

Our Story



Origins

SOS Sahel International UK was established in the mid 1980s as a response to the devastating drought and famine across the Sahel. Whilst we began as a response to an emergency situation, we have always had our roots in long-term development, dedicated to relieving the poverty of marginalised groups who live in the drylands of the Sahel.

We launched our first programme in Sudan in 1985, with country programmes in Ethiopia, Niger, Kenya and Mali soon to follow. The organisation adopted a Sahel-wide strategy emphasising grassroots participation and sustainability. Over the years, the economic, social, environmental and political context of the Sahel has constantly shifted, however SOS Sahel UK has managed to stay the course. The people we work with live in some of the toughest environments on the planet; our projects have therefore consistently addressed issues related to environment, natural resource management and climate change as a means to reduce poverty.

Historically, SOS Sahel UK was an umbrella organisation. However, with a dedication to African-led development from the outset, conversations about devolution that started in the early 1990s became a firm commitment to African-led development by the end of the decade. In 2002/03, a transformation process began in earnest, as the country programmes became independent African organisations, better able to reflect the perspectives and priorities of dryland dwellers. SOS Sahel UK has now transformed from an implementing NGO, into a facilitating one, working with national NGO partners (many of which were former country programmes) that share our values and follow the principles of community-led development.



From Country Programmes to Equal Partners

The process of decentralisation began in the 2000s when the first national NGOs assumed responsibilities of the SOS Sahel country programmes in Niger (CARC-GRN registered in 2003), Mali (Sahel Eco registered in 2004) and Ethiopia (SOS Sahel Ethiopia registered in 2005). The country programme in Kenya drew to a close in 2009. The Sudan country programme continued for many years, until SOS Sahel Sudan registered in 2010 and slowly began taking the reins, becoming fully independent in 2014. SOS Sahel South Sudan grew through different process; in 2011, with the secession of South Sudan from Sudan, SOS Sahel South Sudan was established as an independent national NGO from its infancy.

The transformation process was long and difficult, but ultimately worthwhile. We provided our partners roots from which to grow, and it has resulted in some extremely strong and reputable national organisations across the Sahel, that have local knowledge and experience at their heart. The importance of strong civil society in often turbulent and difficult contexts cannot be downplayed. For effective, appropriate and sustainable development to take place, it needs to be led from the ground up with trust, commitment and cooperation.

SOS Sahel UK continue to partner with some of our historic ‘daughter’ organisations—namely SOS Sahel Ethiopia, SOS Sahel Sudan and SOS Sahel South Sudan. This partnership is led by them; we provide help and support where needed—mobilising funding and other resources, supporting the generation of learning and evidence, and providing capacity building support.

