

WHAT IT TAKES TO **EAT**

Conflict and Sudan's
Fragile Food System

April 2026



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Front cover image: A farmer holding her sorghum harvest in El Girba, Kassala.
Photo: Suliman Fadlallah / Mercy Corps



Photo: Guy Peterson / Mercy Corps

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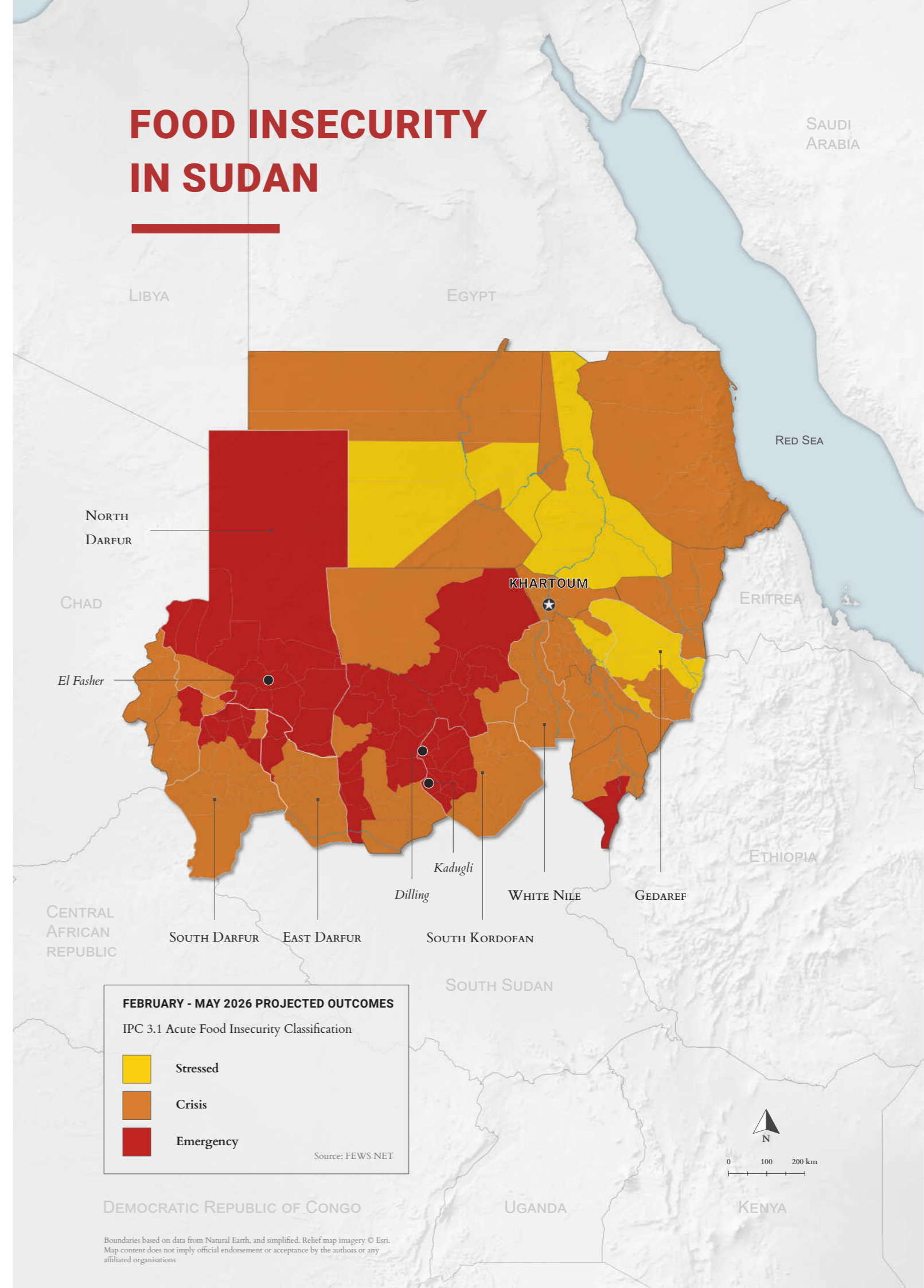
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

THE PERILOUS PATH OF FOOD IN SUDAN

In several areas of Sudan, each meal eaten by a family is made up of ingredients that have crossed one or more battlefields. In fact, these meals are only made possible thanks to efforts by farmers, suppliers, traders and volunteers who risk their lives and safety to feed themselves and others, keeping a fragile food system running. The unrelenting conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), reinforced by allied armed groups, has made the path of food from farms through markets to household plates treacherous, with devastating consequences.

“
Food is available outside, but
traders cannot reach us
because **the roads are not safe.**

- Internally displaced woman,
North Darfur

In the two areas worst hit by the conflict – North Darfur and South Kordofan – millions of families can only access one meal a day. Often, they miss meals for entire days. Many have resorted to eating leaves and animal feed to survive, with child malnutrition spiking. Communal kitchens set up to collectively prepare and share meals are struggling to stretch the scarce food available as resources dwindle.

An Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report from November 2025 confirmed famine in El Fasher and Kadugli, and identified a risk of Famine in 20 more localities across Sudan’s North Darfur and South Kordofan. It further alerted last month to famine-level acute malnutrition detected in two more localities. According to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, more than half (61.7%) of Sudan’s population – 28.9 million people – is now acutely food-insecure, of whom over 10 million are experiencing severe and extreme levels of food insecurity. Sudan’s food crisis is deepening and threatening to spread. The Crisis is being compounded by a worsening economic crisis and climate change.

