

Advocacy Note: The Strategic Imperative of Emergency Agricultural Support in Sudan (2026-2028)

1. Introduction

The humanitarian crisis in Sudan has reached a critical threshold, with over 28.9 million people facing acute food insecurity and 10.2 million experiencing severe or extreme food insecurity (Severity Levels 4 and 5) conditions as of early 2026, according to food security and livelihood assessments. While agriculture remains central to the national economy, accounting for an estimated 25% of GDP and employing around 65% of the population, these figures mask a severe breakdown at the household level. Widespread displacement, conflict-related disruptions, loss of inputs, and the fragmentation of local markets have all undermined smallholder production and people's ability to access food, even where agricultural value continues to be generated in segments of the sector^{1 2 3}. The urgency of the situation is underscored by a sharp reduction in planted crops, despite the sector's potential: in 2025, a USD 17 million investment in seeds successfully contributed to 22.2% of national sorghum production⁴. Despite this proven impact, a significant funding shortfall for 2026, combined with years of consecutive interruptions, threatens to dismantle local production entirely. Conflict-affected communities consistently prioritize agricultural support alongside food aid, viewing self-sufficiency as essential to their dignity and long-term recovery⁵. Given that seeds, tools, and livestock serve as lifelines for millions of the affected population, provision and restoring access to these inputs is vital to saving lives and stabilizing supply chains⁶. Consequently, this advocacy note justifies an immediate, multi-sectoral scale-up of agricultural support to revitalize lifesaving local production, protecting the most vulnerable and reducing their aid dependency. This further calls for complementarity between humanitarian and resilience partners and donors to ensure linkage from relief to resilient and sustainable self-reliance for the most vulnerable.

2. Impact of Conflict on Agriculture: Vulnerable Households and Economy

Disruptions to agricultural production and food supply chains, widespread insecurity and continued humanitarian access challenges have resulted in widespread hunger and malnutrition, with some parts of South Kordofan, North Kordofan and North Darfur, facing the risk of catastrophic levels of food insecurity^{7 8}. Most farmers in Darfur and Kordofan states attributed their agricultural productivity decline to the conflict, from destruction of crops and loss of farming equipment, to increase cost of agricultural inputs and market disruptions^{9 10}. Limited access to agricultural inputs represents a critical gap repeatedly highlighted by communities, even when they have access to land and are willing to engage in agricultural production¹¹.

The Breadbasket Collapse: Al Jazirah, which formerly producing 50% of Sudan's wheat, among other major food producing regions faces a near-total cessation of operations¹². The disruption of these irrigated systems due to conflict has triggered a nationwide cereal deficit¹³.

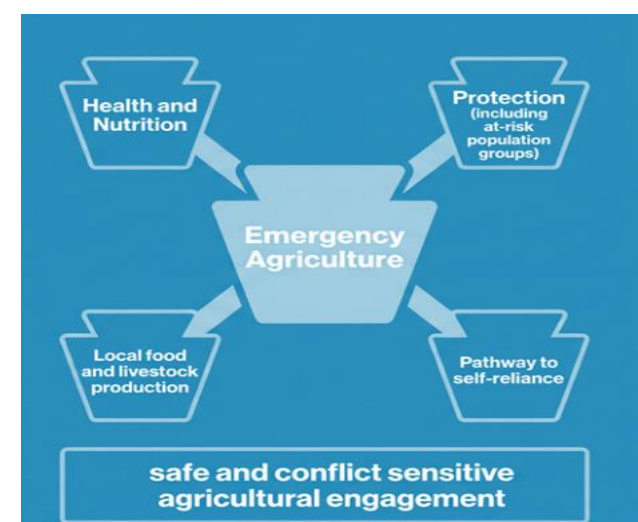
Disrupted Agrifood micro, small and medium enterprises: Agrifood micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) form the "hidden middle" of Sudan's agrifood system, linking farmers to markets through processing, trade and logistics. Conflict has severely disrupted these enterprises; over half have relocated and fewer than one in five operate at full capacity¹⁴. Their relocation or closure has several severe impacts on the recovery and future of Sudan's agriculture.

