

War and Resilience

The Multifaceted Impacts of Sudan's Conflict and Pathways to Recovery

Edited by Khalid Siddig, Oliver K. Kirui, and Paul Dorosh

Overview

Sudan is facing one of the most severe humanitarian and economic crises in its modern history as a result of the civil war that erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This conflict has severely damaged livelihoods, markets, and institutions, resulting in a rapid deterioration in the economy and overall welfare of the population. As of early 2026, nearly 12 million people, corresponding to about one-third of the population, have been displaced, including more than 4 million refugees who have fled to neighboring countries. The conflict has also reshaped economic geography by creating separate economic zones under SAF and RSF control, which has inhibited trade flows, raised prices, and reduced access to food.

War and Resilience: The Multifaceted Impacts of Sudan's Conflict and Pathways to Recovery draws on recent household and enterprise surveys, satellite and remote-sensing indicators, market price data, and economywide modeling to document the impacts of this crisis and identify realistic entry points for stabilizing conditions and supporting recovery. The book situates the current conflict within Sudan's longer historical trajectory of political exclusion, regional marginalization, and recurrent cycles of military rule. It explains how these structural factors shaped the conditions that led to the 2023 war

and influenced its progression and scale. The book also identifies areas where Sudan's population has nonetheless shown remarkable resilience through social networks, remittances, informal support systems, and adaptation in both rural and urban settings. The book concludes with a discussion of recovery scenarios and suggestions for rebuilding key economic and social sectors.

Historical Context and Underlying Drivers

In the first part of the book, the chapter authors present an analysis of the structural foundations of Sudan's instability. Since independence in 1956, the country has shifted between short periods of civilian rule and long periods of military governance. These cycles reinforced inequalities between the central riverain regions and peripheral areas of the country. They also contributed to civil war in the South, conflict in Darfur, and a long history of mistrust between regions and communities.

Along with unequal access to political and economic opportunities, policies that sought to impose a narrow national identity exacerbated social and regional divisions. Rather than fostering inclusion, authoritarian and coercive measures deepened grievances and undermined attempts to build a coherent national framework capable of managing Sudan's diversity.

The book also highlights the evolution of Sudan’s political marketplace, a system in which political authority relies on transactional exchanges and military actors play central economic roles. This system helps explain the origins of the 2023 conflict. The SAF and RSF each developed parallel commercial networks and sought control over lucrative sectors such as livestock, wheat milling, manufacturing, and transport. As these interests expanded, competition intensified, contributing to the outbreak of large-scale violence.

This historical perspective clarifies why Sudan’s conflict has been so destructive and why recovery will require more than service restoration and economic support. Sustainable recovery depends on reforms that address longstanding political and economic inequalities and reduce the dominance of armed actors in the economy.

Humanitarian, Social, and Economic Impacts

The book presents detailed empirical evidence on the impact of the conflict on households, markets, and public services. Income losses have been widespread, and both rural and urban households have experienced significant reductions in purchasing power. Food consumption has fallen sharply, and dietary diversity has declined in all regions surveyed. Analysis using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale shows that the share of food-secure households dropped from roughly half before the war to between 9 and 20 percent after it began (Figure 1).

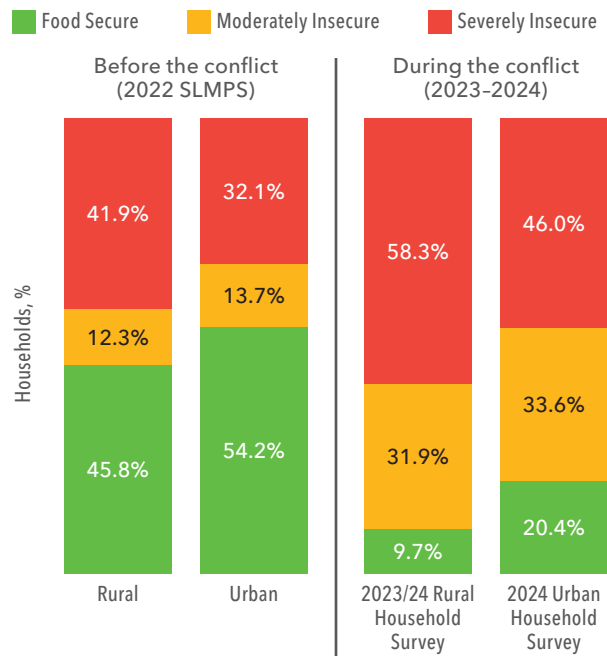
Satellite-based indicators likewise show clear reductions in human and economic activity, especially in Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman, though some eastern areas, which received large numbers of internally displaced persons, recorded increases in activity.