Nearly three years of conflict, marked by violence, displacement and siege tactics, have systematically eroded Sudan’s food system – field by field, road by road, market by market – producing mass hunger. The United Nations (UN) Independent International Fact-Finding Mission has documented a “war of atrocities” against civilians, including the use of starvation and sexual violence as weapons of war, with direct and large-scale attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructures.¹ Millions of civilians have been attacked, abused and harassed in their homes while attempting to flee and during displacement. Women and girls have faced brutal sexual and gender-

¹ OHCHR (5 September 2025) [“A War of Atrocities”: Sudan Civilians Deliberately Targeted, UN Fact-Finding Mission Reports International Crimes on Large-Scale](#)

based violence that has further restricted their safety, mobility and access to food and essential services,² sharply increasing their risk of starvation. Thousands of farmers have been killed, and entire farmlands destroyed. Markets are fragile and vulnerable to violent attacks, closures and predatory taxation.

Still, while the path of food in Sudan has been marked by fragility and catastrophe, it also stands as a testament to Sudanese courage and tenacity in the face of extreme adversity. Sudanese communities are adapting with extraordinary ingenuity and solidarity: planting under fire, trading by the cup, rationing one meal across many mouths and sharing food even when there is barely enough for one family. Across these regions, farmers’ associations, suppliers, transporters and traders, women’s savings groups, Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs), other mutual aid groups, and village committees are keeping food moving – often with no formal funding, little external recognition and at great personal risk.

This report documents the path that food items take in Sudan’s North Darfur and South Kordofan, states that remain active battlefields experiencing famine-like conditions. The path of food in these areas, from its production in farms to consumption by families, is fraught with impediments that demonstrate how the conflict has compromised the country’s already fragile food system. The report combines analysis of secondary data with extensive, primarily qualitative, data on the experiences of Sudanese communities and aid actors drawn from 80 key informant interviews and 40 focus group discussions with displaced farmers, traders, women, men, local responders and humanitarian actors across North Darfur and South Kordofan, as well as in White Nile and Gedaref.

To prevent further death and suffering, it is imperative that parties to the conflict in Sudan cease all actions that exacerbate conflict-induced hunger and that violate their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL), including the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, unlawful denial of humanitarian access, and targeting of civilians and civilian objects.³ Restoring Sudan’s food systems will require concerted actions to support production, protect markets, ensure safe movement of civilians and food items, maintain community purchasing power, and address the political economy that weaponises food. Aid interventions must address blockages and disruptions at each stage while building on the sources of resilience already present.

² OHCHR (May 2025) [Sudan: Experts Denounce Systematic Attacks on Women and Girls](#)

³ UNSC (24 May 2018) [Resolution 2417 \(2018\) Adopted by the Security Council at its 8267th Meeting on 24 May 2018](#)



THE FARM

Growing Food While Under Fire

Photo: Elias Abu Ata / NRC

“

We planted knowing we might be killed before harvest.

Not planting was also death.

Farmer, South Kordofan

Prior to the ongoing conflict, 65% of people in Sudan relied on agriculture and related activities for their livelihoods.⁴ Smallholder farming not only represented a vital source of people's food intake, but also served as a source of income, helping families and individuals meet their basic needs. In the Greater Darfur and Kordofan regions, rainfed agriculture enabled the production of staple cereals including millet and sorghum.⁵

Today, violence has forced many farmers in the two regions to abandon their fields, drastically reduce the areas they cultivate or stop farming altogether. Attacks on communities – including the mass killings of the Masalit in Darfur in 2023⁶ – have forced thousands of farmers to flee, leaving agricultural land abandoned. Over half of the 400 farmers surveyed by CARE International in Darfur and South Kordofan in 2025 reported having been unable to safely harvest their crops due to the conflict.⁷

“Some of our relatives planted their fields and when the crops were ready for harvest, they brought a tractor and a thresher. Armed men came and took the tractor, the threshers and the crop. **Nothing remained.**”

- Internally displaced male farmer,
South Kordofan

As men have fled to rural areas to avoid forced recruitment into armed groups or else to seek alternative livelihoods, the roles of women farmers in food production, processing and vending have expanded. Still, the conflict has compounded the structural barriers faced by women farmers, including insecure land tenure, lack of land ownership, limited access to agricultural inputs, knowledge and financial services, and escalating protection risks. These factors erode women's ability to farm safely.⁸ Notably, research suggests that women who had previously harvested on 10 or more acres are likely to have reduced their land use compared to before the conflict.⁹

And yet, in many households, women now function simultaneously as farmers, traders and caregivers, sustaining food access where formal systems and assistance have failed – and keeping food on plates despite extraordinary risks.

In addition, many displaced farmers report residing in areas where farmlands exist, yet are out of reach, because without ownership or tenure rights, they cannot cultivate or harvest it.

⁴ FAO (19 March 2024) [Special Report: 2023 FAO Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission \(CFSAM\) to the Republic of the Sudan](#)

⁵ FAO (21 March 2022) [Special Report: 2021 FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission \(CFSAM\) to the Sudan](#)

⁶ Human Rights Watch (9 May 2024) [“The Massalit Will Not Come Home”: Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan](#)

⁷ CARE (2025) [Conflict, Agriculture, and Women in Sudan Research Brief](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

“**You are a mother. You leave your children in the house. You go out in the middle of gunfire. You risk your life just to bring them something to eat.**”

- Internally displaced woman,
North Darfur

With seed stocks destroyed, looted, or depleted, farmers report severe shortages of staple seeds, grain that would otherwise have been used for consumption for planting, and poorer quality of seeds due to reuse or damage by pests. Agricultural extension services that existed before the conflict – providing pest control, seed quality assurance and subsidised seeds are absent in many areas, leaving a significant gap in production.

