in terms of the national political context and now as part of an integrated UN mission
- Adapting UNHCR's ways of working to match its strategic re-orientation

As a strategic evaluation, there were no deep dives into any particular type of UNHCR intervention, nor dedicated focus on any particular sector. But it has explored UNHCR's partnerships in some depth.

2.2. Evaluation methods

⁴ See Annex 2 for the stakeholder analysis

⁵ An inception report and a review of documentation were key outputs during the inception phase for this evaluation.

⁶ As set out in the inception report for the evaluation

2.2.1. Overall approach

The inception report set out the approach and methods the evaluation team planned to use, accompanied by an evaluation matrix (see Annex 8). In the spirit of a learning-oriented evaluation that had to adapt to a significant change in the political context towards the end of the field mission phase, the approach was adjusted in order to be responsive to the learning needs of UNHCR Sudan. Two particular adjustments were made:

- 1) The evaluation team did not strictly adhere to the evaluation matrix, but instead the findings on effectiveness have been organized and analysed to match the current Strategic Objectives (SOs) that UNHCR Sudan is following, and that are proposed for the new MYSP (as presented to the Strategic Management Retreat). The intention has been to structure the findings in an accessible and usable format for UNHCR staff in Sudan.
- 2) The evaluation approach changed tack after the military coup on October 25th, which significantly changed Sudan's political landscape. In consultation with the evaluation manager, the evaluation team adopted elements of a 'Real-Time Learning' approach⁷ to support UNHCR staff to reflect upon and adapt to the highly unstable and dynamic context. The evaluation team developed three possible scenarios for the future trajectory of Sudan – status quo, best case and worst case (see Annex 7) – and ran an online workshop for UNHCR senior management in Sudan to explore the implications of each scenario for UNHCR's strategy, programming and partnerships. These three scenarios are referred to throughout the evaluation report and specific recommendations have been developed for each of the scenarios. While the political context in Sudan continues to be unstable and fluid, the evaluation team's analysis of the context is up to end December 2021.

UNHCR Sudan Strategic Objectives SO 1: Provision of Protection and Essential Humanitarian Support SO 2: Emergency Response and Preparedness SO 3 Durable Solutions for Refugees, IDPs, Returnees and Stateless SO 4: Catalyzing Development-oriented Responses to Displacement

2.2.2. Analytical frameworks

As this is a strategic evaluation, it has set out to answer a number of high-level questions taking account of the entirety of the UNHCR portfolio. The evaluation has been guided by two analytical frameworks:

Strategic analytical framework

A five-point analytical framework was developed in the inception phase, informed by the emphasis in the TOR, and has been used to guide the evaluation and its conclusions. See Figure 1.

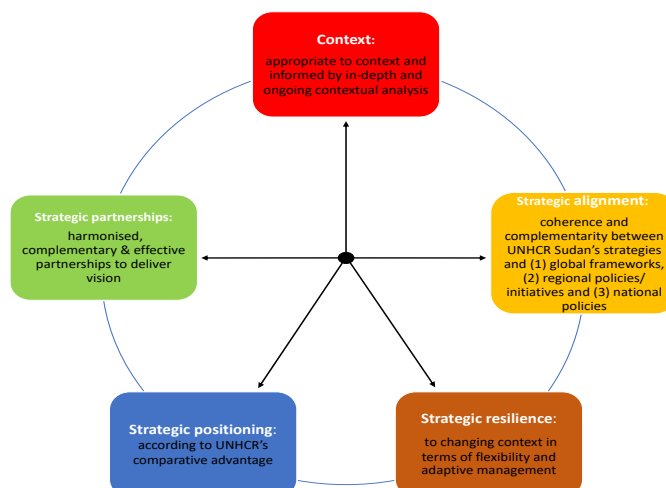
Framework to assess UNHCR's partnerships (see Annex 2).

A framework was developed to assess UNHCR's partnerships, combining three dimensions:

- a) A four-category typology of **partnership approaches**, using UNHCR's spectrum of partnerships, from more transactional approaches to more transformative;
- b) **Partnership principles** for effective partnerships (an expanded version of Humanitarian Partnership Principles); and
- c) A tool to assess the **added value** created by partnership working, and key areas of **collaborative advantage**.

⁷ See Buchanan-Smith, M. and Morrison-Métois, S. (2021) 'From Real-Time Evaluation to Real-Time Learning: Exploring new approaches from the COVID-19 response'. ALNAP paper. London: ODI/ALNAP

Figure 1: Analytical framework for the CSE



2.2.3. A Theory of Change based approach

A *Theory of Change* (ToC) has been used to guide and inform the different steps of the evaluation framework. As UNHCR Sudan did not have an explicit and agreed ToC for the evaluation period (2018-21), this had to be built retrospectively during the inception phase. This was initially constructed from the documentation review and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) during the inception phase, and was subsequently tested, validated and further developed through a participatory *Theory of Change Workshop* held online with the country office.⁸ The ToC focused on the most recent strategic shifts made by the CO, and was thus designed to be primarily relevant to the country strategy/portfolio in October 2021.⁹ It has been adapted further during the main phase of the evaluation in order to feed into the MYSP for 2023, with key learning points extracted. See Annex 4. The entire process has also played an important role in introducing UNHCR senior staff to the concept and utility of the TOC.

2.2.4. Participation and utilisation-oriented

As a learning-oriented evaluation, it was designed to ensure maximum participation of UNHCR staff, while being sensitive to the pressure and time constraints they face on a daily basis. Ways of involving staff included:

- (1) Consulting primary intended users during the inception phase about how the evaluation can best meet their needs.
- (2) Engaging staff at Sub-Office and Field Office (FO) levels in short, facilitated reflection and learning sessions through mini workshops that lasted for one to two hours. (See a summary of points raised from the mini-workshops in Annex 6).
- (3) At the end of most of the visits to Sub-Offices and FOs evaluation team members debriefed the head of office and/ or other staff.
- (4) A dedicated debriefing meeting for three members of the Senior Leadership Team.
- (5) Two online workshops for senior management, as described above: one on the TOC in September and one on future scenarios in December.

Although an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) had originally been proposed for this evaluation, to comprise some of UNHCR's key partners in Sudan, including donors, government, other UN agencies and implementing partners (IPs), the ERG was never actually formed by the CO. As a result, the evaluation became much more oriented towards UNHCR Sudan staff, especially Senior Management.

⁸ For a detailed explanation of why and how Theories of Change can be applied in evaluations, and built retrospectively when required, see the slide deck for the participatory *Theory of Change Workshop* held with the country office on 8th September 2021.

⁹ The evolution of the strategic framework, which underpinned the previous strategy phases (as set out in Section 2 of the documentation review from the inception phase) is contained in the ToC workshop presentation.

2.2.5. Purposive sample

As well as engaging with UNHCR senior management and key stakeholders in Khartoum, the evaluation team carried out field missions of three to five days in five states where UNHCR has a sub-office or FO and a substantial programme, i.e. (1) **White Nile State** (Kosti), (2) **North Darfur** (El Fasher), (3) **West Darfur** (El Geneina), and (4) **Gedaref State** (Gedaref). In addition, the 'Two Areas' comprising the Kordofans, and Blue Nile state were covered remotely, through online workshops and remote interviewing, and a short visit was made to the FO in Khartoum State.

Field locations were selected purposively to ensure coverage of different contexts and groups of Persons of Concern (POCs), different types of UNHCR interventions, and the range of strategic issues that the evaluation set out to address, listed above. See Annex 2 for the criteria used to select field locations.

2.2.6. Data collection methods

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, with a high dependence on qualitative methods as is usually the case for this kind of strategic evaluation. The following data collection methods were used to answer all evaluation questions, with a major emphasis on KIs:

1. **Review and analysis of secondary documentation:** Review and analysis of secondary sources began in the inception phase with a documentation review report and continued thereafter as other documents were made available to the team. See Annex 9 for the bibliography.
2. **Key Informant Interviews:** This has been a key source of information as 240 key informants (KIs) have been interviewed. See Annex 3 for a full list of KIs covering a range of different categories.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** This method was used to consult 16 different groups of POCs (refugees and IDPs) and host communities. See Annex 3.
4. **Online surveys:** Two online surveys were carried out: (a) Of UNHCR Sudan staff, (b) Of UNHCR partners.
5. **Observation:** One member of the evaluation team was present as an observer throughout the UNHCR Senior Management Retreat in Khartoum in October. Observation was also consciously used as a means of gathering data and information during fieldwork, for example in camps and with POCs.

Annex 2 describes the ethical considerations taken into account in the data collection methods.

2.2.7. Analysis process

The team has triangulated its findings on an ongoing basis:

- Triangulating information received from different key informants (for example between different implementing partners, and between different UNHCR staff).
- Triangulating between different information sources, for example information from KIIs and documented results.
- Triangulating between different geographic locations e.g., between UNHCR Sub-Offices.

In order to assess strategic alignment of UNHCR Sudan's frameworks, strategies and policies, the team reviewed a number of global and regional frameworks and strategies, plus national policies, as captured in Annex 2.

As far as possible the team carried out its analysis collectively, initially in a two-day workshop in Khartoum and subsequently online.

2.2.8. Constraints

The evaluation faced the following constraints:

1. Political instability and the military coup on 25th October cut short KIIs in Khartoum, especially with GoS and UNHCR staff in CO, and with some development actors.

2. Political unrest and suspension of the internet in Sudan in the three weeks following the military coup hampered collective team analysis.
3. Response to the online surveys was also hampered during the weeks of political unrest and suspension of the internet. The partnership survey had been launched just before the 25th of October but could not be promoted with GoS partners after the coup. The staff survey, which was ready to be launched at the time of the coup, was delayed by a further couple of weeks.
4. The illness of one team member during the fieldwork phase cut the capacity of the team, affecting fieldwork in Khartoum state, which was further constrained due to lack of access after the coup. This impacted the evaluation team's ability to cover the stateless.
5. The evaluation team's access to refugee camps in White Nile state was constrained by flooding in early October, requiring two separate visits to Kosti.
6. The limited time in the field for such a major evaluation meant that the evaluation team spent a total of five days consulting UNHCR's target caseload: POCs (refugees, IDPs, stateless) and host communities. While this brought important POC perspectives into the evaluation findings, the depth and breadth has inevitably been limited, as well as the evaluation team's ability to address diversity.
7. It is challenging to identify UNHCR's key achievements, outcomes, and impact from its monitoring data, and therefore to identify if and how it is fulfilling its comparative advantage in Sudan as a UN agency fulfilling certain normative functions.¹⁰ (See also Section 5.2 below). This has been a major constraint for the evaluation team, which has instead relied on interviewing a very large number of key informants, and triangulating findings between KIs.
8. Delays in receiving some critical documentation also hampered the analysis phase of the evaluation.

3. Context and UNHCR's Operation

3.1. Context analysis

This section summarizes key developments in the Sudan context from 2018-21 (the period covered by the CSE), which have been most relevant for UNHCR Sudan's country strategy and operations. It also provides a brief update on the context since the military coup on October 25th 2021, which has implications for UNHCR's future strategy and operations.

3.1.1. Political and economic context

2018 to October 2021

By 2018 Sudan had been ruled by a totalitarian government for almost three decades, under the so-called "Al-Ingaz" (Salvation) regime headed by President Bashir. The conflict in Darfur was in its fifteenth year despite a number of attempts to mediate and broker peace. Political control of the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile states was also contested.

In 2018-19, Sudan faced a growing economic crisis as it struggled with the cumulative impact of decades of economic problems and the implementation of economic and structural reforms designed to tackle these. The cost of living rose rapidly with inflation reaching 73 per cent in December 2018, accompanied by serious shortages of basic supplies (bread, fuel, medicines) and reduced access to basic services (health care, education and banking). This severely impacted the livelihoods and well-being of POCs and host communities alike – as well as the wider public.¹¹ Protests in Khartoum in January and again in December 2018 signaled growing popular dissatisfaction and a desire to end the Bashir regime. Country-wide unrest and further protests culminated in a large-scale popular uprising, which saw the downfall of the government on 11th April 2019.

A new Transitional Government of Sudan (GoS) was established in August 2019. While composed of many able technocrats, the new government inherited the legacy of decades of poor governance, weak

¹⁰ This was noted in the documentation review completed in the inception phase

¹¹ UN OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020

civil service structures, lack of attention to basic services and economic mismanagement. An important but highly challenging political and economic reform process to “dismantle” the embedded structures and corrupt practices of the old regime and transform political and economic governance began. There was a partial lifting of US sanctions in October 2019 in response to the political transition, while the Berlin conference for Friends of Sudan in June 2020 was also followed by delisting of Sudan from the US State-Sponsored Terrorism List (SSTL) in December 2020, setting the scene for the country to be readmitted back into the international financial system with the potential for gradually improving economic stability.

Despite these positive developments, early 2020 saw a further decline in the economy due to the impact of COVID-19, floods, desert locusts, and shortages of critical production inputs. Commodity prices increased during the second half of 2020 as hyper-inflation took hold.¹² In October 2020, the government announced a gradual lifting of fuel subsidies as part of economic reforms in the country, and full liberalization of fuel prices in July 2021. February 2021 saw the flotation of the SDG currency by the Central Bank in line with the parallel market, in an attempt to revive the economy and halt food price hikes.¹³ These economic reform measures, coupled with currency liberalization impacted both host communities and PoCs, with poverty rates increasing to 48.3% in 2019 and to 56% in 2020.¹⁴ Despite the decision that Sudan should receive badly-needed debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative made at the Paris conference in June 2021, the Transitional Government was under huge pressure as it struggled to improve economic conditions, with a high degree of political volatility as those allied to the former regime sought to exploit popular discontent resulting from economic hardship.¹⁵

An important political development during the first eighteen months of the Transition phase in Sudan was the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in October 2020 with the Darfur armed movements and some other groups from South Kordofan, Blue Nile and East Sudan. But this did not include all of the rebel movements, in particular certain factions in both Darfur and the Nuba Mountains; this has contributed to ongoing instability, particularly in those geographic areas.¹⁶ It was against this backdrop that this evaluation was commissioned, in April 2021.

From end October 2021

On October 25th there was a military coup. Sudan’s army chief appointed himself as the head of a new ruling body, dissolved the transitional government, arrested the prime minister and several of his cabinet colleagues, imposed a state of emergency and cut off the internet. General Al-Burhan defended the coup saying that the army acted to prevent civil war and still intended to return power to civilians. The staging of the coup is partly attributed to the support or participation of leaders of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), some of whom are also signatories to the JPA, and have kept their representatives in the post-coup cabinet.¹⁷

The military takeover was immediately met by large waves of anti-coup protesters in the streets of Sudan’s major cities. Regular demonstrations, strikes, rallies and a campaign of civil disobedience have continued. Over 50 protestors are reported to have been killed and hundreds more wounded.¹⁸

Sudan’s military leaders have also come under immense pressure from Western countries threatening to slash economic aid, including tens of billions of dollars in debt relief.¹⁹ On November 21 General Al-

¹² UN WFP Market Monitor December 2020 – Sudan. Inflation was 254% in December 2018, Sudan Central Bureau of Statistics as reported by Sudan News Agency <https://suna-sd.net/read?id=701191> accessed October 2, 2021

¹³ <http://www.fao.org/giews/food-prices/food-policies/detail/en/c/1381867/>

¹⁴ African Development Bank, Sudan Economic Outlook <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/sudan/sudan-economic-outlook> accessed October 2, 2021

¹⁵ IMF (2020) <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/06/29/pr21199-sudan-to-receive-debt-relief-under-the-hipc-initiative> accessed October 2, 2021

¹⁶ UNHCR (2020) Sudan Transition Strategy 2021 – 2022

¹⁷ See <https://riftvalley.net/publication/what-next-juba-peace-agreement-after-coup-sudan>

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/4/more-protests-expected-in-sudan-after-pm-hamdoks-resignation>.

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/11/world/africa/sudan-military-coup.html>

Burhan responded by signing a political declaration with Abdalla Hamdok, reinstating him as Prime Minister and promising the formation of a technocratic cabinet²⁰. The suspension of economic and development aid, and of debt relief since October 25th, by the World Bank and a range of other actors, are a major setback to the prospect of further economic reform.²¹

Although it is still early to determine the full economic impact of the coup, all the indications are that Sudan's economic crisis is deepening as fuel prices have escalated, there are widespread shortages of both locally produced and imported goods, and economic activity has stalled. The consequences are serious for the livelihoods of millions of Sudanese. Rapidly increasing humanitarian need is already a reality²².

3.1.2. Sub-national conflict dynamics

In the two years after the revolution the incidence of violent conflict and protection challenges actually rose in a number of states.²³ This was particularly evident in Darfur with a major outbreak of violent conflict in West Darfur in January and again in April 2021 (see section 5.3.2), and fresh waves of internal displacement in North Darfur.²⁴ Following the signing of the JPA, security deteriorated in a number of Darfur's towns as the armed groups associated with some of the JPA signatories roamed freely and there was little or no progress in implementing the security arrangements of the JPA. Criminality increased, and key informants in North Darfur described a rise in violence against IDPs attempting to engage in seasonal return to farm in 2021.²⁵ This has coincided with the withdrawal of UNAMID leaving a protection vacuum in Darfur, which UNITAMS has been unable to fill. There has also been continued insecurity and conflict in the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. In all of these states lack of humanitarian access has been a major issue throughout the transitional period.²⁶ Increased insecurity and perceived lack of progress in addressing the underlying causes of conflict, such as land issues, has fuelled disillusion and disappointment with Sudan's Transitional Government amongst local people.²⁷ Since the military coup there has been a further upsurge in violence and looting in Darfur and also in South Kordofan.²⁸

3.1.3. Regional conflict dynamics

Conflict and volatility in neighboring countries has triggered new influxes of refugees in the last three to four years, particularly from conflict in the Tigray region of **Ethiopia** since the end of 2020, which has continued to escalate (see Section 5.3.2). Since the secession of South Sudan in 2011, ongoing conflict and insecurity had triggered recurrent influxes of refugees from **South Sudan**, which is the source of the largest number of refugees in Sudan. Ongoing inter-communal conflict in the **Central African Republic** (CAR) since 2017 has resulted in continued new arrivals of CAR refugees in Central and South Darfur in 2020 and 2021. Following the death of President Deby in **Chad** during a military operation against rebels, Chad has also been under a transitional government. Eastern Chad has been affected by violence and displacement in addition to the influx of Sudanese refugees from West Darfur.

²⁰ PM Hamdok has since resigned, on Sunday 2nd January 2022, casting further doubt over the political future of Sudan.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59855246>

²¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2021/10/27/world-bank-group-paused-all-disbursements-to-sudan-on-monday>

²² See https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sudan_2022_HNO_En.pdf which predicts that 30% of the population will need humanitarian assistance in 2022. The number of people in need in Sudan in 2022 will be the highest in the past decade.

²³ As reported by UNITAMS staff

²⁴ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/1/8/Darfur-Sudan-Janjaweed-militia-revolution-conflict-IDPs-displacement>

²⁵ Kills in El Fasher town, North Darfur

²⁶ OCHA (2021) Sudan Situation Report

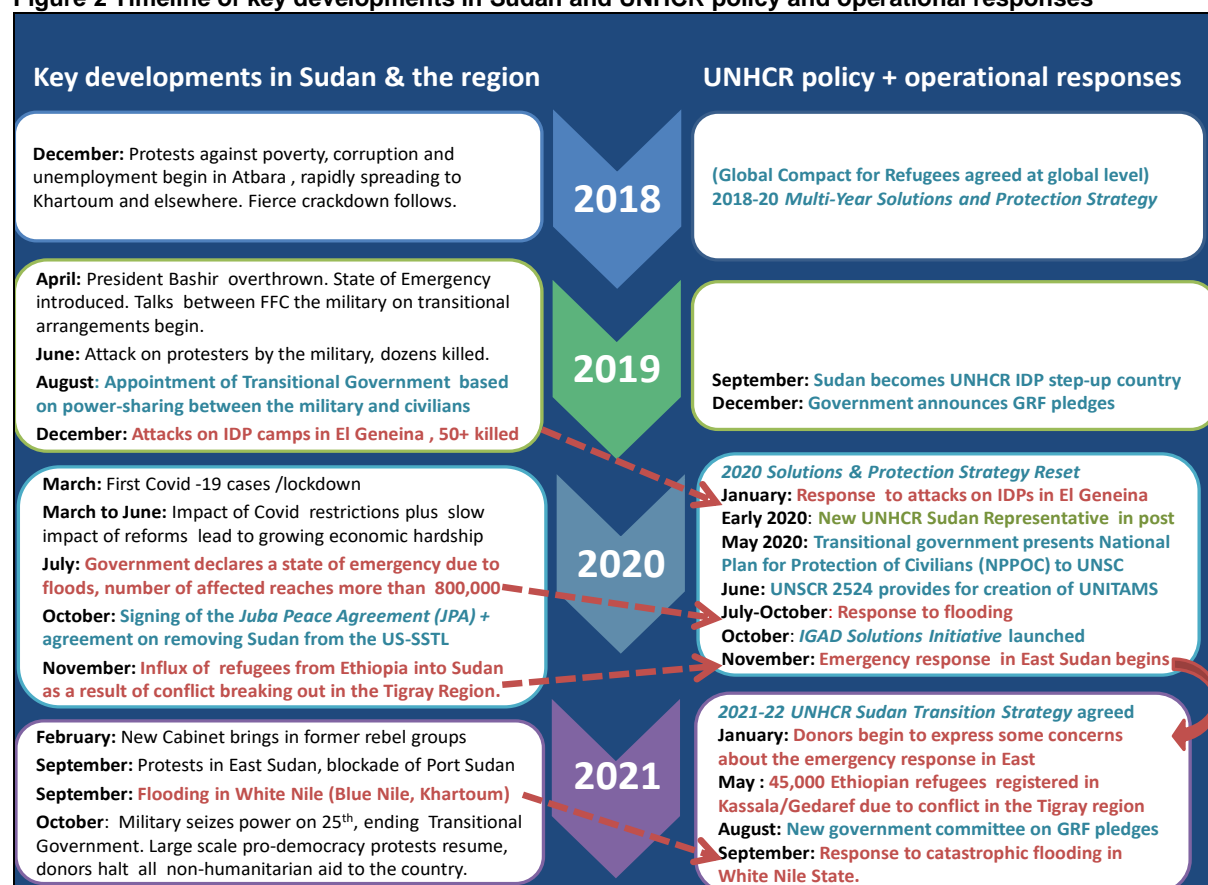
²⁷ Kills in North and West Darfur

²⁸ In mid-November, for example, there were attacks on civilians by armed tribal militias in West Darfur, North Darfur, South Darfur, and Rashad (South Kordofan) resulting in fatalities, looting of livestock and property, displacement, and burning of villages. OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, Sudan (January - December 2021). On the evening of 28 December, the premises of WFP warehouse in El-Fasher came under attack from unknown armed groups, following the looting and reported violence around the former UNAMID base in town two days earlier. (<https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/secretary-general-condemns-looting-reported-violence-around-el-fasher-base-former>). In response, a curfew was declared by the Wali of North Darfur on 29th December

3.2. An overview of the UNHCR Sudan operation

The changes in context referred to above have significantly influenced the shape of UNHCR operations in Sudan over the course of the evaluation period (2018-2021). Figure 2 presents a summary of key developments in Sudan during the 2018 to 2021 period. The dotted red arrows indicates where there is a direct link between a key development in Sudan and UNHCR's policy and operational response.

