



NAVIGATING SUDAN'S CONFLICT:

Research Insights and Policy Implications

Proceedings of a conference

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ABSTRACT

This report synthesizes the key discussions and outcomes of the “Navigating Sudan’s Conflict: Research Insights and Policy Implications” conference, held on March 5, 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya. Convening a diverse group of experts in research, development, and humanitarian efforts, the conference aimed to explore actionable solutions for the socioeconomic challenges triggered by Sudan’s ongoing conflict. Participants at the conference delved into the conflict’s adverse impacts on agriculture, markets, employment, and food security, as well as its wider regional impacts. Notably, the conference findings underscore the urgent need for supporting smallholder farmers, stabilizing markets, generating employment opportunities, and enhancing agricultural productivity within a comprehensive recovery strategy. Furthermore, conference participants stressed the importance of innovative data gathering, collaborative policy formulation, international support, and coordination to ensure effective interventions. This report succinctly presents the interventions discussed in the conference’s research and panel discussion sessions, particularly the pivotal insights offered in each to guide policy that will build peace, strengthen resilience, and relaunch and accelerate human and economic development efforts in Sudan.

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1 BACKGROUND

The conflict in Sudan between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces erupted in April 2023 and continues to date, posing a catastrophe for the Sudanese population. The conflict has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. Over the ten months of fighting through late February 2024, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported almost 13,900 fatalities across Sudan (ACLED 2024). The Sudan Federal Ministry of Health recorded 27,700 injuries in the nine months of conflict through late January 2024. By March 2024, the conflict had resulted in the displacement of over 8.3 million people, of whom 1.7 million sought refuge in neighboring countries (OCHA 2024). The violence, initially concentrated in Khartoum and Darfur, subsequently extended to the central and eastern parts of Sudan, areas previously deemed as safe havens. This expansion in the conflict has resulted in more people being displaced, and their humanitarian needs have placed additional pressure on the already strained resources of the states in eastern Sudan.

Historically, conflict has exacerbated food insecurity in Sudan. In the first quarter of 2023, 34 percent of the population, over 16.2 million people, faced food insecurity (WFP 2023). By early 2024, 37 percent of the population, 17.7 million people, were experiencing acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 or above) due to the conflict and associated economic downturn (OCHA 2024).

This deterioration in the socioeconomic situation underscores the critical need to strengthen Sudan’s economic resilience, protect vulnerable communities, and build a more inclusive society and economy. In response to this crisis, the International Food Policy Research

Institute (IFPRI), through its Sudan Strategy Support Program (SSSP), has offered critical knowledge and program recommendations to both development and humanitarian agencies. IFPRI researchers have provided a broad spectrum of conflict-related studies on Sudan (Guo 2023, Kirui et al. 2023a, Kirui et al. 2023b, Abushama et al. 2023a, Siddig et al. 2023, Abushama et al. 2023b). This research has employed a range of methodologies to comprehensively assess the challenges Sudan faces around food insecurity, poverty, agro-processing, forced migration, and the overall sustainability of the livelihoods of the Sudanese populace and how to address and overcome those challenges.

In parallel, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has focused on multisectoral early recovery efforts, emphasizing community cohesion and re-establishing social contracts within local governance structures. A key collaborative activity of IFPRI and UNDP has been to undertake extensive analyses of the socioeconomic impact of the conflict in Sudan. To provide insights into poverty, food security, livelihood strategies, and the role of social protection mechanisms in mitigating the shocks caused by the conflict, these assessments involved both quantitative analyses of surveys done with households in both rural and urban settings and with micro, small, and medium enterprises and economy-wide analyses using detailed models of the Sudanese economy.

2 CONFERENCE ON NAVIGATING SUDAN'S CONFLICT

In an effort to disseminate more broadly the results of these analyses of the socioeconomic impact of the conflict in Sudan, a one-day conference entitled “Navigating Sudan’s Conflict” was held on March 5, 2024, at the Trademark Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, with some participants also connecting online. The conference was jointly organized by IFPRI, UNDP, and the World Food Programme (WFP) with the active engagement and support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The conference program was designed so that its content could serve as an important input to strategic efforts to build peace, strengthen resilience, and relaunch and accelerate human and economic development efforts in Sudan.

