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Actions in the Field



Fuel depots are often targeted in Sudan. © SDC

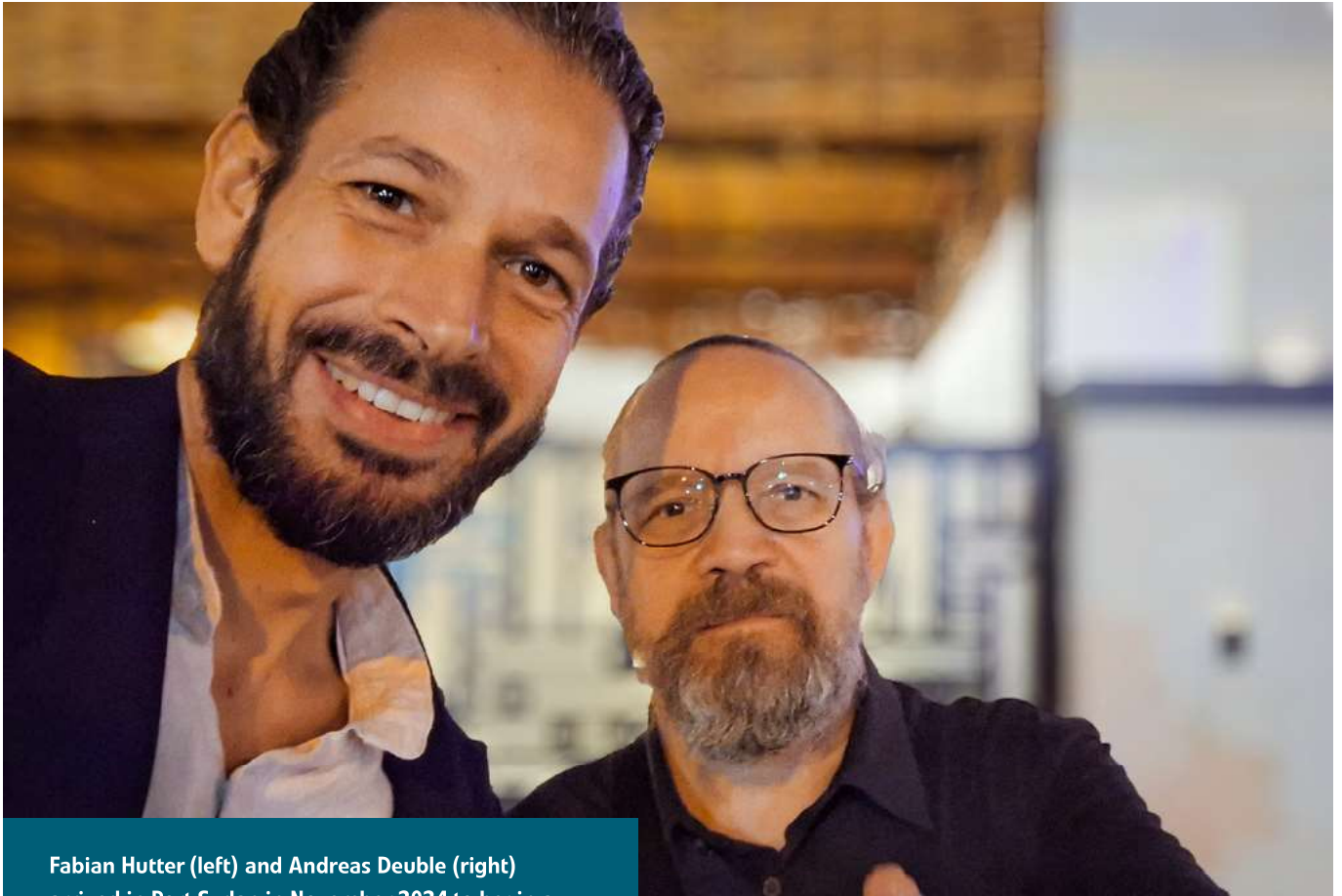
Cash and voucher assistance and other challenges in Sudan

In the time that Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit members Andreas Deuble and Fabian Hutter have spent in Sudan as coordinators of the Cash Working Group, they have experienced drone attacks, funding cuts and the withdrawal of Sudanese pound bills. They talk about the particular challenges of implementing Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) programmes in Sudan – and about the satisfaction this mission gives them.