Figure 2 Timeline of key developments in Sudan and UNHCR policy and operational responses



UNHCR Sudan is one of the largest UNHCR operations in the world, with the presence of over 5 million IDPs, IDP returnees and refugees who are spread across Khartoum, White and Blue Nile States, Kordofan, East Sudan and Darfur.²⁹ Following the strategic reset to step-up programming for IDPs, largely focussed on Darfur, the number of IDPs targeted by UNHCR increased by around 37% since 2018 while the number of targeted refugees has remained largely constant (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of POCs targeted by UNHCR per year³⁰

POCs	2018	2019	2020
Refugees	1,078,287	1,055,489	1,040,730
Asylum seekers	17,622	15,545	15,596
Returned Refugees	1,805	2,191	0
IDPs	1,864,195	1,885,782	2,552,174
Returned IDPs	386,243		
Other POCs	3,737	3,694	3701
TOT POCs	3,351,889	2,962,701	3,608,500

²⁹ UNHCR (2021) Presentation to Senior Management on Structures and Reporting Lines

³⁰ Source: UNHCR Global Focus Insight (Key Budget Reports)

Between 2018 and 2019, UNHCR's expenditure trebled, reflecting increasing numbers in need, increased political space for UNHCR to address those needs, and increased levels of donor funding (see Figure 3).

The operation currently has 656 staff, also a considerable increase since 2018, with a staff budget alone of \$40 million at the end of 2021.³² This is almost double the level in 2018 (\$21,806,656).³³

Of UNHCR's total expenditure of \$129.4M in 2020, a much higher proportion (just under 80%) was on refugees (\$101.8M), even though refugees are a much smaller proportion of the caseload than IDPs, on which expenditure was \$22.5M, 17% of total expenditure.³⁴ On the basis of the figures for IDPs and refugees in 2020 in Table 1, this gives a per capita expenditure of \$98 per refugee and \$9 per IDP. This disparity is evident in Figure 4.

There is also a disparity between the funding of protracted refugee caseloads and new refugee influxes. At the Senior Management Retreat in 2021, the Kassala sub-office reported a decreasing budget for a rising caseload, (\$31 per refugee in 2022)³⁶, with the Kosti sub-office also citing a decrease from an estimated \$26 per refugee in 2021, to \$13 per refugee in 2022. Kosti has the lowest rate of disbursement of its operational budget in 2021 so far (68% compared with around 80% for all other sub-offices).

The increasing proportion of spend on basic needs and shelter between 2020 and 2021, largely for refugees, goes some way to explaining what the increased spend on refugees has been on. The proportion of spend on registration and profiling has seen the most significant change over the evaluation period, downwards. See Table 2

Figure 3: Planned budget and expenditure by year ³¹

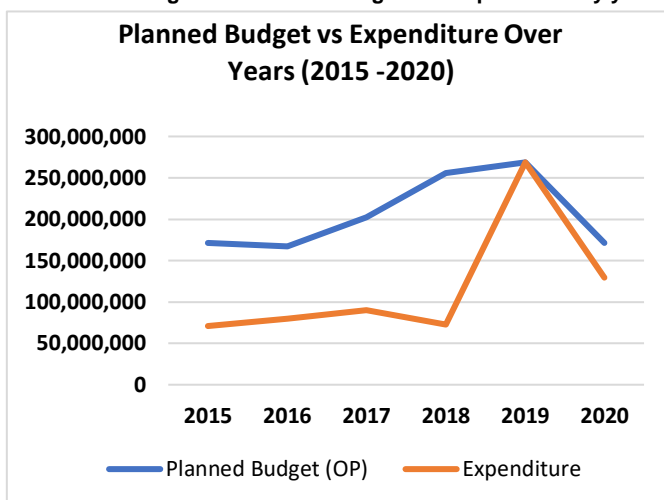
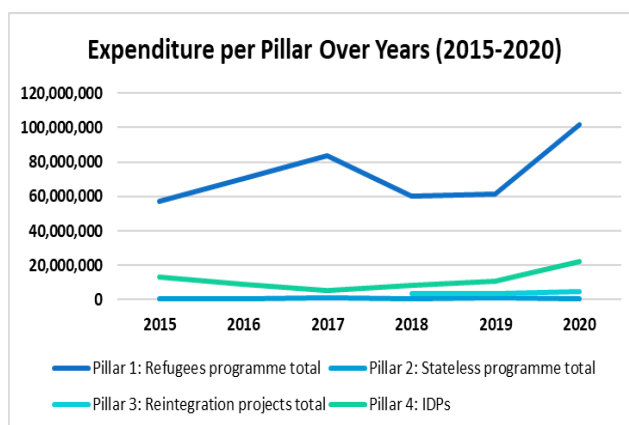


Figure 4: Expenditure by pillar (POC category) by year ³⁵



³¹ Source: UNHCR Global Focus Insight (Key Budget Reports).

³² UNHCR (2021) Presentation to Senior Management on Structures and Reporting Lines

³³ UNHCR (2021) Presentation to Senior Management on Structures and Reporting Lines

³⁴ Notes from the UNHCR Sudan Senior Management Retreat, October 2021

³⁵ Source: UNHCR Global Focus Insight (Key Budget Reports).

³⁶ Based on figures cited at the Senior Management Retreat, of US\$ 4M/127,900 refugees)

Table 2: Spend by Objective per annum³⁷

Objectives evolution by Year					
Objectives	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Basic and Domestic Items	13.11%	28.26%	35.55%	12.12%	24.53%
Shelter and Infrastructure	7.11%	4.76%	9.87%	33.71%	15.08%
Health	16.11%	14.09%	11.50%	8.83%	11.91%
Reception Conditions	10.12%	7.79%	9.18%	7.97%	8.76%
Community Mobilization	1.34%	2.44%	11.97%	10.76%	8.41%
Operations Management	7.77%	5.40%	6.16%	12.08%	7.88%
Education	14.14%	13.65%	5.62%	3.84%	7.80%
Registration and Profiling	16.36%	10.58%	4.16%	2.66%	6.69%
Water	7.80%	6.17%	3.95%	4.40%	5.04%
Sanitation and Hygiene	6.13%	6.85%	2.03%	3.63%	3.91%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

As UNHCR strategic ambition grew over the evaluation period, so did UNHCR’s willingness and need **to work in partnership**. The number of partners has grown. See Figure 5. The number of local NGO partners has decreased in favour of international NGOs.³⁸ See Figure 6. A full assessment of UNHCR’s engagement with partners is presented in Chapter 6 and in the separate Partnerships Report.

Figure 5: Partners and PPAs by year³⁹

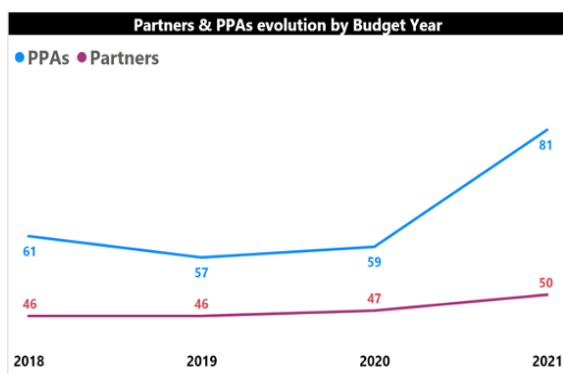
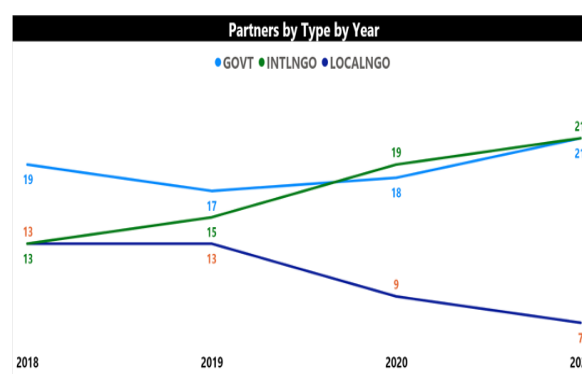


Figure 6: Partner by Type by year



4. Relevance

4.1. Introduction

This section explores UNHCR Sudan’s strategic alignment with global frameworks, regional strategies and national policies (section 4.2), and how it has adjusted its portfolio in response to a rapidly changing context (section 4.3). It provides an overview of the extent to which UNHCR’s strategies and operational design are tailored to meet the needs and priorities of POCs and host communities (section 4.4), and concludes with an assessment of how far UNHCR Sudan has operationalized the HDP nexus (section 4.5).

4.2. Alignment with global frameworks, regional plans & strategies, national policies

Key findings:

- Since 2018 there has been increasing alignment between the main strategies guiding UNHCR’s operations in Sudan, global refugee frameworks, UNHCR’s corporate policies and strategies, regional

³⁷ Source: UNHCR (2021) Presentation to Senior Management on Structures and Reporting Lines

³⁸ The changing pattern in terms of PPA partners is due to a range of factors including decentralization of contracting as well as reported challenges in terms of local NGOs capacity (Kills with FOs); it is also partly a result of UNHCR shifting contracts offshore during the economic crisis, an option that was only available to international NGOs. See Section 4.3.1

³⁹ Sources for Figures 5 & 6: UNHCR (2021) Presentation to Senior Management

strategies, and the emerging national policy context under the transitional government. However, operationalization of UNHCR Sudan's current strategic direction is lagging and requires concerted effort and investment to be fully realized and internalized by UNHCR staff.

- A consequence of UNHCR Sudan aligning more closely with global, regional and national frameworks, strategies and policies is a substantial expansion of its portfolio; for example, to 'step-up' its engagement with IDPs, and to pursue longer-term and durable solutions for both refugees and IDPs while continuing to fulfil its role as an emergency refugee agency. While clear strategic objectives have been set through the transition strategy for 2020 onwards, there is nonetheless a sense of considerable overload and stress for the CO and senior leadership, sometimes lacking prioritisation within the expanded portfolio.
- A more progressive national policy context relating to refugees, IDPs and host communities emerged in the Transitional phase, actively supported by UNHCR. This is still at an early stage, yet to be rolled out and implemented at sub-national/ state level, with many challenges to operationalization, particularly since the military coup. There is, however, an important role for UNHCR staff at Sub-Office level to play in supporting strategic thinking and the roll-out of national strategies at state level. This in turn requires strategic prioritization and direction within UNHCR.

Alignment with frameworks

During the inception phase the evaluation team identified the most important frameworks for UNHCR Sudan alignment, at four different levels: global, UNHCR corporate, regional and national levels. See Table 3 below, and Annex 2, Figure 2.1.

As a signatory to the **1951 Refugee Convention**⁴⁰, Sudan has a long history of an open-door policy on refugees. The more recent **2018 Global Compact for Refugees (GCR)** sets out a new approach to refugee response and management, promoting a longer-term perspective and broader support base. The transitional government effectively signed up to the GCR (in contrast with the former Bashir regime, which did not), making nine broad pledges at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019, with UNHCR's support and encouragement (see below). This promised a new era in Sudan, of a more progressive policy context on refugees, and it became more feasible for UNHCR Sudan to align its country-level strategies to the guiding global refugee frameworks. Under the previous regime the space to engage with even the most basic elements of protection had been severely constrained.⁴¹ However, the gap between progressive policy statements and operationalization of those statements should not be underestimated, particularly in the changing political context.

In 2019 the new transitional government strongly encouraged UN agencies and other international actors to shift their focus from humanitarian assistance to more developmental interventions. In many ways this aligned with the shift in direction that UNHCR has been promoting at corporate level, for example to share refugee burden-sharing, to work more closely with development actors, and to support the resilience and self-reliance of refugees and host communities, while still engaging in its core business of responding to refugee emergencies⁴². These shifts in direction are reflected in UNHCR's Sudan's 2021-22 Transition Strategy document, which emphasizes solutions and includes 'catalyzing development-oriented responses to displacement' as a strategic objective, as well as the provision of protection, essential humanitarian support and emergency response and preparedness.⁴³

UNHCR's corporate policy on '**Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement**'⁴⁴, followed by its '**Initiative on Internal Displacement**' of 2020-21⁴⁵ represent another significant shift in strategic direction at global level, which UNHCR Sudan has closely followed as a selected IDP 'step-up' operation. As a result, it has significantly expanded its engagement with IDPs in Sudan, in particular

⁴⁰ As well as the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa

⁴¹ See, for example, Jaspars, S. and Buchanan-Smith, M. (2018) 'Darfuri Migration from Sudan to Europe. From displacement to despair'. HPG/ ODI, and Research & Evidence Facility of the EU Trust Fund for the Horn of Africa. August

⁴² See, for example, UNHCR (2017) 'UNHCR's Strategic Directions. 2017-2021'

⁴³ UNHCR (2021)

⁴⁴ UNHCR (2019) 'Policy on Engagement in Situations of internal Displacement'

⁴⁵ UNHCR (2019) 'UNHCR's Initiative on Internal Displacement. 2020-2021'

attempting to fill the protection void described in section 3.1, when UNAMID withdrew. This is most evident in Darfur, which has the largest concentration of IDPs and has continued to experience new waves of displacement in recent years, in a context in which the protection infrastructure for IDPs was substantially weakened with the withdrawal of UNAMID.

In terms of the regional and national policy context, UNHCR has appropriately engaged with government to support four key policy initiatives during the transition phase, although each is at an early stage:

- 1) UNHCR Sudan has been proactive in supporting GoS to implement its aspirational **GRF pledges**, bolstered by high-level engagement from the High Commissioner for Refugees during a visit to Sudan in March 2020. This resulted in a comprehensive and ambitious Action Plan⁴⁶, drafted by UNHCR. With hindsight, this did not adequately prioritise nor reflect the main concerns and focus of government.⁴⁷ As acknowledged by UNHCR staff, the detailed draft plan may have proved overwhelming to GoS when a lighter and less ambitious approach was needed. Nevertheless, the GoS established a high-level mechanism to realise some of the aspirational GRF pledges and to monitor progress of implementation⁴⁸, actively supported by UNHCR, which has shared lessons learned from other countries. The new reconstituted government (that lacks political support) following the military coup at the end of October 2021 has reiterated its commitment to the GRF pledges. At the time of writing UNHCR has continued to support the inter-ministerial committee on the GRF pledges, for example to report on progress against the pledges to the international High Level Officials meeting in mid-December 2021.
- 2) UNHCR has actively engaged with the GoS **National Plan for Protection of Civilians (NPPOC)**, drafted in May 2020 and presented to the UNSC in preparation for the exit of UNAMID, and which includes a component on addressing IDPs and refugees.⁴⁹ UNHCR features prominently in a draft UN plan for support for implementation of the NPPOC as this must be a collective effort. Although at the very early stage of implementation, UNHCR has begun to support awareness of the NPPOC through consultation in Darfur and is citing the NPPOC to frame recommendations in its protection advocacy briefs.⁵⁰ UNHCR is uniquely-placed to continue supporting federal government's roll-out of the NPPOC, as a collaborative effort, and especially at state government level in parts of the country where protection needs are high, for example in Darfur and also the Two Areas.
- 3) The **Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan (JPA)**, signed in October 2020, has a specific component on IDPs and refugees.⁵¹ This includes the right to voluntary return, citizenship, identity, participation, ownership, and housing.⁵² The agreement seeks to pave the way for durable solutions by creating conditions conducive to the voluntary return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees, but was yet to be fully implemented before the military coup of October 25th, in particular the security arrangements, which are fundamental to safe and successful return and reintegration. Nevertheless, senior leadership in UNHCR Khartoum cite this as a key policy for UNHCR to engage with, and just under half of respondents of the online staff survey refer to the JPA continuously or frequently. UNHCR Sudan is uniquely placed to support GoS in implementing the protocol on IDPs and refugees in the future, although the proposal for a Joint Refugee and IDP Commission appeared to have been deprioritised by government, even before the military coup of 25th October. At the time of writing, the future of the JPA after the coup is in question.⁵³

⁴⁶ UNHCR (2020) 'Draft Plan of Action – GRF pledges'

⁴⁷ For example, it included activities such as 'Review of the Asylum Act', which government officers have told the evaluation team is not their priority.

⁴⁸ GoS (2021) 'GoS National Vision for Host Communities and Refugees (2021-2026)'

⁴⁹ 'The national plan of the Sudan for protecting civilians after the exit of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur' 21 May 2020

⁵⁰ See, for example, 'Protection of Civilians Advocacy Brief' from the Protection Cluster in Darfur, in September and October 2021

⁵¹ Republic of South Sudan (2020) 'Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees' Juba Peace Agreement, initialed in Juba on 28 August 2020 by the Transitional Government of Sudan, the Darfur Parties and the Mediation

⁵² With reference to the agreement signed in Juba on 28 August 2020 by the Transitional Government of Sudan, the Darfur Parties and the Mediation on 'Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees'

⁵³ See <https://riftvalley.net/publication/what-next-juba-peace-agreement-after-coup-sudan>

- 4) UNHCR has provided substantial support at many different levels to the **regional IGAD ‘Solutions’ initiative**, launched at the end of 2020, including to IGAD directly. Its support for GoS engagement with this initiative has included high level visits and advocacy from the High Commissioner, ongoing support to the GoS inter-ministerial Technical Committee for the National Plan for Host Communities and Refugees; and co-hosting (with UNDP) an international consultant to draft a national ‘Solutions’ strategy in collaboration with GoS.

UNHCR has also supported GoS in developing a National Vision for Host Communities and Refugees (2021-2026), published in July 2021, which incorporates these four policy initiatives, and was a requirement to access development funding from the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank Group.⁵⁴

At the UN level, **Resolution 2524** provides the framework for an integrated UN mission with the establishment of the *United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS)*⁵⁵. The 2021-22 UNHCR Sudan Transition Strategy situates UNHCR’s role within this framework, stating that ‘UNHCR’s work on protection, peacebuilding, and durable solutions in particular, will be closely aligned with UNITAMS’.⁵⁶ At the Darfur level UNHCR is credited for its vision and approach in promoting integrated cross-UN ways of working, and is playing a leading role in providing critical thinking on how to operationalise integration,⁵⁷ although this is at a much earlier stage in respect of the Two Areas. (See also chapter 6 on partnerships). In practice, however, alignment with Resolution 2524 has been constrained by the limited capacity of UNITAMS and slow progress in producing an integrated cross-UN strategy, plus lack of guidance on how UNITAMS and UN agencies should work together.⁵⁸

UNHCR’s engagement with **Agenda 2030 and the SDGs** has been mainly through the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF - the last of which was prepared under the former regime), and especially preparations for the forthcoming UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF). UNHCR is beginning to engage with the latter, for example currently inputting into the Common Country Analysis (CCA) to ensure UNHCR’s data and analysis on refugees is incorporated. Although describing itself as a humanitarian agency, UNHCR Sudan sees its contribution principally in the SDG results areas on social services, rule of law and governance, and community stabilization⁵⁹. It will need to engage actively to ensure the development needs of refugees, IDPs and the stateless are well-reflected in the UNSCDF.

Table 3 presents **the evaluation team’s assessment of strategic alignment** between UNHCR Sudan’s strategies and key frameworks with strategies and policies at global, regional and national levels, in the period preceding the military coup of October 25th. The overall picture is of medium to high level strategic alignment, particularly in written strategy documents and in terms of the perspective and orientation of UNHCR’s senior leadership in Sudan. However, there is much less evidence that this has been **operationalized at programme and sub-national levels**. The results of the online staff survey show that the majority of respondents frequently or continuously refer to many of these frameworks, particularly the GCR, the GRF pledges, the NPPOC and the IGAD Regional Solutions Initiative. But a substantial number do so very occasionally or not at all. See Figure 7.

Table 3: Strategic alignment of global frameworks, regional strategies and national policies

Level	Framework/ policy	Alignment	Comments
Global	GCR	Medium	• Aspirational, yet to be fully operationalized

⁵⁴ GoS (2021) ‘GoS National Vision for Host Communities and Refugees (2021-2026)

⁵⁵ UNSC (2020) ‘Resolution 2524 (2020)’. Adopted by the Security Council on 3 June 2020

⁵⁶ Page 4 of the UNHCR Sudan 2021-2022 Transition Strategy

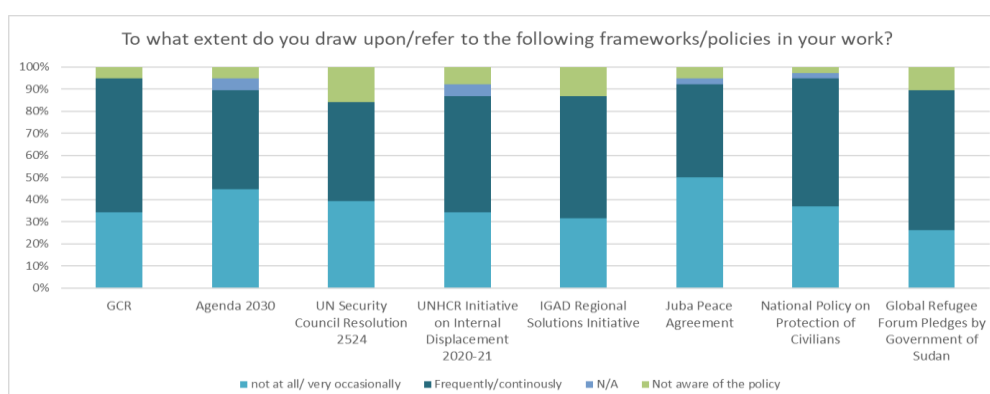
⁵⁷ According to KIs interviewed for the evaluation

⁵⁸ According to numerous KIs interviewed by the evaluation team, within and outside UNHCR

⁵⁹ Source: UNHCR inputs into IMS questionnaire

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting GoS GRF pledges⁶⁰
	Agenda 2030 & SDGs	Emerging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity through UNSCDF Important link to catalyzing development responses
	UNSC Resolution 2524	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR highly aligned in terms of Darfur vision Much work to be done in terms of operationalization (collectively with other UN agencies)
UNHCR Corporate	UNHCR's Strategic Directions (2017-2021), Initiative on Internal Displacement	Medium to high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligned in terms of Sudan strategy and aspiration eg working across spectrum of forced displacement - 'step-up' on IDPs, partnerships Much to be done re operationalization
Regional	IGAD Regional Solutions Initiative	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR commitment and engagement is high Still at an early stage re operationalization & addressing political issues
National Policy Context	NPPOC	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR key player in UN support plan for NPPOC Very early stages of implementation Darfur focus.
	JPA	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR leadership on Durable Solutions Constrained by delayed implementation of other aspects of JPA e.g., security arrangements

Figure 7: Indication of UNHCR staff engagement with key frameworks and policies



Source: UNHCR online staff survey

The **shift in strategic direction** from a heavy preoccupation with South Sudanese refugees at the beginning of the period covered by this evaluation to a more expansive portfolio driven by a longer-term perspective and with much greater engagement with IDPs, as per UNHCR's mandate, requires support and investment to roll out, especially for UNHCR staff who have long been steeped in the provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees. This has not yet happened beyond senior management level.⁶¹ The expansion of UNHCR's portfolio associated with this strategic alignment has stretched the CO to the point of overwhelm, with staff at the Sub-Office level seeking guidance on prioritization and strategic direction. In the words of one staff member: *'We have to fulfil our core humanitarian mandate AND look at durable solutions and peace-building. How do we get the balance right?'*

In summary, UNHCR has been working closely and constructively with GoS at federal level to develop a progressive policy context for refugees, IDPs, the stateless and returnees, but across a wide range of issues that can lack coherence and prioritization. The GoS National Vision, which identified five sectoral priorities should help to provide focus. As long as the GoS continues to pursue a progressive policy regime for refugees and IDPs, UNHCR's prioritization should follow the GoS's prioritization.

⁶⁰ For example through the Solutions initiative, supporting a national strategy on solutions, supporting the National Vision on refugees and host communities

⁶¹ KII with UNHCR staff at CO and SO levels

However, the lack of progress in implementation of national policy initiatives has left a policy vacuum at sub-national level. This is where UNHCR has a critical role to play in the future. At the time of writing, after the military coup, there are many unknowns about how the policy context will evolve.