The conference was designed to achieve several key objectives:

- ▶ Present critical findings and solicit feedback on current research and analyses,
- ▶ Identify actionable intervention points for immediate, short, and medium-term solutions in Sudan,
- ▶ Facilitate evidence-based discussions to advance policy dialogue while also using those discussions to identify analytical gaps that must be quickly filled, and
- ▶ Explore opportunities for collaboration among various stakeholders to cultivate partnerships and encourage collective action.

The event featured a mix of plenary sessions, panel discussions, and research presentations simultaneously in English and Arabic, ensuring broad participation. The diversity in conference participants, including private sector representatives, international organizations, civil society organizations, researchers, and other key stakeholders, enabled the conference to provide a collaborative platform for better understanding and addressing Sudan’s challenges in all their breadth, thereby laying the foundation for recovery and sustainable

development in the aftermath of the conflict. The collaborative environment fostered comprehensive discourse to explore viable strategies for addressing the complex and multifaceted consequences of the conflict. Through comprehensive understanding, strategic evaluation, and collaborative discourse, the conference laid the groundwork for mitigating the conflict’s impacts, fostering resilience, and paving the way for sustainable development.

The conference was opened with speeches by representatives of some of the conference organizers—Paul Dorosh, the Director of the Development Strategy and Governance Unit of IFPRI; Thair Shraideh, the Sudan Country Resident Representative of UNDP; and Loren Stoddard, the acting Mission Director for USAID Sudan. All three stressed the urgent need to build resilience in response to the conflict’s detrimental effects on livelihoods, food security, and economic development.

Khalid Siddig, leader of IFPRI’s SSSP, then provided an overview of the current situation in Sudan. He highlighted the vital role of research in guiding and driving timely, strategic, and effective interventions to overcome the many conflict-related humanitarian and development challenges facing the country. He pointed out SSSP’s leading role in data collection and analysis since the conflict’s onset, bridging the gap between research and on-the-ground humanitarian and development actions.

Figure 1. Some of the conference participants



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

The conference was organized around two main session types, research sessions and panel discussions, with each session type comprising of three sub-sessions.

2.1 Research Sessions

2.1.1 Implications of the conflict from micro to macro levels

The first research session aimed to unravel the complex effects of the conflict on Sudan’s society and economy. It featured three presentations that examined the conflict’s drivers and impacts.

The first presentation by Hala Abushama, a Research Assistant at IFPRI, provided a detailed examination of the drivers and impacts of Sudan’s conflict, employing both micro and macro-level analyses. It shed light on the conflict’s political and economic origins, notably the shift in political settlement between 2021 and 2023, which led to competition and disrupted public services and commodity markets. The involvement of the Sudan Armed Forces and Rapid

Support Forces in the agrifood system, especially in bulk purchases, imports of inputs, and exports of cash crops, significantly influenced market dynamics and agricultural productivity.

Key findings from surveys among large agrifood processors and smallholder farmers revealed severe disruptions. About 80 percent of surveyed agrifood processors reported experiencing a scarcity of material inputs, with a substantial number of them reporting complete shutdowns or massive infrastructure damage due to the conflict. Among smallholder farmers, 40 percent had not prepared for planting in the summer season, citing lack of funds for inputs or direct impacts of the conflict.

Economic activity and poverty assessments using a multiplier analysis of Sudan’s social accounting matrix (SAM) projected devastating impacts if the conflict continued. These included a 48 percent decline in gross domestic product (GDP) and significant losses across the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors of Sudan’s economy, pushing an additional 1.8 million people into poverty.

The policy recommendations emerging from these studies highlighted the need for multifaceted interventions to alleviate the food security crisis and poverty. These interventions should focus on rebuilding the agrifood system, supporting economic recovery, and enhancing resilience among affected communities. The presentation underscored the importance of targeted efforts to support smallholder farmers and agrifood processors alongside broader economic stabilization measures.