In several areas, locust swarms, predatory birds and mice have ravaged farmlands and destroyed harvests, compounding existing issues.¹⁰ The 2023 locust invasion in the Nuba Mountains contributed to agricultural losses, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.¹¹ Farmers are increasingly relying on repeated hand-weeding and harvesting their crops early to reduce losses. They further describe how previously manageable climate shocks have become debilitating, as the conflict and economic crisis challenge their ability to adapt.

Farmers also assert that prices of seeds, fertiliser and fuel have more than doubled in local markets, with labour and transport costs becoming unattainable. The collapse of formal credit has resulted in

farmers turning to informal money lending, trade credit from suppliers and deferred payment arrangements to access seeds and land for cultivation.¹² When crops fail, are looted or are sold at a loss, farmers remain in debt, further deepening their vulnerability.

“**One bottle of pesticide is now 100,000 Sudanese pounds. Before it was 25, 26 or 27 thousand. But in the recent period, it became 100. Even getting two or three is a problem.**”

- Male internally displaced farmer,
South Kordofan

Moreover, communal labour groups for planting and harvesting – one of Sudan's most significant informal risk-sharing institutions – have collapsed in many areas. Nafeer (or Fazaa), a volunteer-based system where members of a community come together to help complete tasks such as planting and harvesting, has become more fragile as displacement persists and resources dwindle.

¹⁰ FAO (19 March 2024) [Special Report: 2023 FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission \(CFSAM\) to the Republic of the Sudan](#)

¹¹ Radio Tamazuj (23 July 2024) [Over 3 Million People Starving in Nuba Mountains](#)

¹² Clingedael (2024) [Sudan's Agricultural Input Supply in Times of War: Proposed Interventions to Counter the Unfolding Famine](#)

“

If you don't borrow, you don't plant.

If you plant, you borrow again.

- Female internally displaced farmer, South Kordofan

In spite of this, farmers are continuing to cultivate, not because the conditions are viable, but because cultivation, despite the risk it brings, is their only line of defence against hunger and dependence on aid. Communities are demonstrating extraordinary adaptability. Farmers have adjusted their practices in a variety of ways, changing how they obtain seeds and machinery or relying on traditional storage systems like silos and granaries. Host communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs) share labour and harvests with households moving from urban centres back to rural areas specifically to farm.¹³ These adaptations have allowed agricultural activities to continue despite insecurity, climate shocks and pest outbreaks.

Photo: Suliman Fadlallah / Mercy Corps



¹³ Hussein Suleiman (2025) *Farming against the Odds: How Local Synergies Are Sustaining Agriculture amid Conflict and Displacement in Eastern Sudan*



THE ROAD

Routes and Markets Under Fire

“

Traders fear the road.

They are beaten, robbed or taxed at gunpoint, so they bring less food or don't come at all.

– Male trader, South Kordofan

Trade routes and markets provide vital connections that enable food availability and consumption. In North Darfur and South Kordofan, however, direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, looting, harassment at checkpoints, and threats against traders and suppliers have disrupted the movement and processing of food, driven up prices and forced markets to shrink or operate intermittently. Furthermore, market areas have been repeatedly shelled, burnt or looted, resulting in significant civilian casualties and disruptions to food access.¹⁴ These actions by parties to the conflict play out in food-insecure areas where access to existing road infrastructure is already largely cut off during the rainy season.

“
Every road has checkpoints.
At each one, they take money or food. By the time you arrive, nothing is left.

- Male trader, North Darfur

To move food and other items to markets, traders and suppliers navigate a maze of checkpoints, roadblocks and informal taxes. In areas they control, parties to the conflict and armed groups impose levies on every truck or donkey cart as it crosses successive checkpoints, forcing traders to pay multiple fees in cash, fuel or food. This has dramatically raised transport costs and risks in North Darfur and South Kordofan. Analysis suggests that

limiting roadblocks could meaningfully reduce informal taxation, lower food prices and improve market functioning.¹⁵ Instead, roadblocks and extractive taxation continue, pushing food prices beyond reach.

Before the conflict, most commodities in Darfur and Kordofan were sourced from eastern and central Sudan via Khartoum or Al Gezira. Currently, all supplies are transported from Chad, South Sudan or Libya.¹⁶ These routes are costly and precarious.

With limited options in local markets, families can no longer access a variety of food types – meat, vegetables, oil, sugar and spices have become luxuries for many families. Instead, they are consuming the cheapest and most readily available staples, including local millet and low-quality sorghum.

STARVATION IN BESIEGED AREAS

Human rights reports indicate that parties to the conflict have deliberately weaponised hunger by destroying crops, assets and water points, widely looting and destroying markets, forcibly taking livestock and resources, curtailing humanitarian access, and severely restricting movement.¹⁷

¹⁴ OHCHR (13 December 2024) [Sudan: Alarm as Civilians Killed in Attacks on Markets](#); OHCHR (26 June 2024) [Using Starvation as a Weapon of War in Sudan Must Stop: UN Experts](#)

¹⁵ REACH (27 August 2025) [Sudan: Market Functionality and Conflict Dynamics: What Evidence Tells Us about the State of Markets in Conflict-Affected Areas](#)

¹⁶ ACAPS (25 November 2025) [Sudan: Economic Impacts and Emerging Trends in West and Central Darfur](#)

¹⁷ OHCHR (26 June 2024) [Using Starvation as a Weapon of War in Sudan Must Stop: UN Experts](#); FAO (15 April