4.3. Strategic and operational adjustments in response to key changes in context

Key findings:

- **UNHCR has shown greatest adaptive agility at the strategic level, appropriately and rapidly changing strategic direction and working more closely with government in the transitional phase, also adapting plans and budgeting in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- **However, weak context analysis is a major factor constraining UNHCR's adaptiveness. At national level this has limited strategic thinking and preparedness for change in the political context. At sub-national level, lack of robust context analysis has been a major constraint to conflict-sensitive programming. In the dynamic and unstable political context of Sudan this is highly problematic. Where there are examples of good context analysis and understanding within UNHCR, these tend to be one-off. Adaptive management is also constrained by a weak organizational monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) culture.**

4.3.1. Adjustment and adaptation to three key developments in Sudan: 2018-2021

In the fluid and highly dynamic context of Sudan, strategic and operational flexibility are essential for UNHCR to remain relevant. This is also critical for strategic resilience, one component in the analytical framework guiding this evaluation. The evaluation has looked at UNHCR's adjustments and adaptiveness to four key developments in Sudan in the period 2018 to 2021. Three are explored in this section: the changing political and security context, the economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The fourth – response to climate-related emergencies – is covered in Section 5.3.2 on emergency response.

1) Adjusting and adapting to the dynamic political and security context

The instability of the political and security context in Sudan in the last few years is described in section 3.1 above, including the implications of instability and conflict on displacement in the wider region. UNHCR Sudan grasped the opportunity post-revolution to work in a very different way with the new transitional government, rapidly producing the 'Strategy Reset' that reoriented the agency's approach to work with the transitional government in a 'whole-of-government' approach⁶², and prioritising peace in line with the new Constitutional Declaration of 2019. This was updated in 2021 with the more detailed two-year Transition Strategy, which sought to align with the various global, regional and national initiatives, some of which were very new. This showed a rapid and entirely appropriate high-level adaptation to the newly emerging political context, positively engaging with the emerging progressive policy context. However, UNHCR's strategy and planning appears to have been based on an overly optimistic expectation of the trajectory of the transition phase. Although emergency preparedness and response are key strategic objectives, there is no evidence of planning for different political scenarios if this positive trajectory did not materialise, as is now the case since the military coup on 25th October 2021.⁶³

Key to working in a dynamic political situation is strong contextual analysis, to inform and plan for adaptation, and to be prepared to launch an emergency response. (Emergency preparedness is covered in section 5.3.2 below). Some of UNHCR Sudan's strategy documents contain an overview analysis of the national context, for example the 2021-22 Transition Strategy, and the Operations Plan Document for 2021.⁶⁴ Less clear is how this contextual analysis and understanding is updated on an

⁶² In other words, engaging with a wide array of commissions and line ministries. See Chapter 6 on partnerships

⁶³ In contrast, see the Darfur Development Strategy (DDS) Review that outlines three different scenarios for the Transition phase (TRIAS Consult, 2019 'Defining Peace and Development Priorities for Darfur in Relation to Future Scenarios and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Sudan')

⁶⁴ As noted in the documentation review conducted during the inception phase

ongoing basis⁶⁵. With a few exceptions, ongoing contextual analysis and understanding is weaker at sub-national level, highly dependent on the analytical skills and knowledge of heads of SOs and FOs. Yet well-informed and granular analysis is essential to understand local conflict dynamics, the implications for protection, and to inform conflict sensitive programming. Box 1 captures the learning from a lack of/ belated conflict analysis and understanding in West Darfur, with consequences for the emergency in 2020, although the evaluation team notes that political economy and conflict analysis has significantly improved in recent months under UNHCR's new senior leadership in the region. This example from West Darfur also demonstrates the danger of a lack of strong contextual analysis to inform conflict-sensitive programming, thus potentially fuelling conflict. Constraining factors include:

- 1) UNHCR's high dependence on international staff in management and decision-making positions, many of whom are in post for relatively short periods of time, which limits their ability to develop a deep understanding of the context, or to take historical factors into account.
- 2) With a few exceptions, limited knowledge and expertise amongst UNHCR staff working in conflict settings in applying conflict analysis and conflict sensitive programming.
- 3) Limited networking and engagement with local knowledge and expertise, to deepen understanding of the experience and perspectives of different communities.
- 4) Lack of access of UNHCR staff to conflict-affected areas, because of insecurity.

Box 1: West Darfur - the importance of local-level context analysis

Context:

During the last seventeen years of conflict in Darfur, UNHCR and many other humanitarian actors have a track record of working almost exclusively with IDPs from settled farming backgrounds, and minimal or no engagement with Arab pastoralist groups.⁶⁶ The latter were vilified early on as perpetrators of the conflict, associated with the Janjawiid, although subsequent research revealed high levels of vulnerability within this group.⁶⁷ The exclusion of pastoralist groups by international agencies has been raised a number of times and was a factor triggering the formation of the Pastoralist Commission after the Doha 2011 agreement, but to little avail. According to key informants in Darfur, the continued exclusion of pastoralist groups was a contributory factor to the outbreak of violent conflict between them and IDPs on two occasions in 2021, (See also Section 5.3.2) and resulted in pastoralist leaders making specific demands of UN agencies).⁶⁸

Contextual and conflict analysis

This exclusion of pastoralist groups, and the consequences, are indicative of a lack of contextual analysis and of conflict sensitive programming at the sub-national/ local level, as acknowledged by some UNHCR staff. In response, a joint UN peacebuilding assessment was carried out in three localities in West Darfur, under the UNITAMS banner and with UNHCR's engagement.⁶⁹ The aim was to better understand the causes of conflict in those three localities, which had become major hotspots for violence in West Darfur since the end of 2019, and to identify potential opportunities for peacebuilding programming.

Learning

There is important learning for UNHCR from this experience in West Darfur, as outlined below.

- Context, and especially conflict analysis, needs to take a historical perspective, to understand long-term dynamics and grievances as part of a robust political economy analysis.

⁶⁵ It is done once a year when operational plans are drawn up, but in a fluid and fast-changing context like Sudan, ongoing context analysis is crucial

⁶⁶ See Young et al (2020) 'Changing Land Tenure Regimes' Taadoud Integrated Natural Resource Management Learning Brief 1 https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/NRMBrief1TaadoudII_Final.pdf

⁶⁷ Young et al, (2009) 'Livelihoods, Power and Choice. The Vulnerability of the Northern Rizeygat, Darfur, Sudan'. Tufts University, FIC. January

⁶⁸ KII's with UNHCR staff

⁶⁹ UNITAMS (2021) 'West Darfur Peacebuilding Assessment. El Geneina, Kereinik and Beida Localities', May

- Inclusion is usually understood and approached as ensuring that particularly vulnerable individuals or groups are not overlooked (for example the disabled or elderly), within a population group that has already been targeted for assistance. The West Darfur experience highlights another important dimension to inclusion with implications for conflict sensitive programming: ensuring that entire ethnic/ livelihood groups are not excluded.
- At sub-national level deep understanding of the context and conflict dynamics within UNHCR has tended to rely on skilled and informed individuals rather than being systematically carried out or incentivized within the organization.
- Expertise in conflict sensitive programming is similarly dependent on a few individuals. UNHCR staff working in conflict-affected areas require training and support to develop these skills.
- In addition to periodic one-off detailed context and conflict analyses, this needs to be continued and carried out on an ongoing basis by UNHCR teams
- Context and conflict analysis carried out collectively by UN agencies has a number of benefits, including: familiarity with, and understanding of different geographic areas, and of different aspects of livelihoods and the economy; relationships with different groups, key informants and networks; and scale in terms of pooling resources
- There is much local level knowledge and expertise that UNHCR is not currently drawing upon, for example within local universities. The UNITAMS peace-building assessment was, however, carried out in close collaboration with the University of Geneina's Peace and Development Centre.

There are two examples of relatively new UNHCR initiatives that demonstrate how strong contextual analysis can inform adaptive programming in response to instability and outbreaks of violent conflict:

- The **protection cluster in Darfur has published a number of advocacy briefs** in recent months, highlighting incidents of violent conflict that have resulted in displacement, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), injury and death. They describe well local level conflict trends and dynamics to inform action on protection, with specific recommendations. (See Box 2 in Chapter 5 below for a more detailed description).
- In collaboration with UNITAMS, **UNHCR recently established a 'Protection of Civilians Incident Tracking' tool**, covering Darfur, the Two Areas as well as White Nile, Kassala and Gedaref. It aims to analyse trends and patterns of recorded incidents by protection partners, in order to plan and adjust their interventions. Cumulative and collaborative analysis can also identify hotspots of violence to inform other programming such as the feasibility of promoting durable solutions in particular geographic locations. This is welcomed by UNITAMS and is said to be used and referenced by senior UN leadership.

Building on these examples, in terms of the analytical skills and collaborative approach adopted, plus the learning in Box 1, is essential for UNHCR to improve its contextual understanding and therefore its ability to understand and adapt to the changing political and security context.

2) Adapting to the economic crisis

The severity and impact of the economic crisis that has engulfed Sudan since 2018 has been described in section 3.1 above.

Programmatically, UNHCR adapted to the very high inflation rate by prioritizing in-kind distribution of humanitarian assistance over cash transfers, particularly amongst the refugee caseload, in Gedaref State and elsewhere. Where UNHCR has been providing cash transfers, for example to IDPs for shelter in West Darfur, it increased the amount available in response to high inflation. The impact of the economic crisis on household livelihoods is said to have accelerated UNHCR's efforts to support host communities, beyond the provision of infrastructure, and to promote a 'whole of society' approach.⁷⁰ Economic pressure on the livelihoods of the poorest and most vulnerable is inevitably accompanied by increased protection risks as households and individuals engage in more precarious and hazardous

⁷⁰ KII UNHCR staff

activities to earn income. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to carry out a detailed impact assessment of UNHCR's adapted programming, although UNHCR documents report how the dire economic conditions mean that refugees and refugee returnees have struggled to meet their basic needs and, with limited access to the job market, have remained heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance.⁷¹

The economic crisis has had a major impact on the **operating environment** in Sudan: the combined effect of fuel shortages, hyper-inflation, and the difference between the official exchange rate and the parallel market rate until these were aligned.⁷² With support from HQ, UNHCR Sudan reached out to learn from offices in other countries that had/ were experiencing rampant inflation. Adaptations included shifting as many contracts as possible offshore, so they could be paid in dollars, although this inevitably favoured INGOs. The challenges were most acute for national NGOs and government partners for which this option was not available, although UNHCR was able to take advantage of the relaxation of some regulations from the Central Bank of Sudan.⁷³

3) Adaptation to COVID-19

The main adaptation to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was the addendum to the Sudan Country Refugee Response Plan of 2020.⁷⁴ This describes how the Refugee Consultation Forum (RCF) was leading an inter-agency COVID-19 Contingency and Preparedness Action Plan with a number of localized response plans for refugee camps and settlements. The Sudan Country Refugee Response Plan budget was revised upwards, with significantly expanded budget lines for WASH, Health and Nutrition, and Protection. During field work, the evaluation team heard reports of how some of this additional programming had supported the Ministry of Health at state level, of the establishment of isolation centres for the Covid-affected, and of awareness and vaccination campaigns targeting refugees.⁷⁵ UNHCR's 2021 Operations Plan features the pandemic as a significant factor throughout the year, sees its role as continuing to incorporate refugee's needs in COVID-19 responses within Sudan as well as taking special measures in refugee camps.⁷⁶ UNHCR has also co-led the IDP COVID-19 camp Task Force with IOM. The Operations Plan acknowledges the economic impact of the pandemic on livelihoods, especially on already vulnerable South Sudanese refugees.

Applying COVID-19 regulations to protect UNHCR staff proved particularly difficult in the emergency refugee response in Gedaref. There were high rates of infection amongst staff with one fatality. In the words of one key informant: 'we learned the hard way'.

4.3.2. Analysis of factors that enabled or constrained UNHCR's strategic adjustment

According to the results of the staff survey carried out by the evaluation, UNHCR has been most adaptive in response to COVID-19, followed by the changing political and security context, with slightly weaker performance in adapting to Sudan's economic crisis. The overall verdict from staff who participated in the survey is that UNHCR is 'reasonably adaptive'. See Figure 8.

At the macro and micro levels, the evaluation team concurs with this assessment. UNHCR quickly adjusted its strategic direction in response to the changing political context in Sudan, and IPs report a responsiveness to their requests to adjust PPAs to changes in need or context at the very local level. Between these two levels, however, adaptation appears to be constrained by four key factors:

- (1) Weak contextual analysis and engagement with knowledgeable local actors;

⁷¹ UNHCR (2020) Concept Note – UNHCR Sudan Community Support Project Mechanism (CSPM), as captured in the documentation review carried out in the inception phase

⁷² This was noted in the documentation review in the inception phase

⁷³ KII UNHCR staff

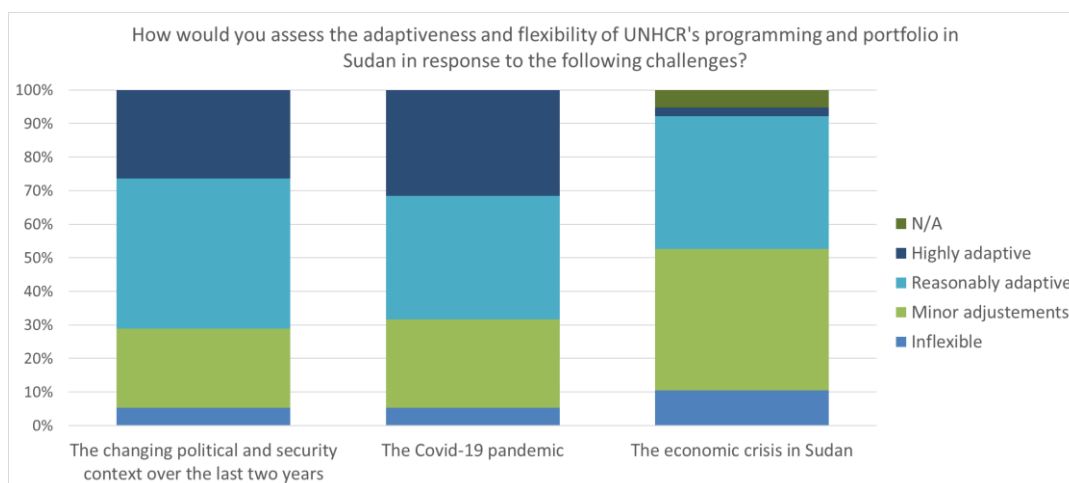
⁷⁴ UNHCR (2020) Sudan Country Refugee Response Plan - COVID-19 Addendum

⁷⁵ For example in White Nile state

⁷⁶ This includes adaptations in how new refugee influxes are managed and transferred to camps, preventive measures in reception and transit centres as well as camps, and WASH interventions. See UNHCR 'Operations Plan. Sudan. 2021'

- (2) Standardised tools and reporting frameworks that encourage standardized programming and objectives, and discourage engagement with the context and adjustment to the changing context;⁷⁷
- (3) Overly bureaucratic processes and procedures, eg. on procurement and release of budgets;⁷⁸
- (4) A weak MEL culture – see Chapter 5 – which is key to adaptive management.⁷⁹

Figure 8: UNHCR staff perceptions of UNHCR’s adaptiveness and flexibility



Source: UNHCR online staff survey

4.4. Tailoring to the diverse needs and priorities of POCs and host communities

Key finding:

- **UNHCR’s needs assessments are generally strong, implying that it has good knowledge of the needs and priorities of POCs and host communities. But the record is mixed in terms of programming meeting those needs and priorities in all their diversity. Constraining factors include:**
 - **Programming being overly driven by donor priorities and requirements**
 - **Lack of access, and inadequate financial resources**

UNHCR has a strong track record in carrying out assessments, particularly for refugees, providing valuable information about the basic needs and priorities of POCs and host communities to inform UNHCR’s programming. The annual Basic Needs and Vulnerability Assessment (BaNVA)⁸⁰ provides an important and useful national overview of basic needs and vulnerabilities of refugees and host communities in different states of Sudan, as does UNHCR’s participatory assessments, where the analysis is also carried out at state level. It is less clear how this kind of information and analysis has informed its overall strategy during the transitional period. The 2021 Transition Strategy⁸¹ appears to have been guided more by analysis of the overall political and policy context at national level than by POC concerns and perspectives. It is less evident how the daily challenges and ongoing protection needs faced by POCs, much of which remained unchanged after the revolution, were taken into account, except at the most general level.

UNHCR carries out many one-off emergency and sectoral needs assessments. For IDPs these are increasingly and appropriately inter-agency.⁸² For both refugees and IDPs these play a particularly important role in informing operational design, as does the annual Humanitarian Response Plan that OCHA draws up with UNHCR input. However, there are still some fundamental constraints to UNHCR meeting the needs and priorities of POCs and host communities, including:

⁷⁷ As noted in the documentation review carried out during the inception phase

⁷⁸ As reported in the staff survey, in mini-workshops with staff in different SOs and FOs, and by UNHCR partners

⁷⁹ Ramalingam, B., Wild, L., and Buffardi, A. (2019) 'Making Adaptive Rigour Work. Principles and practices for strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management'. ODI Briefing Note. April

⁸⁰ Voluntas, SPSC (2021) 'BaNVA. Final Report'. August

⁸¹ UNHCR (2021) 'Sudan Transition Strategy 2021-22', June

⁸² According to review of UNHCR assessments carried out by the evaluation team

- 1) UNHCR staff at sub-office level describe how UNHCR Sudan has been overly driven by donor priorities and requirements, for both IDP and refugee programming.⁸³
- 2) Ongoing communication between UNHCR (often through its IPs) and POCs and host communities is not as strong as it needs to be for responsive and adaptive programming⁸⁴, especially for two-way communication whereby POCs and host communities have access to UNHCR to raise concerns. (See Chapter 5)
- 3) In the more insecure parts of Sudan where internal displacement has been highest, for example most of the Darfur states, UNHCR staff and some of their IPs have faced major access constraints due to lack of capacity to provide armed escorts where these are required, thus severely limiting the ability to consult or assess need.
- 4) Where UNHCR's assessments have clearly indicated needs and priorities of POCs and host communities, their ability to respond has been constrained by inadequate resources, for example the assessment of needs of POCs and host communities in White Nile state after flooding.⁸⁵

Note: This sub-section has focused on one commitment under UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy – organizational learning and adaptation in response to input from POCs. See section 5.4 for an assessment of UNHCR's delivery on the other five AGD policy commitments.

4.5. Operationalisation of the HDP nexus

Key finding:

- **The 'HDP nexus' is a new concept for most staff within UNHCR Sudan, at a very early stage of being applied. Nevertheless, UNHCR's strategic reorientation to promote a longer-term perspective in its emergency response, to incorporate durable solutions and to support the peacebuilding priorities of the Transitional government indicates close alignment with nexus ways of thinking, whether or not they are labelled as such. UNHCR's performance in adopting nexus ways of working is weaker, excepting some good practice in durable solutions work, ranging from an absence of joint conflict analyses to weak learning and evidence gathering across HDP actions.**

The triple Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus is still a relatively new concept, for the aid sector in general including UNHCR. The evaluation has used the OECD-DAC Recommendation on the HDP nexus as the benchmark: this document is regarded within the sector as the key reference on the nexus, which UNHCR is considering signing up to.⁸⁶ A shorthand interpretation of the HDP nexus is the following: '*prioritising prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, investing in development whenever possible, while ensuring immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met*'.⁸⁷ Over one-third of respondents in the online staff survey said they were not aware of the HDP nexus, or did not refer to it in their work.

UNHCR's global strategic reorientation, in particular the GCR, is widely regarded as an expression of the H-D part of the nexus even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the GCR policy document.⁸⁸ The triple nexus is not explicit in any of UNHCR Sudan's key strategy documents although aspects of the nexus are implicit. Indeed, the vision statement of the 2021-22 Transition Strategy speaks directly to the three nexus pillars: 'Refugees, IDPs, returnees, and stateless persons are protected, have safe access to essential services alongside hosting communities, contribute to sustainable peace, and progressively attain durable solutions'.

⁸³ Staff at SO level have described being given a few days' notice by the CO or RB to feed into donor proposals, thus precluding any meaningful consultation with POCs or assessments, particularly as new funding windows opened up. 'We miss a lot, responding to donor priorities rather than what's needed on the ground'. Staff also describe donor reporting being prioritised over consultation with POCs and host

⁸⁴ This has emerged through UNHCR's own assessments (see, for example, UNHCR Sudan 2019 Participatory Assessment) and also during field missions carried out by the evaluation team where some POCs described having to wait for UNHCR to contact them, rather than being able to approach UNHCR or its IPs directly.

⁸⁵ UNHCR staff report the diversion of funding from the White Nile flood emergency to other emergencies in Sudan

⁸⁶ See <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>. A number of other UN agencies have already signed up to this document, including WFP, IOM, and UNICEF. UNHCR has also recently completed an evaluation on its engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation – a useful reference for this CSE

⁸⁷ OECD DAC. 2019. Op. cit.

⁸⁸ As noted in the documentation review carried out during the inception phase

This is also reflected in the four SOs, which straddle the H-D components of the nexus, and UNHCR's strategic priorities, which explicitly include the peace component: 'support to Government-led durable solutions and peacebuilding initiatives, including the implementation of peace agreements'. The emphasis on an expanded multi-partner approach to deliver the vision is similarly in line with the HDP nexus. The strategy is much less clear in promoting nexus ways of working such as conflict sensitive programming, working to UNHCR's comparative advantage, and learning across HDP actions and multi-year flexible financing.

UNHCR's programming in Sudan has similarly evolved to address all three components of the nexus. Adopting a longer-term perspective in its emergency refugee response, for example the provision of services by government ministries, and the emphasis on solutions are very much in line with nexus ways of programming.⁸⁹ Its engagement with peacebuilding, however, is still embryonic as UNHCR works out its role and comparative advantage in this new area of work alongside more experienced peacebuilding actors. (See also Chapter 6).

Table 4 summarises key aspects of nexus ways of working that are particularly relevant to UNHCR, against which UNHCR Sudan's current strategy and programming are assessed. This reveals some discrepancy between its strategic aspirations and ways of working in practice. Areas of 'low alignment' provide a useful agenda for how UNHCR can strengthen operationalisation of the triple nexus in the future, both in its strategic thinking and in its programming.

Table 4: Assessment of UNHCR Sudan's alignment with the HDP nexus

Nexus way of thinking/ working*	Transition Strategy 2021-22'	programming	Comments
Coordination across the 3 pillars of the nexus	High (aspirational)	Medium	Stronger on humanitarian action, which is now taking a longer-term perspective. Still emerging for the D-P linkages
Joint analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict	Low	Low	This is essential to inform the appropriate emphasis between the H, D and P pillars
Engagement with peace-building	Medium	Low to Medium	This is a new focus for UNHCR, in which it is still finding its way, and its place
Putting people at the centre	Medium	Medium	Strong on assessments, weak on ongoing communication and responsiveness
'Do no harm' and conflict-sensitive programming	Low	Low	Weak, constrained by lack of contextual analysis See Section 5.2.1 above
Joined-up HDP programming – risk-focused and flexible	High	Low to Medium	Adaptation and flexibility high at the strategy level, but weaker adaptability in terms of programming
Invest in learning and evidence across HDP actions	Low	Low	Weak MEL culture – see Chapter 5
Predictable, flexible multi-year financing	Low	Low	Constraints to donor funding, much of which is available for relatively short time periods

* Summary based on OECD-DAC Recommendation (2019) as deemed applicable to UNHCR

5. Effectiveness

5.1. Introduction

⁸⁹ For example, the adoption of a durable solutions marker in the HRP (2021 and 2022) allows gathering of data on the degree to which humanitarian projects start to support interventions towards durable solutions. Secondly, the durable solutions analysis process led by the DSWG collected evidence on barriers and vulnerabilities of IDPs and returnees that can inform interventions across the HDP nexus.

As explained in section 2.3.1 above, the analysis and findings on effectiveness have been re-organised against the four strategic objectives described in UNHCR Sudan's 2021 Transition Strategy, that are also being used by the CO to guide the future MYSP. The chapter begins with an overview of UNHCR reporting of results and outcomes (section 5.2), including critical enabling and restricting factors, which are described more fully in section 5.5. The extent to which UNHCR Sudan has made progress on commitments to IDPs, and on inclusion of refugees and host communities is covered through examination of the four strategic objectives: sections 5.3.1 – 5.3.4. Section 5.4 explores the delivery of UNHCR commitments to implement its Age, Gender and Diversity policy. The chapter concludes with a reflection on efforts towards sustainability – section 5.6.