Figure 2. First research session—from left, Leni Kinzli, moderator, and speakers Vito Intini, Fredrik Svensson, and Hala Abushama



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

The second presentation in the first research session was by Vito Intini, the Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Finance team leader and Regional Lead Economist for UNDP. His presentation focused on utilizing satellite imagery and remote sensing to monitor economic activities in Sudan amidst the ongoing conflict. In the absence of conventional data, this innovative approach has been pivotal to bridging critical knowledge gaps in a timely manner during the Sudanese conflict. By leveraging nighttime light (NTL) data from satellites and integrating it with various datasets, including GDP, population, conflict events, food insecurity patterns, and displacement data, the presentation offered a comprehensive view of the economic and social impacts of the conflict.

The empirical analysis showcased the evolution of NTL across Sudan, illustrating the varying impact of the conflict on economic activities. For instance, significant decreases in NTL were observed in Khartoum and Nyala, indicating substantial economic downturns. Conversely, other cities like Atbara and Kassala in the northern and eastern regions of Sudan showed increases in NTL, suggesting an increase in the economic activities in these regions. The presentation also highlighted the limitations of using GDP data for Sudan, pointing to the potential of NTL as a more reliable indicator for economic activity.

Satellite imagery on nitrogen dioxide emissions also provided insights into the spatial distribution of human economic activities in Sudan in the early weeks of the conflict (Guo et al. 2023). Variations in the emissions data offered a new and insightful perspective on the economic fluctuations associated with the breakdown in peace and security in the country.

Dr. Intini underscored the importance of leveraging remotely sensed data for real-time monitoring and analysis of economic activities in conflict-affected regions. Such approaches not only overcome the limitations associated with conventional in-person data collection methods but also provide a reliable basis for formulating targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of the conflict in Sudan on its economy and people.

The final presentation in the first research session was delivered by Fredrik Svensson, Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Officer at WFP, who provided an in-depth analysis of the food security situation in Sudan before and during the conflict. Utilizing pre-conflict data and data from the Sudan 2023 Rural Household Survey, the presentation highlighted the challenges to understanding food insecurity patterns under conditions of political turmoil, macroeconomic crisis, intercommunal violence, and climate-induced shocks. Mr. Svensson drew attention to the dire state of food security even before the conflict, which factors like inflation, subsidy removals, and erratic agricultural production had impaired. The conflict further exacerbated these issues, leading to a significant escalation in food insecurity, as seen in data from the Sudan Rural Household Survey and data used for the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification process for Sudan.

The food security outlook for Sudan under conflict is grim. Due to restricted access to food and decreased agricultural production, food insecurity is anticipated to worsen, especially from May 2024 onwards during the lean season. Access to food in markets has been and is likely to continue to be sharply constrained—food prices and inflation reached 300 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023. Sharp increases have been seen in the number of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity.

The policy insights Mr. Svensson drew from his analysis included the need for urgent international intervention to support Sudan's food security and economic stabilization. These efforts should include facilitating humanitarian access, boosting agricultural production through input support, stabilizing macroeconomic conditions, and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable communities. To reverse the drastic setbacks in economic and human development caused by the conflict, a coordinated approach among international partners will be required to address both immediate food needs and longer-term economic recovery.

2.1.2 Mechanisms for building economic resilience and support

The second research session centered on economic resilience and how it might be strengthened in Sudanese households and communities and the country's overall economy

in the face of conflict and the associated economic shocks. The session featured four presentations on insights gained from the analysis of nationwide rural household surveys and programs on how Sudanese households and communities might be assisted in better managing such shocks.

The first presentation was by Oliver Kirui, an IFPRI Research Fellow associated with SSSP, and focused on insights from the 2023 Sudan Rural Household Survey on the shocks that rural households in Sudan faced due to the compounded crises imposed by the conflict and the coping strategies they employed in response to those shocks. The survey, encompassing a sample of over 4,500 households across all 18 states, revealed the profound effects of such shocks on household welfare, emphasizing the vulnerability of rural households. The most common shocks households faced were sickness, death, and violence, all of which correlated significantly with increased household food insecurity. A notable portion of households lacked effective coping strategies, underscoring the insufficient reach of social assistance in rural Sudan during times of need. Among the coping mechanisms that were reported by survey households were reducing expenses on agricultural inputs, selling household goods, and selling productive assets, all of which are likely to reduce the resilience of the household in recovering from the shocks and indicate the dire strategies to which family's resort in crisis.

