# FRONTLINE RESILIENCE:

## MAPPING THE ROLE AND NEEDS OF WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN SUDAN

Gender-Based Violence AoR
**Sudan**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AISCG** | Area Inter-Sector Coordination Group |
| **AoR** | Area of Responsibility |
| **GBV** | Gender-Based Violence |
| **GBV** WG | Gender-Based Violence Working Group |
| **HNRP** | Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan |
| **HPC** | Humanitarian Programme Cycle |
| **IASC** | Inter-Agency Standing Committee |
| **IDPs** | Internally Displaced Persons |
| **INGO** | International Non-Governmental Organization |
| **M&E** | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| **NFI** | Non-Food Items |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organization |
| **OCHA** | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| **SC** | Sub-Cluster |
| **SEA** | Sexual Exploitation and Abuse |
| **UNFPA** | United Nations Population Fund |
| **WASH** | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| **WHO** | World Health Organization |
| **WLO** | Women-Led Organization |
| **WRO** | Women's Rights Organization |

# INTRODUCTION

As Sudan enters its second year of full-scale conflict, it is now home to the world's largest internal displacement crisis. Since the outbreak of war in April 2023, more than 12 million people have been forcibly displaced - 8.8 million internally within Sudan, and over 3 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries. The scale of humanitarian need in 2025 is staggering: over 30.4 million people - more than half the population - require urgent assistance, including 16 million children[1]. This deteriorating crisis has compounded existing vulnerabilities, with massive disruptions to health, education, protection services, and food systems.

Gender-based violence (GBV) has escalated to catastrophic levels. Over 12.2 million women and girls, and an increasing number of men and boys, are now at risk, reflecting an 80% increase from the previous year[2]. Conflict-related sexual violence, abductions, and forced marriage are reportedly widespread, particularly in displacement sites and active conflict zones, exacerbated by impunity and the collapse of protection mechanisms (UNFPA Sudan, 2025). At the same time, Sudan ranks among the top four countries globally for global acute malnutrition, with rates estimated at 13.6%, and an estimated 4.9 million children under five expected to be acutely malnourished in 2025[3].

Despite these unprecedented needs, the humanitarian response remains gravely underfunded. As of mid-June 2025, only 14.1% of the $4.16 billion sought under the 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) has been received. In contrast, 70.3% of the 2024 HNRP was funded—an alarming reversal that risks further erosion of essential services and humanitarian access[4].

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1    OCHA, 2025
2    UNFPA, 2025
3    UNICEF, 2025
4    OCHA FTS, 2025

**+12 million people**
forcibly displaced

**+30.4 million people**
need humanitarian assistance

**+12.2 million women and girls**
at risk of GBV

**4.9 million children under five**
to be acutely malnourished in 2025

**14.1%**

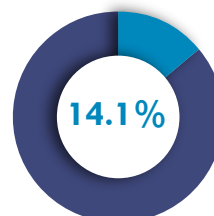**of the $4.16 billion sought for the 2025 HNRP received**

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Women-led organizations (WLOs) in Sudan are not only pivotal responders in the current humanitarian crisis. They are foundational to the country's eventual recovery, peacebuilding, and reconstruction. These organizations, rooted in local communities and led by women with lived experience of the crisis, are often the only actors able to operate in insecure, remote, or inaccessible areas. Their ability to build trust with survivors of GBV, deliver culturally appropriate services, and navigate complex local dynamics makes their role indispensable to any effective humanitarian response.

In conflict-affected areas such as **Khartoum, Kordofan, and the Darfur's,** WLOs have continued to deliver frontline life-saving support, including GBV prevention and response, psychosocial first aid, dignity kits, awareness campaigns, and safe space management - all often in the absence of formal institutions or state services. These organizations also play a critical role in early warning, community protection, and identifying emerging needs long before these are captured by international actors. Their contextual knowledge and adaptive approaches make them uniquely equipped to work within rapidly changing conflict dynamics.

However, WLOs are consistently marginalized in formal humanitarian coordination and decision-making processes. While they may be invited to participate in clusters and working groups, their engagement is often tokenistic, lacking genuine influence over strategy or funding allocations. This marginalization persists despite their clear operational relevance, community legitimacy, and the global commitments under the Grand Bargain and IASC Gender Policy to support women's leadership and localized responses[5]. Funding challenges further constrain their effectiveness: XX% of surveyed WLOs reported having to shut down programs or lay off staff due to financial shortfalls.

It is therefore critical to recognize WLOs not only as service providers but as essential leaders in crisis response, policy influence, and long-term nation-building. These organizations represent the infrastructure upon which Sudan's recovery must be built. Their inclusion in peace processes, recovery planning, and state reconstruction is not a matter of representation alone; it is a strategic necessity. WLOs are already delivering integrated services that combine GBV response with economic empowerment, livelihoods, legal aid, and peacebuilding. These are exactly the types of multi-sectoral, resilience-focused approaches needed to rebuild post-conflict Sudan in an inclusive, rights-based, and gender-just way.

> **WLOs are foundational to Sudans eventual recovery, peacebuilding, and reconstruction**

> **WLOs are consistently marginalized in formal humanitarian coordination and decision-making processes**

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5    IASC, 2017; Grand Bargain, 2021

Ensuring WLOs receive direct, flexible, multi-year funding is thus not only a matter of equity but of operational effectiveness and sustainability. Investment in their institutional strengthening, leadership, and data systems will yield dividends far beyond the emergency phase. With appropriate support, WLOs can scale their reach, deepen their impact, and lead Sudan's transformation from war and trauma to recovery and renewal.

The ongoing conflict in Sudan, and the movement restrictions it has created, clearly highlight just how critical WLOs are in responding to this humanitarian crisis, especially when it comes to GBV prevention and response. Recognizing this, the Sudan GBV Area of Responsibility has launched an initiative to fully acknowledge the value of WLOs in strengthening GBV coordination and response, aiming to leverage their diverse skills and rich experiences.

> **WLOs are critical in responding to this humanitarian cirsis, especially when it comes to GBV prevention and Response**

## GBV AOR efforts in empowering WLOs in Sudan's GBV Response

The Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) in Sudan, has implemented a multidimensional approach to significantly enhance the presence and engagement of WLOs in humanitarian response, particularly in addressing gender-based violence. Recognizing the critical role of WLOs in delivering survivor-centered care, both entities have prioritized strengthening WLO leadership within GBV coordination structures, encouraging them by having a co-leadership role at national level to enhance an inclusive and supportive environment.

This commitment extends to advocacy efforts, where the GBV AoR have actively championed WLO participation in the broader humanitarian response. These efforts have led to tangible outcomes, such as the establishment of a dedicated fund scheme for WLOs under the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (managed by OCHA in 2023) and increased WLO engagement in international platforms, where they effectively represent the needs of women and girls in Sudan.

To further empower WLOs, the GBV AOR initiated a comprehensive plan that began with a survey of WLO in 2023 followed by a survey in 2025 to assess their capacities, perceptions, and experiences, especially those involved in GBV humanitarian efforts.

The survey results , which highlighted WLOs' substantial contributions despite challenges like insecurity, limited mobility, and funding shortfalls, informed the development of a WLO empowerment strategy.

This strategy aims to bridge existing gaps and equip WLOs for meaningful participation in the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC), specifically in GBV prevention and response. Furthermore, the GBV AOR has been instrumental in the establishment of the WLO taskforce under it, initially in Red Sea State and Kassala with plans to expand to other states.

This taskforce serves as a crucial platform for WLOs to address capacity gaps, exchange information, discuss GBV response issues, prioritize the voices of women and girls at risk, and advocate for increased funding and donor commitments to support their vital work, especially in hard-to-reach areas.

Through these concerted efforts, the GBV AoR committed to ensuring WLOs are adequately equipped and can participate meaningfully in the prevention and response to GBV, leveraging their unique skills and experiences for a more contextualized and effective humanitarian approach.

# KEY FINDINGS
## 2025 SURVEY

**1**   **WLOs have limited influence despite their presence in meetings and forums.** Their attendance does not translate into substantive influence over outcomes, indicating a significant gap between their involvement and actual impact within decision-making processes. This is largely due to the demonstrable absence of sufficiently structured mechanisms that would enable them to provide direct and meaningful input into the strategic planning and resource allocation to meet the needs of Women and Girls. Ultimately, this lack of clarity about the communication pathways restricts their capacity to shape critical programming and resource distribution.

**2**   **Underutilization of External Technical Support.** Despite facing internal capacity limitations, many WLOs rely almost exclusively on internal assessments and resources. This limits their ability to scale or improve technical quality. Integrating localized external expertise into capacity-building strategies would significantly strengthen organizational effectiveness, particularly in areas such as proposal development, GBV case management, and program monitoring.

**3**   **Leadership Gaps in Disability Inclusion:** Although the survey confirmed that 96.5% of participating organizations are women-led, with nearly 80% having more than five women in leadership roles, inclusion of women with disabilities remains limited. Over half (53.4%) of organizations reported having no disabled women in leadership or management, highlighting a critical gap in inclusive leadership and representation.

**4**   **Diverse Organizational Structures and Safeguarding Practices:** WLOs vary widely in size and structure, from small grassroots groups to larger formalized entities, with a strong showing of volunteer-driven models. Encouragingly, nearly all surveyed organizations have policies addressing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), sexual harassment, and codes of conduct. However, gaps remain in policy implementation and enforcement, requiring continued support to strengthen safeguarding across the board.

**5**

**Strong Thematic Focus on Gender and GBV within Humanitarian Response:** A large majority (87.9%) of WLOs report a primary focus on gender equality and GBV prevention and response. Their programming has consistently targeted vulnerable groups: including internally displaced women and girls, those with disabilities, and elderly women through multi-sectoral interventions such as humanitarian aid, rights awareness, psychosocial support, economic empowerment, and community training over the past three years.

**6**

**Severe Funding Constraints Undermining Humanitarian Impact:** The most critical challenge facing WLOs is chronic underfunding. A staggering 91.4% of organizations reported having to suspend activities or lay off staff due to financial shortfalls. These funding gaps intensify existing institutional weaknesses, such as staff shortages, displacement of personnel, and operational constraints. weak Monitoring and Evaluation capacity prevents local organizations from effectively leveraging their on-the-ground knowledge with data-driven insights, limiting their influence in coordination forums and hindering their ability to secure resources and advocate for community needs.

**7**

**Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Humanitarian Coordination:** While WLOs are formally represented in coordination platforms, their engagement often lacks depth or impact. Many representatives experience discomfort (15.5%), concerns for personal safety (12.1%), or limited opportunities to share expertise (31%). Systemic access barriers, including language challenges (18.9%), unreliable internet and digital tools (18.9%), and transportation or mobility issues (14.2%), further restrict their ability to participate effectively in key decision-making spaces.

# PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

## Purpose of the Study:

This study was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2023 and updated in the first half of 2025 by the GBV AOR in Sudan. The survey aimed to gather perceptions and experiences of local and national WLOs in Sudan, specifically those involved in humanitarian response, particularly in GBV. The study sought to assess the role of WLOs in humanitarian action, including the HPC, identify entry points for their participation in humanitarian clusters and activities, and evaluate their capacities. The findings will inform the GBV SC strategy to empower WLOs, strengthen their leadership, and promote their meaningful engagement in humanitarian actions, particularly GBV prevention, response, and risk mitigation. The data will also serve as evidence to advocate for increased resources and support for WLOs.

## Methodology of Study:

The study utilized a survey approach, collecting data from 58 organizations operating in the states: Khartoum, Kassala, Jazeera, and Red Sea, Northern State, River Nile, Blue Nile, North Darfur, North Kordofan, West Kordofan, South Kordofan, White Nile, West Darfur, South Darfur and Sennar.

**The survey covered:**

- **Organizational Profile:** Size, establishment date, mandate, and staffing.
- **Impact of Conflict:** Changes in organization size, budget, funding access, and operational challenges.
- **Organizational Capacity:** Availability of policies regarding Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), sexual harassment, and inclusion; skills and resources for proposal writing, financial management, and strategic planning.
- **Beneficiary Groups:** Focus of interventions and outreach strategies.
- **Challenges Faced:** Conflict-related challenges: funding, access, staff capacity, stakeholder perception, and participation in decision-making spaces.

The 58 participants in the survey consisted of 56 WLOs and 2 National NGOs with more than 50% women leadership/staff.

The geographical coverage of the surveyed organizations is as follows: Kassala (26), Red Sea (15), Khartoum (12), Jazeera (8), Northern state (8), Gedaref (7), Blue Nile (6), North Darfur (6), North Kordofan (6), White Nile (5), West Kordofan (3), River Nile (3), South Kordofan (3), Sinnar (3), and South Darfur (1).