Gendered Vulnerabilities, Women, and other at-risk populations: The conflict in Sudan has precipitated one of the world's most severe food insecurity crises, disproportionately devastating the lives and livelihoods of women and girls¹⁵. A GiHA WG 2025 snapshot found that 75% of women-headed households in Sudan are food insecure, and nearly half report poor food

consumption, almost double the rate from the year before. Women-headed households are three times more likely to be food insecure than those led by men. The conflict has also impacted women's role in agriculture. Before the war, women accounted for more than 85% of farmers practicing rainfed agriculture across greater Darfur and Kordofan. A CARE 2025 study confirms women are taking on expanded roles in cultivating, harvesting and marketing crops during conflict. But the conflict compounds the structural barriers they face: insecure land tenure, lack of land ownership, limited access to agricultural inputs, knowledge and financial services, and exclusion from leadership and decision-making. Women's presence in agriculture has increased as men migrate to find income or are unwilling to engage outside the home due to fear of persecution or association with armed groups. In the same study, insecurity was noted as a particular challenge for farmers, disrupting livelihoods¹⁶. This breakdown of food systems is particularly acute in conflict hotspots like Darfur and Kordofan, where women face heightened risks of exploitation and displacement. National data underscores the severity of this deepening inequality, indicating that 73.7 percent of women do not meet minimum dietary diversity, consuming fewer than five food groups, which signals dangerously poor diet quality and severely endangers maternal and child health¹⁷. Older people and people with disabilities suffer disproportionately from severe food insecurity as physical and systemic barriers exclude them from both labor-intensive livelihoods and essential humanitarian aid, requiring inclusive agricultural inputs such as adapted tools, Inclusive agricultural inputs such as adapted tools.

Major disruption in livestock sector: Based on the figures provided by the Central Bank of Sudan, export related to livestock (live animals, meat, hides & skins) for the period January – September 2025 was about 293 million USD, with a drastic reduction of 47 and 45 percent compared to 2022, the last year before the war, and to the previous year, respectively.¹⁸ This further negatively compounds weakened resilience of the most conflict affected areas who significantly rely on livestock.

Multisectoral Benefits of Emergency Agriculture in Humanitarian Contexts



Source: Sudan Food Security & Livelihoods Cluster Desk Review Analysis (2026).

3. The Cost of Inaction: Systemic Collapse in Agriculture and Protection Failures

Emergency agriculture must be recognized and funded not merely as a food security intervention but as a multi-sectoral platform that simultaneously delivers outcomes across nutrition, health, protection, inclusion, and accountability” AAP & CE Working Group Sudan (2025).

A lack of financial support for agricultural interventions threatens the stability of Sudan's food system and risks causing long-term structural damage and lead to a further increase of the humanitarian caseload.

¹ 2025 FAO annual Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Sudan February 2026

² [What it Takes to Eat](#), ACF, CARE, IRC, Mercy Corps, NRC

³ FAO Sudan Emergency and Resilience Plan 2026–2028

⁴ [Livelihoods in Sudan Amid Armed Conflict | United Nations Development Programme](#)

⁵ Narrative Analysis: Emergency Agriculture and Livelihoods in Sudan – Accountability to Affected Population & Community Engagement Working Group South Sudan (AAP & CE WG) - 2025

⁶ [Famine conditions confirmed in Sudan's Al Fasher and Kadugli but hunger and malnutrition ease where conflict subsidies](#)

⁷ [phsa-sudan-conflict-and-complex-emergency.pdf](#)

⁸ Sudan Key Message Update (March -September 2026) - FEWSNET

⁹ [CARE Sudan \(April 2026\). Conflict, Agriculture, and Women in Sudan: Research Brief.](#)

¹⁰ 2025 FAO annual Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Sudan February 2026

¹¹ Narrative Analysis: Emergency Agriculture and Livelihoods in Sudan – Accountability to Affected Population & Community Engagement Working Group South Sudan (AAP & CE WG) - 2025

¹² [rebuilding-the-breadbasket-advocacy-brief.pdf](#)

¹³ One Conflict, Four Crises: Sudan's Humanitarian Landscape After Three Years of War

¹⁴ Investment pathways for recovery of Sudan's agrifood micro, small and medium enterprises – FAO (2026).