5.2. Analysis of UNHCR's reporting on results and outcomes⁹⁰

Key findings:

- **Data and evidence gathering are recognized by UNHCR Sudan's senior management as a gap, with which this evaluation concurs. Constraints include lack of investment in MEL and a cumbersome corporate RBM system.**
- **Lesson-learning processes appear to be *ad hoc* without documentation or follow-up, implying a weak learning culture that limits UNHCR's ability to take corrective action.**

UNHCR recognizes that data, and all it underpins in terms of effective delivery and coordination, is of critical strategic importance to the CO, if it is to realise its ambition and improve its reputation in Sudan: data, coordination and evidence were identified as of strategic priority by participants at the October 2021 Senior Management Retreat.⁹¹ While data gaps were raised during fieldwork, especially in the areas of registration and tracking of POCs, (East, Darfur) and protection monitoring (East and Darfur), as well as more generally for monitoring and evaluation purposes, equally there are opportunities in the collective recognition by UN agencies to use, coordinate and share data.⁹²

For such a large programme, there are currently extremely limited human resources dedicated to strategic oversight of data: one Senior Information Manager Officer in Khartoum supported by the Regional MEL role, and one MEL staff member in Darfur. The CO is also hampered by a cumbersome results-based management system where data gathered does not afford senior leadership insights into quality deficiencies, problem areas, or areas of impact.⁹³ Plans to implement the theory of change approach – which also formed part of this evaluation exercise – if conducted collectively, can assist with further defining intervention logic to achieve impact, and therefore indicators.

The absence of lesson learning has been raised consistently during the fieldwork phase: by internal staff invited to reflect on performance and by external key informants who engage with UNHCR. It is not clear how lessons learned are being gathered in a coherent way by UNHCR Sudan, nor how lesson learning processes are being driven and owned by programme teams and necessary steps taken to address problems. For example, while lessons from the emergency refugee response in the East were discussed at the senior management retreat, and individual senior managers have articulated relevant lessons, they have not been compiled or documented so that future planning can be based on these lessons.⁹⁴ Learning from mini-workshops carried out by the evaluation team with UNHCR staff at sub-office and FO levels have been collated in Annex 6 as part of this evaluation.

5.3. Effectiveness against Strategic Objectives in Transition Strategy

⁹⁰ This section draws on the findings of the documentation review carried out in the inception phase

⁹¹ Two of the 17 Strategic Priorities and Action points are data focused and over half of the remaining priorities depend on solid data. (UNHCR Note on Senior Management Retreat; Oct 21, 2021)

⁹² While data-based verification and registration processes are a strategic priority, during the scope of this evaluation we were unable to secure a concise overview of progress, and reasons for success and failure in different areas. This would be useful for the CO in order to set strategy in this priority objective.

⁹³ For example, it is impossible to tell from Indicator Achievement Reports whether UNHCR is any good at what it delivers, and hard to draw strategic judgements from the data about where the operation is excelling and where quality or effectiveness is lacking

⁹⁴ Discussions with various UNHCR Sudan senior managers

5.3.1. Protection and essential humanitarian response (SO 1)

Key findings:

- UNHCR has worked well to fulfil its comparative advantage in strengthening national policy on protection and has stepped into trying to address the protection needs of IDPs.
- There are, however, performance weaknesses in core areas of UNHCR's protection mandate, with failures to live up to partner expectations and to deliver on some of UNHCR's normative functions, in relation to coordination, advocacy and leadership in terms of ensuring essential protection systems and mechanism are in place. This has resulted in patchy performance on protection across the operation, although there are good practice examples to learn from.

Supporting the national policy on protection

UNHCR's strategic approach to protection has focused on supporting GoS and the national policy context.⁹⁵ For refugees, this has been through promotion of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), supporting alignment of national legislation with refugee law and inclusion of a refugee agenda in government and development programmes.⁹⁶ For protection of IDPs, an example is a new UNHCR project promoting awareness of the NPPOC.⁹⁷ This focus plays to UNHCR's comparative advantage, positioned between communities and government actors to advocate for change at policy level. However, UNHCR needs to further define its role in the implementation of protection of civilians, including its catalysing role in filling the protection gap left by the drawdown of UNAMID and the protection consequences of deteriorating socio-economic conditions since 2019.

Leadership, coordination, and advocacy on protection

The space for raising protection issues opened up since the fall of the previous regime in 2019, and UNHCR has been well positioned to enter this space. However, the presence and capacity of security institutions is weak. As described in section 3.1 above, protection needs have increased in some locations, and in Darfur the withdrawal of UNAMID has left high expectations of, and responsibility with UNHCR, particularly in view of the limited capacity of UNITAMS. Since the October 25th, 2021, coup, there is some evidence the protection space is already contracting.⁹⁸

Partners have flagged weaknesses in UNHCR fulfilling core areas of its protection mandate where it is failing to live up to expectations of its role on coordination, advocacy and leadership, and thus ensuring essential protection systems and mechanisms are in place.⁹⁹ There is a desire to see stronger UNHCR **leadership** on protection needs within the international community, for both refugees and IDPs, with the latter requiring considerably more effort.¹⁰⁰ The Protection Strategy currently under development at the UNCT level is a good example of where efforts could be spearheaded to finalize and implement this strategy in a timely and collegiate manner whereby UNCT members are meaningfully engaged in a collective approach to protection, recognising that protection needs in Sudan far exceed the capacity of any one agency to address.¹⁰¹ There are a number of areas where UNHCR can prioritise in order to achieve its objective of championing "the centrality of protection by leading the HCT and advising the RC/HC on protection mainstreaming, collective advocacy and interventions" including advocacy for greater livelihood support from other UN agencies (eg FAO, WFP) to reduce protection risks, with a particular focus on youth and women.¹⁰² UNHCR could also usefully be playing a more vocal advocacy role with donors to address funding disparities between protracted caseloads and new refugee influxes

⁹⁵ UNHCR's powerpoint presentation to the Refugee Consultation Forum, 29 September 2020

⁹⁶ UNHCR's powerpoint presentation to the Refugee Consultation Forum, 29 September 2020

⁹⁷ KII with UNITAMS and 2021-22 Sudan Transition Strategy p10

⁹⁸ Perthes, V. (2021) 'How to Stop Darfur's Descent into Darkness', Foreign Policy Magazine, December 30, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/30/sudan-darfur-coup-violence/>

⁹⁹ An assessment of partnerships and coordination related to protection is included in Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁰ KIIs with UN agencies and IP partners

¹⁰¹ KII UNHCR staff. See also section 3.1 above

¹⁰² For example, to discourage youth migration, risky livelihood strategies and coping mechanisms for women. While this may be recognised by UNHCR, there was little evidence of adequate advocacy with other UN agencies.

such as that in the East, as described in section 3.2. Funding disparities go some way to explain the greater protection risks for those caught in ‘forgotten crises’ in places like Kassala and White Nile, where livelihood support is inadequate and solutions have not yet been found.¹⁰³

There is evidence of UNHCR playing an **advocacy** role on some protection issues, for example with the state authorities in Darfur after incidents of displacement. (See also Box 2 below). But there is a call from some experienced international actors for UNHCR to play a bolder and more confident advocacy role, especially with government, speaking out against refugee and IDP atrocities in a timely manner, and thus playing to its comparative advantage doing what others cannot, while allowing other actors, for example NGOs, to play to their comparative advantage with a more hands-on approach to addressing protection needs at camp and community level while UNHCR has put the systems in place.¹⁰⁴

Protection for refugees

Protection of refugees, although a flagship activity at the core of UNHCR’s mandate, has been inconsistent in Sudan. In the East the recent influx of refugees was flagged at a high level for the lack of protection provision including SGBV, community protection, and serious delays in providing SOPs on protection; delays to WASH activities and lack of access to healthcare, despite high levels of political attention and funding.¹⁰⁵ Provision of protection and essential humanitarian services to the refugee influx in the East has improved since UNHCR deployed more senior technical staff, yet key informants from donors and government still highlighted a gap in livelihood support and risks to women and girls, and protection had not been adequately mainstreamed across other sectors.¹⁰⁶ Protracted refugee caseloads in the south continue to lack a sustainable solution and are vulnerable to loss of basic services as funding ebbs and flows, with protection implications due to the lack of livelihood opportunities. This was reported as a key protection issue for protracted caseloads in White Nile state, where there is an important advocacy and catalysing role for UNHCR to play in engaging donors and partners alike to address this gap. Likewise, there are serious unmet protection needs for both IDPs and refugees in Blue Nile.¹⁰⁷

Out-of-camp refugees make up over 70% of the South Sudanese refugee population, and live in dire humanitarian conditions, with poor access to basic services and livelihoods opportunities and protection vulnerabilities.¹⁰⁸ Conditions for these populations have worsened during the economic crisis and the Covid pandemic. The UNHCR Khartoum programme carried out a workshop with the Commission for Refugees (COR) in March 2021 to advance durable solutions for refugees in Khartoum State, which included specific recommendations to enhance refugee protection mechanisms, access to rights and addressing vulnerabilities through establishment of protection coordination mechanisms.¹⁰⁹ While this is a good example of leadership towards addressing increasing protection needs, these less visible long-term out-of-camp populations have received less attention and funding from UNHCR than new refugee influxes. A consequence of this is limited progress on documentation and inclusion in national services that keenly affects out-of-camp South Sudanese refugees. Momentum for initiatives like the one in Khartoum state could struggle in the face of the new political dispensation and limited donor funding.

Protection for IDPs

Expectations of UNHCR to lead on filling the protection gap in Darfur following UNAMID’s withdrawal are high. Protection needs in Darfur are also considerable and only likely to increase as security

¹⁰³ KII UNHCR staff

¹⁰⁴ KIIs international agencies

¹⁰⁵ (2021) Letter to UNHCR from group of donors; consistent with key informant interviews carried out for this evaluation.

¹⁰⁶ KIIs with donors and with UNHCR staff

¹⁰⁷ IDPs and refugees are situated in the same locations in Blue Nile State. Interviews with UNHCR staff and KIIs with international agencies

¹⁰⁸ UNHCR Sudan (2021) Country Refugee Response Plan

¹⁰⁹ UNHCR Sudan (2021) Report: Consultative Workshop – Assistance and Solutions for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Khartoum

deteriorates. Several interviewees remarked that protection needs remain to be clearly mapped out and a plan to address them articulated and responsibilities allocated according to partner strengths, but there has been a lack of capacity to do so in the face of growing need.¹¹⁰ Although UNHCR takes this role seriously, as articulated in the commitments of the IDP Step-Up agenda and the appointment of D1 level senior management in Darfur, greater support from senior leadership in Khartoum could provide momentum for addressing gaps.

The gaps are a lack of a collectively owned strategy; the absence of a monitoring and referral system in some Darfur states¹¹¹; inadequate protection monitoring instruments (although a tool for Protection of Civilians monitoring has just been released by the UNHCR-led protection cluster). Service mapping is also not yet in place; this is key for the work for the protection cluster. Some former UNAMID services, like the provision of legal aid, have not yet been picked up by UNHCR. Efforts to step-up advocacy, however, have been recognized, including taking protection concerns to the Wali, and the production of advocacy briefs in Darfur. See Box 2. Community-based protection has been an area of strength, and UNHCR has sustained protection networks inherited from UNAMID, capitalizing on strong existing relationships between ex-UNAMID staff who have now joined UNHCR staff and local committees. IDP protection so far is mainly focused on Darfur.

Box 2: Good practice examples of UNHCR protection work in Darfur

Darfur Protection of Civilians Advocacy briefs: Since May 2021 the UNHCR Darfur office (protection sector) has produced regular (sometimes weekly) 'Protection of Civilians Advocacy Briefs'¹¹² for all Darfur states, drawing on experience of a similar project for IDPs from its Iraq programme. These Briefs were initially produced for internal use within UNHCR and are now circulated more widely. They fulfil an important reporting function on incidents of insecurity and the protection implications (for example in terms of SGBV, injuries and deaths, and displacement), and make a number of specific advocacy recommendations targeted at different UN actors, and citing the NPPOC. Feedback from key informants within the UN system (beyond UNHCR) indicate that these advocacy briefs are well-received and valued. They are produced in a prompt and timely fashion. In order to fulfill their advocacy purpose, they could be more actively promoted by the CO in Khartoum.

Network of Women's Protection Committees in Darfur:¹¹³ Since UNAMID's withdrawal, UNHCR has picked up and is working with an established network of women's protection committees across the IDP camps of Darfur. Initially set up in the early years of the Darfur conflict by INGOs (some of which were expelled by GoS in 2009), the network was subsequently supported by UNAMID, and now by UNHCR. This is a positive and powerful example of continuity of support to an important community structure over more than 15 years, despite international institutional turnover. The network's capacity has increased so that committees now support each other. Individual committees provide support to victims of SGBV, report protection incidents and where possible seek legal aid and justice.¹¹⁴ With deteriorating security in many parts of Darfur, UNHCR has a critical role to play in continuing to support this network of women's protection committees, for example with legal aid and representation, to ensure their existence and role are known and respected by actors responsible for security, including the police and state authorities, and as a critical community-based structure for reporting protection incidents and to be supported in protection activities.

UNHCR staff in Darfur are very much aware of the shortcomings in the protection system compared with the overwhelming needs and have recently prioritized strengthening protection in West Darfur, which has seen some of the worst cases of violent conflict in recent weeks.

¹¹⁰ KII with UNHCR staff and other international actors

¹¹¹ KII North Darfur

¹¹² 'Protection of Civilians' Advocacy Briefs', Sudan Protection Sector, Global Protection Cluster

¹¹³ This information is based on FGDs in Abu Shouk camp and KII with UNHCR staff

¹¹⁴ The opportunities to seek legal aid and for SGBV and other protection incidents to be taken up within the justice system appear to have diminished since UNAMID's withdrawal.

Mixed migration and counter-trafficking

Mixed migration is likely to increase and become more dangerous in Sudan given national and regional insecurity.¹¹⁵ With the conflict in Ethiopia there has been an increase in human smuggling and trafficking on the eastern border, as refugees seek onward travel to Europe.¹¹⁶ There is a clear need to be addressed by the international community and UNHCR recognises this in its Transition Strategy.¹¹⁷ Partnerships will need to be chosen carefully. Over-reliance on COR has not proved effective and UNHCR appears to have been slow to pick this up.¹¹⁸ A politically savvy approach in an area vested in nefarious interests is necessary if UNHCR strategy in this area is to result in tangible difference. Despite UNHCR's investment in the Counter Trafficking and Mixed Migration Working Group, there is scepticism amongst some international actors that Sudan's numerous working groups are contributing to transformative change.¹¹⁹ The theory of change work planned for 2022 could help to define a strategy for this important thematic area.

5.3.2. Emergency Response and Preparedness for Refugee Influxes, IDP Displacement, Natural Disasters, and Returnees

Key findings:

- **Some aspects of UNHCR's strategic reorientation are apparent and appreciated in its recent emergency responses, for example increased support to host communities and early engagement with government line ministries for service provision, with a longer-term perspective. But there have been fundamental shortcomings (including protection, staffing and leadership issues, and poor coordination) in its response to the high-profile refugee emergency in the East, despite this being core UNHCR business that has occupied much senior management time at all levels: CO, Regional Bureau & HQ levels.**
- **Other major emergencies have received less attention, particularly severe flooding that affected the protracted refugee caseload in White Nile State where the response has been underfunded and somewhat neglected, by UNHCR and by the wider humanitarian community, despite its annual occurrence.**
- **UNHCR has a mixed record in responding to conflict-related emergencies affecting IDPs where context analysis and conflict sensitivity have lagged behind events (see Box 1 in Chapter 4). It has a key role to play in certain sectors (protection and shelter and NFIs), but this does not appear to be given commensurate attention or priority as refugee-related emergencies where UNHCR is held fully to account, despite the scale of some IDP emergencies.**

In the last couple of years, there have been three major emergencies that UNHCR Sudan has responded to. This section focuses on the most high-profile of the three, the emergency refugee response in East Sudan in 2020/ 21, drawing out key learning for UNHCR and for the wider organisation. See the accompanying briefing note for more detailed analysis and learning from all three emergency responses in 2020-21.

In many ways the influx of almost 60,000 Ethiopian refugees, fleeing conflict in Tigray from November 2020, carries the hallmarks of a classic emergency refugee crisis. There are, however, some distinguishing features: it took place during the Covid-19 pandemic; it has been particularly high profile as access to the refugees' areas of origin in Ethiopia has been highly constrained; and identifying

¹¹⁵ MMC (2021) Sudan at a cross-roads: the mixed migration consequences of Sudan's military coup.

<https://mixedmigration.org/articles/sudan-at-a-crossroads-the-mixed-migration-consequences-of-sudans-military-coup/>

¹¹⁶ CHR. Michelsen Institute (2021) Eastern Sudan: hosting Ethiopian refugees under tough conditions.

<https://www.cmi.no/publications/7943-eastern-sudan-hosting-ethiopian-refugees-under-tough-conditions> In addition to information from KIIs for another project.

¹¹⁷ 2021-22 Sudan Transition Strategy pp 10

¹¹⁸ Some of the reasons for this relate to overall management and leadership weaknesses in the emergency response in the east, described in the next section

¹¹⁹ KIIs with international agencies.

appropriate sites for refugee camps has been a major challenge in the physical and political environment in East Sudan, with repercussions for the effectiveness of the response.

UNHCR's leadership of the response and its programming have been subject to high profile criticism from western donor governments and some international NGOs, which has included: inadequate basic service provision, and failure to protect, particularly from trafficking and SGBV. At the time of the evaluation there was widespread agreement that UNHCR had considerably improved its performance.¹²⁰ But as explained above, there are still areas where further improvement is necessary, particularly around protection.

A fundamental question being asked of UNHCR, especially by some of its donors, is why performance has been problematic for a relatively small-scale yet well-funded emergency refugee response, that is the heart of UNHCR's core business. The evaluation has identified some of the key learnings from the emergency refugee response in the East, for UNHCR Sudan and for the wider organisation, presented in detail in the briefing note. These include:

- **Context:** paying greater attention to context and mobilising collective advocacy efforts (eg including donors) to negotiate camp locations.
- **Strategic orientation:** the benefits of adopting a long-term perspective from the outset, and working with host communities, while prioritising the provision of basic and fundamental services, including protection.
- **Planning:** improved contingency planning for natural hazards, and for basic infrastructure to ensure UNHCR is able to function effectively.
- **Leadership:** the importance of experienced and consistent senior leadership with clear lines of authority, and the need for support¹²¹ to the CO senior leadership.
- **Management and staffing:** issues of handover from the initial surge team, more realistic assessment of staffing needs and experience required, and the need for greater continuity
- **Partnerships:** more open relationship with donors, and partnerships with IPs oriented around comparative advantage and better utilisation of their skills.

The high-profile criticism of UNHCR's response to the emergency refugee crisis has triggered a certain amount of soul-searching within the organisation, especially at the CO level¹²², and has absorbed considerable senior management time and attention. However, these reflections and learnings do not appear to have been consolidated and shared, despite the seriousness of some of the concerns raised and the impact on UNHCR's reputation within Sudan and beyond. Hence, the evaluation team's efforts to capture key learning.

Contingency planning for further refugee influxes is an important part of the response. This, too, appears to have strengthened over time as earlier concerns about shortcomings in contingency planning have been taken on board. Key learning and adaptation includes:

- taking a regional perspective, informed by analysis of the context in Ethiopia and driven/ led by the Regional Bureau.
- collaboratively and interactively developing an inter-agency contingency plan within Sudan, for example through meetings and workshops involving all key actors.¹²³
- early negotiation and advocacy for new camp locations, drawing on donor governments as needed.

¹²⁰ Particularly amongst Key Informants interviewed in Gedaref who welcomed more senior and experienced leadership within UNHCR's team in Gedaref state.

¹²¹ This could include advisory and coaching support when senior leadership is under intense pressure and may have to make tough decisions

¹²² It was the focus of discussion at the recent Senior Management Retreat in Khartoum, for example, where the need for a thorough lesson-learning exercise was identified

¹²³ A number of agencies in Gedaref articulated their preference for doing contingency planning in workshops rather than through the electronic circulation of documents, which is how it had started

As documented in the briefing note on UNHCR's emergency responses in Sudan, additional learning from the emergency response to violent conflict in El Geneina in West Darfur in January and April 2020, and the flooding affecting the protracted refugee caseload in White Nile state includes:

- providing clear channels of communication for POCs.
- a strengthened procurement and supply chain that is better able to scale up to a rapid-onset emergency.
- UNHCR giving equal priority to the sectors where it plays a leading role in an IDP emergency response as to an emergency refugee response.
- continuing to support host communities, with basic services and addressing compensation for land now occupied by camps.
- shifting the locus of decision-making closer to the response.

5.3.3. Durable solutions (SO 3)

Key findings:

- **There has been good progress in leveraging the peace dividends of the political transition, particularly in leadership, collaboration and coordination in support of the IGAD Solutions Platform and the draft National Solutions Strategy, plus contributing to an evidence base for solutions for IDPs in Darfur through the DSWG.**
- **UNHCR does not currently have adequate capacity to support its ambition in durable solutions. In a context of deteriorating security and political fragility, further gains depend upon a coherent approach between UNHCR's policy work and its programming engagement, a well-articulated strategic approach to solutions, which is widely understood by staff working at all levels, and senior leadership to support sectoral collaboration and advocacy for funding.**
- **Recent research by the DSWG demonstrates the importance of understanding contextual differences and why an area-based approach is entirely appropriate. Informed by the context analysis, there is recognition that more than one solution is likely to apply to IDPs simultaneously, moving beyond conventional approaches to solutions.**

Durable solutions for IDPs, returnees, those at risk of statelessness and refugees is the third strategic objective in UNHCR's Transition Strategy (2021-22).¹²⁴ UNHCR broadened its ambition on durable solutions – which had previously largely focused on refugees – in response to the political transition in Sudan. The transitional government's prioritization of peace as key to identifying solutions to displacement has allowed UNHCR to engage meaningfully in IDP and returnee solutions where lack of security is cited as the most significant barrier to safe return.¹²⁵ UNHCR Sudan's current approach to durable solutions, with the long-term view of building self-reliance and placing communities as agents of their development means engaging across all three aspects of the HDP nexus, and greater alignment with the GCR as a global framework.

The strategy to achieve this objective principally follows two workstreams: one at policy level through support to the IGAD Solutions Initiative and engagement with GoS; and the second at a more evidential level, through the work of the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG). In support of these flagship activities, UNHCR teams have increased engagement with line ministries to promote POC access to national services, which intersects with work on the development side to support the GoS to realise its GRF pledges.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ UNHCR (2021) Sudan Transition Strategy 2021 - 22

¹²⁵ The Sudan Constitutional Declaration for the Transition Period set the completion of a comprehensive peace agreement as a priority for the first six months. Voluntary return and sustainable solutions for both IDPs and refugees were cited as one of fourteen key issues to be addressed in the peace negotiations, and fundamental rights were to be protected by law, including women's rights.