2024) [5 Things You Should Know about How Conflict in Sudan Is Devastating Agriculture and People's Food Security](#)

Despite the legal prohibition on the use of starvation as a weapon of war under IHL and the reaffirmation of such obligations in UN Security Council Resolutions 2417 and 2736, violations continue unabated. Evidence from El Fasher, Kadugli and Dilling demonstrates that no tangible progress has been made towards accountability by any party to the conflict.¹⁸

EL FASHER, NORTH DARFUR

El Fasher in North Darfur stands as the most pronounced example of deliberate conflict tactics leading to starvation and death in Sudan. The siege targeted every lifeline of the city, causing mass displacement and starvation. Indeed, the UN Fact-Finding Mission for El Fasher found that prolonged siege tactics “deliberately deprived the population of food, water, medical care, adequate housing and basic services, dismantling the material foundations of their survival”; it concluded the siege bore “hallmarks of genocide”.¹⁹

From spring 2023, the RSF and allied armed groups besieged parts of the city; by May 2024, El Fasher was fully encircled. Markets were shelled and all main and secondary roads leading into the city were cut off, blocking access to food, medicine and humanitarian assistance. When roads into the city weren't blocked, they were opened only intermittently or rendered lethal thanks to various checkpoints, with direct attacks on traders and prohibitive taxation systematically disrupting commercial food flow. Markets could only partially function, with staple grains coming into the city at night under life-threatening conditions.

“
People sold food secretly,
house to house.
**Bringing large quantities
is too risky.**

- Male community leader, North Darfur

Moreover, researchers at Yale's Humanitarian Research Lab identified that 41 farming communities in the region were also attacked between March and June 2024, destroying the local food supply chain as the siege of the nearby city of El Fasher tightened. The report highlights a 2,040% increase in fires affecting villages and farmland, as well as targeted destruction of livestock enclosures, leading to the forced displacement of farmers and preventing the production of food.²⁰

In their desperate quest for food, civilians would climb over the berm surrounding the city while simultaneously evading snipers to reach traders waiting outside. Some never returned, killed while attempting to cross. For their part, small traders in the city improvised makeshift stalls on the ground, digging shallow holes nearby to take cover from drone attacks, or sometimes moving their “shop” into their homes. Still, they would only be open for a few hours each day due to the risk of strikes.

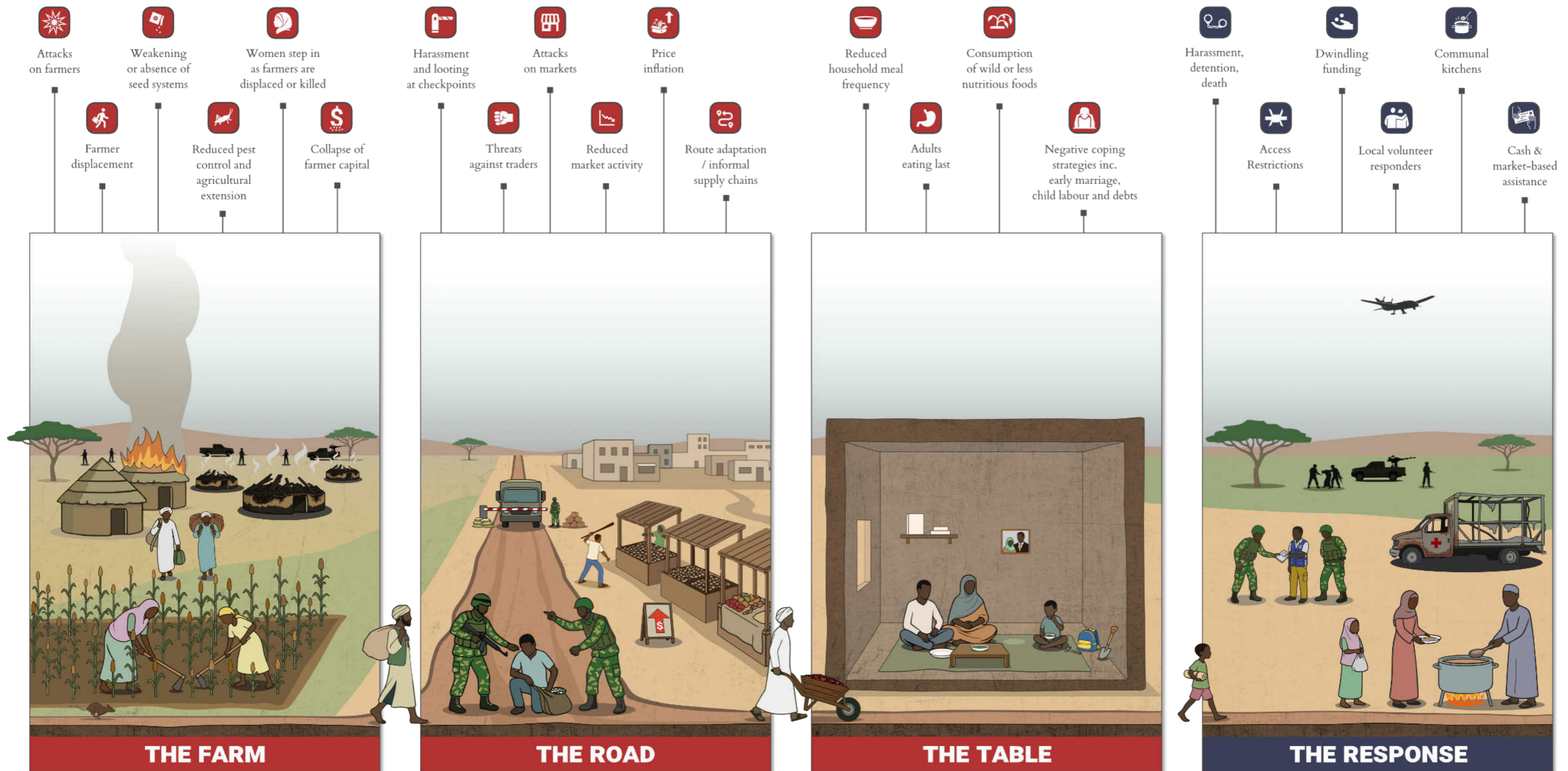
2024) [5 Things You Should Know about How Conflict in Sudan Is Devastating Agriculture and People's Food Security](#)