The conflict has caused a major breakdown in health and education systems. Before the war, most urban households reported full access to health services. By 2024, only a small fraction still reported full access, and a substantial share had no access at all, especially in Darfur. School dropout rates have risen dramatically across all regions, reaching very high levels in conflict-affected areas. Girls have faced particularly severe risks due to insecurity and reduced access to safe learning environments.

Markets, Trade, and Price Dynamics

Market fragmentation is a defining feature of the current conflict in Sudan. Transport disruptions, insecurity, and higher marketing costs have contributed to large price differences across regions. Wheat and sorghum price

FIGURE 1 Household food security status, 2022–2024



Source: Authors’ analysis of Sudan Labor Market Panel Survey (2022), Sudan Rural Household Survey (2023/24), and Sudan Urban Household Survey (2024).

Note: Data are based on scores from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale.

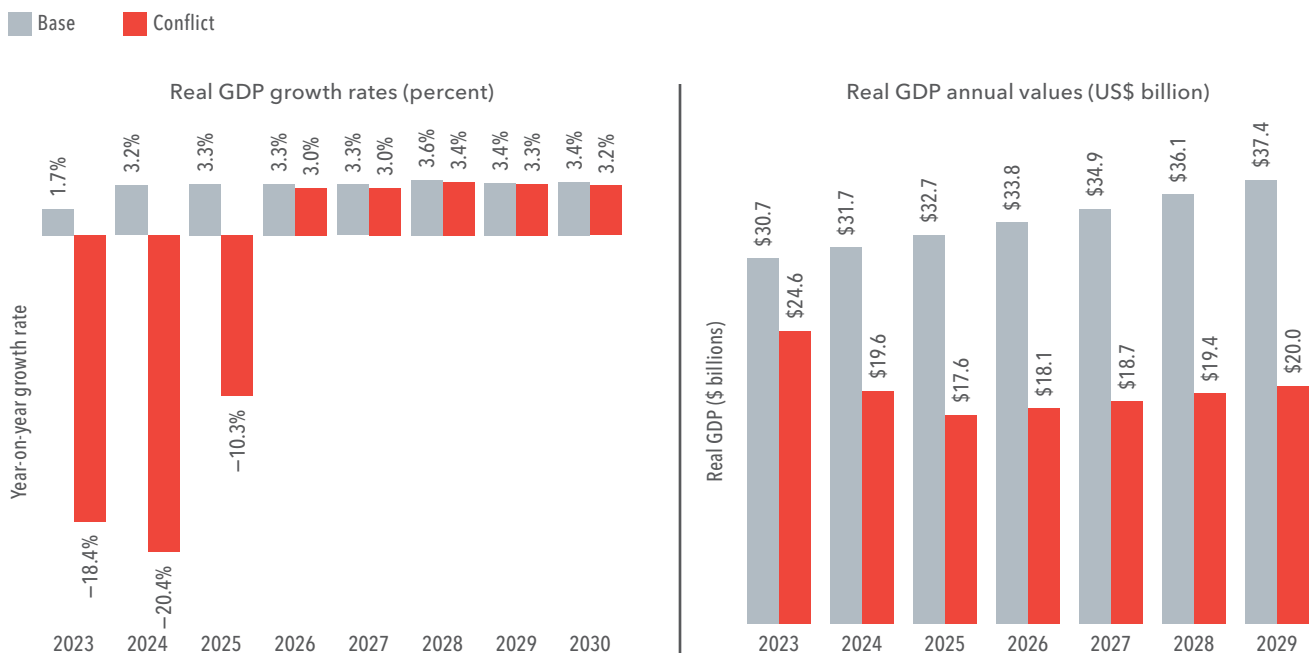
movements show irregular transmission between markets, reflecting broken supply chains and limited movement of goods between SAF- and RSF-controlled areas.