**FIGURE 1.** Number of WLOs surveyed by state
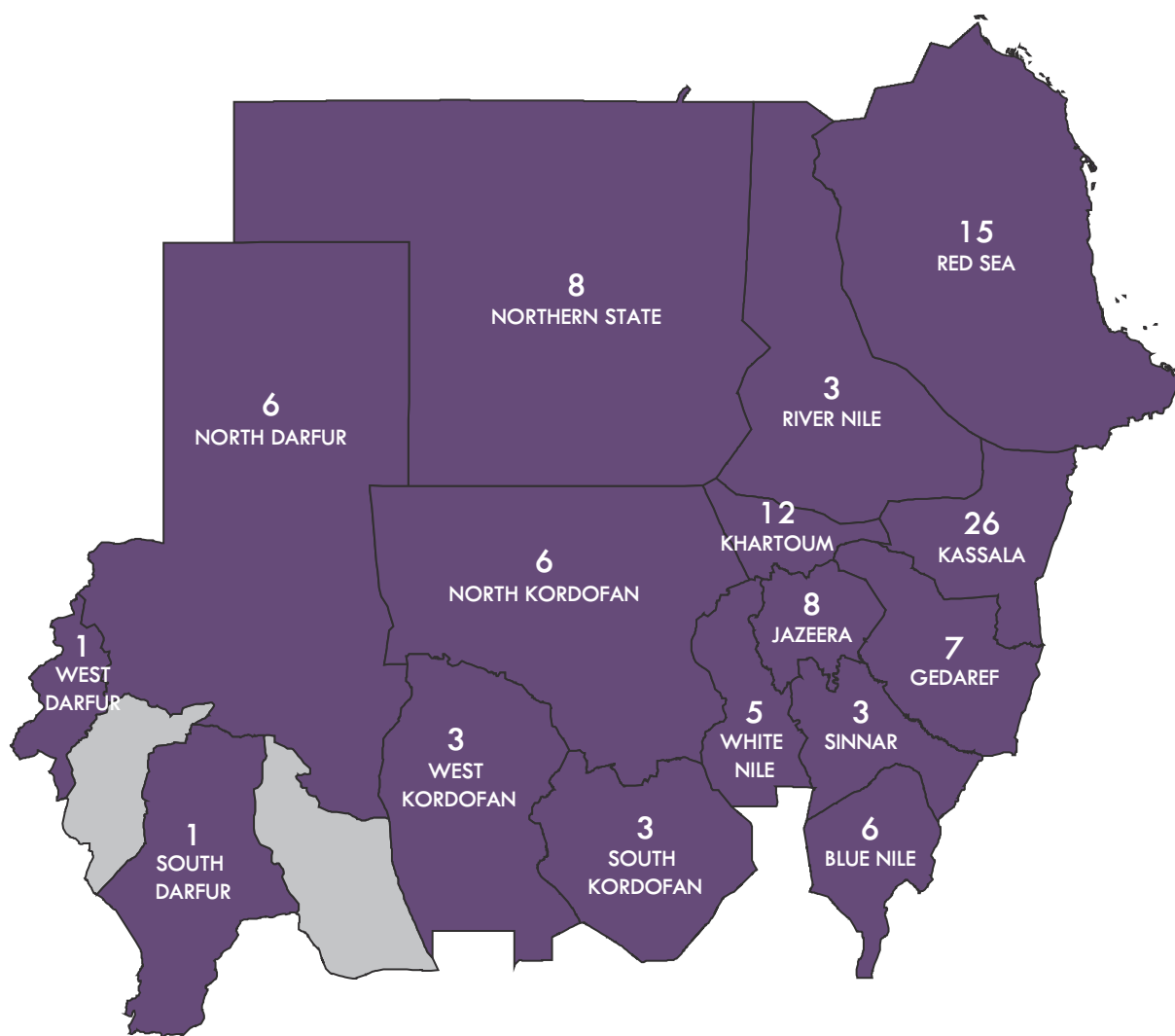


*"The names and boundaries on this map do not imply any UNFPA position on legal status or borders."*

# MAIN FINDINGS

## 1. Gender Dynamics in Organizational Leadership

Among the 58 organizations surveyed, 56 were identified as WLOs, and two were national NGOs with more than 50% women in leadership or staffing roles. Analysis of leadership distribution revealed that 20.7% of organizations had between one and five women in leadership positions, 39.7% had between five and ten, and another 39.7% had more than ten women in leadership roles. This data reflects the strong presence of women in leadership across a majority of the sampled organizations.

While these organizations are defined by women-led leadership structures, staffing compositions are diverse. Some organizations reported exclusively or predominantly female staff, with examples such as "40 females" or "20 females," suggesting either a natural gender skew typical of the sector, a mission-aligned hiring approach, or staffing patterns characteristic of smaller organizations. However, many others reported mixed-gender teams, such as "14 females and 3 males," "19 females and 7 males," or "20 women and 5 men," indicating a deliberate commitment to inclusive staffing. This diversity underscores that WLOs are not limited to women-only teams but embrace a range of perspectives and competencies that support their programming and organizational goals.

One particularly illustrative example—a workforce composed of "42 females and 47 males"—demonstrates that WLOs can include a nearly equal or even male-majority staff base. This affirms that the term "women-led" pertains to the leadership ethos and governance of the organization, not necessarily the gender composition of the entire staff. Such variation reflects diverse operational needs, organizational strategies, and the evolving understanding of gender-inclusive workspaces.

Regarding inclusivity in leadership, 46.6% of surveyed organizations reported having women with disabilities in their management teams, while 53.4% did not. The inclusion of disabled women in leadership roles is a positive indicator of organizational efforts to promote equity and representation. Organizations that embrace such diversity are likely to benefit from a broader range of lived experiences, improved responsiveness to community needs, and a leadership team that reflects the diversity of the populations they serve. These practices not only enhance service delivery but also send a powerful message about accessibility and empowerment, inspiring both staff and beneficiaries alike.

**FIGURE 2.** Women with a disability in organization management team
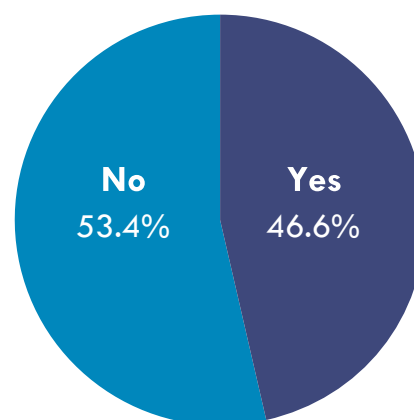


Nonetheless, the fact that more than half of organizations do not include disabled women in their leadership highlights a critical gap. This absence limits the opportunity for disability-informed planning and service design and may unintentionally reinforce structural barriers. The lack of representation may also contribute to feelings of exclusion among disabled women in the workforce and reduce opportunities for upward mobility. Addressing this disparity is not merely an issue of fairness - it is essential for optimizing organizational performance and achieving a more inclusive and equitable humanitarian response.

The survey also captured the range of organizational sizes. Of those surveyed, 6.9% were classified as very small (0–5 staff), 22.4% as small (5–15 staff), 29.3% as medium (15–25 staff), 19.0% operated primarily through volunteers, and 22.4% were large (more than 25 staff). This diversity in size brings different

capacities and constraints with respect to inclusion practices. Very small and small organizations may offer close-knit, mission-driven environments but often lack the formal structures needed to systematically recruit and support disabled women in leadership roles. Medium-sized organizations, while more structured, must take deliberate steps to institutionalize inclusive practices as they grow.

**Size of organization in terms of staff / volunteers**



- Medium (15-25) 29.3%
- Small (5-15 staff) 22.4%
- Very Small (0-6) 6.9%
- Large (25+) 22.4%
- Volunteer-based 19.0%
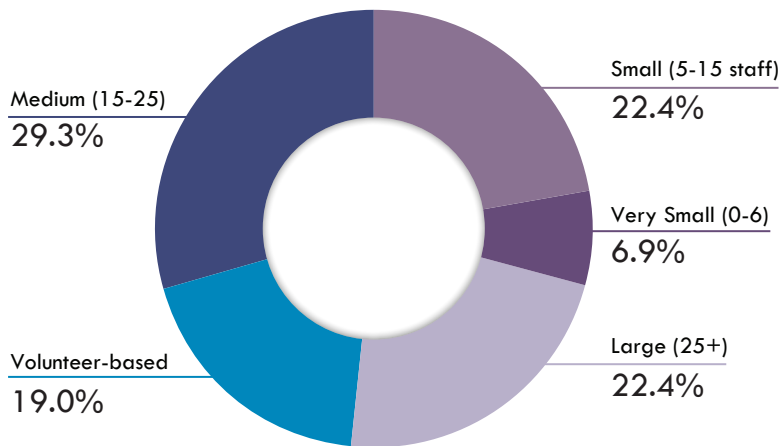
Volunteer-based organizations, often driven by deep community trust and activism, may risk overlooking formal inclusion frameworks due to limited resources or informal management systems. Meanwhile, large organizations, despite greater access to funding and infrastructure, may still struggle with entrenched biases or bureaucratic limitations that hinder the promotion of disabled women into decision-making roles.

Overall, these findings emphasize that efforts to promote inclusive leadership—particularly the participation of disabled women—must be tailored to organizational size, resources, and internal culture. Support strategies should be flexible and context-specific, enabling WLOs across all profiles to build inclusive leadership that reflects the full diversity of the communities they serve.

## 2. Organizational Policies

The majority of surveyed organizations have adopted key safeguarding policies. Specifically, 58 organizations reported having policies on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), 57 have sexual harassment policies, 52 include provisions for people with special needs, and 57 maintain a general code of conduct. Only four organizations indicated they do not have any of these core policies in place.

**Number of organisations with specific safe guarding policies by type of policy**



| | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 58 | 57 | 52 | 57 | 4 |
| Adressing sexual exploitation and abuse | Sexual Harassment | Inclusion of People with special needs | Code of conduct | None |
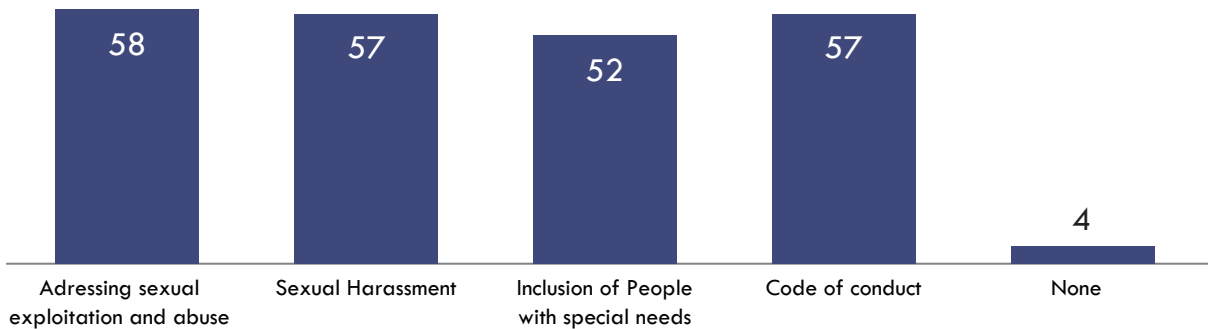
This broad adoption of safeguarding frameworks reflects a commendable level of ethical responsibility and institutional commitment to upholding protection standards. The prevalence of these policies among WLOs demonstrates a proactive approach to risk mitigation and accountability—essential components in humanitarian settings where power imbalances, resource scarcity, and protection risks are acutely heightened.

However, closer analysis reveals important gaps that merit attention. A small but notable number of organizations still lack specific protections related to sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, and inclusion of persons with special needs. Given the context of Sudan's ongoing conflict, where gender-based violence, discrimination, and marginalization are widespread, the absence of these policies in even a few organizations represents a serious vulnerability.

Moreover, the presence of policies alone does not guarantee protection. Their effectiveness depends on systematic implementation, regular staff training, monitoring mechanisms, and accessible complaint and response systems. Without these, even well-drafted policies may remain performative rather than protective. In a context where women and girls face heightened risks, particularly in displacement sites and during aid delivery, the enforcement of safeguarding protocols must be seen not as optional but as fundamental to ethical and effective humanitarian action.

Therefore, while the findings indicate progress, they also point to the need for continued technical support and capacity-building to ensure that safeguarding measures are fully operationalized. Donors and coordination platforms should prioritize resourcing WLOs not only to adopt comprehensive policies but also to translate them into consistent practice—reinforcing a culture of accountability, trust, and survivor-centered protection across all levels of humanitarian response in Sudan.