¹²⁶ UNHCR (2021) Sudan Transition Strategy 2021 - 22

Good progress has been made at the policy level. In October 2020, the Sudan-South Sudan Solutions Initiative was launched to strengthen the collective response to create enabling conditions for durable conditions, capitalizing on peace agreements in each country.¹²⁷ UNHCR has provided effective leadership at global, regional and national levels to support the “government-led comprehensive approaches” developed through the IGAD process.¹²⁸ UNHCR has collaborated with UNDP to support a senior consultant who has worked closely with the GoS in the second half of 2021 to support their first national strategy on Durable Solutions (presented at the IGAD Support Platform for review in August 2021). Although Sudan now has a solid national strategy and action plan in draft form – albeit hastily compiled little over a month before the deadline – elements remain politically contested and the situation post-October 25th coup is likely to present serious challenges to GoS leadership of the process.¹²⁹

Considerable progress has also been made by the DSWG, currently co-chaired by UNHCR, UNDP and DRC.¹³⁰ The DSWG has collaborated with the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) to carry out analysis in eight localities in Darfur in order to provide an evidence base for durable solutions programming in line with the HDP nexus. The area-based approach to IDP solutions in Darfur is entirely appropriate given the diversity and complexity of the context, reflecting the fact that opportunities and barriers to solutions vary greatly geographically.¹³¹ This work is a good example of cross UN collaboration as well as advocacy.¹³²

A challenge for UNHCR moving forward on its durable solutions ambitions will not only be in navigating the unstable political environment, but also ensuring linkages are made across workstreams and sufficient coordination is in place to galvanise informed support at locality, state, and federal levels of government and across HDP actors in Sudan. For instance, some key informants expressed the opinion that the DSWG is too much of a talking shop and more follow-up action is required, although the DSWG is by definition a coordinating not an implementing mechanism. Others indicated they did not feel engaged or well informed on UNHCR’s durable solutions work in general, despite expressing interest to be involved.¹³³ This can be negatively perceived as UNHCR withholding information, although is more likely due to lack of capacity within UNHCR. There is currently one staff member dedicated to durable solutions in the CO, and that role is focussed on IDPs.

While the work of the DSWG, the IGAD Solutions Initiative and support to implementation of the GCR are all strategically aligned, there is a gap in coordinating and communicating a coherent durable solutions approach within and beyond UNHCR in order to realise gains that amount to more than the sum of these separate workstreams. Indicators of this gap include comments made by key informants at state level reflecting a lack of understanding of durable solutions (e.g., confusion with Recovery, Return and Reintegration, RRR); wariness that a context where basic needs could not be met was inappropriate for solutions; and even scepticism that existing protection programmes had merely been repackaged as solutions and peacebuilding (e.g. in the East, and Darfur).

Some authors argue that conventional approaches to IDP solutions – return, local integration or relocation – are too narrow, failing to consider an option whereby IDPs retain access to their heritage

¹²⁷ IGAD (2021) Support Platform for the Nairobi Process

¹²⁸ UNHCR (2021) Zero Draft-UNHCR Submission-Solutions Initiative on Sudan and South Sudan – Aug 2021

¹²⁹ As of November 2021, the October 2021 coup had already delayed a final field mission by the consultant and the status of the government review of the Draft National Strategy and Action Plan was unknown.

¹³⁰ The working group is mandated to inform and advise, develop policy and coordinate work on durable solutions, placing a strong emphasis on ‘generating shared data and engaging all major stakeholders’ Tawila Durable Solutions Baseline report, p9

¹³¹ JIPS presented its findings – that reflect these contextual nuances – to the DSWG in October 2021 and produced five thematic briefs on key themes emerging from the IDP Solutions work with clearly marked advocacy messages for policy makers and donors. See JIPS (Oct 2021) Thematic briefs on IDP Solutions, Post-return, Nomads, Rule of Law, Land Tenure

¹³² UNHCR has most closely collaborated with UNDP in their solutions work, the DSWG-JIPS work also engages UN Peacebuilding Fund, UN Habitat, FAO, IOM and UNICEF

¹³³ Drawn from KIIs across UN and non-UN actors working across the H-D-P nexus in Sudan.

land in addition to an urban location where they may have settled. This is based on deeply embedded indigenous land ownership practices for example in Darfur.¹³⁴

5.3.4. Catalysing development-oriented responses (SO4)

Key findings:

- **Capacitating national social service systems towards refugee inclusion has made good initial progress particularly in the education sector, and to a lesser degree, health, with most progress at state level. UNHCR has also done valuable groundwork, together with the World Bank, towards GoS eligibility for funding under IDA-19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR).**
- **A number of developmental programmes either specifically targeting, or inclusive of, refugees and other POCs are underway in Sudan and UNHCR has supported some of these, as well as engaging with development actors in support of potential new programming, including scope for private sector partnerships.**
- **While the period to end October 2021 saw opportunities opening up in relation to inclusion and development programming, a number of factors clearly emerge as obstacles to progress. These are both external (GoS and partner capacities, donor willingness to fund), and also internal (UNHCR capacity and influence).**

UNHCR's focus is on being catalytic - not about "doing" development, but rather engaging, supporting and catalyzing other development actors and service providers.

Progress towards development programming being inclusive of refugees (Outcome 4.1)

UNHCR Sudan's Transition Strategy identified the need to engage with national development planning as well as the UN's 2030 agenda and related UN planning processes. To date, a moderate level of progress has been made in mainstreaming /integrating refugee and IDP issues in national policies and plans. As noted in Section 4.2, progress towards GoS-led national planning processes is at an early stage and is constrained by weak government capacity. A full national development plan will be some way down the line. UNHCR's focus in terms of national development planning over the evaluation period has hence been geared more towards inputs towards the UNDAF and subsequently UNSDCF (for 2023 onwards).

Moderate progress has also been made under Outcome 4.2 in increasing development programming for refugees, IDPs and returnees, through coordination and advocacy for delivery with operational and development partners, and with a specific focus on livelihoods. Programmes underway include GIZ projects supporting government education and WES services in the East, plus livelihoods support for stateless South Sudanese in Khartoum state; livelihoods programming through the joint UN Prospects programme (focused on East Darfur and West Kordofan).¹³⁵

Progress towards inclusion in national social services (Outcome 4.2)

GoS policy commitment for inclusion in national services is covered in Chapter 4 (on policy alignment) and Chapter 6 (on partnership working with GoS). Planned activities in this area included coordination with national institutions and systems towards refugee inclusion; integration of refugees into the national education, health, and WASH systems as well as possibly social protection schemes; capacity building support to national education, WASH and health services and social protection schemes; and increased use of cash grants for sector services. Before the October 2021 coup, good initial progress was being made to support GoS in inclusion in national services. This includes a costed plan of action for refugee education, now approved by the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs. Some progress has been made at the state

¹³⁴ Abdul-Jalil, M. (2013) 'Reflections on customary land tenure in Darfur and its implications for the "three options" model regarding HLP durable solutions for IDPs'

¹³⁵ Potential programming includes Government of Japan/ JICA peacebuilding and local government support in Darfur, and AfDB service delivery programmes for forcibly displaced, and engagement with IFC support for sustainable employment opportunities in the agricultural sector, in partnership with Sudanese agribusiness firms. (KILs with UNHCR CO and Regional Bureau - documentation is still internal and could not be shared)

level, for example in the education sector in partnership with Ministry of Education (together with UNICEF) in East Sudan.¹³⁶ Less has been achieved in the health sector, with complaints about access to and quality of local health service provision in a number of locations.¹³⁷

The agenda of inclusion in national services was also the main focus of UNHCR engagement and joint analytical work with the **World Bank** in 2020-21 in respect of a potentially significant funding package for GoS health and education service provision under the WHR.¹³⁸ UNHCR provided much appreciated technical and advisory support for the Bank’s assessment mission in June 2021, enabling important groundwork towards GoS eligibility for badly needed WHR funding to be completed.¹³⁹

Constraints on progress towards SO4

Before the October 2021 coup opportunities for inclusion and development programming opened up, but there have been a number of **obstacles**. External obstacles include weak GoS capacity at state and federal levels, a shortage of capable/experienced implementing partners in some areas, and the limited appetite of donors to fund longer-term developmental objectives in the absence of progress towards a political transition. Internal constraints include UNHCR’s limited capacity to focus on developmental objectives in terms of staffing, expertise, and senior management time, which will need to be significantly scaled up once the context is conducive.¹⁴⁰

5.4. Delivery of commitments on the AGD policy

Key findings:

- **There is high awareness of the AGD policy amongst UNHCR staff.**
- **UNHCR Sudan has made a good start on implementing aspects of the AGD policy, such as assessments, however there is some way to go to realise the spirit of the policy. This is likely to require a considerable culture shift, by allowing the voices of POCs to drive strategy.**
- **Participatory and vulnerability assessments are good examples of effective partner collaboration and are addressing data gaps. Next steps will be to forge responsive links into programming, which will require more frequent follow-up than currently in exists.**

UNHCR’s Global AGD policy is organized around six interdependent areas of engagement, five of which are assessed in Table 5 below, and the sixth – organizational learning and adaptation – is assessed in section 4.4 above. The online staff survey carried out by the evaluation indicated a high level of awareness of the AGD policy with three-quarters of respondents having received training or orientation on the policy. But the survey results revealed a split in UNCHR staff views on whether refugees of diverse backgrounds were able to engage meaningfully and are consulted in emergency assistance: 68% of respondents felt they were, 32% felt engagement was minimal.¹⁴¹

Table 5: Summary assessment of UNHCR Sudan’s performance against the global AGD policy

UNHCR Commitment under Global AGD policy	UNHCR Sudan’s alignment with commitment, in practice	Limitations	Comments for the way forward
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¹³⁶ Education provision in Gedaref state camps is fully handled by the Ministry of Education, and preparations for handing over education facilities in Kassala State are being finalised.

¹³⁷ KII with COR in Darfur, partners workshop South Kordofan, host communities meeting, White Nile State

¹³⁸ As announced by the World Bank at the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/12/17/world-bank-announces-us22-billion-scale-up-in-support-for-refugees-and-host-communities-at-first-global-refugee-forum>

¹³⁹ It is important to note that World Bank funding and processing of new operations has been paused following the October 25th coup, to be resumed if and when the former civilian transition government is reinstated. See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2021/10/27/world-bank-group-paused-all-disbursements-to-sudan-on-monday>

¹⁴⁰ For example, there has been only one full-time staff members covering this agenda, and no specific livelihoods expertise

¹⁴¹ Online staff survey for this evaluation

<p>Inclusive programming - All data collected by UNHCR will be disaggregated</p>	<p>Data in annual participatory assessments disaggregated by gender, age and people with specific needs (PSN)¹⁴²</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. POC participants in FGDs and UNHCR staff identified weaknesses in addressing the most vulnerable, including over-reliance on long-standing community networks to identify members for FGDs¹⁴³ 2. Lack of proactive assessment of those at heightened risk during the refugee emergency in the East – such as children and youth – highlighted by both implementing partners and donors.¹⁴⁴ 	<p>Some programme staff aware of these vulnerabilities and taking initiative at sub-office levels – to be encouraged and learned from¹⁴⁵</p>
<p>Participation and inclusion - Participatory methodologies at each stage of an operation's management cycle; incorporate capacities and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys</p>	<p>Well-established system of annual participatory assessments with partners in all states, feeding into annual operational planning process BaNVA identifies and helps prioritise household level vulnerability taking a combined view of specific protection needs and socio-economic factors.¹⁴⁶</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some UNHCR staff concerned that community opinion not actively informing programme design.¹⁴⁷ 2. Feedback from some POCs that needs of the vulnerable are unmet, sometimes but not always due to lack of financial resources.¹⁴⁸ 3. Some IPs noted gaps between the BaNVA and programme design.¹⁴⁹ 	<p>Assessments could be strengthened by providing insights on contextual factors – ethnicity, livelihood, community – that impact vulnerability</p> <p>In White Nile state efforts have been made to respond to a 2018 Evaluation of the South Sudanese refugee response.¹⁵⁰</p>
<p>Communication and transparency - Protection and solutions strategies to detail approach to communicating with women, men, girls, & boys of diverse backgrounds</p>	<p>Mixed picture with some instances of regular communication with some POCs where relationships with UNHCR and staff are strongest.¹⁵¹</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication in some places male dominated, perceived as uni directional from UNHCR, or inaccessible to women (e.g., White Nile, East) 	<p>Generally little documented evidence of this.¹⁵²</p>
<p>Feedback and response</p>	<p>Systems of complaints and feedback mechanisms observed to</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Tend to be unidirectional, as described above, top-down from UNHCR to communities 	

¹⁴² According to UNHCR's Emergency Handbook, individuals in the following categories are generally considered to be at heightened risk of "specific needs": girls and boys, including unaccompanied and separated children; persons with serious health conditions; persons with special legal or physical protection needs; single women; women-headed households; older persons; persons with disabilities; and persons of diverse sex, sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTI individuals). UNHCR Emergency Handbook, <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/125333/identifying-persons-with-specific-needs-pwsn> accessed 6 January 2021

¹⁴³ Examples include lack of clear focus on special needs and inadequate protection for women and girls (West Darfur); gaps in assessments of, and programming to address risks to youth (East, Khartoum); and a failure on behalf of UNHCR operations to proactively reach out to those with disabilities during the height of the pandemic, despite evidence that PWD are at greater risk (North Darfur). See also fieldwork reports from West and North Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Khartoum, and UN (2020) Policy Brief: A Disability Inclusive Response to Covid-19.

¹⁴⁴ (2021) Letter to UNHCR from group of international donors in Sudan and KII

¹⁴⁵ For instance, a disability activist NGO was invited to an NPPOC workshop in El Fasher where they were able to raise the fact that disability was not mentioned in the NPPOC, an important advocacy point for UNHCR to amplify

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR (2020) BANVA ToR Oct 2020

¹⁴⁷ KIIs in Khartoum and East

¹⁴⁸ Amongst children, girls, and women in West Darfur; those with disabilities and mental health issues in the East

¹⁴⁹ KII with partners. It was beyond the capacity of this evaluation to establish the reasons why, although lack of financial resources is undoubtedly a factor

¹⁵⁰ Although the team came across a concerning case of abuse in a young girl with disability during their field visit, progress had been made to prioritise those most at risk in particular female-headed households.

¹⁵¹ For example, with some community groups in North Darfur

¹⁵² As reported in the documentation review carried out during the inception phase

- establish and operate feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints.	be in place in some of the fieldwork locations visited by the team	2) Complaints and accountability mechanisms suffer from lack of anonymity and trust in some places, ¹⁵³ sometimes dominated by COR	
Gender equality commitment to women and girls, includes: - ensure that 50% female representation in management and leadership structures - adopt and apply SGBV SOPs; operationalize the four main referral pathways for all survivors.	Evidence of 50% representation of women in committee structures ¹⁵⁴ Mixed record in adopting and applying SOPs and operationalizing four referral pathways	1) Unclear how active and meaningful female engagement was e.g., in decision-making 2) Committee members do not always represent the constituencies they are supposed to represent, a legacy from the Bashir regime. ¹⁵⁵ 3) SGBV response in the East was weak and slow to demonstrate improvements ¹⁵⁶	Often works better to have two different committee structures for men and women, than women tokenistically present on mixed committees. UNHCR staff recognize that capacity of protection clusters could be strengthened re SGBV SOPs. ¹⁵⁷ Potential for stronger partnership-working with UNFPA to address this (see Chapter 6)

Although UNCHR has made solid progress implementing the modalities of the AGD policy, there is still distance to be travelled to realize the spirit behind the policy, which would require a more significant cultural shift in prioritizing the voice of POCs at programme level. This would also require a more proactive approach to address the needs of those most at risk, and to improve transparency and accountability. The pay-off could be an improvement in donor relations once evidence of robust feedback loops are in place.

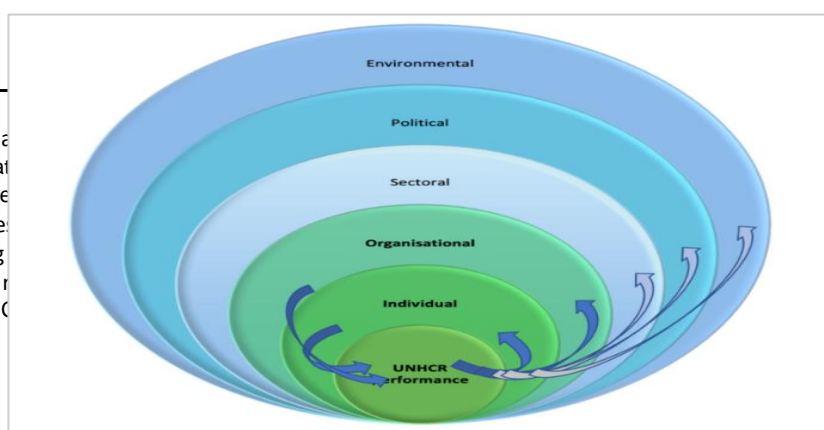
5.5. Analysis of enabling and constraining factors, as articulated by UNHCR staff

Key Findings

- **The majority of enabling and limiting factors are at individual or organisational levels and therefore within the ability of UNHCR to address. The level of engagement of UNHCR staff in reflective exercises during the course of the evaluation is in itself an enabling factor.**
- **Those barriers and limiting factors external to the organisation can inform planned theory of change and scenario planning exercises as multi-year strategies are being created.**

Figure 9 captures the different spheres of enabling and constraining factors impacting effectiveness that emerged from the evaluation team’s engagement with UNHCR staff and key informants, in particular from the mini-workshops at sub-office and FO levels. UNHCR’s can directly address factors affecting its performance in the more inner circles but has less ability to influence enabling and constraining factors in the outer circles.

Figure 9: Spheres of enabling and constraining factors which impact UNHCR effectiveness



¹⁵³ Khartoum, Ea
¹⁵⁴ From observat
¹⁵⁵ This was obse
selected to repre
¹⁵⁶ PSEA working
November 2020 r
¹⁵⁷ KIIs with UNHC

nittee members were
refugee leaders
most a year after the

Key points raised in the staff workshops are summarized in Annex 6. The frankness of staff and their level of engagement in reflective exercises carried out by the evaluation team is regarded as an enabling factor that UNHCR can harness to address some of the barriers staff themselves highlighted to realize opportunities. Most of the factors mentioned during the mini-workshops were at the organizational level.

Where there is effective leadership at sub-office/ FO levels, this emerged as an enabling factor, for example in driving prioritisation. On the other hand, aspects of human resource systems were raised as demotivating and a barrier to effective performance, particularly related to national staff.¹⁵⁹ Other constraints include low technical capacity; skillsets of staff not suited to changes in strategic direction. Some UNHCR systems were highlighted for being slow and cumbersome such as procurement and MEL, where different results models and systems could be confusing, which concurs with the evaluation team's assessment. The cultural legacy of siloed thinking in terms of POCs is still engrained, and the disconnect between offices in the capital, sub-office and FO level hampers smooth coordination and decision making. A significant number of issues raised are within the ability of UNHCR Sudan to address. Those in more remote spheres of influence can be carried into the planned Theory of Change and scenario planning exercises to inform strategy and ambition going forward.

Constraining factors affecting national staff:¹⁵⁸

- Delays in promoting national staff
- Very few national staff in senior positions
- Limited consultation with national staff on policies and programme design, and limited opportunities to influence programming
- Lack of career pathways

5.6. Sustainability

Key Findings

- **Achieving sustainability is implicit rather than explicit in much of UNHCR Sudan's approach. Given its importance, UNHCR Sudan would benefit from adopting a robust working definition of, and approach to sustainability, ensuring that sustainability considerations are embedded within its overall country strategy, and with sustainability risks clearly identified and monitored.**

The framework to assess sustainability for the CSE combines (i) a humanitarian focus on **connectedness** of short-term emergency responses with longer-term solutions,¹⁶⁰ with a more developmental focus on (ii) **financial, economic, environmental, and institutional** capacities of the

¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁹ These issues were all raised in KIIs with national staff and some international staff, especially at sub-office and FO levels

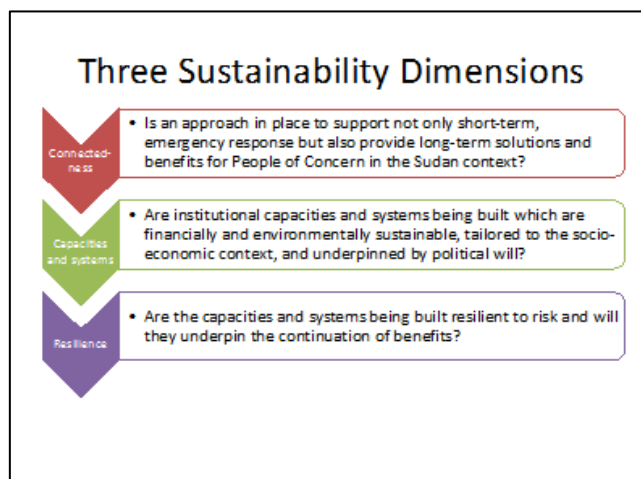
¹⁶⁰ ALNAP 2016: Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide

systems needed to sustain benefits, and (iii) **resilience to risk** of the capacities and systems to underpin continuation of benefits.¹⁶¹ See Figure 10 that captures these three dimensions.¹⁶²

Findings from all the three key themes of the CSE (*relevance, effectiveness, and coherence*) are important in addressing these three inter-related sustainability dimensions:

(1) **Connectedness:** In terms of UNHCR Sudan's balance of short and long-term focus and addressing interconnected problems, the CO is attempting to do both, with two more short-term strategic objectives in the transition strategy (SO 1 and 2), and two longer term (SO 3 and 4). Thus, the Sudan country strategy includes a framework to work towards connectedness, although this is not yet spelt out in a clear Theory of Change. There is also potential to frame a clearer strategy and narrative on connectedness by more explicitly adopting and applying the HDP nexus (see Section 4.5)

Figure 10: Key sustainability dimensions



(2) **Capacities and systems:** UNHCR's vision for Sudan involves a hefty capacity-building agenda particularly given current low levels of government and other national capacities. As highlighted in Chapter 6 on partnerships, a start has been made on different dimensions of **institutional capacity** development (individual, organizational and the wider enabling environment), but the needs are huge and available resources limited. Progress towards **financial sustainability** will be highly challenging given the lack of governmental resources. Work to secure WHR funding for GoS is a step in the right direction. There are examples of emerging good practice in terms of **environmental sustainability** (e.g., work on use of biofuels for cooking, reforestation). A stronger focus on environmental sustainability will also require greater engagement on land use issues (with agencies such as UN Habitat and FAO).

(3) **Resilience to risk:** The preliminary gains made in terms of building national capacities and systems are highly fragile given the volatility of the context. Embedding capacity and systems in a sustainable way is hence a major challenge. UNHCR Sudan remains hopeful that government will sustain its policy commitments, but gains made in areas such as protection (i.e., the NPPOC) are now at risk. There are important opportunities to build more sustainable and resilient capacities at the level of communities and civil society, as well as the (indigenous) private sector. There is huge potential, but UNHCR Sudan is not yet engaging adequately with local and national actors to exploit these opportunities.

If UNHCR makes the objective of sustainability more explicit, it would also be useful to evolve a set of *sustainability indicators* to monitor progress, addressing the different levels and dimensions as set out in the framework above, which can be built into policies, plans and programme design.

¹⁶¹ OECD-DAC 2019: Better criteria for better evaluation

¹⁶² UNHCR considers sustainability from a number of different angles, including the contribution being made to Agenda 2030; the contribution to environmental sustainability; and the importance of delivering results which can be sustained over time. See for example a study in Rwanda <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/research/evalreports/5b56e7397/sustaining-results.html>

6. Partnerships

This Chapter provides a summary of an in-depth **Partnerships Assessment** conducted as a “deep dive” within the overall evaluation, which is available as a stand-alone report containing more detailed analysis on the findings, together with a number of short case studies, and technical annexes. The methodology for the partnerships assessment included both KIIs and an online partnerships survey (see Annex 2), while a tailored analytical framework was developed for the partnerships assessment, which is summarized in Annex 4 of the stand-alone report.

6.1. Strategic approach to partnerships

Key Finding

- **UNHCR Sudan’s mandate requires multiple forms of partnership working with a wide range of partners. Efforts have been made to focus partnership working around strategic objectives and increasing priority is being given to strengthening partnerships; the time-consuming nature of partnership working for the CO means further strategic prioritisation is needed.**

Globally, partnerships are of growing importance to UNHCR as a means to address the scale and complexity of protecting, assisting, and finding durable solutions for refugees and other POCs. Partnership is not an end in itself, but rather something to be measured in terms of impact on the well-being of POCs.¹⁶³ Strengthening and diversifying partnerships is a key theme of UNHCR’s global 2017-2021 strategy, and it is taking a number of initiatives to enhance its approach to partnerships in support of the GCR,¹⁶⁴ including an integrated focus on strengthening national and local capacities.¹⁶⁵ Partnerships are also an increasing priority at the regional level.¹⁶⁶

Role of partnerships in UNHCR Sudan’s “Theory of Change” (ToC)

The Evaluation ToC developed jointly with the CO to guide the evaluation (in the absence of an existing ToC) identifies partnership working as “front and centre” within the country strategy. It is an important cross-cutting issue, key to underpinning the overall approach (see **Annex 4**). Fleshing out the partnerships component of UNHCR Sudan’s ToC will be a key dimension of the forthcoming MYSP.