Dr. Kirui's presentation concluded with policy insights focusing on enhancing social protection strategies to reach more affected households, improving access to financial services to support livelihood diversification, and the critical need for fostering community-based support mechanisms. These measures aim to mitigate the impact of shocks on food security and household welfare, promoting resilience in Sudan's rural communities.

The second presentation was delivered by Youssef Chaitani, the head of the Risk Prevention Section at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) of the United Nations. Dr. Chaitani delved into the vulnerabilities and resilience mechanisms within Sudan, offering a comprehensive overview of the various risks the country faces. He outlined the domestic, regional, and global drivers of conflict, which include governance challenges, issues around political identity, geopolitical tensions, and local and regional competition over natural resources. The presentation highlighted that the recent exacerbation of many of the domestic drivers resulted in the current conflict, with associated health challenges and acute food insecurity.

Dr. Chaitani introduced conference participants to the Arab Risk Monitor framework (ESCWA 2023). This can be used to assess interconnected risks that encompass conflict, development, climate, natural resources, and societal factors. It quantifies the drivers of conflict risk and assesses vulnerability and resilience in the region. Using the framework, Dr. Chaitani provided a detailed risk assessment showing Sudan's high vulnerability and low resilience across several domains, including the economy, society, and institutions. He underscored the continuing challenges in Sudan of unaddressed domestic drivers of conflict, the rising adverse social and economic impacts of the conflict, and continuing trends of high vulnerability and low resilience at household and community levels and for Sudan's economy as a whole. The analysis suggests that the ongoing conflict will result in further declines in Sudan's Human Development Index (HDI), trapping the country in a cycle of conflict and underdevelopment.

To counter these challenges, Dr. Chaitani recommended strengthening drivers of resilience at all levels. These include the garnering of political will to enhance economic resilience both locally and nationally, operationalizing the nexus approach to focus on shared priorities for strengthening people’s resilience, and enhancing peacebuilding assets. These recommendations emphasize the need for a comprehensive strategy to address the underlying causes of vulnerability and promote sustainable development and peace in Sudan.

Figure 3. Some of the conference participants



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

The third presentation was by Billy Mwiinga, who heads the Sudan Coordination Office of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Nairobi. Mr. Mwiinga outlined WFP’s response to the crisis in Sudan in 2023 in supporting 6.2 million individuals across 17 states with emergency food assistance and nutritional support. A key effort included cash and voucher-based transfers to nearly 330,000 beneficiaries, underscoring WFP’s pivotal role in addressing immediate food security and nutritional needs amidst conflict.

Looking ahead to 2024, WFP’s strategy for Sudan emphasizes life-saving assistance, addressing malnutrition, and tackling the root causes of hunger through a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. This multifaceted strategy involves immediate to long-term interventions. These include basic service delivery and infrastructure support, efforts to enable sustainable livelihoods, and undertaking resilience-building activities, such as agricultural support, nutrition interventions, and educational programming.

The policy recommendations proposed by Mr. Mwiinga included the necessity of adapting to conflict sensitivities, employing technological innovations for remote operations, and prioritizing partnerships for effective resilience-building in Sudan’s complex crisis landscape.

The final presentation in the second research session was delivered by Moses Siambi, the Regional Representative for Africa of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). Dr. Siambi presented on the Sustainable Agrifood Systems Approach for Sudan (SASAS), which seeks to stabilize and enhance food security and agricultural productivity in selected states of Sudan. Initially, the SASAS project focused on South Kordofan, Gedaref, Kassala, Blue Nile, Aj Jazirah, and While Nile states, supporting

communities through partnerships with local and private sectors to bolster agrifood systems. However, the outbreak of the conflict in April 2023 necessitated a strategic shift towards more stable areas with potential for irrigated agriculture. The reach of the project was expanded to the Northern and River Nile states and moderate agricultural potential areas in Red Sea and Gedaref states.