# 3. Organizations' Mandate

The mandates of the surveyed organizations reflect a broad and integrated approach to humanitarian action. The most frequently reported areas of work include Advocacy (59 organizations), Service Delivery (52), Training and Capacity Building (59), and Awareness Raising and Campaigning (59). In addition, 27 organizations reported other mandates, demonstrating a wide-ranging commitment to both emergency response and long-term community development.

**FIGURE 5.** Mandates of Surveyed WLOs



| Mandate | Count |
| --- | --- |
| Advocacy | 59 |
| Service Delivery | 52 |
| Training / Capacity Building | 59 |
| Awareness Raising and campaigning | 59 |
| Other (please specify) | 27 |

Among the "Other" mandates, the most commonly cited were: Women's Empowerment (22.9%), Protection and Legal Aid (14.3%), Economic Empowerment (10.0%), Education and Youth (8.6%), Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution (8.6%), Health (8.6%), Governance, Rights, and Rule of Law (8.6%), Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and Non-Food Items (5.7%), Agriculture (4.3%), Humanitarian Response Coordination (4.3%), and Environmental and Climate Change (4.3%).

A significant majority—87.9% of organizations—stated that their primary mission is to support gender equality and/or the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV).

**FIGURE 6.** Number of Organisations whose primary mission to to support gender equality and/or GBV prevention and response
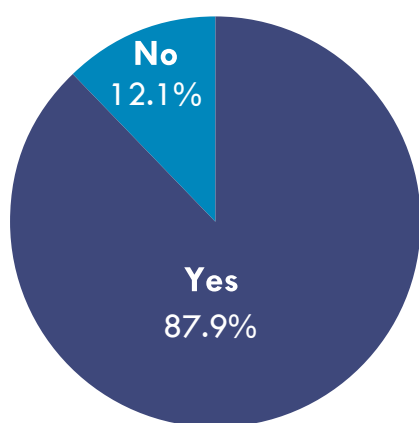


This central focus aligns with the realities on the ground in Sudan, where conflict-related sexual violence is widespread, and women and girls face escalating risks due to displacement, loss of privacy, food insecurity, and the collapse of essential public services.

In conflict-affected areas such as Darfur, Khartoum, and the Kordofans, these mandates are not abstract policy statements but rather urgent operational imperatives. Advocacy, service delivery, and capacity building are deployed not only to respond to acute emergencies but also to lay the foundation for systemic change. For example, legal aid and protection services become essential in environments where access to justice is minimal and impunity for GBV is widespread. Likewise, training and awareness-raising initiatives aim to shift harmful gender norms and support community resilience under pressure.

Notably, the presence of economic empowerment and agricultural initiatives within organizational mandates is particularly strategic. These programs are critical in reducing women's vulnerability to exploitation and transactional sex in contexts where traditional livelihoods have collapsed and food insecurity is acute. Similarly, peacebuilding and governance-related efforts reflect an understanding that lasting stability requires inclusive, gender-responsive recovery processes rooted in justice and accountability.

In sum, the mandates of WLOs reveal that these organizations are not only addressing the immediate humanitarian crisis but are also actively contributing to the long-term resilience and empowerment of conflict-affected communities. Their multi-sectoral approach—grounded in gender justice and community leadership—positions them as essential actors in both emergency response and the future reconstruction of Sudan.

# 4. Beneficiary Groups Targeted by Organizations

The surveyed organizations predominantly serve women and girls, reflecting their primary mission to address gender inequality and gender-based violence (GBV). All 58 organizations reported targeting women and/or girls in general, followed closely by internally displaced women and girls (57), women with disabilities (50), elderly women (44), refugee women and/or girls (44), and youth (44).

**FIGURE 7.** Number of organizations by type of beneficiary
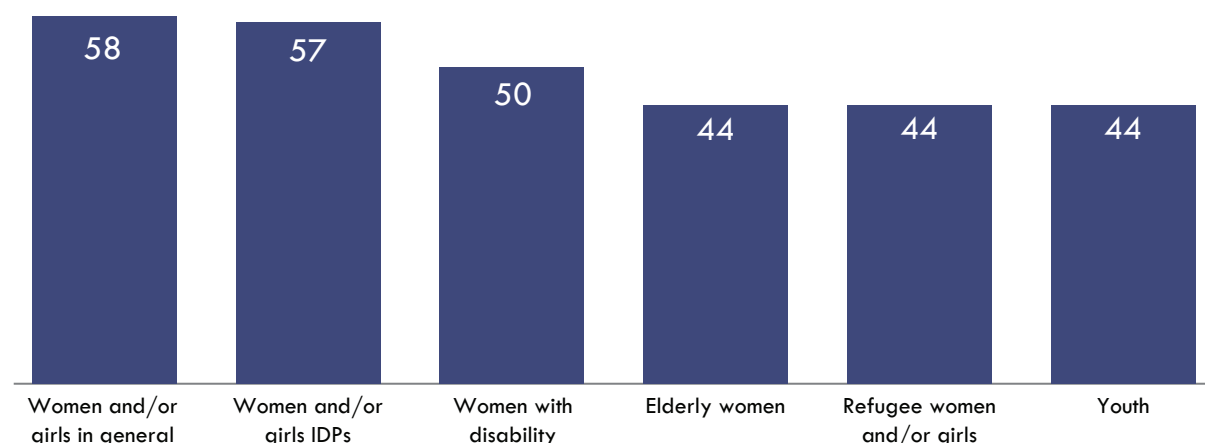


In addition to these primary groups, organizations also reported working with a wide range of other vulnerable populations. These include:

- Children (16.4%)
- Adolescents and youth/talented youth (11.9%)
- Refugees, IDPs, and displaced persons (11.9%)
- People with disabilities and households with persons with disabilities (7.5%)
- Men and boys (6.0%)
- Individuals in need of WASH or non-food item support (5.7%)
- Orphans (4.5%)
- Women-headed households and widowed women (4.5%)
- Minorities, indigenous groups, and ethnic communities (4.5%)
- Female farmers and women in the informal sector (3.0%)
- Women activists and empowerment groups (3.0%)
- Host communities (3.0%)
- Legal aid recipients and GBV survivors (3.0%)
- Private sector actors, students, and researchers (3.0%)
- Community leaders and the general community (3.0%)
- Unaccompanied minors or children of unknown parentage (3.0%)
- Households facing poverty or livelihood shocks (3.0%)

A substantial 87.9% of organizations identified gender equality and/or GBV prevention and response as their core mission. This focus is clearly reflected in their beneficiary selection, which prioritizes those most at risk due to intersecting vulnerabilities—particularly women and girls affected by displacement, disability, age, and social marginalization.

The inclusion of youth and children among key target groups illustrates a commitment to early intervention and generational change. These efforts help promote equitable attitudes and behaviors from an early age, laying the foundation for long-term social transformation. Similarly, although the proportion of organizations targeting men and boys is relatively modest, this

engagement is a critical element of effective GBV prevention. It fosters accountability, challenges harmful masculinities, and helps to build supportive alliances for gender equality across communities.

Overall, the beneficiary strategies of WLOs reflect a holistic and intersectional understanding of vulnerability. Their inclusive approach addresses both immediate protection needs and the structural inequalities that underpin gender-based violence, poverty, and marginalization. This positions them as essential actors not only in humanitarian response but in advancing long-term gender justice and social cohesion across Sudan.

# 5. Impact of Conflict on WLOs

Organizational Key Impact and Results Over the Last Three Years

The survey identified the following key impact areas for WLOs over the past three years:

- Training and Capacity Building (15.5%)
- Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods (12.2%)
- Humanitarian Aid and Emergency Relief (12.2%)
- Women's Rights Awareness (11.2%)
- Health Services and Psychosocial Support (9.4%)
- Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response (9.4%)
- Legal Aid and Advocacy (6.1%)
- Peacebuilding, Tolerance, and Social Cohesion (6.1%)
- Education and Literacy (3.6%)
- Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) (3.6%)
- Environmental and Climate Awareness (2.9%)
- Media and Advocacy (1.8%)
- Networking and Coordination (4.3%)
- Support for People with Disabilities (1.8%)

**FIGURE 8.** Organisation key impact and results for the last 3 years



Education and Literacy 3.6%

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) 3.6%

Environmental and Climate Awareness 2.9%

Media and Advocacy 1.8%

Networking and Coordination 4.3%

Support for People with Disabilities 1.8%

Health Services and Psychosocial Support 9.4%

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response 9.4%

Legal Aid and Advocacy 6.1%

Peacebuilding, Tolerance, and Social Cohesion 6.1%

Training and Capacity Building 15.5%

Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods 12.2%

Humanitarian Aid and Emergency Relief 12.2%

Women's Rights Awareness 11.2%

This distribution of impact areas offers critical insights into the strategic priorities and operational responses of WLOs amid Sudan's escalating humanitarian crisis. Notably, the emphasis on Training and Capacity Building, as well as Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods, reflects a forward-looking orientation that transcends short-term relief. These investments aim to foster resilience and self-reliance among affected populations, particularly women and girls, by equipping them with the skills and resources necessary to recover from crisis and lead within their communities.

At the same time, the continued focus on Humanitarian Aid and Emergency Relief underscores the acute and ongoing need for immediate, life-saving interventions. This includes the provision of food, shelter, and emergency services in the context of widespread displacement, growing food insecurity, and deteriorating public services. WLOs are often among the first and only responders in conflict-affected communities, bridging critical gaps where international access is limited.

Importantly, the prioritization of Women's Rights Awareness and GBV Prevention and Response—together comprising over 20% of reported activity—speaks directly to the devastating surge in GBV, including conflict-related sexual violence. As of 2024, the GBV sub-sector in Sudan reported a 288% increase in demand for services. WLOs have responded by expanding survivor-centered interventions, delivering psychosocial support, facilitating access to medical care, and engaging in community-based advocacy aimed at addressing harmful norms and promoting accountability for perpetrators.

The inclusion of Legal Aid and Advocacy as a core area of impact reinforces the critical role WLOs play in linking survivors to justice mechanisms and supporting efforts to address impunity. In a context where formal justice systems have collapsed or become inaccessible, community-based legal support remains a key avenue for redress and protection.

Furthermore, programming in Peacebuilding, Tolerance, and Social Cohesion—despite the protracted nature of the conflict—demonstrates that WLOs are not only responding to current needs but also working to lay the groundwork for sustainable peace. Their role in community dialogue, intercommunal mediation, and social cohesion efforts is vital to mitigating the risks of prolonged instability and to fostering conditions for eventual recovery.

Despite immense operational challenges—including access restrictions, attacks on humanitarian personnel, and severe funding shortfalls—WLOs have maintained a multidimensional, survivor- and community-centered approach. Their work continues to alleviate immediate suffering while promoting long-term empowerment, protection, and resilience for some of Sudan's most vulnerable populations.

# 6. Budgetary Impacts Due to Conflict

The survey results reveal that WLOs in Sudan are facing severe and sustained financial challenges. The majority of respondents (41 out of 58 organizations) reported relying primarily on international donors as their main source of funding. In contrast, only 7 organizations are self-funded, and 10 depend on local donations. This funding profile reflects a critical vulnerability: an overwhelming dependence on external donors makes these organizations highly susceptible to fluctuations in international aid priorities and global economic conditions.

**FIGURE 9.** Does the organization face funding challenges?



No 8.6%

Yes 91.4%
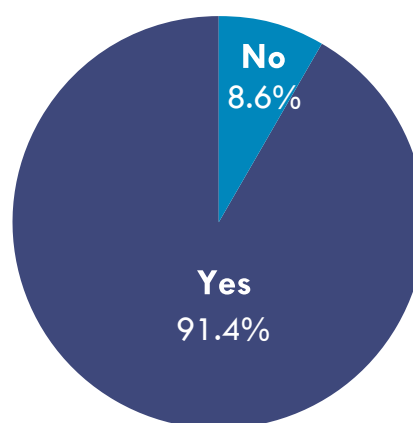
**FIGURE 10.** Main source of funding



**FIGURE 11.** Number of surveyed WLOs that received funding for humanitarian interventions
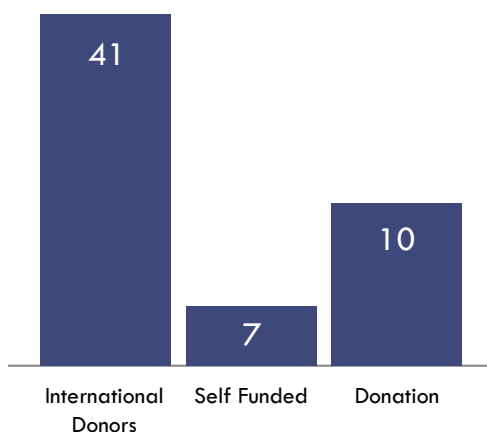


This vulnerability has become increasingly pronounced amid recent cuts from major humanitarian donors. As of mid-2025, only 14.1% of the $4.16 billion required under Sudan's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan has been funded—marking one of the lowest humanitarian funding performances globally. Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that 91.4% of WLOs reported facing significant funding challenges. These financial constraints threaten not only organizational sustainability but also the continuity of life-saving services at a time of escalating humanitarian need, including mass displacement, famine, and rising GBV cases.