¹⁸ OHCHR (24 October 2025) [Paths to Justice: Accountability for Atrocities in the Sudan](#)

¹⁹ Fact Finding Mission (2026) [Sudan: Hallmarks of Genocide in El-Fasher](#)

²⁰ The Guardian (2026) [“Extraordinary Cruelty”: Images Show Longterm “Starvation Strategy” in Sudan](#)

FEEDING FAMILIES UNDER FIRE



Conflict is steadily undermining Sudan's agricultural production systems, weakening the capacity of rural communities to grow food even as they continue to farm under increasingly strained conditions.

As production weakens, conflict also disrupts the routes and markets that move food, making its transport and trade increasingly dangerous, costly, and unpredictable even as traders adapt to keep supplies flowing.

As disruption spreads through production and markets, households are forced to eat less and rely on increasingly harmful coping strategies to survive.

As hunger deepens, local volunteers and humanitarian actors struggle to sustain life-saving assistance while facing insecurity, access constraints, and dwindling resources.

“
We stayed alive by eating once every two or three days.

We cooked at night so no one would see or hear.

- Internally displaced woman,
North Darfur

Every round of fighting inside El Fasher meant a spike in the cost of available food. Multiple community kitchens closed due to food stocks running out. Residents described attacks on and disappearances of people attempting to flee the city. Meanwhile, the siege also cut off humanitarian assistance. Despite repeated requests from humanitarian agencies and their readiness to deliver, no aid was allowed to enter the city.

“
Some children died. Some died on the long road from El Fasher. Elderly people also died because they could not endure these conditions.

- Internally displaced woman,
North Darfur

During the days following the fall of the city, as tens of thousands of people fled into neighbouring towns, humanitarian actors reported receiving high numbers of women and children with distressing stories of their escape.²¹ Many were suffering from hunger and malnutrition.²² Families recounted harrowing tales of how they managed to stay alive while trapped inside the besieged city, including by reducing the frequency of meals, consuming animal feed, and breaking into abandoned slaughterhouses, collecting old cow skin and eating it.

KADUGLI AND DILLING, SOUTH KORDOFAN

In Kadugli, communities have endured prolonged isolation and near-total cut-off from essential services.²³ By late 2025, Kadugli's two main markets had closed, with major traders no longer bringing in supplies. Reports indicate that sorghum stocks had been monopolised and stored in warehouses,²⁴ and when grain was released into markets, it was sold at exorbitant prices.

In Dilling – South Kordofan's second-largest city – a complex and volatile environment has undermined communities' ability to access food items and other basic commodities. The roads connecting the town to Kadugli, El Obeid and El Fula – critical sources of supply into the town – are controlled and contested by parties to the conflict. These have been scenes of active conflict

²¹ IRC (29 October 2025) [Darfur: IRC Warns Civilians Trapped in or Fleeing El Fasher Risk Being Killed as Arrivals Remain Alarming Low](#)

²² AP (26 September 2025) [Malnutrition in Darfur's Besieged El Fasher City Kills 23 People in a Month](#)

²³ Mercy Corps (3 February 2026) [Sudan: Urgent Support to Communities "Still on the Margins" Remains Critical as Access Shifts in South Kordofan](#)

²⁴ Key informant interviews

“
Kadugli is surrounded. You cannot go out to farm and food cannot come in.

- Community leader, South Kordofan

and also see heightened risks of looting and violence. In early February 2026, the SAF claimed they had ended the two-year siege by retaking control of Kadugli and Dilling.²⁵ Nonetheless, at the time of writing, essential supply routes remain regularly attacked by drones, threatening both traders and aid transportation. Markets are recovering slowly:

prices are decreasing but remain high and volatile due to irregular entry of commodities into the city with extremely high food prices. Cash is also scarce.²⁶ In early March, the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET) assessed that the technical thresholds of famine were no longer being met in Kadugli and Dilling. The risk of famine however remains high if siege conditions resume in these areas.²⁷

MARKET RESILIENCE OUTSIDE FULL SIEGE CONDITIONS

Outside besieged towns where markets have completely collapsed, supply chains and markets have shown remarkable resilience to the conflict, even in volatile areas of Greater Darfur and Kordofan. Traders have found avenues to keep supplies flowing. A remote sensing study of 484 markets in 2025 found that during violent episodes, markets in conflict areas shrank and then recovered within one to eight months once fighting subsided. Rural markets in particular have shown an ability to adapt and recover following conflict events, as they often expand due to displacement or disruption of markets in urban centres.²⁸

In certain towns and cities, including Tawila, Geneina, Zalingei and Nyala, local market unions are facilitating collective negotiation with local authorities, access to credit for members and bulk purchasing of supplies.

This resilience is fragile and uneven. It depends on continued trader willingness to take risks – both physical and financial – as well as on periods of relative calm between conflict events. When fighting intensifies or sieges are tightened, even the most adaptive markets collapse.

