

Including Older People in Sudan's Recovery

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Older people in Sudan

Sudan is facing one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. Armed conflict, economic collapse, and climate pressures have devastated livelihoods, displaced millions of people, and pushed communities toward famine conditions. More than 33 million people now require humanitarian assistance.

Older people, in all their diversity, face some of the greatest risks in humanitarian crises but are often the least visible in the international response. Across Sudan and in neighbouring host countries, many older people live with the combined impacts of conflict, poverty, ill-health and displacement and yet they struggle to access food, healthcare, protection, and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Older women, in particular, may be widowed, caring for grandchildren, or living alone, with limited income and few support networks. Many older Sudanese live with disabilities or chronic health conditions, but humanitarian assistance is frequently delivered in ways that mean walking for long distances, queueing in extreme heat, or navigating complex systems that require documentation that many do not have.

Despite these challenges, older people continue to play important roles within their families and communities, contributing to community resilience and recovery by:

- caring for children and supporting extended families during displacement
- maintaining agricultural knowledge that is crucial for food production in climate-stressed areas
- acting as trusted mediators in local conflict resolution
- sustaining community cohesion in displacement sites and fragile environments

When older people are excluded from humanitarian planning, services are often inaccessible or unsafe for them, increasing the risks they face. This undermines the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the response, as assistance fails to reach all those who need it. Inclusive approaches that recognise older people's rights, capacities and experiences strengthen community resilience and helps create conditions for long-term recovery. An effective humanitarian response in Sudan must therefore address the barriers older people face and enable them to live with dignity, safety and independence.

Regional crisis requires sustainable solutions

The conflict has forced millions to flee to neighbouring countries including Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic, placing enormous pressure on already fragile host regions.

Humanitarian support for refugees and host communities remains essential. At the same time, the international response must also invest in restoring livelihoods, services, and stability inside Sudan so that displaced populations can return in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner when conditions permit.

Older people are central to this process. Their longstanding ties to land, communities, and local governance structures make them key actors in rebuilding social stability and supporting reintegration.

Priority actions for the Sudan Conference

We call on the German Government, the UK Government, and international partners to commit to the following priorities:

1. Make humanitarian programming age-inclusive

- Require humanitarian programmes to systematically include older people and address the intersection of age, gender, and disability.
- Include older people as a priority group in funding strategies and humanitarian planning frameworks.
- Allocate funding for Age Inclusion Specialists within the humanitarian cluster system in Sudan.
- Ensure older people and their representative organisations are meaningfully consulted in programme design, implementation and monitoring.

2. Strengthen local and community-based response systems

Sudanese civil society organisations, community networks, and Emergency Response Rooms remain the backbone of the humanitarian response.

Donors should:

- Provide direct, flexible, and multi-year funding to local organisations, including older people's associations.
- Simplify funding mechanisms to enable rapid support for local responders
- Invest in community-based resilience and local food systems.

Empowering local actors helps ensure assistance reaches the people most at risks, including older people.

3. Ensure access to health, protection, and livelihoods

Older people often face major barriers in accessing humanitarian assistance and essential services.

Humanitarian partners should:

- Expand mobile health services and outreach for people who face mobility or access barriers.
- Remove documentation requirements that prevent older people from accessing assistance.
- Train humanitarian staff to identify and respond to age, gender and disability related barriers to protection and assistance.
- Ensure that protection and gender-based violence services are accessible and inclusive of older women and men.
- Support livelihood and agricultural recovery programmes that enable older people to contribute to rebuilding communities.

4. Improve data and accountability

Older people remain largely invisible in humanitarian data systems.

Donors and agencies should:

- Require data disaggregation by sex, age (including 60+ in ten-year cohorts), and disability.
- Integrate age-sensitive indicators into monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- Ensure feedback and complaints mechanisms are accessible to older people and allow them to influence humanitarian programmes.