Further compounding this crisis, 11 organizations did not receive any financing for humanitarian projects in the current year, while 3 had not submitted funding applications. These figures suggest both structural and procedural barriers—such as inaccessible proposal systems, short funding cycles, or insufficient support for smaller, local actors—that prevent WLOs from engaging effectively with available funding mechanisms.

Of particular concern is the impact of financial instability on human resources. Half of all surveyed organizations reported having to terminate employees due to budgetary limitations since the onset of the conflict. This has far-reaching implications. Staff layoffs not only diminish the immediate capacity of organizations to respond but also result in the loss of experienced personnel, institutional memory, and community trust—assets that are difficult to recover in a volatile operating environment. Reduced staffing also affects critical services such as GBV case management, psychosocial support, and frontline aid delivery, further endangering already vulnerable populations.

In summary, the financial challenges facing WLOs are not isolated budgetary issues but systemic threats to the humanitarian response in Sudan. Without urgent, sustained, and flexible funding, these frontline actors—who are often the only providers of services in inaccessible or high-risk areas—will be unable to maintain operations, undermining the collective humanitarian response and leaving millions without essential protection, health care, and survival assistance.

# 7. Key Weaknesses and Capacity Gaps

The survey identified several critical weaknesses that hinder the effectiveness of WLOs operating in Sudan. These weaknesses are particularly impactful given the current humanitarian emergency, characterized by widespread displacement, food insecurity, conflict-related violence, and the near collapse of essential services.

The most frequently reported challenge was **Funding-Related Weaknesses** (reported by 47 organizations), followed by **Institutional Capacity and Resource Gaps** (13), **Infrastructure and Equipment Limitations** (7), **Staffing and Retention Issues** (7), **Training and Capacity Building Needs** (5), **Contextual Challenges** (6), **Governance and Management Issues** (3), **and Donor Relations and Networking** (2).

**FIGURE 12.** Organisational weaknesses by type of weakness area

| Weakness area | Count |
| --- | --- |
| Funding-Related Weaknesses | 47 |
| Institutional Capacity / Resource Gaps | 13 |
| Infrastructure and Equipment | 7 |
| Staffing and Retention Issues | 7 |
| Training & Capacity Building | 5 |
| Contextual Challenges | 6 |
| Governance & Management Issues | 3 |
| Donor Relations & Networking | 2 |
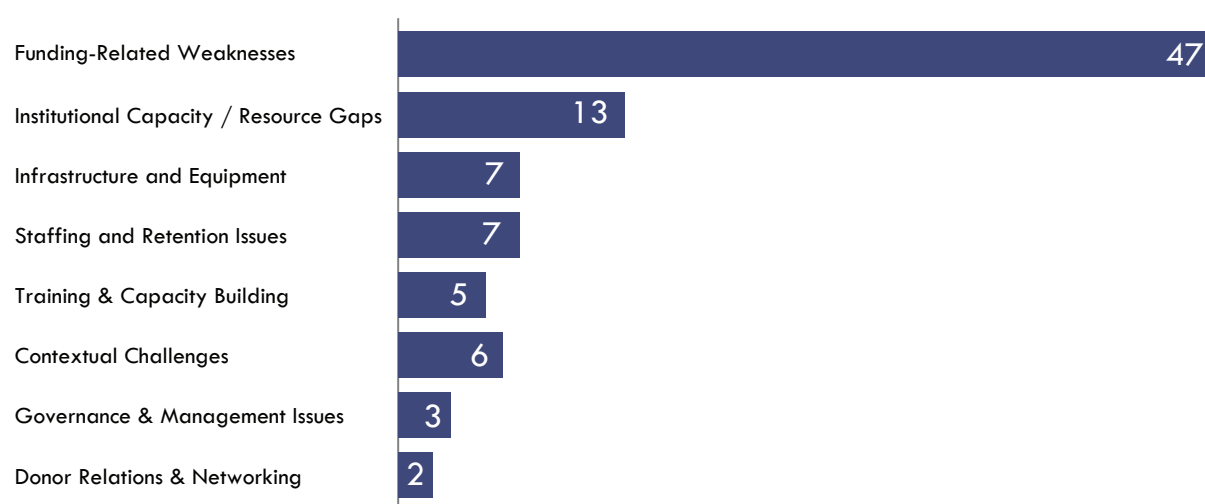
The overwhelming prevalence of funding-related challenges underscores a systemic crisis in the resourcing of local humanitarian actors. Sudan's 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) requests $4.16 billion, yet as of March 2025, it remains only 6.3% funded—an unprecedented shortfall despite the countru facing the world s largest internal displacement crisis, widespread famine, and a surge in conflict-related sexual violence. Recent cuts from major donors, including the United States, have disproportionately impacted WLOs, many of whom are entirely reliant on external funding and lack access to diverse or flexible financing sources These constraints have resulted in suspended programming, mass staff layoffs, and the inability to sustain life-saving interventions, even as needs continue to rise sharply across the country.

Closely interlinked are **Institutional Capacity and Resource Gaps**, which limit organizations' ability to manage larger-scale programming and absorb increased funding. These gaps are often exacerbated by **Staffing and Retention Issues**, as many experienced personnel have been displaced from Sudan or recruited by international agencies due to more stable compensation or accessible visa pathways. WLOs are further constrained by bureaucratic barriers that limit their access to international technical support, while the conflict environment complicates recruitment, training, and staff safety.

**FIGURE 13.** Key capacity gaps

| Capacity gap | Count |
| --- | --- |
| Lack of Stable and Suffiecient Funding | 37 |
| Need for Continuous and Specialized Staff Training | 34 |
| Organizational and Institutional Capacity gaps | 37 |

**Infrastructure and Equipment limitations**—including damaged offices, lack of vehicles, and interrupted supply chains—hinder effective service delivery in critical sectors such as health, WASH, and protection. These limitations are particularly acute in conflict-affected and remote areas, where local organizations are often the only operating actors but lack the logistical capacity to meet community needs.

**Contextual Challenges** present another layer of operational complexity. These include extreme access constraints due to active hostilities, militarized checkpoints, insecurity for humanitarian workers, and difficulties navigating fragmented governance structures. Such conditions frequently force organizations to take significant risks or scale back interventions, leaving populations without essential services.

Additionally, weaknesses in **Governance and Management**, while less frequently reported, have far-reaching implications. Gaps in internal accountability, decision-making, and leadership structures can undermine trust with partners and donors, restrict collaboration opportunities, and reduce program impact. **Donor Relations and Networking** challenges further isolate local actors from funding mechanisms, especially where proposal processes are complex, highly competitive, or not adapted to local contexts.

When asked to identify their top three capacity gaps, respondents prioritized:

1. **Lack of Stable and Sufficient Funding** (37 organizations)

2. **Need for Continuous and Specialized Staff Training** (34 organizations)

3. **Organizational and Institutional Capacity Gaps** (37 organizations)

The **lack of stable and predictable funding** remains the most urgent and systemic issue. The sharp decline in humanitarian funding—amid rising operational costs and deepening needs—has forced many WLOs to reduce services, lay off staff, or close entirely. This unpredictability not only undermines current interventions but also prevents long-term planning and institutional development, both of which are critical for sustainability and accountability.

The **need for ongoing and specialized staff training** is equally urgent, particularly in Sudan's fluid and high-risk context. Staff must adapt to evolving threats, including new forms of GBV, complex protection needs, and rapidly shifting conflict frontlines. Specialized training in areas such as psychological first aid, advanced GBV case management, conflict-sensitive programming, and remote service delivery is essential for maintaining safe and effective responses. However, conflict dynamics also restrict access to in-person training and disrupt knowledge transfer, further compounding this challenge.

Finally, **organizational and institutional capacity gaps** reveal systemic barriers that affect operational quality and scalability. These include weaknesses in financial management, monitoring and evaluation, internal governance, and coordination. In contexts like Sudan—where communication infrastructure is often disrupted and organizations operate with minimal administrative support—strengthening these systems is crucial for the successful localization of aid and for improving accountability to both affected communities and funding partners.

In sum, the key weaknesses and capacity gaps facing WLOs are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Addressing them requires not only increased and flexible funding but also sustained investment in institutional development, technical capacity, and inclusive coordination mechanisms. Without this, the ability of WLOs to continue playing their critical frontline role in Sudan's humanitarian and recovery response is at serious risk.

# 8. Challenges Experienced by Organizations Due to the Conflict

The most significant and commonly reported challenge facing WLOs in Sudan is the lack of funding and staffing capacity to maintain operations or adequately respond to community needs. All 58 organizations surveyed identified this constraint, reflecting a widespread and systemic impact of the ongoing conflict. This funding shortfall has triggered a cascade of secondary consequences, including donor-initiated project terminations (reported by 22 organizations) and employee layoffs (19), further weakening the operational reach of organizations at a time of unprecedented humanitarian need.

**FIGURE 14.** Challenges organisations have experience as a result of the conflict



| Challenge | Value |
|---|---|
| Lack of funding/staff to maintain operations or to respond to community needs | 58 |
| Employees or their family members being displaced to other states | 38 |
| Lack of strong logistical and administrative support (i.e. space to work, internet, mobility) | 32 |
| Employee layoffs | 19 |
| Inability to access key policy and decision-making spaces | 27 |
| Your organization is not being perceived as key stakeholders in the response efforts | 19 |
| Projects funded by donors terminated due to conflict | 22 |
| Threats of violence and lack of staff safety | 18 |
| Diverting resources to support other humanitarian sectors | 13 |
| Lack of Access to operation / Implementation areas | 12 |

The lack of funding is directly linked to the broader collapse of international financial support for Sudan. With donor attention diverted to other high-profile emergencies, Sudanese WLOs—many of whom are entirely dependent on external funding—are being forced to scale down or cease programming altogether, despite remaining the primary responders in many areas.

Staffing instability is another major challenge, with 38 organizations (65%) reporting that employees or their family members have been displaced to other states. This internal displacement of humanitarian workers not only affects service continuity but also places additional emotional and logistical strain on already overstretched teams. In many cases, experienced staff are lost due to personal displacement, recruitment by international agencies, or burnout—undermining organizational effectiveness and the quality of aid delivery.

Logistical and administrative limitations also pose significant barriers. Thirty-two organizations (55%) cited inadequate infrastructure—such as lack of office space, connectivity, and basic operational tools—as a major impediment. These deficiencies are further exacerbated by access restrictions and conflict-related damage to infrastructure, which impair both mobility and communication in affected regions. At the same time, 27 organizations reported being unable to access key policy and decision-making spaces, limiting their ability to advocate for the needs of women and girls or influence humanitarian coordination processes.

Security threats remain an ongoing risk to humanitarian operations. Eighteen organizations (31%) reported staff safety concerns and threats of violence. Since the start of the conflict in April 2023, at least 85 aid workers have been killed—most of them Sudanese nationals—underscoring the high personal risks borne by local responders, including staff from WLOs. This hostile environment not only endangers lives but also constrains mobility, access, and delivery of assistance. Furthermore, 13 organizations reported diverting resources to meet other urgent humanitarian needs, while 12 cited a lack of access to operational or implementation areas as a serious constraint.

Collectively, these challenges underscore the extreme operational fragility facing WLOs in Sudan. Even as they attempt to deliver life-saving services amid famine, mass displacement, and systemic violence, they are doing so under conditions of chronic underfunding, staff loss, logistical collapse, and elevated security threats.

The top three challenges reported by WLOs in the post-conflict period are:

1. **Lack of Funding and Financial Instability** – reported by 43.1% of respondents

2. **Security and Access Challenges** – 25.9%

3. **Staff and Organizational Stability Issues** – 17.2%

Only 13.8% of respondents reported not experiencing one or more of these core challenges.

In conclusion, while WLOs remain central to humanitarian response in Sudan, they continue to face compounding challenges that severely constrain their ability to scale or sustain operations. Without urgent, flexible, and sustained support, including measures to protect and retain local staff, improve access, and enhance infrastructure, the ability of WLOs to provide essential assistance will remain deeply compromised, putting millions at further risk amid one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

## 9. Achieving Objectives: Programs and Services Provided by Organizations

The surveyed WLOs deliver a wide array of services in response to Sudan's escalating humanitarian crisis. Their programs address both immediate emergency needs and longer-term community resilience, often under conditions of extreme insecurity, resource scarcity, and operational disruption.