²⁵ Aljazeera (3 February 2026) [Sudan Military Claims to Break the Siege of Key Kordofan City of Kadugli](#)

²⁶ NRC (February 2026) [The Siege of Kadugli May Be Over: The Hunger Is Not](#)

²⁷ FEWSNET (March 2026), [Sudan Food Security Outlook: Famine thresholds no longer met, but credible risk of Famine persists in parts of Sudan \(February – September 2026\)](#)

²⁸ Mercy Corps (August 2025) [Using Satellite Imagery to Map the Impact of Conflict on Rural Markets in Sudan](#)



THE TABLE

Eating Less, Eating Leaves, Famine

“

We no longer ask what
we will eat.

We ask who will eat.

- Internally displaced woman, North Darfur

When food reaches a Sudanese household in North Darfur and South Kordofan, a long chain of violence, economic shocks and climate stress has already shaped what is available, how much it costs and whether it can be accessed safely. Even where farmers manage to harvest against the odds, yields are often too low to cover household needs.

“

This [post-harvest] is the season when food should be more plentiful, but people are still hungry.

- Community leader, South Kordofan

Families are coping by cutting meals to as little as one per day, as well as often going several days without eating at all. Many are surviving on diluted sorghum porridge stretched with extra water, with little or no vegetables, pulses or animal-source foods. Women, who already tend to eat last and least,²⁹ are acutely vulnerable to malnutrition and starvation.³⁰ In Sudan’s worsening hunger crisis, simply being a woman has become a predictor of hunger.³¹

Female-headed households are reported to be three times more likely to experience food insecurity than male-headed households, with fewer than 2 per cent considered to be food-secure. Reports further indicate that routine tasks for women, such as going to the fields, visiting markets, collecting water or standing in food lines, now carry a high risk of rape and harassment, undermining their safety and ability to access life-saving assistance.³² These gendered threats are inseparable from the hunger crisis. Food scarcity both heightens exposure to violence and amplifies its consequences.

“

Food is only porridge now. We add more water so everyone can eat.

- Internally displaced woman, South Kordofan

As the crisis deepens, households are forced to sell off what might help keep them alive in the long term – livestock, tools and sometimes land – to survive in the short term.³³ In the most extreme situations, people resort to eating wild leaves, grass, animal feed and peanut shells.³⁴

²⁹ UN Women Gender Alert (2025) “Last and Least”: Gendered Dimensions of Food Insecurity in Sudan

³⁰ CARE (n.d.) *Conflict, Agriculture, and Women in Sudan: Research Brief*

³¹ GiHA (July 2025) *Sudan: Women, Food Insecurity, and Famine Risk in Sudan, Gender Snapshot*

³² UN (11 November 2025) *Sudan War: Women Endure Starvation, Rape and Bombs Fleeing El Fasher*

³³ IPC (5 February 2026) *IPC Alert: Famine Threshold for Acute Malnutrition Surpassed in Two More North Darfur Localities, Crisis Worsening in Greater Kordofan*

³⁴ Africa News (28 June 2025) *Driven to Starvation, Sudanese Eat Weeds and Plants to Survive*

“

People are eating things that are not food anymore.

This is how bad it is.

- Community leader, South Kordofan

FAMINE AND IPC ANALYSIS

The IPC provides technical analysis to determine and classify the severity of acute food insecurity. An IPC famine confirmation means that many families have exhausted all means to get food; severe malnutrition is widespread among children; and people are dying from the combined effects of starvation and disease.

In Sudan, the IPC analysed and classified situations of famine in multiple locations, including:

- **Zamzam IDP camp and El Fasher, North Darfur:** In late 2024, the IPC confirmed famine in Zamzam IDP camp (home to between 150,000 and 200,000 people displaced by escalating violence in El Fasher).³⁵ In October 2025, the IPC found that famine was ongoing in El Fasher itself.³⁶
- **Kadugli and Dilling, South Kordofan:** With essential supplies severely constrained, the crisis has also intensified in South Kordofan. IPC analysis for September 2025 and projections thereafter assessed famine outcomes and conditions in Kadugli and indicated similarly extreme conditions for Dilling.³⁷

“

Before, we cooked every day. Now we cook when food comes, maybe once or twice a week.

- Community kitchen volunteer, South Kordofan

³⁵ IPC (24 December 2024) *Sudan: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Snapshot | October 2024 – May 2025*

³⁶ IPC (3 November 2025) *Famine Review Committee Sudan, October 2025: Conclusions and Recommendations*

³⁷ IPC (November 2025) *Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for September 2025 and Projections for October 2025 – January 2026 and for February – May 2026*



THE RESPONSE

Constraints, Local Leadership
and What is Working

Photo: Ahmed Ahmed / NRC

“

Funding for local actors
is very small.

It doesn't create real impact
compared to the scale of need.

– Local responder, Sudan

Despite the scale of Sudan’s hunger crisis, the response remains constrained by severe funding shortfalls, bureaucratic and security-related access challenges, and gaps in the coordinated food response. Recent aid cuts have further worsened an already catastrophic situation, forcing life-saving services to scale down precisely as needs rise. At the same time, Sudanese civil society and frontline responders continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and innovation, sustaining assistance under extremely difficult conditions.

Host families are sharing their often limited food with newly displaced relatives and neighbours. Local responders – including ERRs, women-led organisations and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – alongside community kitchens, known as Takaaya, have emerged as a collective response to hunger, feeding thousands.³⁸ These efforts rely on contributions from host communities, diaspora networks and volunteers to provide hot meals to displaced and vulnerable people. They also draw on deeply rooted community values, rapid mobilisation and granular knowledge of local needs.