UNHCR Sudan is giving growing priority to partnership working both in its strategies and in practice. The strategic focus on partnerships was sharpened under its Transition Strategy 2021-2, which identified more clearly than in previous strategies the key partnerships required to deliver its strategic objectives (protection, emergency response, durable solutions and inclusion in national services/development). A combination of policy imperatives (as set out in Chapter 4) and more operational ones (explored in Chapter 5), means that UNHCR Sudan has a complex task managing partnerships across different sectors, with different types of actors, in different locations and at different levels.¹⁶⁷ A combination of *implementing* (PPA) and *operational* (non-PPA) partnerships creates a considerable workload for UNHCR staff (see Box 3). To add to the complexity, UNHCR is often engaged in multiple forms of partnership working with the same partner organisation simultaneously, with multiple staff engaging concurrently with the same partners on different issues.¹⁶⁸ Given the large number of partners with which UNHCR Sudan has to work and current “stretch”, it will be helpful to further prioritize partnerships and partnership management, to ensure that appropriate levels

Box 3 – Time spent on partnerships

UNHCR staff spend a considerable proportion of their time on partnership working. 15% of respondents to the online Staff Survey report that they spend more than 90% of their time on partnerships, while a third spend 60-90% of their time, and another third spend 40-60%.

¹⁶³ UNHCR (2019): Guidance for Partnering with UNHCR

¹⁶⁴ At a global level, UNHCR has established a Private Sector Partnerships Service (PSPS) in its Division of External Relations and within this, a Shared Value Partnerships Unit (SPU) working directly with global private sector actors.

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR Strategic Directions 2017-21

¹⁶⁶ Ibid; KIIs with RB staff; RB presentation to UNHCR Sudan Senior Management Retreat (October 2021)

¹⁶⁷ A mapping of UNHCR Sudan’s different type of partnerships is presented in Annex 4 of the *Partnerships Assessment*.

¹⁶⁸ This is presented visually in Table 3 in Annex 4 of the Partnerships Assessment. Having multiple points of engagement is cited as a source of confusion for some partners in the Partnership Survey.

of effort are being targeted in the necessary directions, and devise strategies for engagement with each of the partner categories.¹⁶⁹

6.2. UNHCR's partnership with the Government of Sudan

Key findings

- **Good progress has been made in terms of high-level policy engagement with GoS, particularly around the Whole-of-Government approach, cross-government policy and steps towards inclusion in government service delivery. Some progress has also been made in relation to the protection agenda. Strengthened engagement is needed both with COR as the main counterpart, and also the Ministry of Interior, Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) and various line ministries including Ministry of Health (both at national and state levels).**
- **UNHCR's partnership with COR needs ongoing effort to move it beyond being a transactional, funding-focused relationship to a more transformational partnership - where the two work together on the wider GoS policy agenda, and with UNHCR able to be a critical friend when needed.**
- **Various forms of capacity development support have been delivered at different levels, but in a relatively ad hoc manner, not as yet guided by a clear overarching strategy and approach.**

Partnerships with host governments to build their policy leadership and delivery capacities are central for UNHCR.¹⁷⁰ The UNHCR-GoS relationship (which as GoS counterparts pointed out goes back over half a century) has been a central focus of UNHCR Sudan's attention and has undergone a number of key strategic shifts during the period of the transition, mirroring the main phases of the CSE period (2018-21) (See Chapter 4). The 2021-22 Transition Strategy sets out the need for an **adaptive UNHCR approach to working with government**, particularly should opportunities for peace and durable solutions expand. The military coup at the end of October 2021 is a significant development, which could, depending on the course things take, require a recalibration of UNHCR's relations with government – potentially requiring adaptation to a changed political and policy landscape. (See section 7.2.2 below and Annex 7).

6.2.1. GoS policy leadership and "Whole-of-Government" approach

The importance of a "Whole-of-Government" approach is clearly identified in the Transition Strategy. While COR within the Ministry of Interior is the main GoS national counterpart, cross-government working requires engagement with a wider array of commissions and line ministries with a growing emphasis on solutions for IDPs as well as refugees, and inclusion in national services, together with supporting government to adopt a more coordinated approach at national, level, and local level.

A detailed assessment and evidence of progress towards a Whole-of-Government approach is set out in the Partnerships Assessment. As noted in Chapter 4, UNHCR Sudan has made significant progress in supporting the GoS to move towards the Whole-of-Government approach at a national policy level, particularly through engagement with the Ministries of Cabinet Affairs and Foreign Affairs, and with outcome level achievements evidenced by GCR pledges and the 2021 National Vision. Good preliminary progress has also been made at state level in relation to inclusion of POCs in government service delivery, particularly in education, although more engagement is needed in relation to health service delivery. Less progress has been made in relation to building the role of the Ministry of Interior, where strengthened engagement is required, as well as in developing the role of/ engagement with HAC at federal and state levels on IDPs and protection issues as well as in support of refugee

¹⁶⁹ Specific suggestions on prioritisation tools are contained in the Partnerships Assessment (Section 6). Findings on priority categories of partnerships are highlighted in the remainder of this section, and also in the Partnerships Assessment.

¹⁷⁰ K4D (2017) Lessons from the coordination of refugee responses <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/225-Lessons-from-Refugee-Response-Coordination.pdf>

operations; specific areas of concern highlighted by the CO include the need to engage and lobby government technical counterparts for the SNFI sector as well as on HLP issues.

6.2.2. Relationship with COR

COR forms the main government counterpart, and overall, relationships between UNHCR and COR are good.¹⁷¹ As outlined above, the “Whole-of-Government” approach requires COR to adjust its previous modus operandi focused on directly providing services to play more of a coordinating role across government. This has been a challenging area for UNHCR to make progress. In 2020, the CO commenced a dialogue with COR focused on changing the parameters of the partnership, as well as responding to issues raised in internal audit reports.¹⁷² COR leadership is aware of the changes required in its role at the national level, to become less of an implementer and more of a cross-government coordinator, in line with the National Vision.¹⁷³ It has participated in national policy fora initiated by Ministry of Cabinet Affairs (MoCA) and is taking some steps to build its coordinating role at state level.¹⁷⁴ While good progress has been made in building key aspects of COR’s protection responsibilities such as registration (see Chapter 5), COR is still trying to hold on to functions that should be delivered by other parts of government. Specifically, more effort is needed to ensure COR’s role on refugee coordination dovetails with that of the HAC relating to IDP protection and support, now coming under the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA).

Moving from a transactional to a more transformational approach

The challenge of transforming government relations to focus on working together on shared policy objectives is evidently one experienced in other contexts. Global UNHCR guidance to support government engagement strategies at country level is hence being developed and will be forthcoming.¹⁷⁵ Different ways need to be found to motivate officials, and incentivize the new approach.¹⁷⁶ It will be helpful to work towards a strategic, non-transactional, broad-based partnership agreement (such as an overarching MoU), with shared transformational objectives, supported by a range of incentives and underpinned by clear partnership principles and approaches, to either replace or augment current partnership arrangements on contractually-oriented PPAs.¹⁷⁷ This should help in developing the relationship between UNHCR and COR to be more open and mutually accountable, something COR would like to see, as well as UNHCR partners.¹⁷⁸

A case study on UNHCR’s partnership working with COR is presented in the *Partnerships Assessment*. This highlights that the tendency has been for the relationship to be transactional, with COR highly focused on acquiring resources. Delivering GoS/UNHCR policy objectives now requires a broader, more transformational partnership approach, built around shared strategic objectives.

6.2.3. Building government capacity

Strengthening national and local capacities is one of UNHCR’s key global strategic directions, building host states’ role in national coordination/leadership, but there is frequently a lack of capacity particularly

¹⁷¹ Evidence of the UNHCR-COR relationship is presented in the Partnerships Assessment.

¹⁷² The 2019 Audit report notes a need for UNHCR Sudan review the way in which government partner acts as an implementer, ensuring that it benefits from the appropriate mandate and technical competencies of different parts of government, and better monitoring. In the 2021 Audit, the focus is on assisting government to deliver of its 9 GCR pledges.¹⁷² UNHCR 2021 (a)

¹⁷³ KIIs with COR officials at the national level; KIIs with UNHCR senior leadership.

¹⁷⁴ KIIs with MoCA, national COR officials and UNHCR CO.

¹⁷⁵ KII with RB; RB representative presentation to the Senior Management Retreat (October 2021)

¹⁷⁶ Individual incentives could be provided by for example training opportunities and study tours, while institutional incentives could link provision of funding to evidence of reforms and collaborative, intergovernmental working.

¹⁷⁷ The importance of partnership principles, and partnership agreements which enshrine these, is covered in Section 6.6

¹⁷⁸ KIIs with COR leadership at different levels; KIIs with various UNHCR partners including donors. A number of partners also expressed a concern that UNHCR is not currently willing and/or able to advocate on sensitive issues (see Chapter 5 examples from eastern Sudan pertaining to the citing of refugee camps), and adequately highlight GoS violations (e.g. in the area of SGBV and trafficking)

at the local level.¹⁷⁹ GoS capacity development is an identified priority for UNHCR Sudan,¹⁸⁰. Concerns were raised in all locations about the weak capacity of government service delivery ministries at the local level, particularly the health sector, but also education, hampering their ability to extend services to POCs (including host communities to support SO4 of the Transition Strategy relating to inclusion in national services).¹⁸¹

Evidence of progress in relation to GoS capacity development is presented in the Partnerships Assessment, using a 3-tier UNDAF capacity development framework.¹⁸² There are examples of capacity development at all three levels of the framework (individual, organizational, and enabling environment/policies). GoS capacity development has been tailored to local contexts, including a focus on competencies such as registration, verification and documentation protection and camp management (COR), as well as a focus on service delivery with line ministries.¹⁸³ Despite these examples, the evaluation team did not find evidence of an overarching capacity development strategy to ensure a strategic, prioritized, and effective approach, for using the UNDAF model or a similar framework. **This is an area where a more systematic framework and approach will be beneficial, both at CO and sub-office levels.**

6.3. Partnerships and coordination at federal and state level

Key findings:

- **In the absence of clear government-led national planning processes, UNHCR is currently utilizing multiple interagency coordination structures related to its mandate and strategic objectives. While important efforts are underway to strengthen interagency coordination, these efforts need to be stepped up to address duplication of effort, harmonizing and streamlining structures to make them more effective and efficient, and tailored to local contexts.**
- **Policy-oriented partnerships (for example focused on protection and solutions) are in place, but mechanisms are fragmented, their effectiveness not yet optimal, and there is no systematic assessment of results that they are achieving.**

6.3.1. Interagency coordination

There is a mixed picture of the effectiveness of UNHCR's coordination role on refugees, IDPs and other POCs in Sudan, with a number of positives identified as well as a number of areas for improvement. ***A detailed summary of feedback on interagency coordination is contained in Figure 2, Section 3 of the Partnerships Assessment (which complements this report).***

In 2020, UNHCR introduced a survey of RCM members to assess how well the system is perceived to be working. This found that around a third of respondents thought coordination between RCM and IASC structures to be adequate, while half considered it either only partially adequate or inadequate.¹⁸⁴

Key for UNHCR is the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM). The RCM brings together both humanitarian and development partners working on the refugee response in Sudan (see Partnerships Assessment, Annex 3). UNHCR Sudan has invested effort into strengthening the way the RCM and OCHA-led IASC structures dovetail and synergise, particularly during 2020-21.¹⁸⁵ At national level, the Refugee Consultation Forum (RCF), which oversaw the launch of the first

¹⁷⁹ K4D (2017)

¹⁸⁰ Transition Strategy. KIIs with CO and sub-offices.

¹⁸¹ This was a recurring theme across all KIIs in all locations, including with government representatives themselves.

¹⁸² It should be noted that the evaluation team has not conducted an in-depth, representative assessment of capacity development approaches (e.g. comparing different sectors) and very limited reports pertaining to capacity development (e.g. needs assessments, evaluations) were available. Evidence presented hence draws on KIIs and available UNHCR documentation.

¹⁸³ UNHCR (2020): Capacity building support to COR in 2021 detailed planning (Letter from UNHCR to COR)

¹⁸⁴ UNHCR Sudan (2021) – RCM Coordination: Satisfaction Survey

¹⁸⁵ At the request of the HCT, UNHCR has developed a concept note, which once agreed, will be submitted to the HCT.

comprehensive Country Refugee Response Plan (CRRP) in 2020 is seen as performing well,¹⁸⁶ while state-level RWG performance varies from one location to another.¹⁸⁷

Governmental participation and leadership in interagency coordination processes is sub-optimal.¹⁸⁸ This is due to different factors including competing priorities and agendas (with multiple coordination mechanisms under the RCM/IASC structure and emerging development coordination architecture requiring government attendance and inputs), as well as challenging logistics faced by government officials and related low levels of motivation. UNHCR staff recognize that for long-term objectives to be fulfilled, they will need to support GoS leadership of key strategic coordination mechanisms (i.e. more at the policy level), and focus less on operational engagement, although for the time-being a focus on emergencies is still thought to be needed.

6.3.2. Policy partnerships (Protection, Solutions, Peacebuilding and Development)

UNHCR is utilising a range of mechanisms to coordinate progress towards its four key strategic objectives, as shown in Table 6. This overview highlights that policy-oriented partnerships are in place for protection, emergency responses and solutions, but not yet to the same extent for peacebuilding or development. Mechanisms are frequently fragmented, their effectiveness not yet optimal, and there is no systematic assessment of results that they are achieving.

Table 6 – Partnerships around the Four Strategic Objectives and their outcomes to date

Summary of findings on policy-focused coordination	Partnership outcomes
SO1 – Protection partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNHCR coordination of protection clusters (RCM/IASC) is variable, with poor protection cluster leadership highlighted in a number of states.¹⁸⁹ Action taken to strengthen protection cluster leadership is not considered adequate.¹⁹⁰ For UNHCR, its role in co-chairing the national Counter-Trafficking and Mixed Migration Working Group (CTWG), East Sudan Mixed Migration WG (co-chaired with IoM), AAP Working Group and PSEA Network provides opportunities. Others have concerns about weak outcomes on trafficking and areas of risk not addressed.¹⁹¹ UNHCR’s role supporting government-led protection efforts (NPPOC) is commended, as well as the “one UN” Civilian Protection Strategy to support this.¹⁹² Stronger advocacy and coordination to operationalize JPA security arrangements is urgently needed. 	<p>Outcomes achieved through protection partnerships have been mixed (see Section 5.3.1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial progress at a policy level on the NPPOC (working with GoS) and UN-wide protection policy (through the UNCT). Weaker progress on SGBV and prevention of trafficking outcomes. Outcomes in supporting ‘out-of-camp’ refugees and the stateless also weak.
SO2- Coordination of emergency responses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection and shelter/NFI cluster leadership has proved challenging for UNHCR, both under the RCM and the joint RCM-IASC coordination model. Staff are very stretched, particularly when “double-hatting” as sector coordinators/cluster leads.¹⁹³ Setting up the RCM for the response in the East created extra work and took time; experienced staff were also not available. A number of 	<p>Outcomes achieved through emergency response partnerships have equally been mixed (see Section 5.3.2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IPs report respectful and flexible partnerships with UNHCR but a need for more information sharing and facilitation of partner relationships with GoS

¹⁸⁶ There is also a Protection Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to coordinate refugee protection at the national level; UNHCR and partners did not highlight this in their assessments; overall, protection coordination is considered as a weaker area.

¹⁸⁷ The RCM was reported to be weaker in Darfur, White Nile and the East (KIIs with UNHCR and partners in these locations).

¹⁸⁸ This was raised in KIIs with multiple stakeholders, both external partners and within UNHCR. Specific examples given of a weak government role in RWGs include Darfur, White Nile and Gedaref. In South Kordofan, the need highlighted was for government to play a more enabling role (in facilitating humanitarian access to opposition areas). At the national level, stronger government participation in the DSWG is considered necessary (now the role of the Ministry of Federal Affairs, as Co-Chair)

¹⁸⁹ Including (but not limited to) North Darfur and Gedaref. These shortfalls were highlighted both in KIIs with UNHCR staff and with a wide selection of external partners.

¹⁹⁰ As above.

¹⁹¹ These concerns were raised in KIIs with donors and INGOs, and also by some UNHCR staff.

¹⁹² KIIs with various UN agencies, as well as one of the main donor partners.

¹⁹³ A concern was expressed by some UNHCR staff, for example in Darfur, that “double-hatting” does not enable people to be independent of their organisation when playing a coordination role. However, it was also mentioned that concurrently being a cluster coordinator and playing a technical role brings good technical capacities to the coordination/ convening function.

<p>other UN agencies reflected that use of IASC structures may have been a better short-term alternative.¹⁹⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tailored, consultative approach to improving coordination in different contexts is important and not a “one size fits all approach”. 	
SO3 – Partnerships for Solutions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DSWG co-chaired by UNHCR, UNDP and DRC provide policy coordination and advocacy support and is a useful forum, but needs to move from policy level discussions to action (See Section 5).¹⁹⁵ • A separate mechanism on IGAD Solutions exists at federal level (headed up on the GoS side by MoFA). IGAD needs to play a stronger convening role, and greater involvement of I/NGOs is needed to increase transparency, participation and buy-in. • A state level DSWG only exists to date in North Darfur, not in other relevant contexts (e.g., for Khartoum state). 	<p>Outcomes achieved through solutions partnerships (see Section 5.3.3).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective partnership with UNDP supporting the GoS national strategy on Durable Solutions • Good partnerships with DRC and UNDP in DSWG – needs to be opened up to other actors
Peacebuilding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peacebuilding is not an area of UNHCR leadership per se, but it is playing an increasing role. PB mechanisms are currently fragmented, with limited current PB coordination at national and state level due in part to GoS Peace Commissions (which should be playing a coordinating role) being weak.¹⁹⁶ UNHCR can encourage harmonization of PB efforts as part of its overall engagement to strengthen integrated UN architecture (e.g., for UNSCR 2524). • The joint Peacebuilding Fund is catalyzing intra-UN coordination. 	<p>There is limited evidence available to demonstrate outcomes achieved through PB partnerships as joint work approaches are at an early stage.</p>
SO4 - Development-oriented responses and inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government-led coordination on refugee and IDP issues as well as development-focused coordination are both at an early stage.¹⁹⁷ Mainstreaming into national development plans and targets will be an important priority for the MYSP. In the meantime, the current focus is on integration into UN strategic planning/ responses (such as the UNSDCF) and bilateral development partnerships. 	<p>Likewise, it is too early to gauge the outcome of development partnerships, as these are at a preliminary stage.</p>

6.4. Optimising Collaboration with UN partners

<p>Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent changes in UNHCR leadership have helped strengthen UNHCR’s overall relations within the UN family in Sudan, bilaterally and jointly, both at the national and subnational levels; relationships with UN partners however remain weaker at the state level. • Building a stronger interface with the UN’s sustainable development planning agenda in Sudan is still work-in-progress and needs to be given high priority going forward. • Some long-standing bilateral partnerships are robust (UNICEF, WFP); others need further effort to maximize comparative advantage, e.g., to support key aspects of the protection agenda (IoM, UNFPA), and also peacebuilding and development (UNDP). Integration and leveraging the efforts of others in the UN family will reduce stretch and overload and help build sustainability. While this may also involve a trade-off with UNHCR visibility, it can be addressed through good capturing of results. • Joint working with UNITAMS is underway and improving, particularly around the protection agenda in Darfur. However, UNITAMS’ efforts and capacity are at an early stage and the necessary coordination architecture for the JPA, both in Darfur and the Two Areas, has yet to be put in place.
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¹⁹⁴ KII with other UN agencies (including OCHA, WFP, Unicef). From the UNHCR CO point of view, the IASC cluster system cannot appropriately coordinate a refugee response, and while some sectors (e.g.FSL) were led from the onset by other UN agencies, the limited presence of OCHA, other UN Agencies and NGOs at the onset of the crisis made coordination challenging.

¹⁹⁵ This view was heard both from UN agencies and INGOs.

¹⁹⁶ KII with national Peace Commission

¹⁹⁷ Integration into national development plans is hindered by the fact that taking forward the national PRSP and related budget sector coordination process (to be led by the Ministry of Finance, with UNDP support) is still pending.

UNHCR Sudan's 2021 Transition Strategy stresses its commitment to working closely with all UN sister agencies, both in the interagency context, and bilaterally.

Intra-UN coordination and collective action

Strategic integration of refugee/IDP issues within the UN system response, for example to support GCR pledges, emerges as an area where moderate progress has been made, and there are significant opportunities for UNHCR to achieve more going forward:

- **UN-specific coordination mechanisms:** In Sudan as elsewhere, the UNCT and HCT are playing an important role within RCM/IASC interagency coordination.¹⁹⁸ The HCT has played a positive role in overseeing the Humanitarian Response Plan and in the development of an HCT Protection Strategy.¹⁹⁹ Sudan is a pilot country for the *New Way of Working* to step up progress on UN-wide collective outcomes. Frustration was expressed at the rate of progress in putting in place necessary structures for the integrated mission (as per UNSCR 2524), but also a degree of optimism that strategic coordination is improving, with a knock-on positive effect for UNHCR in terms of its ability to deliver its mandate.²⁰⁰ UNHCR has made an important contribution to discussions on how best to optimise UN coordination structures in relation to UNSCR 2524.²⁰¹ Another opportunity area, although perhaps more for the longer term, will be a move towards more HDP nexus-oriented UN coordination mechanisms and processes, which could fit well with UNHCR's four strategic objectives.
- **UN-wide processes related to Agenda 2030:** As noted in Chapter 4, there was limited focus on refugee and IDP issues in the UNDAF. UNHCR has drafted inputs for the CCA to underpin the UNSCDF. There is as yet no Sudan-specific action plan for UNHCR's contribution to the SDGs. Agenda 2030 is an important opportunity area for UNHCR to step up engagement.
- **Joint UN programming:** The trend towards joint UN programming is promoting synergy of effort and enhancing the potential for impact.²⁰² Examples include Peacebuilding Fund projects with UNICEF and UNDP, and cross-border projects with IoM in Darfur. The PROSPECTS partnership fills an important gap on livelihoods support for IDPs and host communities, based on a good model of UN comparative advantage (with UNICEF, ILO and IFC), but currently only covers two states.²⁰³

There are inevitably challenges to integration in UN system responses, such as competition between UN agencies for visibility and funding, as well as overlapping mandates and instances of working in silos. A previous UNHCR tendency to "go it alone" and not join up with others is now changing at national level, with almost all UN agencies highlighting improved UNHCR engagement with UN agencies, both collectively and bilaterally. This is widely attributed to changes in UNHCR leadership.²⁰⁴ However, this change of approach has yet to be systematically cascaded to the subnational level.²⁰⁵ There are different approaches to assessment of POCs within the UN family, with concerns that UNHCR is hesitant about joined up UN vulnerability assessments.²⁰⁶ There are multiple registration processes for POCs (for example, in White Nile and West Darfur) and scope for better coordination at local level (for example, with IoM and WFP). Within UNHCR Sudan, there is evidently a degree of fear that integration of refugee/IDP issues into UN system responses could lead to a reduction in visibility with a

¹⁹⁸ Figure 5 in Annex 1 of the Partnerships Assessment shows how the RCM fits with cluster and development mechanisms.

¹⁹⁹ KIIs with UNHCR and other UN agencies

²⁰⁰ KIIs both with UNHCR and also UN partners

²⁰¹ KIIS with diverse UN partners, especially UNITAMS

²⁰² KIIs with various UN agencies, as well as with government representatives.