**FIGURE 15.** Primary areas of service



- Support Services 8.1%
- Other 12.9%
- Health and Social Services 17.7%
- Humanitarian Services in Emergencies 32.3%
- Community Outreach Programs 29.0%

Further breakdown of services offered by the organizations includes:

- **Humanitarian Assistance / Emergency Support** (9.0%)
- **Training** (10.1%)
- **Health Services** (8.4%)
- **Support Services** (7.3%)
- **Women's and Economic Empowerment** (6.7%)
- **Education** (6.2%)
- **Protection** (5.6%)
- A**wareness Campaigns / Outreach** (5.6%)
- **GBV Prevention** (5.1%)
- **Advocacy / Human Rights / Policy Work** (4.5%)
- **WASH** (3.4%)
- **Food Security / Livelihood Projects** (3.4%)
- **Psychosocial / Psychological Support** (3.4%)
- **Legal Aid / Legal Support** (2.8%)
- **Social Services** (2.8%)
- **Agriculture / Livestock / Rural Support** (2.8%)
- **Child Protection / Child Services** (2.2%)
- **Reproductive / Sexual Health Services** (1.7%)

In the context of Sudan's protracted conflict, these services represent more than humanitarian programming—they are often the only lifeline available to crisis-affected populations. The widespread provision of humanitarian assistance reflects the urgency of addressing basic survival needs in areas experiencing mass displacement, famine, and systemic collapse. With over 80% of hospitals in conflict-affected regions non-operational (OCHA, 2025), health services and psychosocial support delivered by WLOs have become essential in bridging critical gaps, particularly for women and girls exposed to conflict-related sexual violence and reproductive health risks.

The prominence of **community outreach, awareness-raising, and GBV prevention** activities is especially vital in the Sudanese context, where stigma, harmful gender norms, and fear of retaliation often prevent survivors from seeking help. These programs not only support individuals but also contribute to broader social transformation by challenging silence around GBV and promoting accountability.

**WASH services**, while underrepresented in overall programming, are indispensable in overcrowded displacement settings, where poor sanitation exacerbates the risk of cholera and other waterborne diseases. Similarly, **food security and livelihood interventions** are vital in mitigating famine conditions and reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to negative coping mechanisms, including survival sex and child marriage.

Despite severe access constraints, frequent attacks on aid workers, and critical funding shortfalls, WLOs continue to deliver essential, life-saving services across multiple sectors. Their programming demonstrates not only resilience and adaptability but also a deep-rooted commitment to addressing the intersectional vulnerabilities of women, girls, and marginalized populations in one of the most complex and underfunded humanitarian crises globally.

# 10. Key Strengths of Organizations in Responding to Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The survey revealed a range of organizational strengths that enable WLOs in Sudan to deliver essential GBV prevention and response services despite operating in one of the world's most complex humanitarian environments.

These strengths include:

- **Qualified and Competent Staff** (14.4%)
- **Strong Community Engagement and Acceptance** (11.7%)
- **Women's Leadership and Feminist Approach** (9.0%)
- **Volunteerism, Team Spirit, and Internal Culture** (9.0%)
- **Strong Partnerships with Donors, Authorities, and Networks** (9.0%)
- **Emergency and Humanitarian Response Capacity** (7.2%)
- **Infrastructure (Offices, Equipment, Vehicles)** (6.3%)
- **Organizational Systems and Policies** (6.3%)
- **Legal Aid and GBV Expertise** (5.4%)
- **Transparency, Accountability, and Integrity** (5.4%)
- **Program Diversity and Technical Capacity** (4.5%)
- **Local Knowledge and Contextual Familiarity** (4.5%)
- **Innovation and Adaptability** (3.6%)
- **Communication and Advocacy Skills** (3.6%)

These strengths are not merely organizational assets; they are critical enablers of impact in the context of Sudan's escalating humanitarian catastrophe. The presence of **qualified and competent staff**, combined with **legal aid and GBV expertise**, is particularly vital in a country where conflict-related sexual violence is widespread and access to health and justice services for survivors is severely compromised. With over 12 million people displaced and more than 80% of hospitals in conflict-affected areas non-functional (OCHA, 2025), the ability of WLOs to deliver survivor-centered care—including emergency support, psychosocial first aid, and legal guidance—can mean the difference between recovery and prolonged trauma.

**Strong community engagement and local knowledge** are equally indispensable. In an operating environment marked by direct attacks on aid workers, shifting frontlines, and blocked access routes, international organizations often struggle to reach affected populations. In contrast, WLOs leverage deep-rooted community relationships to navigate volatile terrains, access underserved areas, and tailor their interventions to cultural norms and local priorities. This localized approach ensures that GBV programming is not only more effective but also safer and more sustainable.

The emphasis on **women's leadership and feminist approaches** within these organizations addresses a critical gap in Sudan's national and international response frameworks. Despite the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women and girls, Sudanese women remain largely excluded from formal peace and political processes. The leadership of WLOs offers a powerful counterbalance—amplifying women's voices, advocating for inclusive recovery efforts, and ensuring that programming responds directly to the needs and rights of women and girls, particularly those who are displaced, disabled, elderly, or otherwise marginalized.

The **capacity for emergency humanitarian response** is another core strength, especially as the conflict continues to trigger new displacement waves and worsening conditions, including confirmed famine and repeated disease outbreaks. WLOs have demonstrated agility and responsiveness, often deploying rapidly to provide shelter, WASH services, and protection support in newly affected areas, despite constrained resources.

Finally, the organizations' commitment to **transparency, accountability, and integrity** underpins their legitimacy in a high-risk context. In an environment where aid diversion and corruption are persistent threats, the ability of WLOs to manage resources responsibly, maintain trust with affected communities, and meet donor compliance standards is essential for both operational continuity and the broader credibility of the humanitarian response.

Taken together, these strengths illustrate that WLOs in Sudan are not only essential responders—they are resilient, adaptive, and principled actors working at the frontlines of GBV response and broader humanitarian action. Their embeddedness in communities, combined with technical skill and organizational integrity, positions them as critical partners in both emergency response and long-term recovery.

# 11. Concrete Actions and Best Practices

Support received from donors and partners during humanitarian and response planning efforts by surveyed WLOs has primarily included funding and training (online or in-person). While these types of support remain foundational, they largely reflect conventional engagement modalities that are not always responsive to the complex and evolving realities faced by local actors in conflict settings. Following the outbreak of conflict in Sudan, organizations also reported

receiving additional support in the form of training and capacity building (9), financial support (8), psychosocial and health services (7), food security and cash assistance (6), GBV-related support (5), WASH (4), partnership and coordination opportunities (4), peacebuilding and community support (4), and shelter and supplies (2). Notably, three organizations reported receiving no support and continuing to operate on a self-funded basis.

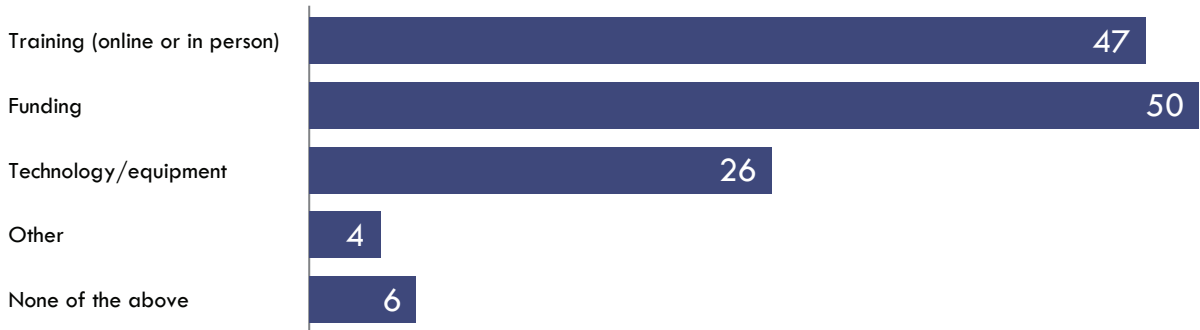**FIGURE 16.** Support received from partners and donors during humanitarian and response planning



| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Training (online or in person) | 47 |
| Funding | 50 |
| Technology/equipment | 26 |
| Other | 4 |
| None of the above | 6 |

FIGURE 17. **Other types of support received post conflict**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Training & Capacity Building | 9 |
| Financial Support | 8 |
| Psychosocial & Health Support | 7 |
| Food Security & Cash Assistance | 6 |
| GBV-Related Support | 5 |
| WASH | 4 |
| Partnerships & Coordination | 4 |
| Peacebuilding & Community Support | 4 |
| Shelter & Supplies | 2 |
| No Support / Self-Funded | 3 |
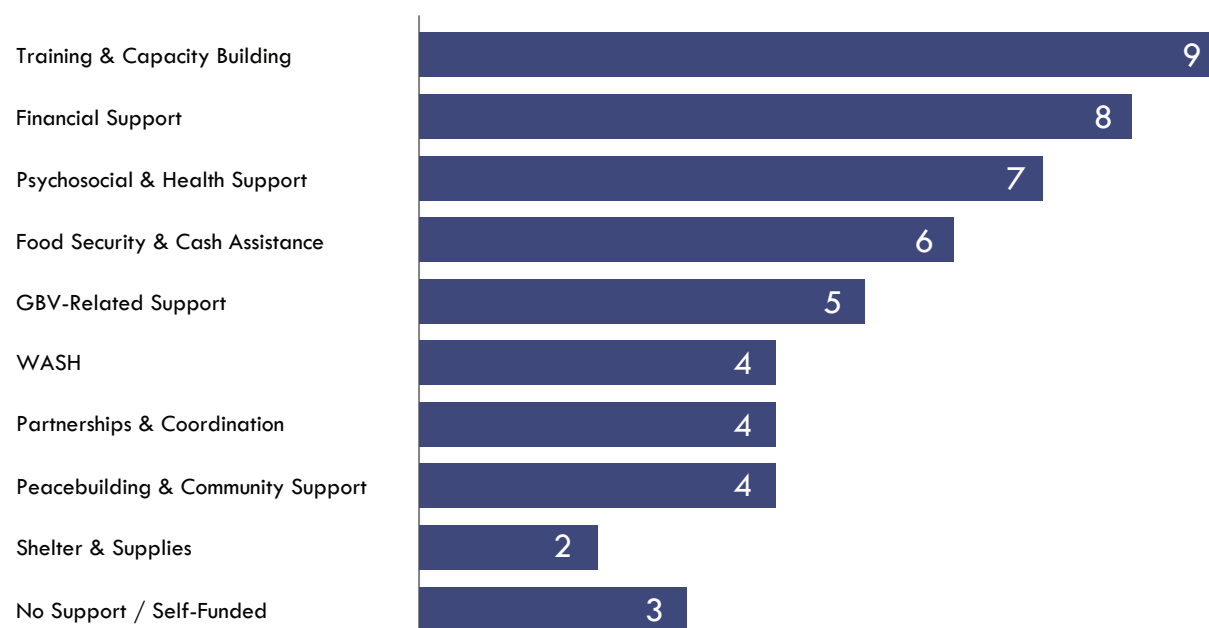
This pattern of support highlights a persistent gap: while training and initial funding are routinely offered during response planning, follow-through support—particularly direct, flexible, and sustained assistance—remains limited. In a context like Sudan, where WLOs are often the only actors with physical and social access to conflict-affected communities, the current donor support model faces significant limitations. Many organizations emphasized that while they receive "funding," it is often earmarked, short-term, or tied to rigid reporting structures that do not allow the flexibility needed to adapt programming in a fluid and high-risk environment. Similarly, training opportunities may fall short if WLOs lack the equipment, internet connectivity, or secure environments necessary for meaningful participation and implementation.

Best practices in supporting women during conflict call for a significant shift from transactional relationships to transformative partnerships. These practices emphasize direct, predictable, multi-year funding to local WLOs, bypassing bureaucratic processes that often privilege larger, international actors. The survey data reinforces this need, with financial support (reported by 23 organizations) and training and capacity building (20) ranked as the top priorities for scaling impact. This reflects both the urgent funding shortfalls impacting essential services and the desire of WLOs to strengthen their long-term sustainability and technical effectiveness.

Financial support should be flexible and unrestricted wherever possible, enabling WLOs to respond rapidly to emerging needs, retain staff, and maintain services in areas where humanitarian access is limited. Such funding not only allows for more agile operations but also acknowledges the critical frontline role that WLOs play, particularly in delivering GBV services in hard-to-reach communities. In a crisis where trust, cultural familiarity, and discretion are key to effective GBV response, local actors are often the only ones capable of reaching survivors in ways that are safe, confidential, and meaningful.