The policy insights Dr. Siambi underscored included the importance of adapting agricultural interventions to an evolving context of conflict and stability within Sudan. He emphasized the need for targeted support in regions with irrigated agriculture potential. Moreover, the project's approach has involved a nuanced focus on enhancing resilience and sustainable development in the agrifood sector. This entails leveraging local partnerships, promoting innovative agricultural practices, and ensuring the scalability of successful interventions across different ecological and social landscapes within Sudan. Through such strategic shifts, SASAS aims to contribute to food security, economic recovery, and the overall resilience of communities amid the ongoing challenges.

2.1.3 Agricultural productivity, market access, and international support

The third research session centered on agricultural productivity and market access in Sudan under conflict and the international support required to address immediate humanitarian needs, including the spillover effects of the conflict on Sudan's neighbors, and to establish a foundation for the sustainable recovery and accelerated development of Sudan's agricultural sector. The session featured three presentations.

Mosab Ahmed, a Senior Research Assistant with IFPRI's SSSP, provided an in-depth analysis of market access, price dynamics, and employment trends in Sudan during the ongoing conflict, drawing from the Sudan 2023 Rural Household Survey and the Sudan National Rapid Farmer Survey. The presentation discussed several factors contributing to price dynamics in Sudan, including the deterioration of the exchange rate, seasonal variation in production, rising transportation costs due to fuel shortages and the increased risk of looting, and international commodity price fluctuations. These factors, all compounded by the conflict, have resulted in substantial price inflation for essential commodities, like sugar, cooking oil, and bread, and for crops and livestock.

Data from the surveys show significant disruptions in market access and functionality. Thirty-two percent of farmers reported that markets are not open as usual on market days. Moreover, one-quarter of rural households reported that they were unable to visit local markets due to physical insecurity, expectations of income loss, and high prices, with female-headed households relatively more affected by these disruptions.

The policy insights from this presentation emphasized the urgent need for strategic interventions to support economic resilience and sustainable livelihoods. These efforts should include greater investment in the agricultural sector, strengthening of social safety nets, investments in improved water management, and providing greater financial support for the private sector. Such targeted interventions are crucial for addressing the profound challenges households face in generating sufficient income to meet their needs, particularly in agriculture. Mr. Ahmed noted that the analyses underscore the importance of addressing the root causes of market and other economic disruptions to mitigate the adverse effects of conflict on Sudan's rural populations. A multifaceted approach is required to enhance market

access, stabilize prices, and support the creation of employment opportunities in the face of Sudan's ongoing challenges.

The second presentation by Vito Intini focused on the regional spillovers of the conflict in Sudan, particularly highlighting the impacts on South Sudan, Chad, and Egypt. The presentation underscored that the conflict exacerbates existing vulnerabilities in these countries, notably through disruptions in trade, increased refugee flows, and heightened food insecurity due to price hikes in essential commodities.

- ▶ In South Sudan, the conflict threatens an already fragile economy reliant on oil exports, resulting in a significant rise in food prices.
- ▶ Chad faces challenges in accommodating the substantial influx of refugees from Sudan, which strains its limited resources and risks increasing tensions over scarce resources like water and land.
- ▶ Egypt, grappling with economic turbulence, confronts further strain from the influx of Sudanese refugees, which pressures its public services and infrastructure.

Dr. Intini advocated for comprehensive regional strategies to mitigate these negative spillover effects. These could include enhancing cross-border cooperation for humanitarian assistance, strengthening regional trade and supply chain resilience, and bolstering regional mechanisms for peace and security. Additionally, international support is required to address the immediate needs of refugees and host communities, while also tackling the long-term developmental challenges exacerbated by the conflict. Collaborative efforts between affected countries, regional bodies, and international organizations are needed to devise and implement strategies that not only address the immediate humanitarian needs but also pave the way for sustainable development and peace in the region.