Yet, local response efforts in Sudan remain chronically underfunded. This significantly limits their ability to sustain and scale operations, as well as reducing impact in areas of severe need. With resources dwindling, community kitchens across the country are closing or reducing meal provision by 50 per cent or more – for example, only providing one meal a day, rather than three.³⁹ Funding cuts are reported to have forced a large share of ERR-supported services to shut down, including in areas facing famine-like conditions.⁴⁰ This scale-down is not marginal; instead, it represents the removal of a primary lifeline for households with few alternatives.

Beyond funding, local responders face grave risks while delivering assistance, with volunteers frequently harassed, detained or killed by armed actors. Out of 119 aid workers killed, detained, wounded or kidnapped in 2025, 117 were Sudanese.⁴¹

In addition to the challenges faced by local responders, especially with regard to funding, humanitarian access for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN agencies remains severely restricted across the country. This access becomes far more obstructed – and the civilian impact far more severe – in contested and besieged areas. Access to and movement across North Darfur and South Kordofan, especially from the east of the country, is complicated by shifting frontlines, conflict insecurity, and bureaucratic and procedural requirements that can limit, hold up or prevent assistance. These restrictions include protracted delays to or denials of travel permits or movement notifications, inconsistent approval procedures across authorities, and administrative constraints that slow delivery even when assistance is available. Humanitarian actors describe repeated access negotiations with all parties to the conflict as a form of bureaucratic control.

³⁸ The New Humanitarian (22 July 2025) [In Darfur’s Displacement Epicentre, Community Kitchens Shoulder the Load](#)

³⁹ Islamic Relief (5 November 2025) [Takaaya: How Community Kitchens offer a Lifeline to Sudan’s Hunger Crisis](#)

⁴⁰ Refugees International (22 May 2025) [Policy Statement on Sudan: Dire Crisis in Sudan: A Global Call to Action](#)

⁴¹ Aid Worker Security (2025) [Untitled dataset](#)

“

While agencies wait for approvals, people are eating leaves.

Bureaucracy is killing people.

– Key informant, Sudan

Beyond administrative barriers, physical access is also constrained by active conflict and attacks, roadblocks, and the presence of unexploded ordnances.⁴² Multiple humanitarian truck convoys were hit by drone strikes in 2025 and the start of 2026, killing civilians and destroying life-saving supplies.⁴³

Looking ahead, it remains unlikely that there will be a significant increase in financial resources to scale up life-saving assistance and

support economic recovery. In 2025, food security interventions under the Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) received less than half of their requested funding – and early recovery received only 1 per cent. In fact, the overall response was only 40 per cent funded by the end of 2025.⁴⁴

Available funding is also largely focused on the short term. Indeed, it is often tightly earmarked for “life-saving” humanitarian activities, leaving insufficient support for sustaining markets, agriculture and basic services that reduce future aid dependence, including in comparatively stable areas. Donors and agencies are frequently averse to early recovery resilience work during active conflict, defaulting instead to repeated emergency assistance rather than investing in interventions that could reduce future humanitarian needs.

With a more coordination and leadership, humanitarian assistance could be linked to early recovery – but these linkages remain weak. Significantly, the aid response continues to be driven by annual planning cycles. As a result, proven resilience pilots by NGOs and communities struggle to scale, suffering from the absence of consistent political backing and multi-year financing. Climate change – an important driver of vulnerability in Sudan – remains largely unaddressed, falling awkwardly between humanitarian and development silos.

WHAT IS WORKING? AND COULD IT BE SCALED?

Despite these constraints, several approaches show potential with regard to strengthening household resilience while meeting urgent needs. In particular, humanitarian actors have increasingly scaled up cash and market-based responses, enabling households to buy food, repay debts, seek healthcare and improve water access.⁴⁵

⁴² IPC (5 February 2026) [IPC Alert: Famine Threshold for Acute Malnutrition Surpassed in Two More North Darfur Localities, Crisis Worsening in Greater Kordofan](#)

⁴³ WFP (3 June 2025) [Joint Statement on Sudan Convoy Attack](#); UN (2025) [Statement by the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in Sudan, Luca Renda](#); UN (2026) [Attack on Aid Trucks Transporting Food in North Kordofan](#)

⁴⁴ OCHA Financial Tracking System (FTS) [data as of 16th March 2026](#).

⁴⁵ NRC (September 2024) [If Bullets Miss, Hunger Won’t: Beyond the Numbers: Hunger and Conflict in Sudan](#)

Coordinated programmes that combine cash assistance with support for local markets – such as grants for small businesses – are helping to stabilise market supply and demand. These market-smart and conflict-sensitive interventions are grounded in rigorous context analysis and “do no harm” approaches. They support traders by providing liquidity, warehousing and risk-sharing arrangements, while linking cash transfers to trader networks and representative organisations.

In some cases, agencies have leveraged pre-war resilience programming to secure integrated humanitarian and early recovery funding. These programmes combine emergency cash, agricultural input support, business grants and community-based conflict resolution in South Kordofan, North Darfur and other areas. Within the field of emergency agricultural aid, evidence suggests that inputs alone (seeds and fertilisers) are often insufficient in insecure contexts; they are more effective when paired with practical support such as skills training, access to finance, improved market access and targeted harvest/post-harvest assistance – especially for women – to reduce losses and strengthen resilience.