The high demand for training and capacity building highlights the readiness of WLOs to further professionalize their work and expand their impact. However, these opportunities must go beyond generic workshops. They should be context-specific, demand-driven, and directly aligned with the operational environment, including training in trauma-informed care, advanced GBV case management, conflict-sensitive programming, data collection and protection, secure communications, and mental health support for both survivors and staff. Additionally, training in organizational development, leadership, negotiation, and advocacy would empower WLOs to lead not only service delivery but also policy influence and peacebuilding efforts.

Strategic support—particularly in strengthening organizational systems and policies, enhancing governance frameworks, and building effective advocacy strategies—is essential in equipping WLOs to participate meaningfully in formal humanitarian coordination and political processes.

This is especially critical in Sudan, where women remain largely excluded from peace negotiations and decision-making platforms despite bearing the brunt of the crisis and leading response efforts on the ground.

**FIGURE 18.** Additional resources or support needed by the organization to scale or enhance impact
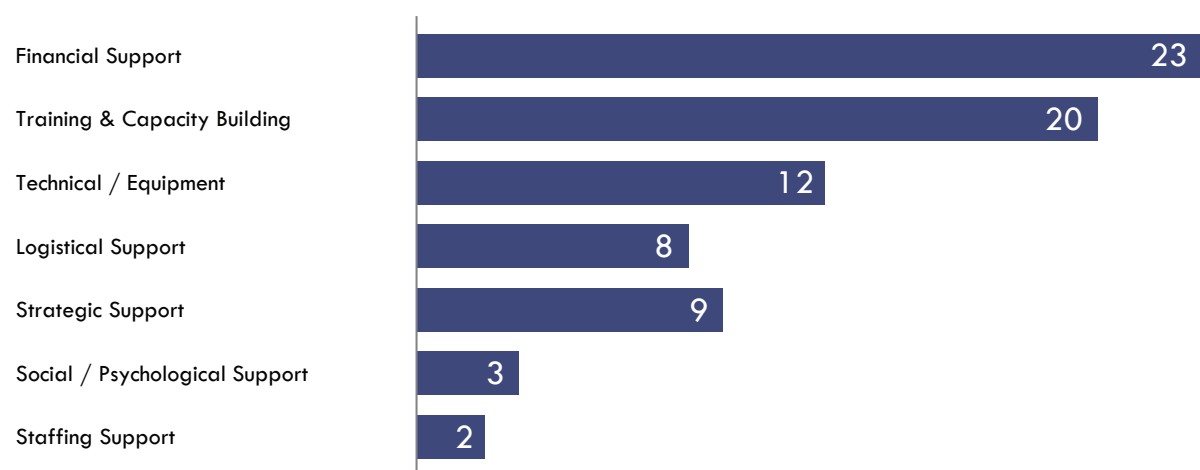


The additional needs identified—technical support (12), logistical support (8), strategic support (9), psychosocial support (3), and staffing support (2)—further underscore the operational constraints WLOs face. Disrupted supply chains, damaged infrastructure, fuel shortages, and broken communications systems all limit their ability to implement programs effectively. Addressing these barriers requires not only financial investment but also logistical facilitation and operational partnerships that recognize and mitigate the daily challenges of working in active conflict zones.

In conclusion, the experiences and expressed needs of Sudanese WLOs call for a reimagining of donor engagement practices—moving from siloed, project-based support to comprehensive, sustained partnerships that center the leadership, resilience, and expertise of WLOs. Supporting WLOs in this way is not only a matter of equity; it is a strategic imperative for a gender-responsive, community-driven, and effective humanitarian response in Sudan.

# 12. Inclusion and participation of the Women Led Organization – Defining Capacity Needs

When asked who determines the capacity development needs of their organizations, 52.4% of surveyed WLOs in Sudan indicated that capacity needs are defined through a combination of both internal and external stakeholders. Meanwhile, 34.9% reported that their organization independently defines its own needs, 7.9% attributed this process to international partners, and 4.8% selected "Other," with one organization specifying "Organization's consultant team."

**FIGURE 19.** Who defines the capacity needs of the organization?



- Other 4.8%
- International partners 7.9%
- A combination of both internal and external 12.9%
- Our own organisation 34.9%
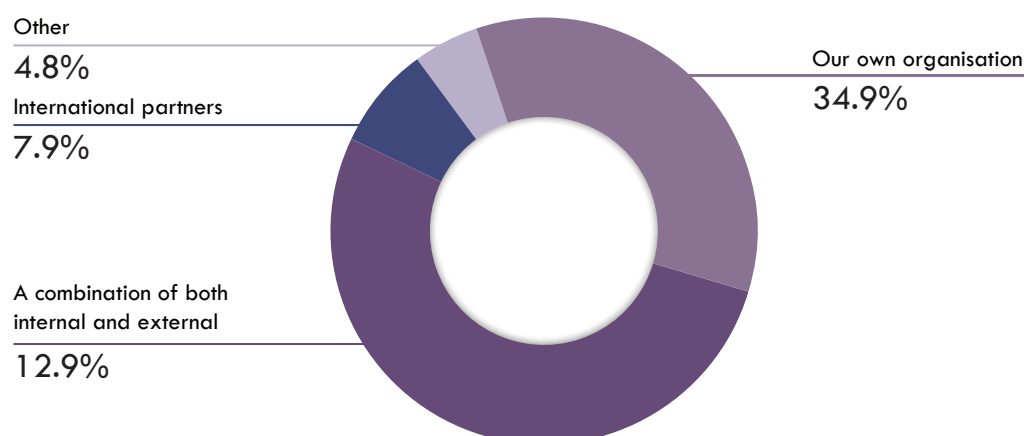
Regarding the extent to which donors and international or national partners are currently aligning their support with WLO-prioritized capacity areas, 50.0% responded "Yes, to some extent," while only 23.1% stated "Yes, to a large extent." The remaining responses revealed gaps in alignment: 11.5% answered "I don't know," 9.6% said "Not at all," and 5.8% selected "Not much."

**FIGURE 20.** Joint prioritization of capacity building areas of donors / international and national partners with WLOs own priority areas



- I don't know 11.5%
- Not much 5.8%
- Not at all 9.6%
- Yes to large extent 23.1%
- Yes to some extent 50.0%
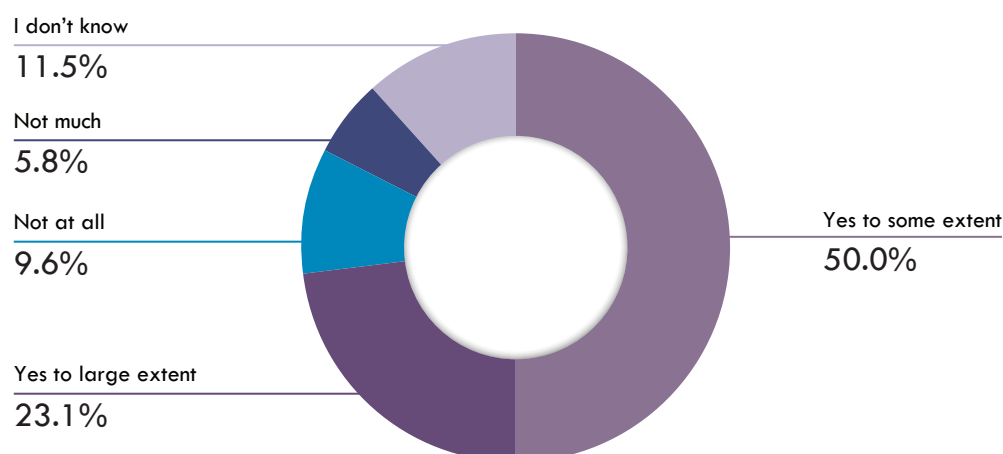
These findings offer critical insight into the ongoing discourse around localization and the effectiveness of capacity strengthening efforts in conflict-affected contexts. While the majority of organizations report some degree of external engagement in capacity planning, the fact that over one-third of WLOs identify their own capacity needs independently is encouraging. This trend aligns with global best practices, which emphasize the importance of demand-driven, rather than

externally imposed, capacity development approaches. In fragile and conflict settings like Sudan, where WLOs operate on the frontlines of humanitarian response, allowing organizations to define their own needs ensures that training and technical assistance are responsive to real-time operational challenges.

For WLOs in Sudan—who are navigating active conflict, repeated displacement, restricted humanitarian access, and the collapse of public infrastructure—the ability to identify and articulate their evolving capacity requirements is not merely a procedural preference, but a strategic imperative. Internally identified needs are more likely to reflect urgent, context-specific priorities, such as adapting GBV service delivery in insecure zones, managing remote operations with limited connectivity, or responding to the mental health toll on both survivors and staff.

While collaborative approaches to defining capacity needs can foster partnerships and shared learning, there is a well-documented risk that external actors—particularly donors and international NGOs—may impose capacity agendas focused on compliance, reporting standards, or institutional benchmarks that are not well-matched to the realities of local organizations. These externally driven priorities can divert time and resources away from program implementation and undermine the ability of WLOs to deliver effective, context-relevant responses.

In particular, Sudanese WLOs face significant barriers in meeting the complex due diligence requirements often designed for large international agencies. These administrative hurdles make it difficult for smaller, community-rooted organizations to access direct funding and appropriate, tailored support. As a result, even when funding is available, it may come with conditions that inhibit local leadership, flexibility, and innovation.

Therefore, increasing the proportion of WLOs that define their own capacity development needs—and ensuring that donor and partner investments align with these priorities—is essential. Organizations that are empowered to self-assess and determine their own capacity requirements are more likely to design and implement training and support strategies that are both relevant and sustainable. For donors and external partners, this means moving beyond performative localization toward genuine alignment, where international support structures adapt to local needs, not the other way around.

In the volatile and resource-constrained environment of Sudan, such alignment is not only a matter of equity—it is a practical necessity. Enabling WLOs to lead their own capacity development strengthens their operational independence, reinforces community trust, and enhances the overall effectiveness of the humanitarian response. Ultimately, locally defined capacity building is a cornerstone of resilient, community-driven systems that can withstand protracted crises and play a central role in Sudan's long-term recovery.

# 13. Engagement of WLOs and Meaningful Participation

Survey results on the engagement of WLOs in Sudan's humanitarian response—particularly in relation to gender-based violence (GBV)—reveal both progress and persistent gaps. A strong majority (86.2%) of respondents agreed that the needs of GBV survivors were considered in the humanitarian response, while 10.3% disagreed and 3.4% selected "don't know." Additionally, 91.2% of organizations affirmed that GBV risk mitigation was integrated into humanitarian planning, with 8.8% disagreeing.

However, when asked whether women's groups were consulted during humanitarian response efforts, agreement dropped to 70.7%, with 8.6% disagreeing and 20.7% responding "don't know." This decline in consensus suggests a troubling gap between the recognition of GBV risks and the meaningful inclusion of WLOs in shaping how those risks are addressed.