Model simulation analysis indicates that wheat consumption in western Sudan would have been significantly higher without market disruptions caused by the conflict. Restricted movement of imported wheat and higher transport costs increased prices and limited households’ ability to access food. Restoring trade flows could reverse these adverse effects.

Changes in territorial control have also affected export patterns. The share of exported products sourced from areas dominated by the SAF, including oilseeds and cotton, increased in 2023. Products sourced from RSF-controlled areas, including live animals, meat, and sorghum, declined substantially amid limited access to Port Sudan.

Local retail markets have been equally affected. Traders face high risks when moving goods, and many have reduced operations. Households report greater dependence on local substitutes and less frequent consumption of preferred foods.

FIGURE 2 Impacts of the conflict on Sudan’s GDP (2023–2030), model simulations



Source: Authors’ estimates based on International Monetary Fund’s World Economic Outlook 2023 and 2024 data updates.

Livelihoods, Coping, and Patterns of Resilience

Households across Sudan have adopted a range of coping strategies to manage the effects of the conflict. These include rationing food, drawing on savings, borrowing, selling livestock and household assets, and migrating to safer areas. Social networks play a central role in survival, especially where formal assistance is limited. Remittances, community support, and informal sharing mechanisms help fill critical gaps.

There are important differences between rural and urban contexts, however. In rural areas, households face challenges related to climate shocks, reduced access to agricultural inputs, and disruptions in labor markets. In urban areas, many households have lost employment and face high risks related to crime and insecurity. In both rural and urban areas, women’s participation in informal economic activities helps to sustain household consumption and also contributes significantly to community resilience.

The survey on digital cash transfers documents a broad preference for digital modalities, especially among households that have experienced violence or theft. Trust in financial institutions and perceived security are important factors that influence these preferences. These findings point to the potential of digital systems to expand the reach and safety of humanitarian support.

Economywide Impacts and Recovery Scenarios

The economywide modeling simulations presented in the book quantify the macroeconomic consequences of the conflict and support the analysis of options for recovery. The dynamic computable general equilibrium model, built on Sudan’s 2021 social accounting matrix, indicates large declines in gross domestic product (GDP), household consumption, and investment under a scenario of continued conflict. Model simulations indicate that the conflict caused severe contractions in GDP in the 2023–2025 period, with only a slow and partial recovery afterward, far below the projected baseline through 2029 (Figure 2).

The analysis shows that integrated recovery packages are more effective than isolated interventions. These packages combine support for agriculture, targeted transfers to households, and measures to revitalize enterprises. Providing working capital and cash transfers early in the recovery process stabilizes consumption and encourages private sector activity. Investments in agriculture are essential for medium- and long-term growth, given the sector’s importance for employment and food production.

The model simulations also highlight the need to avoid foreign exchange distortions, which have historically undermined incentives for domestic production and trade. Maintaining realistic exchange rates supports exports and protects the competitiveness of domestic producers.

Pathways Toward Peace and Reconstruction

The final chapters offer a forward-looking assessment of how Sudan can move toward recovery. Of primary importance are peace and security, which are essential for sustainable growth. Restoring stability in Khartoum is another fundamental step toward reestablishing the country's economic networks and rebuilding confidence.

Other priority areas for reconstruction include:

- Repairing transport and electricity systems that connect markets and facilitate trade
- Restoring health and education services to protect human capital
- Strengthening social protection systems, including digital transfers
- Revitalizing agriculture through targeted investments
- Reducing the role of armed actors in the economy
- Improving governance and aligning investments with previous national development strategies

Delays in implementing these actions would likely result in greater losses of income, productive assets, and human potential. Conversely, early action can prevent deeper deterioration and support more inclusive and sustainable recovery.

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