Various NGOs report establishing Farmer Field and Business Schools, Village Savings and Loan Associations and women farmers’ groups. They have reached tens of thousands of women across East Darfur, South Darfur and South Kordofan, supporting climate-smart farming skills, post-harvest practices, savings/loans access and stronger market linkages. These interventions are showing promise, though they remain limited in scale and geographic reach. Operational actors report both the capacity and willingness to expand these models if more flexible, multi-year funding and stronger strategic backing become available.



Photo: Ahmed Ahmed / NRC

RESTORING THE PATH OF FOOD: RECOMMENDATIONS

To restore the path of food, address ongoing famine and reduce the risk of famine expansion in North Darfur and South Kordofan, parties to the conflict must urgently stop all conduct that drives conflict-induced hunger, restricts civilians' access to food or undermines food systems and markets. The aid response should shift away from short-term, fragmented measures to system-wide action that tackles the political economy of hunger, protects markets and communities as lifelines, and backs locally led solutions. In practice, this means pairing immediate life-saving support with measures that restore production, keep food moving and protect safe access to food.

PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

- **Fulfil obligations under IHL and uphold commitments under the Jeddah Declaration, including protecting civilians, civilian objects, and humanitarian personnel and supplies.** Parties to the conflict must not commit – or allow the commission of – further atrocities.
- **End the use of starvation as a weapon of war and stop attacks affecting food systems.** This means lifting all partial sieges and road blockages and ceasing attacks on fields, farms, markets, food warehouses, water systems and community kitchens.
- **Cease all activities that unintentionally or indirectly exacerbate conflict-induced hunger.** Military and security operations should actively consider likely impacts on civilians, civilian assets and food insecurity. The IHL obligations of distinction, proportionality and precautions must be applied when planning and conducting all operations.
- **Facilitate full, rapid, safe, predictable and unhindered humanitarian access.** Parties to the conflict must secure and respect cross-line and cross-border humanitarian access, as well as ending threats, attacks, harassment and arbitrary detention of local responders, including ERRs, women's groups and farmer associations.
- **Keep markets functioning and protect civilians' access to food.** Armed personnel should be barred from markets, illegal checkpoints should be dismantled, and extortion and predatory taxation targeting traders and transporters should be investigated and sanctioned.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS (UN, INGOs, NNGOs)

- **Increase the power and resources available to local responders.** In this, partnership, accompaniment and predictable support for Sudanese NGOs, women-led organisations, and mutual aid and community structures should be prioritised. In addition, response plans should be designed around community systems (farmer cooperatives, producer groups and women-

led networks), rather than replacing them. Where administrative restrictions prevent direct engagement with local responders, humanitarian actors should jointly pursue coordinated advocacy to remove these constraints.

- **Adopt a cash-first approach where markets are functional while actively supporting the supply of essential goods.** Humanitarian actors should use cash and voucher assistance, including group cash transfers, as the first option. This can be paired with local market support (e.g. liquidity, grants, transport and warehousing support) for micro, small and medium-sized traders and agribusinesses, helping to ensure the availability and affordability of essential goods. Where in-kind support is necessary, organisations should procure locally where feasible, including from women smallholders and local producers to strengthen local markets.
- **Ensure that all interventions across the farm-to-table chain centre gender equality and the protection of women and girls.** This should include a substantial increase of integrated protection activities for all at-risk groups, alongside gender-based violence prevention, mitigation and response. Actors should aim to meet the needs of different vulnerable groups, especially those with multiple vulnerabilities, throughout all sectoral interventions.
- **Integrate climate-smart actions into emergency programming.** This may involve sourcing drought-tolerant seed varieties, implementing water harvesting and using climate-informed planting calendars alongside delivering emergency cash and agricultural support.
- **Strengthen multi-sectoral coordination and famine prevention in hotspots.** Humanitarian actors can use IPC analysis, HNRP data and complementary tools to develop explicit, costed prevention and multi-sectoral response plans for high-risk areas, with clear roles, scale-up triggers and accountability.

MEMBER STATES AND POLITICAL ACTORS

- **Leverage diplomatic pressure to influence the behaviour of conflict parties and prevent further atrocities.** It is crucial that players on the international stage systematically condemn IHL violations and demand full compliance with IHL obligations and commitments made within the Jeddah Declaration. This should be paired with concrete actions and political consequences against perpetrators, without further harming civilians or hindering humanitarian assistance.
- **Strengthen accountability by supporting international mechanisms to investigate, report on and prosecute violations of IHL.** This should include full support for the work of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan, as well as strong advocacy for the implementation of its recommendations.
- **Ensure conflict-induced hunger is treated as a core protection issue.** Member states and political actors must insist that conflict-induced hunger and the conduct driving it are regularly brought to the UN Security Council, in line with Resolution 2417, and that civil society perspectives are systematically included in relevant briefings and processes.

DONORS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- **Fund system-wide, multi-year approaches that connect life-saving aid to recovery and resilience.** This may involve creating multi-donor funding windows that finance integrated humanitarian action, agriculture and livestock support, economic recovery, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, protection, peacebuilding, and climate adaptation.
- **Increase funding volume and quality going as directly as possible to diverse national and local actors.** Donors must also deliver on their risk sharing commitments in Sudan, lightening due diligence processes and compliance requirements for local actors, simplifying funding application, reporting and management requirements, funding security and duty of care to ensure safe last mile delivery.
- **Prioritise locally led solutions that meet the needs of people from all backgrounds, even within limited funding envelopes.** Given women's essential roles in Sudan's food system, donors should increase investment in programmes that intentionally target women and girls, elevate women's and communities' leadership in design and decision-making, support women-led models, and promote approaches that shift harmful norms.

Photo: CARE Sudan 2026