¹⁵ Sudan: Women, Food Insecurity, and Famine Risk in Sudan Gender Snapshot – GiHA (2025)

¹⁶ [Gender alert: 'Last and least': Gender dimensions of food insecurity in Sudan | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

¹⁷ [gender-alert-last-and-least-gender-dimensions-of-food-insecurity-in-sudan-en.pdf](#)

¹⁸ 2025 FAO annual Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Sudan February 2026

Growing Dependence on Humanitarian Aid

Increased Food Prices & Humanitarian Costs

The failure to support local agricultural production is driving a dangerous reliance on emergency food assistance and imported food, which significantly increases food prices and the overall cost of humanitarian assistance across Sudan¹⁹. Current data reveals a worsening production deficit, with cereal production for the 2025/26 season already 22% below 2024 levels and 25% below the pre-war five-year average²⁰. While community feedback indicates that humanitarian assistance alone is insufficient, with 79.8% of recipients reporting that it does not cover their basic needs²¹, investing in agricultural and market support offers a cost-effective complementary solution for improving household food availability where possible. For example, FAO Sudan (2025) analysis demonstrates that every USD 1 invested in sorghum seeds yields USD 29 worth of produce. Neglecting local agriculture production not only exacerbates price spikes for the most vulnerable but also creates critical nutritional gaps, as it fails to provide the fresh milk and vegetables essential for child survival in rural areas and conflict hotspots.

Depletion of Livestock Assets and Sector Collapse

The livestock sector, with an estimated 115.4 million heads of cattle, sheep, goats, and camels, serves as a crucial role to rural livelihoods, national export revenues, and essential nutrition for Sudan's most vulnerable populations²². Given that the highest concentrations of livestock are located within the highly conflict-affected Darfur, Kordofan, and Central regions, protecting these assets is vital for the survival of conflict-impacted communities. However, since the onset of hostilities, the sector has suffered immense damage, characterized by herd depletion, restricted access to grazing and water, and the systematic collapse of veterinary services and markets. This crisis is exemplified in Central Darfur's Wadi Salih locality, where the breakdown of pastoral livelihoods has left approximately 30,000 people, including IDPs and host families, almost entirely dependent on humanitarian aid²³. A critical factor in this decline is the sharp drop in vaccination coverage, which has led to a significant increase in disease incidence²⁴. Restoring these vaccinations is essential not only to prevent zoonotic diseases. The erosion of livestock assets directly reduces access to milk, meat and income, undermining dietary diversity and increasing food insecurity risks. In the context of rising acute malnutrition projections, weakened livestock systems further constrain access to nutrient-dense food. Without immediate emergency support in the form of vaccines, feed, and water, the continued deterioration of animal health will cause further herd losses, severely impacting the food security and nutritional status of the conflict-affected communities including children and pregnant and lactating women, and the wider economy.

Deteriorated Food Consumption and Poor Dietary Diversity

The March 2026 FAO post-harvest assessments reveal that despite the ongoing conflict and constraints, a significant majority of households rely primarily on their own production and market purchases for food, underscoring the vital role of local agriculture. However, in conflict-affected regions including Kassala, Blue Nile, Central Darfur, Sennar, and South Darfur, food security has reached a critical tipping point, with over half of all households suffering from poor Dietary Diversity Scores (HDDS)²⁵. Without immediate diversified support for this constrained agricultural sector, particularly for the most vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and pregnant and lactating women (PLW), there is a grave risk of a further collapse in food consumption and a surge in Severe Acute Malnutrition. This nutritional deterioration carries devastating long-term implications for health, well-being, and social stability.

