

## ISSUE BRIEF 7

# UNDERSTANDING MARKETS AND TRADE IN BORDERLAND AREAS

The impact of the April 2023 war on trade between Sudan (Darfur) and Chad

CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN CHANGE

### Introduction

The Darfur region covers the westernmost part of the Republic of Sudan and borders four countries – Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic and South Sudan – with which it has had multiple and diverse experiences of cross-border economic interactions, past and present. Given the fact that all these borders are porous, such experiences include both officially regulated transactions and non-regulated transactions that have been developed over the years by borderland communities as survival strategies. The border areas are thus characterised by a multiplicity of complex realities, from legal crossing and legal trade to illegal crossing and smuggling of goods (Manger et al, 2019). Communities along the borders had to deal with exclusionary, elite-centred national governments that failed to reverse the patterns of neglect

and marginalisation inherited from the country's colonial past and sustained by all national governments since.<sup>1</sup> No wonder, therefore, that these border areas became ridden with conflicts and rebellions against central governments over the decades (Johnson, 2003).

The Darfur conflict that started in 2003 dramatically increased the importance of cross-border trade as rebel movements strove to obtain external resources to fight the government and as it became increasingly difficult to trade across conflict lines. The war that started in 2023 has added more ingredients to an already complex situation that was only partially controlled by central government, with far-reaching implications for the conflict economies on both sides of the shared borders. Above all it has resulted in major structural economic changes

1. For, example, the current West Darfur State was formerly known as Dar Masalit (Arabic land of the Masalit), an independent sultanate that was finally annexed to Sudan in 1923, making it the last territory to join the Sudan before it gained independence from Britain in January 1956.



The Sudan-Chad border is now critical for trade and Darfur's economy.  
Photograph: Local researcher

as the trade in goods between Darfur and neighbouring countries has become considerably more important while trade with central Sudan has declined significantly.

This brief looks mainly at the changing patterns of markets and trade activities on the Sudan-Chad border after April 2023; how they are connected to the war economy in Sudan; and the implications for humanitarian policy-making and programming. The brief focuses on economic activity at border crossings and in other important marketplaces near the border by communities on the Sudanese and Chadian sides who share ethnic and sociocultural characteristics. Thus, the focus is at the micro level, drawing on local knowledge with the aim of contributing to better understanding of the dynamics of trade in the borderlands, which is also a lifeline for the beleaguered population of Darfur. It is intended to inform humanitarian programming in these areas and in the rest of Darfur, which depend on goods arriving across the border from Chad. This is part of the 'Understanding Markets' project. See Box 1 for a description of the project.

#### **BOX 1 SUMMARY OF THE 'UNDERSTANDING MARKETS' STUDY**

This briefing note is produced by the project 'Understanding markets and trade in a context of extreme conflict and humanitarian crisis, with limited access, in Darfur, Sudan'. 'Understanding markets and trade in a context of extreme conflict and humanitarian crisis, with limited access, in Darfur, Sudan'.

It sets out to address three research questions:

1. How can market monitoring and data collection be adapted, with flexibility and sensitivity, to fill the information gap in Darfur at least partially – in a context of extreme conflict, insecurity and constrained access – through local actors?
2. How has trade in agricultural and livestock commodities adapted, positively and negatively, to the current context of extreme conflict in Darfur; how is trade affecting the conflict; and what are the implications for social cohesion and for conflict-sensitive programming by humanitarian actors?
3. How can a deeper understanding of markets and trade in food commodities contribute to improved understanding of the severity of food insecurity in Darfur?

## **Historical patterns of cross-border trading activities between Darfur and Chad**

The Hajj route from West Africa across the Chad-Sudan border has, for centuries, been a vital overland path for pilgrims traveling to Mecca. This route connects West African nations such as Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Chad with Darfur and onwards towards the Red Sea. The pilgrimage has been intertwined with long-distance trade, with pilgrims often engaging in labour migration and commerce to fund their journey. Goods transported eastwards included ivory, spices, and agricultural products, with goods also being transported from Sudan westwards. In recent decades the volume of goods exported from Sudan to Chad increased dramatically due to the establishment of manufacturing industries in Khartoum State, providing consumer goods such as wheat flour, soap, cooking oil, biscuits and soft drinks.

Traders in the main cities of Darfur used to exchange goods in both directions, with trading partners beyond the border. Many of the big traders were from central Sudan but by the 1980s local Darfuri traders had emerged as strong players. Traders from the Zaghawa ethnic background became prominent, particularly following the ascendancy of the late Idriss Déby to the presidency of Chad with the help of Zaghawa elites in 1991. This boosted cross-border trade with Chad to new levels, especially after an agreement with the Sudan government for Chadian merchants to use port facilities on the Red Sea and to transport their imports through Darfur. That arrangement made Chad less dependent on Libyan ports and more connected with Sudan's economy.

The border economy that underpins mobility and trade in the west has also become a logistical hinterland for Darfur's armed actors. As rival coalitions try to disrupt one another's access, violence has accompanied the smuggling and supply corridors that feed the war.