²⁰³ Prospects Partnership Sudan – Multi Annual Country Programme (MACP) 2020-23. This is part of a wider multi-country approach, funded by the Netherlands. This has 4 pillars (protection, livelihoods, education and new ways of working), with UNHCR as the lead for the protection pillar. The focal areas are East Darfur and West Kordofan.

²⁰⁴ The impact of the change of representative was highlighted in KIIs with UN agency representatives, while the contribution of the D1 UNHCR Principal Situation Coordinator role is considered to have contributed significantly to inter-UN collaboration in Darfur, as observed by other UN partners at Darfur and national level, as well as by government officials at the Darfur level.

²⁰⁵ This view was shared both by UNHCR and almost all UN partners, although a couple of UN partners at national level considered state level partnerships are stronger than at the national level.

²⁰⁶ This was raised by several UN agencies at national level and in the field level in relation to the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF) managed by UNDP as well as state level assessments by UNITAMS. UNHCR does not consider there is an issue and advised that they are committed to the multiagency approach. The evaluation team's assessment is that more can still be done to achieve good harmonization in this area.

consequent risk of reduction in funding. Integration and leveraging others to act will, however, reduce stretch and overload and are key to building sustainability. Any loss of visibility can be overcome by effectively communicating how UNHCR is catalysing and supporting others.

Bilateral relationships with UN agencies

Evidence of the strategic coherence and effectiveness of UNHCR's bilateral UN relationships is presented in the Partnerships Assessment. Its two most long-standing bilateral partnerships (with UNICEF and WFP) are robust, with the three often acting as a Troika, and with the LoU with UNICEF (currently under revision) acting as a good model. There is good UNHCR use of comparative advantage in some aspects of protection, specifically arrangements with UNICEF related to child protection, and work with WFP in emergency settings, as well as engagement with development actors.

For all other bilateral UN partnerships, more effort is needed to optimize the bilateral relationship. Areas where UNHCR's use of its comparative advantage to date is considered to have been less effective include: in protection, the need for stronger UNHCR leadership, coordination and advocacy and ensuring proper services/ responses are being provided by others with the requisite expertise (including UNFPA, IoM);²⁰⁷ in the area of shelter/NFIs, where UNHCR procurement systems are considered to be hampering delivery; in peacebuilding, where greater clarity on what each UN agency does best is required; and finally, working out complementary roles in relation to private sector partnerships (e.g. with UNDP). Country level MoUs/LoUs (similar to that with UNICEF) with the likes of UNDP, IoM and UNFPA will help to address this.

6.5. Partnerships with other national, regional and international actors

Key findings

- **There is mixed progress in terms of UNHCR optimizing its collaboration with other national, regional, and international players to leverage protection, solutions, and implementation of GCR pledges:**
 - **Implementing partner relationships needs further effort to enhance their effectiveness in delivering shared objectives.**
 - **Good preliminary progress has been made in relation to longer-term development partnerships and work on private sector engagement (important for SO4);**
 - **Engagement with a number of categories of other actors needs to be stepped up, including donors (as strategic partners and not just funders), regional actors (partners for Solutions), also local and national actors (partnerships for locally context-sensitive approaches and delivery).**

Implementing partnerships: Controls built into the PPA system are important in managing fiduciary risk, but there is considerable frustration amongst both IPs and UNCHR staff relating to its limitations.

²⁰⁹ These include the short-term nature of PPAs and short window for delivery, often leaving unspent funds;²¹⁰ concerns about cumbersome procedures, late payments and poor communication with partners by UNHCR; concern on the part of GoS counterparts that partners being selected lack capacity, leading to a poor quality of service delivery. All sub-offices are making some effort to build the delivery capacities of IPs. Changes being made to the PPA system globally will allow calls for Expressions of Interest to be aligned to an operation's

Interestingly, the CSE online surveys found that for UNHCR staff, implementing partnerships/PPAs are the best performing type of partnerships. While partner feedback is mixed, a higher proportion of partners than staff see PPAs as poor performing.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Specifically, in some areas of SGBV/PSEA, UNFPA does not consider that its expertise and experience has adequately been drawn on. This has been an area of donor criticism of UNHCR in the refugee emergency response in the East.

²⁰⁸ CSE Partnerships Survey, Staff Survey. This aligns with feedback in KIIs and FGDs.

²⁰⁹ KIIs with UNHCR staff and a wide range of implementers, including GoS ones.

²¹⁰ The rate of disbursement of PPA budgets (as of October 2021) was 75%.

multi-year strategy, more flexibility and latitude for representatives in the selection of partners, and stronger monitoring of IP performance.²¹¹ It is not evident that these changes will address the fundamental problem of short-term contracts. The fact that the host government's view is a non-binding consideration in IP selection will also likely not satisfy the concerns of COR counterparts, who want a guaranteed decision-making role, particularly in respect of tripartite PPAs. Some IPs shared concerns that they are being treated as contractors and not really as partners.²¹² **As well as making the PPA system as effective and efficient as possible, more effort is needed by UNHCR to build rounded, joint value added, two-way partnerships with IPs.**

Donor relations: UNHCR Sudan had 30 donors in 2020.²¹³ Donor relations are seen as warranting different approaches depending on the funding level, according to lesser priority to those whose funding is relatively small (under around the \$1million benchmark). Top priority is accorded to the US (BPRM) as by far the highest funding donor.²¹⁴ While there is recognition of the considerable challenges faced in the emergency response in East Sudan, relations with the main donors came under considerable strain during the course of 2021 as a result of a crisis of confidence in UNHCR's performance. Donors have highlighted that they want UNHCR to "come to us, to tell us their problems, and ask us for our support... and not to retreat. We also want to be part of UNHCR's relationship with government."²¹⁵ Although not all donors are critical and UNHCR's efforts to address donor concerns are starting to bear fruit in terms of restoring donor confidence, a number continue to hold significant reservations about UNHCR's performance and transparency. This has affected at least one donor's willingness to fund operations in other parts of Sudan. Staff working on donor relations in the External Engagement Unit report that they are highly stretched. The RB has played an important role supporting the CO to manage the crisis in donor relations, as well as in mobilizing donor resources.²¹⁶ **Donor relations emerge as an area needing to be given higher priority by the CO, supported by strengthened capacity.**

Lessons learned from the crisis in the East in relation to UNHCR-donor relations are considered in **Case Study 3** in the "Partnerships Assessment"

Development partnerships: For UNHCR, development partnerships are non-funding relationships to leverage other development-focused actors and agencies.²¹⁷ This includes encouraging a stronger focus on issues of forced displacement, and leveraging greater advocacy with government on policy issues. According to SO4 of the Transition Strategy, the main focus is on being catalytic and not about "doing" development. The development-focused engagement strategy is new for UNHCR Sudan, with just one Development Officer who has been in post for less than a year. Good preliminary progress has been made in engaging multilateral development partners on longer-term development objectives, including the World Bank (which is particularly positive about the role UNHCR has played in supporting its engagement with GoS over the WB's WHR funding window), IFC, AfDB, as well as provision of support and advice to bilateral partner projects (GIZ, JICA).²¹⁸ While only limited progress can be made while development assistance to Sudan remains on hold, **development partnerships are an important area in which to scale up capacity once opportunities in the context as well as internal resources allow.**

The private sector: UNHCR's private sector engagement (PSE) is focused on improving the protection and well-being of POCs (meeting needs, building self-reliance), as well as on changing business sector

²¹¹ Presentation on UNHCR's Results-Based Management PART II: Programme Transitions for 2022, Implications for Partners (Undated, shared by the Regional Bureau 7th December 2021)

²¹² KIIS in a number of locations plus some survey findings; however, this was not the view across the board, and a good number of IPs felt that they are treated with a high level of respect and openness.

²¹³ The USA (through its BPRM) is the largest donor contributing just over \$50 million in 2018-9 and \$74 million in 2020, representing over 50% of UNHCR Sudan's budget; "Traditional" bilateral donors include: UK (\$10 million), EU (\$6.3 million), Germany, Netherlands, and Denmark each providing around \$5 million per annum. The UN Common Emergency Response Fund (CERF) provided \$32 million in 2020. There are also donors from the Middle East, small private donors, and foundations.

²¹⁴ KIIs with CO leadership team, External Relations Unit.

²¹⁵ KII with one of the donors

²¹⁶ KIIs with UNHCR CO and RB teams. The role of the RB was also acknowledged by the donors.

²¹⁷ Partnerships with other UN agencies with a development focus are covered in Section 6.4 on UN partnerships.

²¹⁸ More detail on these development partnerships is contained in the Partnerships Assessment (Section 5, p 22)

models and practices to be more refugee inclusive. Collaboration with the private sector is a relatively new focus for UNHCR Sudan, ²¹⁹ but is clearly now of growing importance. There are two main examples to date, one planning a joint project with a telecommunications company, and another planning a project to support livelihoods through agribusiness partnerships, together with the IFC.²²⁰ There is consensus that the private sector can make an important contribution towards better outcomes for POCs including durable solutions, building **sustainability**, as well as strategic resilience in the case of a potential downward turn in the political, economic and security context.²²¹ **PSE/PSP is an important area and one needing additional in-house expertise and capacity, as well as good coordination with other actors in the field.**

Local and National Actors (LNAs): LNAs are key in the recently launched IASC “localization” agenda to strengthen local participation and leadership in humanitarian coordination initiatives.²²² LNAs also play a key role in partnerships for **advocacy**, to influence decision-making at all levels through the development of coalitions and alliances, public campaigning, communications, and media work. The new **UNHCR Sudan Communications Strategy** (2021-22, updated for 2022 onwards) helpfully identifies and targets different categories of LNAs, including national media, decision-makers, and opinion-shapers, POCs,²²³ and the interested public. However, the focus in respect of LNAs in the communications strategy is largely on one-way communication rather than on two-way engagement processes, with stated objectives focused on raising UNHCR’s visibility, thereby missing the need to inform UNHCR’s understanding of local contexts. Consultations with civil society in a number of areas indicated a high level of interest in active engagement with UNHCR, particularly in Darfur. **In particular, LNAs could be playing a much greater role in building local context analysis and understanding, e.g., through engaging local peace institutes, universities, and think-tanks.**

Regional actors: Partnerships with regional players, such as IGAD, AU and neighbouring governments are increasingly important for UNHCR Sudan, particularly in relation to the IGAD Solutions Initiative for Sudan and South Sudan. IGAD is in the lead on this, with a good number of regional and international partners engaged and actively supporting, including the World Bank. Regional partnerships are a shared responsibility between the CO and RB, and UNHCR’s Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa plays an active role. **While participation of regional actors to date has been good, this can be stepped up and the CO can do more,²²⁴ including on cross-border issues.²²⁵**

6.6. Key themes emerging and lessons learned

- **Partnership with UNHCR clearly creates added value for partners and overall benefits outweigh the costs. However, almost all partnerships can be developed to become more transformational and less transactional, and more explicit use can be made of partnership principles. Better use can be made of comparative /collaborative advantage.**
- **There are many obstacles to partnership-working, a number of which are external to UNHCR, but a good number of which are internal; these can be addressed through building internal partnership capacities and systems (including MEL), as well as the UNHCR’s partnership ethos and a supportive organisational culture.**

²¹⁹ Some thought UNHCR has been rather slow off the mark in Sudan in working with the private sector, given the length of its involvement in the country, and in comparison, with UNHCR’s operations in neighboring countries (KIIs with UN, RB)

²²⁰ See the Partnerships Assessment for further details.

²²¹ KIIs with UNHCR team as well as the one private sector representative interviewed.

²²² IASC (2021). While raised as a priority at RB level, it was not mentioned as a priority at the CO level (e.g., for the RCM).

²²³ Refugees and the Diaspora are mentioned specifically, but not IDPs, stateless persons or host communities

²²⁴ This was the view of various actors including donors and is endorsed by the evaluation team.

²²⁵ The need to focus on cross-border issues was highlighted by sub-offices (Blue Nile, South Kordofan, West Darfur).

- ❖ **Partnership with UNHCR creates added value for partners and overall benefits outweigh the costs.** Areas of value creation by UNHCR ²²⁶ include connection (networking and building relationships), convening across silos,²²⁷ exploiting synergies and building critical mass, whereas there is more to be done in other areas such as complementarity, system transformation, innovation, shared learning and capacity-building, as well as delivering at scale/ across geographies. Benefits highlighted by partners include access to funding, stronger outcomes for POCs, sharing of humanitarian expertise, access to data on refugees, joint assessments and monitoring. Transaction costs of partnership-working with UNHCR are considered moderate or low by partners, but higher by UNHCR staff.

57% of survey respondents rated the added value to their organisation of working with UNHCR as high, 30% as moderate, and 5% as low.

Asked to reflect whether the benefits of partnership with UNHCR definitely outweigh the transaction costs involved, just over 50% of partners responded that they definitely do, 25% were unsure and 13% felt that benefits do not outweigh costs.
- ❖ **Partnerships can be developed to become more transformational and less transactional:** While some partnerships can be kept in the “transactional” category,²²⁸ overall, multiple dimensions of UNHCR Sudan’s partnership-working have the scope to become progressively *less transactional and more transformational*, thereby delivering greater dividends in terms of stronger outcomes achieved:
 - Implementing partners generally want to move from funding-based, contractual relationships to more two-way partnerships based on joint value creation.
 - Operational partners such as INGOs working on emergency responses also want more mutually beneficial, outcome-focused partnerships with UNHCR.
 - Emerging development and private sector partnerships offer excellent potential to be shared platforms for joint value creation as well as being transformational, as do policy partnerships on areas such as Solutions.
- ❖ **More explicit use can be made of partnership principles:** Partner feedback in relation to principles of *equality, mutual respect and transparency* was mixed, in some cases very good, but with some suggesting partnerships are not always two-way exchanges, that UNHCR can be rigid, and decision-making processes opaque. The main areas highlighted for improvement include more open, two-way communication, better data-sharing to enhance transparency, plus stronger inclusion and capacity strengthening of national partners and beneficiaries. Explicitly building partnership principles into partnership agreements is a good way for partners to hold each other mutually accountable, thereby promoting partnership-oriented behaviors.

All three mini case studies ²²⁹ (working with COR, donor relations in the East, and the bilateral relationship with UNICEF) demonstrate that UNHCR Sudan’s partnership-working has the scope to become progressively less **transactional** and more **transformational**. Implementing and operational partners also want partnerships to be less transactional.
- ❖ **Better use can be made of comparative /collaborative advantage:²³⁰** The evaluation team’s assessment of the extent to which UNHCR Sudan is making good use of its comparative advantage (based on cumulative evidence) is presented in Table 1 in the *Partnerships Assessment* (Section 6). Given the extent to which UNHCR Sudan is over-stretched, working to its comparative advantage, focusing on what it does best and things that others can’t deliver effectively and efficiently, and working with, leveraging, supporting and enabling others to deliver wherever possible is a key priority.
- ❖ **Partnership-working can be prioritised more strategically:** This can be approached from a number of angles, including (i) using stakeholder management approaches to prioritise partnerships with high influence and relevance, and de-prioritise those with less influence/relevance; (ii) using scenario

²²⁶ This uses the collaborative advantage/ value creation framework developed by The Partnering Initiative. See Partnerships Assessment, Annex 2

²²⁷ This is sometimes referred to as “integrative systems thinking” or programming in the HDP nexus.

²²⁸ For example, donors who make very small donations.

²²⁹ The three case studies are presented in the stand-alone Partnerships Assessment.

²³⁰ A lower score on *use of complementarity and comparative advantage* in the partnership survey aligns with wider findings.

planning to prioritise different types of engagement in different political contexts (see Annex 7 and section 7.2.2); (iii) using the forthcoming MYSP and Theory of Change process to prioritise key partnerships required to deliver UNHCR's priority outcomes, with strategic objectives weighted accordingly.

❖ **Obstacles to effective partnerships include systems, capacity constraints, and behaviours.** ²³¹

Systemic obstacles include: multiple and competing coordination requirements; structures, which create siloed working; restrictions of UNHCR's PPA mechanism; limited devolution of some partnership-focused functions (regional to CO level, CO to sub-office level). Others relate to internal capacity constraints and gaps to be filled (e.g. development functions), as well as partial knowledge/application of UNHCR's global policies on partnerships. Finally, a good number of obstacles are more behavioural, including both organizational culture and individual behaviours.²³²

❖ **Obstacles can be addressed by capitalizing on the drivers of effective partnerships, including organizational culture and leadership, partnership capacities, and good systems:**

- **Organisational culture and leadership:** Where good progress in partnership working has been made, this has been through a strong partnership ethos, proactive relationship management and interpersonal skills both at leadership and technical levels, looking for the benefits of more integrated partnership approaches, nurturing open, two-way relationships based on mutual respect, and being willing to learn from mistakes that have been made.
- **UNHCR Sudan internal capacity and competencies:** Alongside leadership capacity, partnership-working needs to be built into diverse roles and staff capacity nurtured accordingly. Specifically, much better use can be made of national staff skills and capacities. Partnerships functions are currently divided along various lines including external relations (also covering communications, media and reporting functions), as well as interagency coordination (with a separate reporting line), management of PPA partners through the programmes team, and development partner engagement also separate. ²³³ Given the high need for visibility and strong external communications, these functions may be better separated. Specifically, there is potential to step up capacity for partnerships with development actors, private sector, and regional actors.
- **Systems to underpin partnership-working:** These include having a robust framework of partnership agreements explicitly built on partnership principles especially mutual accountability (see above) and which take a long-term perspective, working together on the basis of comparative advantage for shared outcomes. More robust assessment of results and systems to measure progress towards policy objectives are required. ²³⁴ This can be achieved through a combination of routinely monitored, outcome-oriented indicators, together with selective use of outcome-assessment techniques. ²³⁵ A learning approach to partnerships is also an important component of stronger overall MEL.

²³¹ This analysis was pulled together through a brainstorming by the CSE team, based on the composite findings.

²³² Examples include competition between agencies, instances of defensive approaches to external relationship management, unwillingness to share information, and limited utilisation of the rich knowledge of national staff.

²³³ Larger sub-offices have external relations officers (e.g., North Darfur, South Kordofan) or interagency coordination officers (Gedaref). Some of these cover reporting, whereas in others, the functions are separated.

²³⁴ Changes to UNHCR's Results-Based Management (RBM) systems to better record partnerships are underway at a global level (as part of an internal Business Transformation Programme) and will be implemented from 2023 onwards, although it is not yet evident that these will have a strong focus at the level of shared **outcomes** or on contribution to desired longer-term policy impact.

²³⁵ For example, using outcome harvesting, a MEL technique used to identify, describe, verify and analyse outcomes, and work out how change was achieved.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusions

Overall

The last three years has been a period of major expansion for UNHCR in Sudan as it stepped into the space that opened after the revolution in 2019, and as it adopted a number of new UNHCR corporate strategies and policies including the IDP step-up agenda and longer-term more developmental ways of responding to refugee needs. As a result, it has become an increasingly high profile and influential actor in Sudan.

In terms of **relevance**, its strategy and operation align closely with major global frameworks and with regional and national priorities. It has played an important leadership role in shaping regional and national strategies (for example on durable solutions) as well as following GoS policy priorities.

The rapid expansion of its portfolio and strategic reorientation have impacted the **effectiveness** of its programming. While there are good practice examples from its greater engagement on protection of IDPs, to its catalytic role in development, lack of prioritisation within its expanded portfolio means it has stretched itself too thinly. There is a sense of overload, particularly at the senior leadership level. Its core business of responding to refugee emergencies has suffered, and learning and adaptation has not been adequately captured or internalised.

In a country where the needs of POCs and host communities far outstrip national and international capacity to respond, UNHCR has appropriately prioritised working in **partnership** with a wide range of different actors, for greater collective and leveraged impact. It is now time to develop a more systematic, prioritised and open approach to its partnerships, shifting from transactional to more transformative collaborations.

From conclusions to recommendations and key learning

The conclusions and recommendations below focus on how and where UNHCR can strengthen its strategy, programming, and partnerships. The text boxes provide a summary assessment of UNHCR's performance against the five-point analytical framework that has underpinned the evaluation. Four generic lessons are identified at the end of the conclusions.

Conclusion 1: UNHCR has supported the Transitional Government of Sudan to develop the foundations of a progressive policy agenda for both refugees and IDPs and is uniquely positioned to do so. Moderate progress has been made in supporting the role of government institutions in some states. More is required at subnational level to support the roll-out and implementation of policies, as well as to build political will and institutional capacities. Recent political developments underline the fragility of policy gains and underscore the importance of a robust government engagement and capacity development strategy, guided by an in-depth understanding of the political context.

UNHCR appropriately exploited its **strategic position** in advising and supporting the Transitional Government to develop progressive policies for refugees and IDPs

For the first time in three decades the Transitional phase opened up the political space and will for a progressive policy environment for both refugees and IDPs, and for more open debate about long-suppressed protection issues. It is to UNHCR's credit that it quickly stepped into that space and nurtured the political will, at the highest levels of government through the periodic engagement of the High Commissioner, and on a more sustained basis through day-to-day engagement between UNHCR staff and senior civil servants, especially at national level. This encouraged GOS to make pledges at the GRF in 2019 which, although aspirational, have provided the foundation for further policy debate and formulation, as well as ongoing dialogue around Regional Solutions. Implementation of a number of new policies is yet to be realised, for example the NPPOC and the JPA. Translating some policy decisions into government resource allocation and service delivery is also at an early stage.

The changed political and policy context in Sudan during the Transitional phase has enabled much closer alignment between global refugee frameworks, UNHCR Sudan's strategic approach, and emergent national policies. However, ongoing political turbulence within Sudan could threaten the continued roll-out of this more progressive policy context.²³⁶

Since 2019 **strategic alignment** between UNHCR Sudan's strategies, global frameworks and the national policy context in Sudan has strengthened

While the CO in Sudan has followed UNHCR's corporate strategic reorientation, full ownership of this reorientation amongst UNHCR staff in Sudan is yet to be realised, especially at sub-national level. Within GoS, the role of COR in respect of refugees, and also HAC in relation to IDPs, needs to be transformed away from their current hands-on focus on implementation and obtaining financial/logistical resources, particularly at local level, to one of coordinating and convening cross-government approaches.

Conclusion 2: UNHCR successfully adapted to the opportunities in the political context post-revolution, with a rapidly revised strategy. However, its record in adapting to and preparing for more negative changes in the political and security context has been constrained by inadequate context analysis, especially at sub-national level. At best this has resulted in an overly optimistic expectation of the political trajectory in Sudan. At worst, this has risked conflict insensitive programming that could fuel tensions.

UNHCR is striving to be a flexible humanitarian agency able to make programme adjustments at local level in response to changing context and needs. But in the highly dynamic and unstable political context of Sudan, its weak contextual and conflict analysis is a major constraint to its adaptability and hence its strategic resilience, especially to respond to deteriorating insecurity, to be well-prepared for emergencies, and to guide conflict sensitive programming. Overload at senior leadership level has left little space for ongoing analysis and reflection. The dominance of international staff in management positions, often on short contracts and with short-term experience of the Sudan context, is also a constraining factor.

While it has demonstrated programmatic flexibility at the micro-level, UNHCR's adaptability and **strategic resilience** has been hampered by an often-weak understanding of the **context**, overly optimistic as a result of inadequate context analysis and scenario planning at national and subnational levels.

Informed and ongoing context and conflict sensitivity analysis is essential to guide UNHCR's shift in emphasis between the three pillars of the HDP nexus according to the prevailing political scenario, taking account of both national and subnational dynamics.

Conclusion 3: UNHCR has substantially expanded its portfolio and POC caseload. It has made good progress and provided leadership in some newer areas of work, particularly at the policy level in search of regional durable solutions and in catalysing development-oriented responses. Insufficient strategic prioritisation has, however, resulted in overload and stress for staff at all levels. Programming risks being spread too thinly and lacks adequate analysis of the respective comparative advantage of UNHCR vis-a-vis its partners. Better strategic prioritisation and use of comparative advantage is key to leveraging improved impact.