Figure 4. Some of the conference participants



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

The final presentation in the third research session was delivered by Khalid Siddig on the impacts of the Sudan conflict and potential pathways for recovery, focusing on the bounce-back of the agricultural sector, infrastructure investment, and social protection. A comprehensive analysis of Sudan's economy was done using the RIAPA (Rural Investment and Policy Analysis) framework, a dynamic economy-wide model that captures detailed national account variables, agrifood system characteristics, and household economic profiles. The presentation examined various development scenarios for Sudan, including a pre-conflict baseline, with conflict and recovery projections from the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund, and accelerated recovery scenarios emphasizing agricultural rebound, infrastructural investments, and cash transfers to vulnerable households.

The findings from this modeling work indicate a dire need for targeted interventions to mitigate poverty and undernourishment, which dramatically worsened in 2023 and 2024 due to the conflict. Accelerated recovery scenarios suggested that focusing on agricultural productivity, coupled with strategic infrastructural investments and targeted cash transfers, could significantly reduce poverty and undernourishment numbers by 2026. Dr. Siddig suggested that prioritizing agricultural productivity recovery to its pre-conflict levels by 2026 could prevent 1.9 million people from falling into poverty by 2028. The analysis revealed trade-offs between cash and infrastructural investments, highlighting that, while cash transfers have immediate effects, the benefits of infrastructural investments tend to be delayed but will be larger from 2026 onwards.

The presentation on the results of the RIAPA analysis for Sudan underscored the urgent need for comprehensive and multifaceted approaches to address the ongoing crisis and pave the way for sustainable recovery and development.

2.2 Panel Discussions

2.2.1 Evidence-based research for policy and programming in times of conflict

The first panel discussion session of the conference focused on the vital role of data-driven insights in conflict zones, particularly examining the situation in Sudan. The panel included Vito Intini, Khalid Siddig, and Menale Kassie, Principal Scientist and head of the Social Science and Impact Assessment Unit at the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology in Nairobi.

Figure 5. First panel discussion—from left, Clemens Breisinger, moderator, and panelists Vito Intini, Khalid Siddig, and Menale Kassie



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

Dr. Intini shed light on the importance of the multifaceted application of evidence-based research across the Arab states. Emphasizing the necessity for innovative methodologies, he detailed how UNDP leverages micro-level surveys, economy-wide models, and emerging machine learning techniques to inform program design and policymaking in crisis-affected areas. He stressed the importance of integrating traditional knowledge and modern data

analytics to craft tailored and nuanced interventions that will address the unique humanitarian and development challenges presented by conflicts like that in Sudan.

Dr. Siddig discussed IFPRI's innovative approach to data collection amidst conflict, particularly in Sudan. He shared insights on utilizing nitrogen dioxide emissions data obtained by satellites as a novel proxy for economic activity, showcasing IFPRI's ability to adapt research methodologies to conflict constraints. Dr. Siddig underscored the critical gaps in data collection and dissemination in conflict-affected contexts, calling for improved collaboration across mandates to ensure research findings effectively inform policy and programming. He advocated for engagement with partners in development institutions and agencies, the private sector, and civil society from research inception to application, emphasizing the need for demand-driven research that addresses the real-time challenges of conflict-affected communities.

Dr. Kassie emphasized the significance of participatory research and the integration of local knowledge in designing and implementing research projects. By engaging stakeholders from the outset, research initiatives can ensure ownership, relevance, and the incorporation of traditional practices alongside modern scientific inquiry. He highlighted the challenges of influencing policymakers and suggested strategies, such as knowledge brokering and advocacy, to bridge the gap between research findings and policy implementation. He stressed the importance of creating demand-driven research that resonates with the needs of policymakers and practitioners, ensuring that evidence-based insights translate into actionable, impactful interventions in conflict settings.