Compounded Protection Risks

Female-headed households being three times more likely to face food insecurity than those headed by men²⁶. When these agricultural systems fail, the resulting displacement and insecurity exacerbate vulnerabilities, forcing women and girls to travel further for food and fuel and placing them at a heightened risk of sexual violence. As livelihoods are destroyed and families face starvation, communities are forced into severe negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage, child labor, extortion, and survival sex, directly linked to the collapse of the food system²⁷. To mitigate these protection risks and the exposure to violence caused by economic stress, emergency

agriculture serves as a critical intervention; by enabling safe, localized production activities such as home gardens, small-scale poultry, and short-term crops, it provides families with a way to sustain livelihoods while reducing the desperate reliance on harmful coping strategies.

Risk of Relapse of Catastrophic Food Insecurity and Missed Future Opportunities:

Risk of relapses of catastrophic food insecurity levels

While joint efforts across emergency agriculture, food assistance, and cross-sectoral support have successfully averted even more extreme levels of catastrophic food insecurity, the risk of a relapse remains dangerously high. Without a significant increase in emergency agricultural support, which serves as a primary source of both food consumption and dietary diversity, the gains made in improving nutrition and food security among the most vulnerable populations, including those trapped in conflict hot spots, will be lost²⁸.

Short-term funding hinders long-term self-reliance

The current humanitarian funding model remains heavily skewed toward short-term, inadvertently neglecting the agricultural and market support necessary to foster long-term self-reliance and reduce future dependency²⁹. Hence, a more developmental relief approach is encouraged - one that integrates emergency response with rehabilitation, and long-term development to support communities with dignity while ensuring resilience.

Food Security in Protracted Crisis Situations: Comparison of Concepts

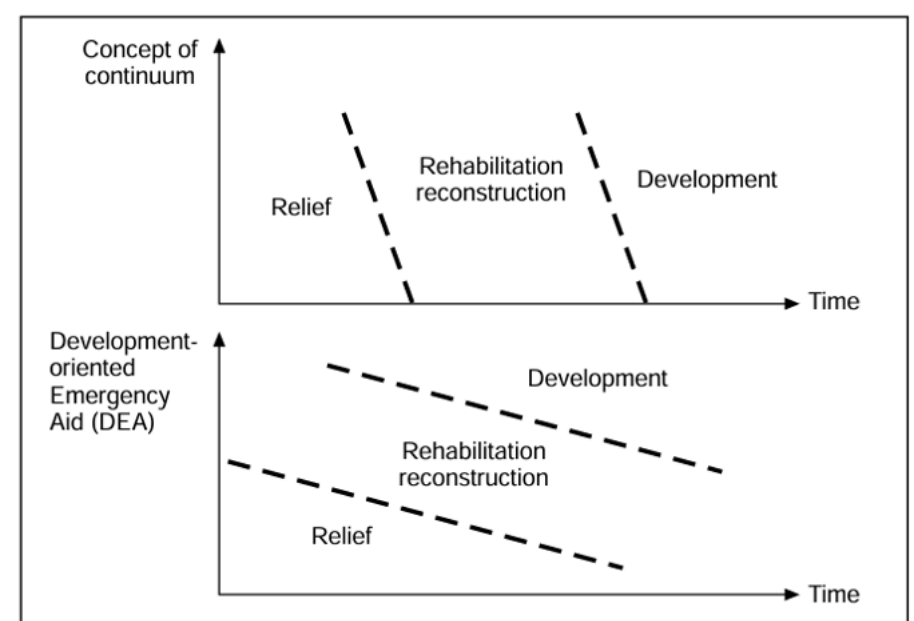


Figure 1: Comparison of Concepts

Source: Korf (2002), *Beyond Relief*.