UNHCR's expanded portfolio has been driven by a more expansive corporate policy; by UNHCR Sudan's HDP nexus ambitions as the humanitarian and policy space opened up in Sudan and peacebuilding was identified as a GOS priority; and in response to a growing caseload with fresh waves of internal displacement and new refugee influxes. This has happened within a very challenging operating environment, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pursuing all four of its strategic objectives simultaneously, without clearly prioritizing between them, has contributed to overload. Clearer prioritization, according to the **context**, will strengthen **strategic resilience**

Lack of adequate prioritisation and strategic direction within this expanded portfolio has contributed to

²³⁶ The evaluation team has developed, and shared with senior management in UNHCR Sudan, three possible future scenarios to guide UNHCR's thinking and approach in this respect.

the sense of overload, with UNHCR struggling to deliver both its core mandate (protection, meeting basic needs and responding to emergencies), while concurrently making progress towards durable and development-oriented responses. There have been important achievements in the latter, which have taken up considerable senior leadership time and attention while the agency has struggled with elements of its core business. While senior management has internalised the shift in strategic direction and more expansive portfolio, this is less evident at middle management level and below.

As the security situation deteriorates and conflict intensifies, UNHCR has to place most emphasis on its first two strategic objectives: protection and humanitarian assistance, and responding to emergencies, giving equal attention to IDP emergencies and the sectors where UNHCR is leading, as to refugee emergencies. Lack of strategic prioritisation is particularly apparent at sub-national level, in some instances compromising the quality of programming.

While UNHCR has played a leadership and normative role according to its **strategic position**, it has not sufficiently bounded its programming or developed partnerships according to its comparative advantage, often spreading itself too thinly.

Defining UNHCR's role according to its comparative advantage is key to ensuring a manageable and effective operation, whereby UNHCR focuses more on its normative role (for example as guardian of international refugee conventions and global frameworks, and in its leadership role in protection and emergency refugee response) while other actors, including NGOs, play more of a delivery and hands-on role at camp and community levels. While partnerships between UNHCR and some UN agencies are guided by the principles of comparative advantage and complementarity, others are inadequate in this respect, for example in protection work, on SGBV, and on human trafficking. UNHCR's partnerships need to be thought through so it does not take on things that others are better placed to do (for example in relation to peacebuilding), and to develop an approach that enables and encourages other agencies to contribute on Solutions. UNHCR needs to be ready to step back when others can do a good job, even if it means potentially losing visibility/ credit, and possibly funding. Improved capturing of results achieved through working through others and harmonized approaches can help to allay fears that loss of visibility may reduce donor willingness to fund UNHCR.

Conclusion 4: Partnership working and leveraging the efforts of other actors is a top priority for UNHCR. Considerable efforts have been made to build partnership and coordination structures, although the effectiveness of these, and GoS participation and leadership in particular, remain patchy, particularly at state level. Duplication and high transaction costs in terms of staff time remain a challenge. Aspects of UNHCR systems, organisational capacity, culture and behaviours have hindered partnership efforts. All UNHCR partners would like more open, two-way partnerships, which create shared value and are less transactional.

The need to work with and through partners forms a central tenet of UNHCR's work and is a high priority in a complex setting such as Sudan. The effort being made by UNHCR on partnership working is appreciated by partners, but there are many areas identified for improvement going forward. Multiple and sometimes competing coordination mechanisms create a heavy burden for UNHCR and also partners, including government. This is exacerbated by currently weak government-led planning and coordination processes. Efforts to support solid and consistent government roles in refugee and IDP-focused coordination are required. There is scope for rationalisation and harmonization of structures particularly at subnational level, both within the RCM-IASC model, and also in terms of UN coordination mechanisms, particularly given UNSCR 2524 and steps towards an integrated mission. The optimal coordination architecture may well vary from one context to another, and new mechanisms may not always need to be established when an existing forum can take on an extended mandate.

UNHCR Sudan's growing focus **on strategic partnerships** is highly relevant, but partnership working is not yet harmonized or supported by the requisite internal systems, capacities and behaviours.

As resources are limited and the roles dedicated to partnerships are very stretched, it will be important to strengthen partnership-oriented functions, skills, and approaches within existing roles. Specifically,

effort is needed to strengthen donor relations and relationship management capabilities, building on lessons learned in the course of the emergency response in the East, ensuring adequate staffing as well as consistent leadership and high level engagement with donors by senior management. Enhanced internal capacity to support development work will enable UNHCR to build on progress in engagement with development actors in support of inclusion in national services as well private sector partnerships (particularly those focused on the creation of livelihoods). Incentivising partnership-oriented attitudes and behaviours within UNHCR is also important. Clearer results areas can be set for partnership working, and these can be more systematically captured, partly through the RBM system updates, which are on the way, but also by tailoring additional ways to assess partnerships (through strengthened outcome assessment as part of stronger MEL – see Conclusion 7).

Conclusion 5: UNHCR’s programming has tended to be driven more by upwards accountability to funders than by downwards accountability to POCs and host communities. This is a constraint to UNHCR’s responsiveness to the latter, and to effective programming. Means of sustaining ongoing and two-way communication are currently lacking between UNHCR and its implementing partners with those the agency is mandated to serve. Although UNHCR’s needs assessments are broadly comprehensive, data and monitoring do not yet systematically address all aspects of vulnerability, in line with the requirements of UNHCR’s AGD policy.

UNHCR has a strong track record of participatory needs assessments and is therefore generally well-informed about the needs and priorities of POCs and host communities. There are examples of how effective communication between communities and UNHCR teams have informed good programming decisions. Overall, however, UNHCR appears to have been more responsive to the demands of its funders, particularly since the high-profile donor criticism of the refugee response in the East. To counterbalance this upward accountability, its ongoing communication with POCs and host communities must be strengthened, so it can be more responsive to their needs and priorities and can better represent their needs to funders, particularly groups that have tended to be overlooked, such as protracted refugee caseloads. Although UNHCR has made progress in Sudan in following its AGD policy, more attention must be given to ensuring communication channels are appropriate and inclusive of the most vulnerable (including youth and women). There are inclusion gaps in existing data systems, for example people with disabilities. Inclusion currently varies according to staff awareness and initiative in different areas. A comprehensive and concerted effort should be made if communications between UNHCR and POCs are to overcome established power structures at community level. Trust between those at risk and the UN agency mandated to protect them is core to increasing effectiveness. Placing greater value on the voice of refugees, IDPs and those at risk of statelessness will likely also improve strategic priority setting, including in areas noted as weak by donors, such as SGBV response.

Conclusion 6:

A number of key aspects of UNHCR’s core business systems emerge as a barrier to effectiveness and a source of frustration for those working at all levels of the organisation. A business transformation process is underway in line with global organisational reforms; however it is not evident that this will adequately address all of the country-specific concerns. Key priorities include: shifting the locus of decision-making close to the response, ensuring staffing is fit-for purpose with the right skill sets and contextual understanding, more timely procurement and release of budgets, more efficient contracting (PPA) systems, and stronger results management.

Human resource systems were frequently cited as a constraint in the organisation’s programming, both in its core business (humanitarian refugee response) and its expanded portfolio and increased POC caseload. This includes: delays in getting the right people with the right skill sets and experience into the right places; shortcomings in leveraging national expertise combined with high turnover of international staff; and lack of a clear career path for national staff. These are important lessons learned from the emergency response in the East and elsewhere. As UNHCR has adapted its overall strategic

direction according to the context, upgrading skillsets has not kept pace. Delays in procurement as well as contracting (PPA) systems are also a constraint to quality and timely delivery.

Conclusion 7: UNHCR's current MEL systems are inadequate to support strategic decision-making and are also a constraint to effective and responsive programming. This is due to a combination of insufficient investment in MEL and a results-based management system that fails to report on outcomes and impact. A stronger learning culture within the organisation is essential to improving effectiveness.

It is challenging to identify UNHCR's achievements from the available monitoring data. This is a hindrance for field-based teams who do not have access to data to inform them what is going well and what is not, and for senior management to know whether programming is on track and responding to need. Very limited staff resources are currently allocated to monitoring and evaluation, at both the CO and sub-office levels. There are also fundamental data gaps, particularly for IDP POCs, including lack of registration and lack of functioning protection monitoring systems in some states. Filling these gaps requires a collective effort between UN agencies. UNHCR appears to have learned some of the lessons from high profile failings in the emergency refugee response in the East. But despite this being UNHCR core business, this learning has not been captured and shared systematically across the organisation. Nor has a safe space for learning and adapting been created. Strengthening MEL and nurturing a more learning-oriented culture are key to ensuring that UNHCR's systems are 'fit-for-purpose', to support evidence-based strategic decision-making and adaptive management at all levels. A well thought-through ToC for the next MYSP, underpinned by a robust context, problem analysis, can inform RBM and MEL approaches. See Annex 4.

Highlights of key learning from the UNHCR Sudan CSE

1. In a fast-changing conflict-affected country/ region, like Sudan and the wider Horn of Africa, a thorough understanding of the context and ongoing conflict analysis is essential for UNHCR programming to remain relevant and adaptive and be conflict sensitive. This requires new and enhanced skill sets.
2. As UNHCR adopts a longer-term and more solution-oriented perspective to its work with refugees, and steps up its engagement with IDPs, the risk of overwhelm, stretching itself too thinly, and weakening its core emergency response performance is high, especially in a country like Sudan, which has large numbers of both refugees and IDPs and weak government capacity. Clarifying UNHCR's comparative advantage, and using this to guide prioritisation, doing what others cannot and stepping back from delivery, is essential to guide prioritisation.
3. The accountability dimension of donor relationships can create unequal power dynamics and narrowly focused relationships. Working together, UNHCR and donors can go beyond performance-related accountability (important though this is), building on donor readiness and comparative advantage to help address delivery challenges and engage diplomatically with government. Regular information-sharing and frank dialogue at a senior level, with both sides welcoming feedback and acknowledging challenges and shortfalls, is important to build and sustain trust.
4. Overarching partnership agreements tailored to the context, such as country specific bilateral LoU/MoUs between UN agencies, are a good way to set shared goals and priorities and jointly commit to partnership principles and ways of working. These need to be dynamic documents, regularly reviewed and updated, and widely disseminated within the signatory agencies, including to the subnational level, so that they are broadly understood, owned and operationalized. Similar overarching partnership agreements can helpfully be developed with different categories of priority partners, including government counterparts (both commissions and line ministries).

7.2. Recommendations

7.2.1. Overall recommendations

Recommendations	Level of priority ²³⁷	Action by: ²³⁸
From Conclusions 1 & 2		
1. UNHCR should strengthen its adaptability to Sudan’s dynamic political context to remain relevant, and especially its contextual analysis to inform how it should continue to support GoS in developing and rolling out progressive policies for refugees, IDPs and host communities in line with global and regional frameworks, and in close coordination with other UN agencies. Specific actions proposed:	HIGH	CO with RB support
a) substantially strengthen its analysis and understanding of the context and of conflict dynamics at national and sub-national levels, drawing on informed and networked local staff, and on local knowledge and expertise through stronger engagement with local and national actors, including CSOs and Sudan’s universities and peace institutes, as well as through collective context analysis with other UN agencies and with IPs	High	
b) improve its adaptability to adjust strategic focus between the H, D and P pillars of the triple nexus, according to the context, strengthening nexus ways of working, including analysis of causes and drivers of conflict, and conflict sensitive programming, and investment in learning and building an evidence base to support programming flexibility (see below)	High	
c) continue to support and advocate for the roll-out and implementation of key national policies for IDPs and refugees (National Vision, GCR action plan, NPPOC etc.), at both national and state levels, stepping up the latter, adapting to the context as necessary and appropriate (see scenario-based recommendations)	Medium	
d) build its strategic partnership with the GoS through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a deeper strategy for engagement with government, which can adapt to different scenarios • building a more strategic approach to government capacity development with systematic capacity assessments and good M&E of its effectiveness • framing, through ongoing dialogue, a more explicitly transformational partnership with COR at national and state levels, with a shared understanding of how COR can catalyse and support a cross-government approach (in line with the National Vision), supported by a clear COR-UNHCR joint action plan • strengthening engagement with line ministries at the national and state level around service delivery as well as the protection agenda and solutions 	Medium	

²³⁷ All recommendations are prioritised as ‘High’ (requiring urgent attention) or ‘Medium’ (requiring attention in the next six to twelve months), in order to support UNHCR in the formulation of its next MYSP, and to strengthen programming in the current and uncertain context in Sudan.

²³⁸ While most of the recommendations are targeted at UNHCR Sudan and the Regional Bureau (RB), HQ has been added where it is known to play a key role e.g., on emergencies, or where it is known to be revising particular UNHCR systems and procedures e.g. PPAs.

<p>From Conclusion 3</p> <p>2. UNHCR should prioritise within its expanded portfolio, according to its comparative advantage in playing a critical normative role, (for example leaving service delivery to others), and prioritising amongst its strategic objectives according to the evolving context in Sudan, to address the current sense of overload and to provide clearer strategic direction to staff, especially at sub-national level.</p> <p>Specific actions proposed:</p>	HIGH	CO
<p>a) UNHCR should prioritise according to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • its comparative advantage as a UN agency with access to government and a normative role to play in terms of setting standards and frameworks for refugee programming and for aspects of IDP programming, and playing an advocacy and catalytic role in ensuring those standards and frameworks are followed. • the evolution of the context in Sudan, where the caseload could well increase further, to guide prioritization of strategic objectives – see scenario-specific recommendations included below these recommendations and proposed actions in the main report. 	Medium	
<p>b) UNHCR should develop and roll-out a plan for the induction of its staff at middle management level and below, on UNHCR Sudan’s strategic reorientation and prioritization according to comparative advantage, and an opportunity to build understanding of the HDP nexus and its implications. Through this process an overview of skillsets could be gained, including how they need to be adapted and/ or upgraded to engage with an expanded portfolio in line with the triple nexus.</p>	High	
<p>From conclusion 4</p> <p>3. UNHCR should develop a strategic approach to partnership-working and strengthen its related internal functions, capabilities, incentives, and systems towards this end.</p> <p>Specific actions proposed:</p>	MEDIUM	CO
<p>a) Prioritisation: prioritise according to partner ability to leverage influence and impact, while concurrently giving a voice to vulnerable stakeholder groups/POC. Priorities include (i) donors (ii) regional actors, (iii) local and national actors.</p>	Medium	
<p>b) Capabilities: build UNHCR’s partnership working capabilities, including through greater use of professional national staff who know the actors/ context, as well as providing training in partnership principles and approaches, building catalytic and transformational partnerships.</p>	Medium	
<p>c) Functions: optimise and strengthen the internal coherence of partnership functions through the forthcoming staff review, working towards a strengthened, more integrated partnerships unit. ²³⁹</p>	High	

²³⁹ This could include: (i) renaming an integrated unit to **partnerships** (as opposed to External Relations); (ii) creating a distinct **external communications** function within the overall partnerships unit (especially at national level); (iii) integrating Development Officer functions (ideally to be expanded once funding permits, including enhanced capacity for private sector partnerships) into the partnerships unit; (iv) strengthening donor relations capacity (for strategic engagement as well as robust reporting) and approaches (v) building strong linkages with PPA partner relationship management by the programme team – for example through an embedded focal point for implementing partners within a joined up partnerships unit.

d) Incentives: build assessment of partnership objectives and competencies into individual performance management, as well as evaluations of programmes and projects (through a stronger MEL function (see recommendation 6)).	Medium	
e) Partnership management: prioritise according to partner ability to leverage influence and impact, while concurrently focusing on giving a voice to vulnerable stakeholder groups/POC.	Medium	
f) PPA partners: utilise the forthcoming global reforms of the PPA contracting system to review and enhance UNHCR Sudan's implementing partnerships, working towards longer-term approaches, which build the capacity of local partners.	Medium	
g) RBM system: utilise planned enhancements to the RBM system, as well as tailored MEL strengthening at the CO level, to better assess the outcomes of partnership working.	Medium	
h) Donor relations: conduct a strategic, collective partnership dialogue with donors concerning UNHCR's focus going forward and appropriate support modalities, to include working towards better harmonisation of different donor funding streams (e.g., through jointly-funded programmes) and associated reporting requirements.	Medium	
From conclusion 4 4. UNHCR should enhance effectiveness and gains of its partnerships by reducing transaction costs (both for UNHCR and others) through harmonisation and streamlining of coordination structures and identifying and better utilising the comparative advantage of other agencies. Specific actions proposed:	MEDIUM	CO
a) Work jointly with OCHA and other partners to appropriately tailor RCM-IASC coordination structures to each context/state, reducing duplication of mechanisms wherever possible.	Medium	
b) Continue to play a leading role in helping the UNCT to agree an optimal architecture for UN integration to implement UNSCR 2524 (in Darfur, the Two Areas, and nationally).	High	
c) Strengthen all key bilateral UN partnerships at country level through LoUs, which clearly identify areas of comparative advantage and complementarity.	Medium	
d) Ensure all joint and coordinated UN programming has a robust arrangement for joint working based on complementarity, synergy and comparative advantage. ²⁴⁰	High	
e) Consider how best to strengthen linkages between solutions focused partnerships/mechanisms (DSWGs, IGAD Solutions) and other UN and interagency coordination processes.	Medium	
From conclusion 5 5. UNHCR should improve its downwards accountability by improving its responsiveness to the priorities and needs of POCs and host communities in line with the AGD policy. Specific actions proposed:	MEDIUM	CO, Sub-Offices and FOs

²⁴⁰ A potential model to build on is the framework for maximising comparative advantage of UN agencies as set out in the Country Vision Note for the PROSPECTS Partnership. See: https://ilo.org/global/programmes-and-projects/prospects/countries/sudan/WCMS_738281/lang--en/index.htm (page 17).

a) strengthened two-way communication with POCs and host communities on an ongoing basis, to better understand how well their needs are being met and necessary adaptations to programming	Medium	
b) setting in place robust processes for ensuring POC representatives are more inclusive of different vulnerable groups	Medium	
c) more authoritatively representing and advocating the needs of POCs and host communities with funders	Medium	

From conclusion 6		
6. UNHCR should address organisational barriers to its programming effectiveness to create a more enabling environment, with an emphasis on HR, management issues including support to senior leadership, aspects of business transformation, and strengthened and more collaborative contingency planning. Specific actions proposed:	MEDIUM	CO with DESS and DHR & RB support
a) ensuring that the planned staffing review clearly addresses national staffing conditions including contracts, conditions, skills and learning, career progression and hence the ability to attract and retain talented national staff at senior level.	Medium	
b) informed by experience from the East, building senior leaderships roles into the HR part of emergency response plans, ensuring continuity and clear handover procedures, as well as knowledge of the local context	High	
c) step up advisory and coaching support to senior leadership to address overload during major emergency responses	Medium	
d) as far as possible, applying the principle that the locus of decision-making should be as close to the response as possible, supported by the necessary lines of authority	Medium	
e) strengthening contingency planning as a collective effort including other UN agencies, donors, IPs and, as far as possible, local and national authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • within Sudan to pay greater attention to natural disasters, including risk mitigation, as well as conflict • regionally for refugee influxes 	Medium	
From conclusion 7		
7. UNHCR should develop and invest in a MEL system that is truly ‘fit for purpose’ and adequately staffed to support strategic decision-making. Specific actions proposed:	HIGH	CO with RB support
a) investing in the design and staffing of a comprehensive MEL system of information gathering, analysis and reporting, that includes qualitative as well as quantitative data, to better support senior management decision making needs	High	
b) developing a more learning-oriented culture, for example through regular ‘After-Action Reviews’ ²⁴¹ and investment in real-time learning processes, supported by skilled facilitators, and as a priority:	High	

²⁴¹ See https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/after_action_review

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conduct and document a lessons-learning exercise on the emergency refugee response in the East, in the spirit of an 'After-Action Review', involving senior management and led by an independent facilitator, sharing the outcome with donors, which could help to restore donor confidence in UNHCR 		
<p>c) following through with the TOC process, rolling it out geographically and amongst both national and international staff. The results will form the basis of the long-term strategy, inform the M&E design, and eventually lead to a more logical rigour as the foundation for transformative change.</p>	Medium	

7.2.2. Scenario-specific recommendations

As well as these overall recommendations, in consultation with senior management in UNHCR Sudan, the evaluation team has developed some specific recommendations for each of the three different scenarios for Sudan. (See Annex 7 for a description of each of the scenarios)

		Current	Worst-case	Best-case
Strategy	Strategic prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise SO1 and SO2 to ensure UNHCR is effectively fulfilling its core mandate • Engage with SO3 and SO4 where possible, on a small-scale and incrementally, as an incentive for greater stability and potential dividend of peace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leadership attention, staffing and other resources Focus on SO1 and SO2, • Realistic and contextualised engagement on SO3 where feasible (likely minimal) • SO4 vision kept alive, tempered by realism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with all SOs, with increasing emphasis on SO3 and SO4 as the political and security conditions improve.
Effective programming	Support to GOS policy	<p>Advocacy and support to preserve progressive policy context, and for incremental progress where possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support continued rollout of NPPOC • Monitor implementation of JPA to inform UNHCR engagement and support to GOS • Joint advocacy with regional and international actors. • Results: prioritise MEL systems and POC feedback loops • SO1: establish fundamental protection mechanisms and SOPs; strengthen UNHCR coordination, advocacy and leadership role • SO2: address constraints to improve emergency response (protection, emergency shelter and NFIs) based on UNHCR comparative advantage, relying more on IPs for direct delivery; strengthen contingency planning for natural disasters as well as displacement and refugee influxes. Joint planning with state level government where possible 	<p>Advocacy with GOS (national and sub-national levels)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support policy, focussed principally on protection and humanitarian access for emergency response. • Results: prioritise MEL systems and POC feedback loops • SO1: establish core protection mechanisms; leverage partnerships to deliver in hard-to-reach places • SO2: urgently strengthen emergency response through applications of lessons learned • SO3: where possible, ensure solutions, and a nexus approach, are taken into account in humanitarian action under SO1 and SO2. 	<p>Close engagement with GOS to further develop progressive policy context based on GRF pledges, and support policy roll-out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerate rollout of NPPOC • Advocate for security arrangements to implement the refugee and IPC component of the JPA. • Results: business transformation process; leverage opportunities to share and coordinate data. • SO1: deepen support to GoS ministries to deliver; strengthen monitoring; community-based approaches • SO2: deepen support across GoS ministries to deliver; increase joint planning; linkages to SO4 • SO3: advocacy for policy change and financial support to solutions; increased engagement with GoS for scale-up of area-based work • SO4 increase advocacy and communications; support GoS in

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SO3: area-based durable solutions where possible. SO4: maintain partnerships (see below). 		developmental programming for refugees and IDPs.
Partnerships		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GoS: Cautious engagement at a political level by international and regional actors; UNHCR focus on shared responsibilities to ensure protection of and meeting emergency /basic needs of POCs (within parameters set by the UN at country level); Growing focus on humanitarian needs, protection, and basic services; plus, strong focus on delivery of services (leveraging other actors through partnership agreements plus operational partnerships as much as possible). Continued foundational work on solutions and development partnerships where possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GoS: focus on holding government to account for delivering on its responsibilities to protect POCs (see above on advocacy) Focus on humanitarian and protection partnerships, continuing to work within the nexus to establish grounds for development-orientated solutions through humanitarian action More direct implementation and delivery through non-government partners is required in this scenario. Solutions and development focused partnerships a lesser, longer-term priority; relationships maintained and some potential bridging projects (e.g., private sector partnerships). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN including UNHCR increasingly aligns with government through integrated national frameworks and structures Gradually increased the focus on the peacebuilding and development dimensions of the HDP nexus (working in partnership with/catalysing others), and reducing humanitarian efforts Emergency and humanitarian partnerships transition to focus more on solutions (while maintaining capacity and readiness to respond if needed). Enhanced partnerships focus on peacebuilding and longer-term developmental solutions.