The session underscored the critical need for an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to research and policymaking in conflict-affected areas. The policy insights proposed in the discussion highlighted the urgency of leveraging both traditional knowledge and innovative research methodologies to inform development strategies that are resilient, context-specific, and inclusive. The panelists' experiences and suggestions call for a shift towards more collaborative and participatory research processes that engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including local communities, policymakers, and development partners. This approach not only enriches the research landscape with diverse perspectives and innovative solutions but also ensures that policies and programs are grounded in the realities of those most affected by conflict in Sudan, particularly vulnerable households. Ultimately, fostering such synergies between research and policy can significantly enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at rebuilding conflict-torn societies and paving the way for sustainable peace and development.

2.2.2 Development interventions and implementation in times of conflict

The second panel discussion focused on development interventions and implementation in times of conflict and underscored the complexity inherent to addressing immediate and long-term needs in Sudan amidst ongoing conflict. Panelists from various agencies and programs of the United Nations highlighted the critical role of leveraging local knowledge and capacities, effectively prioritizing programs during crises, and the practical aspects of implementing interventions in such challenging environments.

One key point emphasized was the importance of understanding and integrating traditional knowledge within agricultural practices and seed distribution systems. Adam Yao, Sudan Deputy Country Representative for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO), articulated this point. Such an approach, he argued, will ensure the resilience of food systems and will support farmers by distributing certified seeds and leveraging local networks for transportation in conflict-affected regions.

Figure 6. Second panel discussion—from left, Karin Ruf, moderator, and panelists Mohammed Abdelmomen, Adam Yao, Billy Mwiinga, Ruben Vellenga, and Slobodan Tadic



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

Mr. Mwiinga of WFP addressed the challenges of access in the distribution of aid to those in need, noting several innovative strategies to reach vulnerable communities through alternative corridors and local procurement programs. He highlighted WFP's efforts to maintain a continuum of humanitarian and development activities, stressing the importance of joint programming and partnership among various entities.

Slobodan Tadic, Senior Crisis Coordinator at UNDP, presented a community-oriented approach, emphasizing the need for integrated solutions that address the multifaceted needs of communities, including access to water, energy, and food. By focusing on community resilience and leveraging local civil society organizations, UNDP aims to support sustainable recovery and development.

Mohammad Abdelmomen, Sudan Country Representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), discussed operational and programmatic strategies to support the industrial sector and employment, focusing on relocating projects to safer states, supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs, and emphasizing the role of private sector engagement even during the conflict.

Ruben Vellenga, Chief of External Relations at UNICEF Sudan, highlighted the devastating impact of the conflict on health and education systems, advocating for a multisectoral response to prevent famine conditions and support children's access to education, emphasizing the importance of partnership, staying engaged in Sudan, and advocating for peace and humanitarian access.

The panel underscored the need for a nexus approach that bridges humanitarian, development, and peace efforts. Doing so will involve emphasizing partnership, local engagement, and innovative solutions to navigate the challenges posed by the conflict in Sudan. Policy insights drawn from the panel discussion include advocating for the integration of local knowledge and capacities in program design, maintaining operational flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, and sustaining international attention and support for Sudan during this crisis.

2.2.3 Linking development solutions and research to support interventions during the conflict

The final panel discussion of the conference integrated insights from the day, focusing on the intersection between research and implementation, the balance between development and humanitarian efforts, and exploring ways for the private sector and civil society to actively engage in addressing the current crisis in Sudan.

Paul Dorosh of IFPRI emphasized the importance of building research institutions within Sudan to guide development and humanitarian assistance effectively. Dr. Dorosh highlighted the need for programs that are not just about immediate aid but also about fostering productivity and resilience, using Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program as an example. Additionally, he identified understanding market integration and the efficiency of price transmission across markets as crucial for enhancing food security.

Figure 7. Final panel discussion—from left, Jawhara Kanu, moderator, and panelists Paul Dorosh, Amel Wagdi, Robert Vokes, Abubaker Omer, and Murtada Kamal



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

Amel Wagdi, General Manager at Mahjoub Sons Group, a leading private sector group in Sudan, discussed the role of the private sector in bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. She highlighted the efficiency, resilience, and long-term orientation of the private sector and suggested that combining the strengths of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and research institutions could lead to innovative solutions for sustainable development. Ms. Wagdi called for institutional reform and a reassessment of how skills transfer involving the displaced populations could impact local economies, emphasizing the need for inclusive private sector engagement.