**FIGURE 21.** GBV Survivors needs were considered in humanitarian response



I don't know
3.4%

Disagree
10.3%
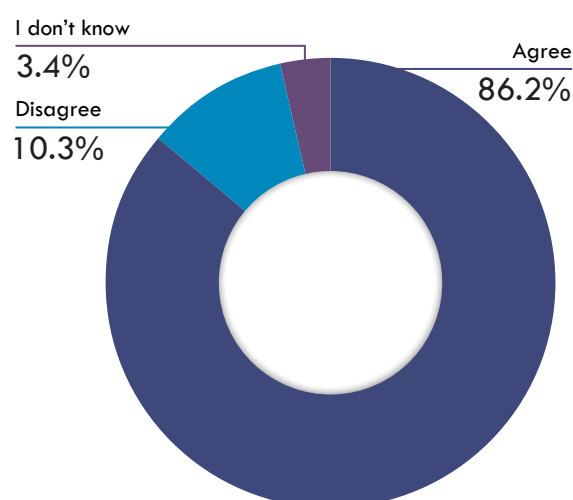
Agree
86.2%

**FIGURE 22.** Belief that humanitarian response planning considered GBV risk mitigation



Disagree
8.8%
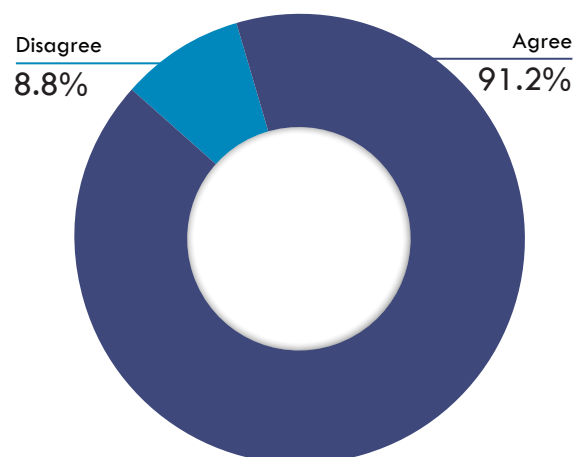
Agree
91.2%

**FIGURE 23.** WLO was consulted during the humanitarian response



I don't know
8.6%

Disagree
20.7%
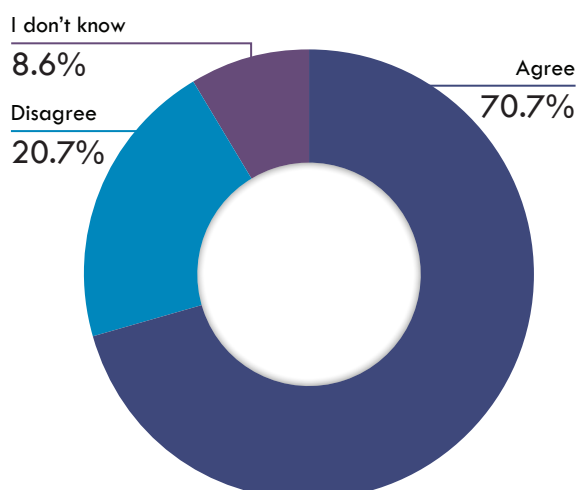
Agree
70.7%

While the high rates of agreement regarding the inclusion of GBV survivor needs and risk mitigation planning suggest an overall awareness and commitment within the humanitarian sector, they also risk presenting a misleadingly optimistic picture if not viewed alongside the quality and depth of engagement. The significant proportion of respondents either unsure or disagreeing that women's groups were consulted points to a concerning shortfall in **meaningful participation**—a critical component of effective and context-sensitive GBV programming.

In Sudan's conflict context, where displacement, sexual violence, and breakdowns in social protection systems have severely impacted women and girls, the role of WLOs is not optional—it is essential. These organizations offer nuanced, community-based insight into emerging GBV trends, the safety of aid distribution mechanisms, and the unmet needs of often overlooked groups such as older women, adolescent girls, and women with disabilities. However, without regular, structured, and empowered consultation, their knowledge risks being left out of humanitarian planning processes.

Moreover, the often-cited **limited monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity** among WLOs further compounds this challenge. Even where consultation does occur, the absence of robust systems to capture and integrate WLO input systematically into broader coordination and planning can lead to a disconnect between intent and impact. As a result, response plans may rely on generalized assumptions or anecdotal information rather than data-informed decisions grounded in real-time, localized evidence.
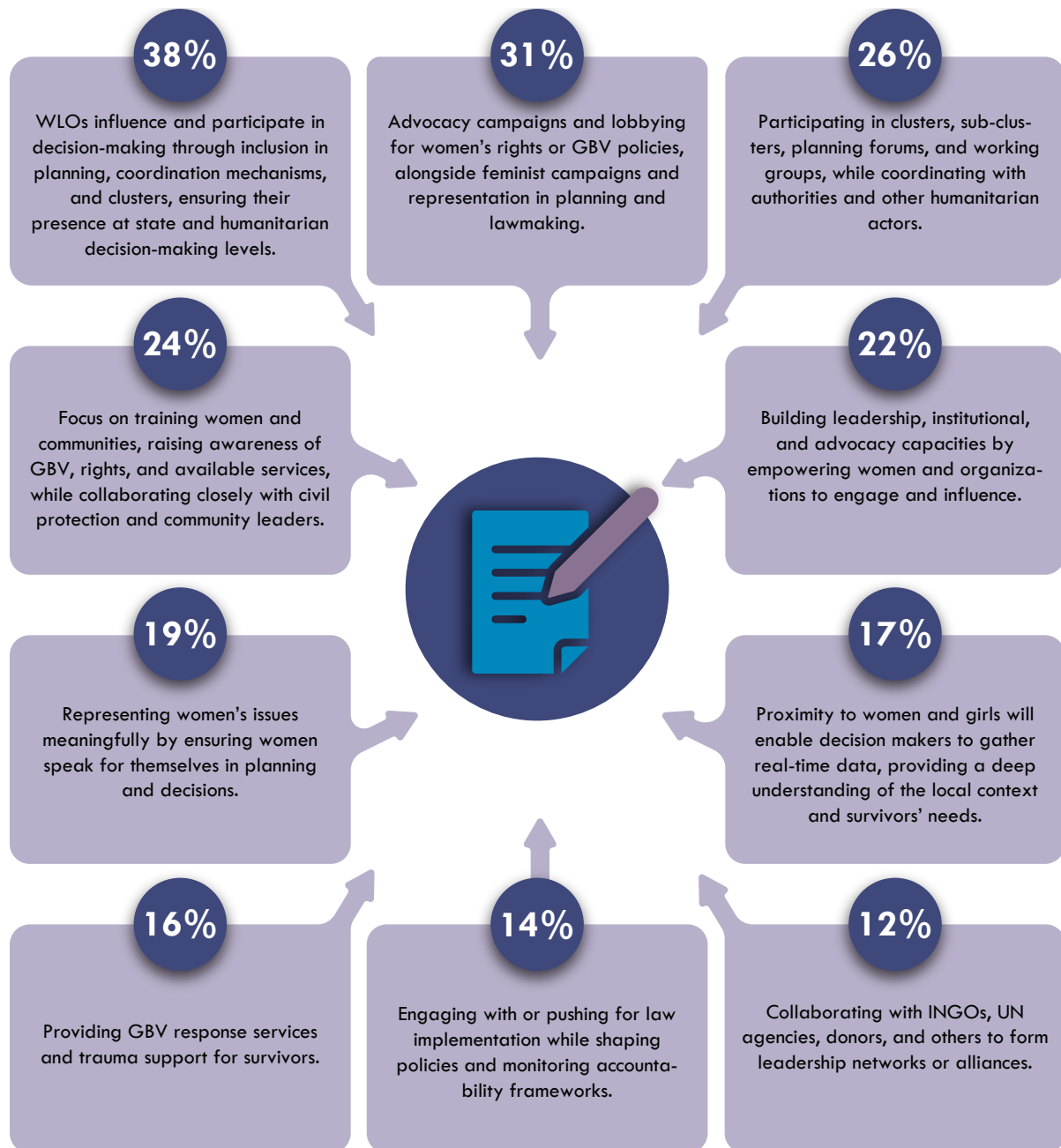
This disconnect is not simply procedural—it has life-or-death implications. When GBV mitigation plans fail to reflect community realities, humanitarian actors risk reinforcing or overlooking harmful practices, missing emerging patterns of abuse, or underestimating the scale and nature of GBV risks.

Survey findings also suggest varied levels of WLO influence over the past three years across key areas, including GBV response planning, participation in coordination mechanisms, donor advocacy, and input into consultations. While some progress is evident, the inconsistent levels of influence reflect systemic barriers that continue to limit WLOs' ability to shape decision-making spaces meaningfully.

To move from tokenistic inclusion to transformational participation, two priorities are clear:

1. **Invest in the M&E capacity of WLOs.** This includes building systems that enable them to track service quality, identify emerging risks, and generate credible, actionable data that can shape response strategies. Stronger M&E frameworks will empower WLOs to better advocate for survivor needs and demonstrate the impact of their work, thereby increasing their influence in coordination spaces.

2. **Institutionalize meaningful consultation and decision-making power for WLOs.** This requires going beyond ad hoc invitations to participate in working groups and instead integrating WLOs as equal partners in strategy development, needs assessments, response design, and funding allocation. Consultation must be structured, consistent, and resourced—enabling WLOs to contribute on their own terms and in ways that center their frontline experience.In a context as dynamic and high-risk as Sudan, ensuring that WLOs shape GBV responses is not only a matter of equity and accountability—it is a matter of operational necessity. Their leadership is essential to designing survivor-centered, context-responsive, and rights-based interventions that can meet the immense protection needs facing women and girls today.

# 14. WLOs can influence decision-making related to GBV and humanitarian planning at their locations in several ways

**38%**
WLOs influence and participate in decision-making through inclusion in planning, coordination mechanisms, and clusters, ensuring their presence at state and humanitarian decision-making levels.

**31%**
Advocacy campaigns and lobbying for women's rights or GBV policies, alongside feminist campaigns and representation in planning and lawmaking.

**26%**
Participating in clusters, sub-clusters, planning forums, and working groups, while coordinating with authorities and other humanitarian actors.

**24%**
Focus on training women and communities, raising awareness of GBV, rights, and available services, while collaborating closely with civil protection and community leaders.

**22%**
Building leadership, institutional, and advocacy capacities by empowering women and organizations to engage and influence.

**19%**
Representing women's issues meaningfully by ensuring women speak for themselves in planning and decisions.

**17%**
Proximity to women and girls will enable decision makers to gather real-time data, providing a deep understanding of the local context and survivors' needs.

**16%**
Providing GBV response services and trauma support for survivors.

**14%**
Engaging with or pushing for law implementation while shaping policies and monitoring accountability frameworks.

**12%**
Collaborating with INGOs, UN agencies, donors, and others to form leadership networks or alliances.

Survey responses on how WLOs influence decision-making in Sudan reveal both commendable engagement and critical capacity-related barriers. The most frequently cited avenue of influence—**participation in planning, coordination mechanisms, and cluster systems**—suggests a growing recognition, at least formally, of the essential role WLOs play in shaping humanitarian responses. This is especially important in Sudan, where local organizations often serve as the only viable link to communities in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach areas, due to their deep-rooted relationships, community trust, and sustained presence.

In a crisis where over 12 million people have been displaced—most of them women and girls disproportionately impacted by sexual violence, forced marriage, and food insecurity—the presence of WLOs in decision-making forums is critical to ensuring that humanitarian strategies are responsive, inclusive, and grounded in lived realities.

However, the effectiveness of this participation is constrained by significant and well-documented **operational and institutional capacity gaps.** While WLOs may be physically present in humanitarian coordination platforms, their ability to **meaningfully influence** outcomes is limited by challenges such as weak internal systems, underdeveloped communication and negotiation skills, and limited monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity.

Without robust data collection and analysis systems, WLOs are often unable to quantify needs at scale or demonstrate the measurable impact of their interventions. This limits their ability to engage in evidence-based advocacy or secure equitable funding, particularly in a donor environment increasingly driven by results-based frameworks and competitive proposal processes. Individual testimonies and local insight—though powerful—often carry less influence in formal decision-making spaces than quantitative data and technical reporting presented by larger international actors.

Moreover, the lack of effective M&E systems undermines WLOs' capacity to track GBV trends, monitor the effectiveness of response interventions, and produce compelling evidence of policy gaps or systemic failures. In a context like Sudan, where the rule of law is weak and formal accountability mechanisms are often absent or dysfunctional, this gap severely limits the ability of WLOs to influence policy reforms, advocate for survivor justice, or press for systemic change in GBV prevention and response.

Despite these challenges, WLOs continue to demonstrate deep commitment to **building leadership, institutional strength, and community-level advocacy.** Their focus on training women and raising awareness reflects a long-term vision of transformation beyond emergency response. However, the success and sustainability of these initiatives depend on internal structures that enable them to measure progress, evaluate outcomes, and communicate achievements to donors and coordination bodies in formats that are both credible and actionable.

Their proximity to affected populations, particularly women and girls, positions WLOs as unparalleled sources of **real-time, context-sensitive data.** Yet, without systems to collect, analyze, and package this data systematically, this immense advantage remains underutilized. The inability to transform community insight into policy influence or strategic funding requests represents a missed opportunity not just for the organizations themselves but for the humanitarian system as a whole.

In essence, WLOs in Sudan are leading from the frontlines—responding to needs, raising awareness, and advocating for the rights of women and girls under increasingly dangerous conditions. Yet their ability to **fully realize their influence** is bottlenecked by persistent structural weaknesses. Bridging these gaps through sustained, tailored, and flexible capacity-building support from donors and partners is not simply a matter of institutional development. It is a **strategic necessity** for ensuring that women's voices—and the urgent needs of Sudan's most vulnerable populations—are meaningfully integrated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of humanitarian response.

# 15. Platforms and Clusters Participation

The survey reveals that WLOs in Sudan are actively participating in multiple humanitarian coordination platforms. All 58 surveyed organizations reported engagement in both the **National GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR)** and **Sub-National GBV Working Group meetings,** while 32 also participate in **AISCG (Accountability and Inclusion Sub-Cluster Group) meetings,** as well as other cluster and coordination meetings at the national and sub-national levels.