Improved security and the restoration of basic services have become the most consistent drivers of return across states such as Al-Jazeera, White Nile, Blue Nile, River Nile, Red Sea, Sennar, and Khartoum including in areas where Internally Displaced People (IDPs) voluntarily returned specifically to resume farming activities³⁰. To capitalize on these emerging opportunities for stability, investment must shift toward safe rural agricultural sectors.

4. Enabling safe and conflict sensitive agricultural engagement

Below is a framework of mitigating measures for the potential multifaceted risks while investing in emergency agriculture in Sudan. This framework balances the urgent need for production by the most vulnerable households with a "Do No Harm" approach, ensuring that emergency agricultural support is both accessible and safe for the affected populations, including the returnees.

Explosive Hazards and Agricultural Access

Explosive hazards, such as landmines and unexploded ordinance, represent a critical yet overlooked barrier to agricultural recovery, especially in the conflict hotspot areas by physically obstructing access to vital resources like farmland, irrigation, and transport routes, implying a missed crucial opportunity for

¹⁹ Siddig, K., et al. (2026), War and Resilience: The Multifaceted Impacts of Sudan's Conflict, IFPRI

²⁰ 2025 FAO annual Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Sudan February 2026

²¹ HNRP Analysis for Agriculture – AAP & CE (2025).

²² The Sudan Food crisis: priority actions Urgent call for assistance – FAO 2026

²³ Narrative Analysis: Emergency Agriculture and Livelihoods in Sudan – Accountability to Affected Population & Community Engagement Working Group South Sudan (AAP & CE WG) - 2025

²⁴ The Sudan Food crisis: priority actions Urgent call for assistance – FAO 2026

²⁵ Emergency & Resilience Programme Seeds Impact Assessment Post Harvest Assessment – FAO 2026

²⁶ Sudan: Women, Food Insecurity, and Famine Risk in Sudan, Gender Snapshot (21 July 2025) - Sudan | ReliefWeb

²⁷ gender-alert-last-and-least-gender-dimensions-of-food-insecurity-in-sudan-en.pdf

²⁸ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment in Sudan, Central Darfur State, Zalingei and Nertiti Localities – NCA (2025).

²⁹ What it Takes to Eat

³⁰ Agricultural land access and peri-urban pressures – NRC (2026)

increasing agricultural production³¹. To enable sustainable food systems and safe resettlement, it is essential to integrate Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) with large-scale survey and clearance efforts, ensuring that agricultural investments are both accessible and lifesaving rather than hazardous.

Conflict, access to agricultural land, and risk of diversion of assistance

There is significant improvement in access to agricultural land in several states such as Gedaref, Sennar, River Nile and the Northern States, with resumption of agricultural activities in Al Jazirah. However, in the conflict hotspots, especially in the areas of Darfur and Kordofan, protection risk analysis and community feedback will guide response activities that will be considered safe according to community feedback. With the appropriate modalities of transfer and household targeting after a feasibility study and protection analysis for emergency agriculture activities, the risk of “predatory taxation”, diversion of assistance and “fueling of the war economy” is also very limited to non-existent, given that majority of emergency agriculture products are largely for household level consumption, and not commercial purpose. Evidence from analysis also shows that meeting the household consumption needs through increased local agriculture production alone does not ensure sustainable self-reliance for the most vulnerable households, hence the need for resilience donors to support the most vulnerable households especially women headed households to access complementary services including financial services and trainings to ensure livelihoods diversification and income generation.

Potential land wrangles on return

In practice, returns are expected to continue including in the former conflict hotspots, given that many households appear to return not because recovery has been secured, but because security has improved enough and displacement has become too difficult or expensive to sustain³². Local committees, such as Agricultural Committees, are responsible for mediating disputes between heirs or claimants, before resolving to formal courts, but these processes are slow and often insufficient for urgent displacement needs³³. Given the significant role of women, yet facing structural barriers especially in accessing land, relevant local agricultural committees should be supported to address the access challenges that women face.