Robert Vokes, Senior Program Development Advisor at Mercy Corps, shared insights on balancing immediate humanitarian needs with longer-term development goals. He described how cash-based approaches support critical market functions and how Mercy Corps integrates humanitarian interventions with agricultural development programs. This nexus approach, including cash transfers through microfinance institutions, supports market functionality and early recovery.

The next panelist, Abubakr Omer, is the Chief Strategy Officer at Sharik Foundation, a community-based social enterprise that aims to better integrate food system value chains. He described how the Foundation responded to the conflict in Sudan by establishing a food system unit and implementing technology solutions to support community needs. Mr. Omer emphasized the importance of collaborative models in providing economic alternatives to conflict and fostering peace through employment and other economic opportunities.

Murtada Kamal, chief executive officer of the Sudan Platform for Agriculture and Food Security, shared a positive outlook on Sudan’s future. He illustrated how agricultural interventions during the conflict, particularly in non-conflict areas, can and have contributed to resilience and productivity. He presented examples of successful agricultural projects, which involved collaborative efforts between the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and research institutions. To enhance food production and security in Sudan, Mr. Kamal advocated for initially focusing on the safe states.

This final panel discussion underscored the importance of collaborative efforts among different sectors, including the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and research institutions, to address the economic and food security challenges posed by the conflict in Sudan. The panelists highlighted innovative approaches to resilience, development, and food security, emphasizing the need for inclusive and sustainable solutions.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The conference on Navigating Sudan’s Conflict provided integrated insights through the various research sessions and panel discussions, presenting a holistic view of the challenges and potential pathways to recovery in Sudan amidst ongoing conflict. Experts from different sectors provided comprehensive analyses and forward-looking strategies to address the multifaceted dimensions of Sudan’s crisis.

Figure 8. Group photo of conference participants



Photo credit: C. Daileader, IFPRI.

The deliberations underscored the severe impact of the conflict on Sudan’s agrifood systems, highlighting the critical need for supporting smallholder farmers and agrifood processors and strengthening market linkages across the agrifood system. The discussions emphasized reconstructing the agrifood system and revitalizing agricultural productivity as fundamental steps toward mitigating poverty and ensuring food security for all. Much of the discussion focused on disruptions to market functionality and the importance of stabilizing markets, ensuring access to essential commodities, and fostering economic recovery. Employment challenges were also spotlighted, as the conflict has erased livelihoods for

many households and worsened unemployment. Enhanced social protection frameworks and the creation of employment opportunities, particularly in agriculture, were identified as crucial for economic stabilization and community resilience. Equally important, the regional ramifications of Sudan's crisis, including refugee flows and trade disruptions, require a coordinated international collaboration to mitigate these broader impacts of the conflict.

The panel discussions further enriched dialogue at the conference by emphasizing the role of evidence-based research for designing interventions, the importance of integrating traditional knowledge alongside modern methodologies, and the value of participatory approaches in research and decision making. The discussions highlighted innovative data collection and monitoring tools, including the use of timely satellite imagery and digital surveys, as vital for tailoring intervention strategies and ensuring effective recovery efforts. Collaborative, evidence-based decision making and program design were emphasized as essential, alongside international support and robust partnerships among governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities.

In conclusion, the conference laid out a comprehensive framework for addressing the humanitarian and development challenges that the ongoing conflict in Sudan has exacerbated. This framework includes advocating for concerted efforts to tackle immediate challenges and mitigate the impacts of conflict while also paving the way for economic development. The collective wisdom of the conference underscored the importance of unity in navigating Sudan's path toward recovery and resilience, emphasizing that a collaborative and inclusive approach is key to overcoming the profound challenges the country faces.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful to IFPRI partners, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP) for their support in co-organizing this significant conference. This conference proceedings document was prepared with the financial support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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The Sudan Strategy Support Program (SSSP) is managed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and is financially supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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