This widespread representation suggests a formal recognition of the value of WLOs in humanitarian coordination structures. However, deeper analysis of the data reveals important caveats about the quality, consistency, and safety of this participation.

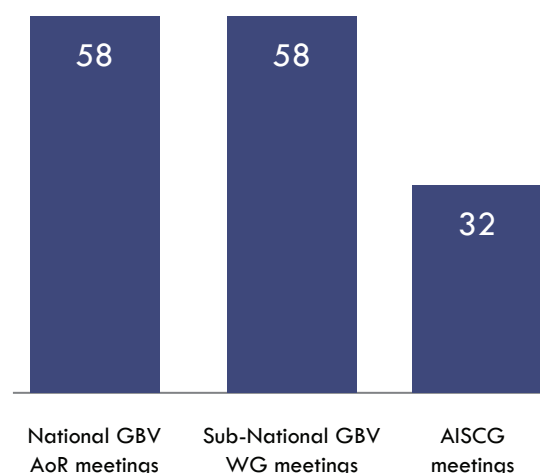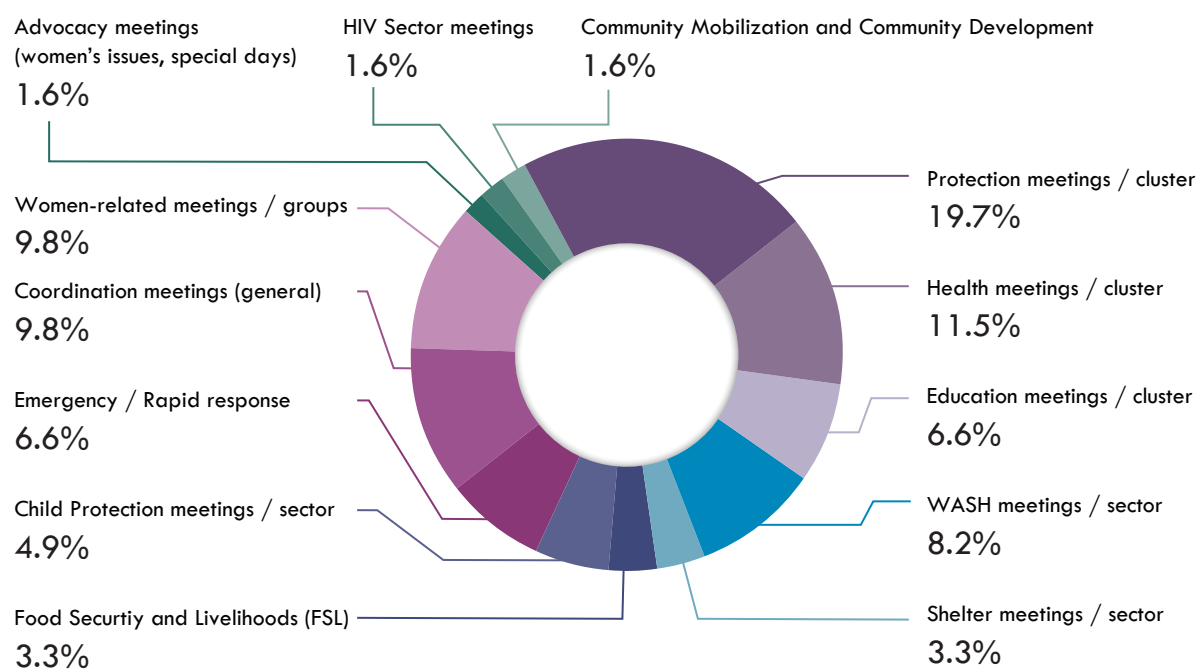**FIGURE 24.** Organisation's participation in coordination and decision making platforms

| National GBV AoR meetings | Sub-National GBV WG meetings | AISCG meetings |
|---|---|---|
| 58 | 58 | 32 |

**FIGURE 25.** Other cluster meetings or any other meetings organizations participate in include

- Advocacy meetings (women's issues, special days) 1.6%
- HIV Sector meetings 1.6%
- Community Mobilization and Community Development 1.6%
- Women-related meetings / groups 9.8%
- Coordination meetings (general) 9.8%
- Emergency / Rapid response 6.6%
- Child Protection meetings / sector 4.9%
- Food Securtiy and Livelihoods (FSL) 3.3%
- Protection meetings / cluster 19.7%
- Health meetings / cluster 11.5%
- Education meetings / cluster 6.6%
- WASH meetings / sector 8.2%
- Shelter meetings / sector 3.3%

## Perceptions of Participation Quality and Accessibility

- **86.2%** of respondents stated that WLOs are **requested to present the needs of women and girls** in their communities.
- **50 organizations** agreed that WLOs can **effectively participate in coordination and decision-making platforms,** while **8 disagreed.**
- **40 organizations** agreed that WLOs **always have space to express opinions and share expertise**, while 18 disagreed.
- **49 organizations** felt **comfortable and confident joining coordination forums,** while **9 disagreed.**
- **51 organizations** affirmed it is **safe to attend humanitarian coordination meetings,** while **7 disagreed.**
- **45 organizations** confirmed that **key meetings are conducted in Arabic,** facilitating participation, while **13 disagreed.**
- **45 organizations** agreed that **logistical barriers to attendance** (e.g., transportation, location, connectivity) are addressed, while **13 disagreed.**

These figures present a mixed picture. While participation in coordination forums is widespread in theory, the realities of **comfort, confidence, and meaningful inclusion** remain more fragile. One-third of organizations did **not agree** that they alwa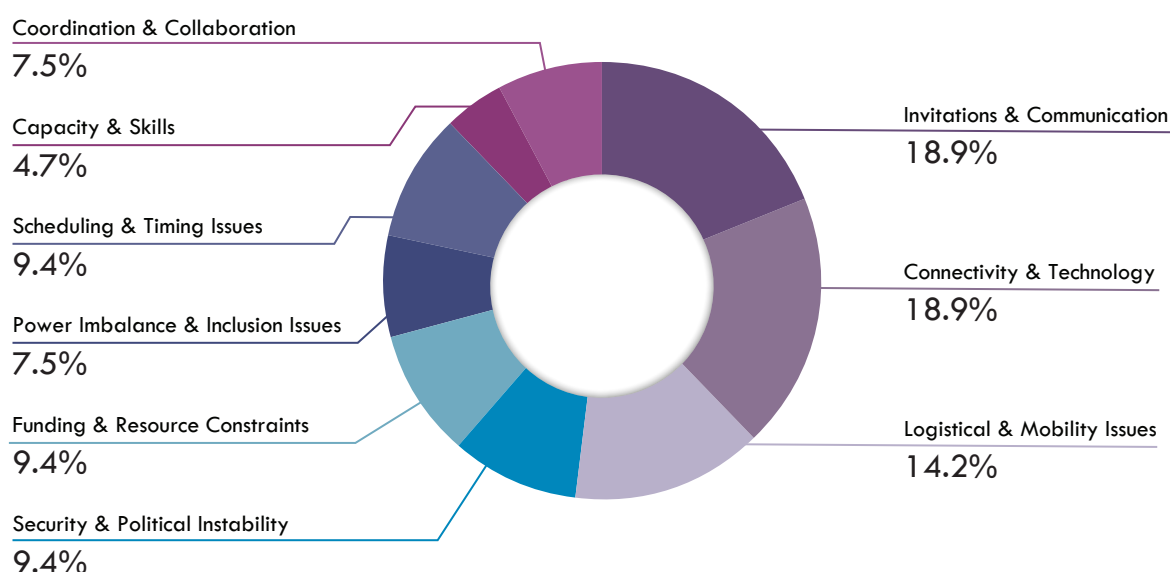ys have space to share their expertise, and a similar number raised concerns about **logistical and linguistic barriers.** This suggests that, despite formal inclusion, many WLOs still face challenges contributing meaningfully and consistently in humanitarian decision-making processes.

## Obstacles to Participation

Though not fully itemized in the survey, commonly reported barriers to meaningful participation in humanitarian coordination include:

- **Transportation and location challenges,** particularly in conflict-affected or rural areas;
- **Limited internet access,** impeding participation in virtual meetings, especially for WLOs displaced by conflict;

- **Language and translation issues,** when meetings are not conducted in Arabic or materials are not localized;
- **Lack of institutional support,** including the time and capacity to prepare for or follow up on coordination discussions;
- **Power dynamics,** where WLOs may feel overshadowed by international actors or lack the negotiation confidence to influence outcomes.

**FIGURE 26.** Main categories of obstacles in attending and contributing to humanitarian meetings



Coordination & Collaboration
7.5%

Capacity & Skills
4.7%

Scheduling & Timing Issues
9.4%

Power Imbalance & Inclusion Issues
7.5%

Funding & Resource Constraints
9.4%

Security & Political Instability
9.4%

Invitations & Communication
18.9%

Connectivity & Technology
18.9%

Logistical & Mobility Issues
14.2%

## Analysis and Implications



While the engagement of WLOs in platforms such as the GBV AoR is commendable, this surface-level inclusion must be contextualized within broader organizational capacity gaps. As previously highlighted, many WLOs lack adequate staffing, funding, M&E systems, and advocacy tools—factors that limit their ability to meaningfully influence coordination outcomes, even when present in meetings. Their participation risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive if these structural barriers are not addressed.

Moreover, in humanitarian contexts like Sudan— where protection risks are high, frontlines are constantly shifting, and aid access is severely constrained—the **meaningful inclusion of WLOs in coordination is not optional, but essential.** Their proximity to communities, particularly women and girls, and their trusted status make them uniquely positioned to identify risks early, shape survivor-centered responses, and flag unintended consequences of humanitarian programming.

However, **meaningful participation requires more than an invitation to attend meetings.** It demands that WLOs are empowered with the technical, linguistic, logistical, and political support needed to participate on equal footing. This includes:

- Ensuring interpretation and translation where necessary;
- Reimbursing transport and communications costs to facilitate equitable attendance;
- Providing preparatory briefings and post-meeting summaries;
- Creating structured spaces for WLOs to lead agenda items or propose solutions.

In conclusion, while WLO participation in coordination mechanisms is broad, the quality and influence of that participation are undermined by persistent structural and contextual barriers. To move from presence to **power**, donors, clusters, and lead agencies must **institutionalize inclusive practices** that value WLOs not only as stakeholders, but as strategic partners capable of shaping a more responsive and accountable humanitarian system in Sudan.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role, influence, and sustainability of WLOs in the humanitarian response in Sudan, particularly in GBV prevention, risk mitigation, and survivor-centered care.

## 1 Establish a Formalized WLO Engagement Framework within GBV Coordination Mechanisms

- Define clear roles, responsibilities, and power-sharing mechanisms for WLOs within cluster coordination structures, ensuring that participation goes beyond consultation to include decision-making authority.

- Institutionalize WLO representation in national and sub-national coordination forums, ensuring that their input meaningfully shapes planning, implementation, and monitoring of GBV interventions.

## 2 Invest in Leadership Development and Mentorship

- Support the leadership journey of women within WLOs by investing in senior-level training, strategic planning, and organizational development.

- Facilitate the creation of regional and national peer-support and mentorship networks for WLO leaders to exchange knowledge, strategies, and solidarity.

## 3 Institutionalize Participatory Capacity Assessments

- Develop flexible and context-specific capacity assessment tools and methodologies tailored to the operational realities of WLOs in Sudan.

- Train WLO staff to lead and manage these assessments, ensuring ownership and internal learning.

- Integrate capacity assessments as a mandatory, ongoing component of partnerships, with findings directly informing program design, funding allocations, and technical support.

- Promote systematic documentation and feedback loops to refine the process, while advocating with donors for flexible, multi-year funding that responds directly to needs identified through WLO-led assessments.

# 4 Fund Localization with Accountability

- Require donors and international organizations to earmark a defined percentage of GBV response funding specifically for WLO-led initiatives.

- Introduce monitoring indicators that track not only WLO presence in coordination spaces, but also the quality and influence of their participation.

- Ensure funding mechanisms are streamlined, equitable, and accessible to smaller WLOs, particularly those operating in hard-to-reach and high-risk areas.

# 5 Decentralize Coordination Structures

- Expand and strengthen sub-national coordination mechanisms to bring decision-making processes closer to local actors.

- Reduce logistical, linguistic, and bureaucratic barriers that currently prevent smaller WLOs from fully engaging in cluster and inter-agency coordination platforms.

- Prioritize localized leadership and contextual decision-making to ensure responses are tailored to the needs of specific communities, particularly in conflict-affected regions.