They arrived in Port Sudan, Sudan's temporary capital since 2023, in November 2024 to begin a one-year secondment to OCHA to co-chair the Sudan Cash Working Group (CWG). In May 2025, the city that until then was considered safe was attacked by drones for three consecutive days. «They came out of nowhere,» they both recall.

The drones, launched by the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), targeted ammunition and fuel depots, the airport, the city centre and the headquarters of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Fabian was staying in an OCHA guesthouse a few kilometres from the fuel depot. «There was a huge explosion. The whole building was shaking. My roommate and I grabbed our running

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Fabian Hutter (left) and Andreas Deuble (right) arrived in Port Sudan in November 2024 to begin a one-year secondment to OCHA to co-chair the Sudan Cash Working Group. © SDC

bags, but in Port Sudan there are no bunkers and there is no safe room in the office. So we stayed tight in our living room, away from windows.»

After the drone attacks, the RSF sent surveillance drones, usually in the early evening, at night and in the early morning hours. «When the SAF shot them down, that made a lot of noise,» Andreas recalls, who lives in another apartment building rented by the United Nations. «It was never quiet. You couldn't sleep. You never knew when it would happen again.»

After about three weeks, life returned to normal – at least what counts as normal in a country that has been in the midst of an armed conflict since 2023 and faces what the UN describes as “unprecedented hunger and displacement». As they found out, «normal» really means a constantly developing «new normal».

Actions in the Field

Unique challenges in Sudan

The CWG provides technical support to all humanitarian actors and coordinates and harmonises cash and voucher assistance in Sudan, ensuring its efficiency and coherence. A number of factors make this work uniquely challenging in Sudan:

- Sudan is the third largest country in Africa, which makes accessing the population difficult, particularly in remote areas.
- At its peak, 11.6 million people were displaced internally, many more than once. The number of IDPs has decreased as the number of returnees is increasing.
- The non-functional markets in hard-to-reach areas, where prices are significantly higher than elsewhere.
- The challenge of finding financial service providers in some areas.
- Onboarding customers into the banking system.

«Due to cash liquidity shortages, nearly all cash programmes had to work through mobile banking, but people lacked IDs, smart phones, etc. to access this service,» Fabian explains.

The cash shortage was exacerbated by the government's decision to pull 500- and 1000-Sudanese pound bills. The RSF has seized caches of these bills and are continuing to use them in regions under their control. The government couldn't print new bills fast enough to meet the demand. «It meant the CWG had to manage 'two different countries' with two different currencies,» Fabian says.

According to Andreas and Fabian, cash and voucher assistance remains an efficient and effective way of providing humanitarian assistance, in particular as in-kind assistance faces logistical and security-related challenges. And it gives affected populations a choice.



The CWG provides technical support to all humanitarian actors and coordinates and harmonises cash and voucher assistance in Sudan. © SDC

Adapting to the «new normal»

As Andreas puts it: «Especially in Sudan, proper planning isn't possible. You have to adapt constantly. It can get hectic and chaotic. I haven't seen that anywhere else as much as here.»

Fabian describes it as adapting to a «new normal». The central bank's decision to produce new bills required months of work before «this became the new normal.» A few weeks later the United States government announced the USAID cuts. «That chaos lasted a couple of weeks and then was the new normal.» In July the central bank suspended online banking, creating havoc – and then another «new normal».

Between January and April this year 61.5 million USD were disbursed in Sudan. The goal was 200 million USD. Given the upheavals, the goal cannot be reached, says Andreas. The disbursed funds – in the form of cash, vouchers or bank-to-bank transfers – covered food, multi-purpose cash assistance, shelter and protection.

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