Further risk mitigation/Do No Harm

Particularly in the current conflict hotspots, participatory consultations with the affected communities to set clear conditions including key design steps and delivery modalities that should be considered for the respective type of emergency agriculture support that is proposed for each category of the community, to ensure conflict-sensitivity measures.

5. Recommendations for Stakeholders

Without adequate agricultural support, food security interventions remain palliative rather than transformative – AAP & CE Working Group Sudan (2025).

For Donors and Financial Institutions

- **Key ask:** With the current funding status, only about a million people will be reached with crop assistance this season, leaving about 10 million people targeted without the much-needed crop assistance (92% gap). **The FSL Cluster partners urgently require about 117 million USD to reach an additional 6.3 million people hyper-prioritized** this agricultural season.
- **Fund system-wide, multi-year approaches that connect life-saving aid to recovery and resilience:** This involves creating multi-donor funding windows that finance integrated humanitarian action including emergency agriculture and livestock support in collaboration with other relevant and safe resilience building activities.
- **Multi-Year Commitment:** Shift to 12–24-month funding cycles to match agricultural seasons
- **Localize Funding:** Increase direct support to national and local partners including women-led and PWD-focused organizations that maintain the inclusive last-mile delivery of inputs.

For Humanitarian and Development Partners

- **Ensure inclusive targeting:** Participatory inclusion of women-led households while meeting specific needs for different women (ex. GBV

survivors, PLW, older/young women, youths, etc.). Targeting special groups such as Persons with Disabilities will improve efficiency in the response. This may be enhanced by partnerships with Women-Led Organizations and, organizations with a focus on PWDs and older people associations while ensuring adapted agricultural packages (tools, seed quantities, livestock types) to differing functional capacities and care responsibilities

- **Strengthen protection referral mechanisms:** Food security and agriculture partners should strengthen referral mechanisms that carefully include protection and GBV cases requiring emergency agriculture and livelihoods support.
- **Agriculture – Nutrition – Health Integration:** Ensure emergency agriculture programs prioritize households with poor dietary diversity, SAM cases, to prevent relapse and secondary infections. The FSL cluster should ensure the cluster operational response tools such as response packages contribute to inclusive and cross-sectoral impacts.
- **Decentralized Support:** Strengthen local farmer associations to manage irrigation, seed multiplication and livestock support.
- **Prioritize Agricultural Demining:** Coordinate with mine action actors to clear high-potential farmland such as in Al Jazirah and Darfur among the several others for both commercial farmers and the vulnerable households.

For Government and Local Authorities

- **Safe Passage/Movements:** Ensure safe trade routes for agricultural inputs
- **Facilitate Access:** Fast-track HAC permits to allow timely monitoring and food security response

6. Conclusion

The window for the 2026 planting season is closing in June. Agriculture remains the most cost-effective, dignified and sustainable pathway to prevent extreme levels of food insecurity, while mitigating malnutrition, protection and health risks, especially for the most vulnerable households. Donors and cluster leaders and partners should allocate resources commensurate with this multi-sectoral impact that agriculture brings³⁴. Emergency Agriculture in combination with food assistance is lifesaving and provides a foundation for recovery and rebuilding Sudan's food systems for the future.

Contacts

Leslie Parker ODONGKARA Co-Coordinator Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster - Port Sudan, Sudan Email: Leslie.odongkara@fao.org Telephone: +249900908910	Joseph Chalhoub Co-coordinator Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster – Port Sudan, Sudan Email: joseph.chalhoub@wfp.org Telephone: +9613152862
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³¹ HNRP Analysis for Agriculture – AAP & CE (2025).

³² Norwegian Refugee Council. (2026). Agricultural Land Access and Peri-Urban Pressures

³³ Norwegian Refugee Council. (2026). Agricultural Land Access and Peri-Urban Pressures

³⁴ HNRP Analysis for Agriculture – AAP & CE (2025).

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