

Women's Role in Agriculture in Sudan &

The Gendered Impact of Food Insecurity

Presented by the Co-chairs of
the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA
WG)

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Gendered Dimensions of Food Insecurity in Sudan



Pre-existing inequalities – where **women already ate last and least**, have been sharply exacerbated.



Women-headed households (WHH) are disproportionately concentrated in **conflict-affected Darfur states**.

This intensifies their vulnerability and limits their access to resources and services.



women and girls in need



Most women in Sudan work in the **agricultural sector**.

With agriculture collapsing and markets decimated, women's already **fragile livelihoods** have been largely erased.



Women and girls face greater barriers to food, income and protection, deepening vulnerability and undermining resilience for households and communities.

Women's Central Role in Agriculture

Women are central to Sudan's food systems despite structural inequalities.

BEFORE THE CONFLICT



Women represent more than **85%** of rainfed and subsistence farming across Darfur and Kordofan states.



Limited land rights, lack of land ownership, limited access to agricultural inputs, knowledge and financial services, and exclusion from leadership and decision-making roles.



Many produce food on small/marginal land or through informal labour.



DURING THE CONFLICT



Women's role in agriculture has **increased** as men migrate, are displaced or are unable or unwilling to engage due to fear.



Inflation disproportionately harms women farmers, who have the least control over income and assets.

Conflict & the Erosion of Women's Agricultural Livelihoods



Women's agricultural **productivity, processing and storing** is disproportionately affected by conflict:



Financial stress from lack of resources and high input costs limits women's ability to farm.



Women lose access to larger land plots (6+ feddan) at higher rates than men during conflict.

“ We used to rely on community labor during harvest, but now many have left or are too afraid to come. No buyers are reaching us, and we can't carry the vegetables ourselves due to insecurity ”

- Woman FGD Respondent, South Kordofan

Source: CARE, Conflict, Agriculture, and Women in Sudan, September 2025



Women's **access to markets and consumption** in the household is largely affected by conflict:



Fuel shortages, insecurity on roads, damaged infrastructure and unpredictable prices disrupt women's access to markets.



Women's food consumption is more severely affected, leaving them with fewer options to cope.

Women and Girls are Disproportionately Impacted by Hunger



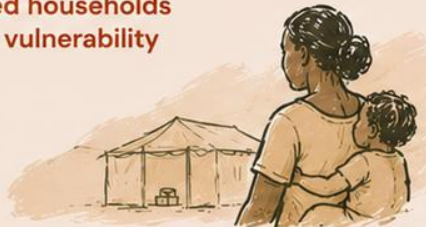
Pre-existing unequal access to food and reduced dietary diversity are exacerbated



Women and girls face different intersecting vulnerabilities



Women-headed households face particular vulnerability



Protection gaps to access distributions for food / agricultural assets



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

– Internally displaced woman, South Kordofan

Source: ACF, CARE, IRC, MC, NRC, What it takes to eat, April 2026

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Food Insecurity Increases Protection Risks



Higher exposure to sexual exploitation



Harmful coping mechanisms are on the rise



Adolescent girls are hit hardest



Violence deepens vulnerability



Psychological distress is widespread



Food and livelihoods programming can **contribute to reducing protection risks** if they are protection-sensitive and complemented by targeted protection measures.



Gender-Responsive Food Security Programming



Gender-responsive programming is essential to ensure that food security and livelihoods interventions are effective, equitable, and do not cause harm. In crisis contexts, gender roles and vulnerabilities shift significantly, requiring deliberate and evidence-based approaches.

KEY APPROACHES



Gender analysis



Gender, age, disability disaggregated data



Women's participation across the programming cycle



Dual approach of gender mainstreaming and targeted gender measures

Gender-Responsive Livelihoods Programming Models



- Gender-responsive cash-first response



- Emergency agricultural support to provide seeds and tools



- Skills training targeting women farmers
(Farmer Field and Business Schools)



- Women's financial inclusion
(Village Saving and Lending Associations)



- Community engagement to address harmful social norms



- Women farmer groups to increase safety and bargaining power



The importance of WLOs and Community Groups in FSL Programming



Women-led organizations (WLOs), from national NGOs to small grassroots groups, continue to deliver life-saving assistance, including where international actors have limited presence.

Women-led responses are essential because they:



have the local knowledge and networks



Have access in hard-to-reach areas



Ensure gender-responsive distribution and GBV/PSEA safeguards

However, they continue to face significant challenges:



Insufficient funding



Exacerbated security risks



Registration barriers

Recommendations for Humanitarian Partners



1

Recognise gender responsive agriculture and livelihoods support as an essential component of lifesaving assistance. Without such support provided to farmers and agribusinesses, provided alongside humanitarian assistance, food and nutrition insecurity will continue to deepen.



2

Scale-up and frontload quality funding to facilitate multi-sectoral operational scale-up where food insecurity is most severe and humanitarian actors have access.



3

Ensure this funding reaches local responders such as mutual aid groups (MAGs) and women-led organizations (WLOs) as directly as possible given their critical roles as first responders.



4

Strengthen donor coordination to ensure complementarity of interventions in the same geographic areas between humanitarian, resilience-building and peace interventions, aiming at reducing aid dependency and gender inequalities.



Recommendations for Gender-Responsive Programming Design and Delivery



1

Ensure that all FSL interventions mainstream protection, gender and integrate protection outcomes.

That should include for example targeting female headed households as a priority, and provide recovery support to GBV and CRSV survivors. Use participatory and safe distribution approaches.



2

Fund women-led solutions addressing financial inequality,

including expansion of VSLAs and strengthened linkages with formal financial institution where existing.



3

Restrict in-kind assistance to localities where markets have fully collapsed or cash is not feasible; ensure all cash assistance interventions are gender-responsive.



4

Increase financial support to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) led by women, focused on business restoration and capacity building, to boost local markets.



5

Integrate social norms analysis into programme design and implementation

to address social norms and structural barriers that women are facing, and enabling adaptive programming measures accordingly.

References and Contact

- GiHA WG, Gender Snapshot on Women, Food Insecurity, and Famine Risk in Sudan, July 2025
- CARE, Research Brief on Conflict, Agriculture, and Women in Sudan, September 2025
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- UN Women, Gender Alert "Last and least": Gender dimensions of food insecurity in Sudan, November 2025
- ACF, CARE, IRC, MC, NRC, Report "What it takes to eat", April 2026

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