## **An overview of markets along the Sudan-Chad border**

The Sudan-Chad border separates local communities from the same ethnic and cultural background, reflecting the colonial legacy of the Scramble for Africa which resulted in the division of the continent into spheres of domination by the British and French empires respectively. However, despite the designated international border, social solidarity between ethnic communities predominates and they engage in economic transactions with their neighbours, to some extent disregarding the fact that they come under the rule or jurisdiction of different central governments.<sup>2</sup>

Markets provide an import arena of interaction for such

2. The combination of geographical proximity, the absence of natural barriers, shared language, shared history, shared religion and shared culture helps facilitate easy interaction between such communities, to the extent that some men have a wife in Sudan and another one in Chad. This is common among the Masalit and Gimir ethnic groups living on both sides of the border.

communities that is not limited to economic transactions only but includes social, cultural and information exchanges as well (see CHC, 2026). In rural areas, where the capacity of markets is smaller, people may meet at the marketplace on the Sudan side once or twice a week and then meet on different days at the adjacent marketplace on the Chad side. For rural communities along the border, markets are part of their livelihood system. Locally produced agricultural goods and livestock are sold to middlemen who take them to distant markets; manufactured goods are brought in by small traders who profit from their exchanges in both directions. In times of crisis, when official channels of trade through formal border crossing points are disrupted, less formal rural markets and informal trade provide an important lifeline for the rural population.

There are six officially recognised border crossings to

which the Chadian authorities assign customs officers on a regular basis: Tina, Kulbus, Adré, Goz Beida, Forobaranga and Um Dukhun. See Figure 1 on page 4.

All kinds of goods can pass through these crossings in both directions except fuel, for which the Chadian authorities designated the Adré crossing as the main legitimate point of export to Sudan, with dedicated fuel depots. Of the many other functioning markets along the border, the most popular since the war began in 2023 are Arosharro and Birak. There has been a notable increase in trading activity in some of these markets in the last three years, largely due to the major population displacement across the border to Chad as Sudanese sought refuge from growing violence and other war-related atrocities. Nevertheless, there are some markets that have experienced a decrease in trading activity, usually because they are located far from areas of refugee settlements. See Table 1.

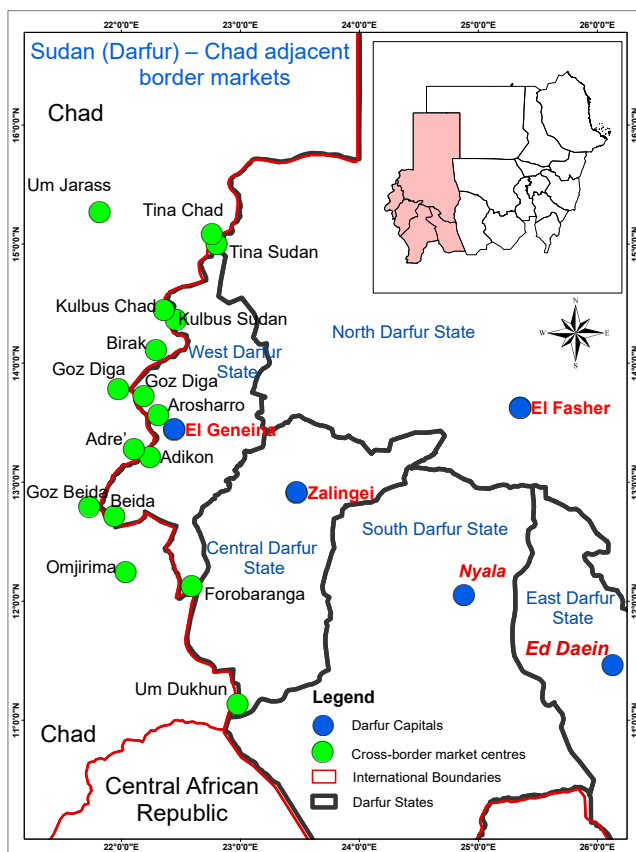
**TABLE 1: ADJACENT MARKETS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE SUDAN-CHAD BORDER**

Marketplaces/ crossings, from north to south	Market frequency and impact of war on trading activity	Major commodities imported since April 2023	Major commodities exported since April 2023
Tina (North Darfur) to Tina, Chad	Daily Increased activity	Wheat flour, sugar, sweets, soap, pasta, fuel (for local use), plastic mats, chairs, cement	Camels, cattle, sheep, onions, watermelons, tomatoes, grapefruit, mangoes
Goz Diga (West Darfur) to Goz Diga, Chad	Twice weekly Decreased activity	Wheat flour, sugar, oil, sweets, livestock	Millet, sorghum, sesame, groundnuts
Birak, Chad (no adjacent market in Sudan) <sup>3</sup>	Twice weekly Increased activity	Wheat flour, sugar, sweets, soap, pasta, fuel	Millet, sorghum, groundnuts
Arosharro, West Darfur (no adjacent market in Chad)	Twice weekly Increased activity	Wheat flour, sugar, sweets, soap, pasta, fuel	Millet, groundnuts, watermelon seeds
Adikon (West Darfur) to Adre, Chad	Daily Increased activity	Fuel, pasta, wheat flour, sugar, sweets, soap, clothes, cement	Mangoes, bananas, oranges, guavas, millet, sorghum, groundnuts, sesame
Beida (West Darfur) to Goz Beida, Chad	Twice weekly Decreased activity	Wheat flour, sugar, sweets, soap	Bananas, oranges, mangoes
Forobaranga (West Darfur) to Omjirima, Chad	Daily Increased activity	Pasta, wheat flour, sugar, sweets, soap	Groundnuts, sesame, sorghum
Um Dukhun (Central Darfur) to Omjirima, Chad	Twice weekly Increased activity	Pasta wheat flour, sugar, soap, perfumes	Millet, sesame, sorghum, groundnuts

Source: Local researchers

3. Goods imported to Birak come from local markets in West Darfur such as Arosharro (Jebel Moon locality), Sania (Kulbus locality) and Abu Rumail (Serba locality). It is strategically positioned close to Abéché in Chad.

**FIGURE 1: BORDER MARKETS ON THE SUDAN (DARFUR) / CHAD BORDER**



Adikon, about 27 km west of Geneina, is the main border crossing point between Sudan and Chad, with continuous commercial activity, followed by Tina then Forobaranga. Adikon gained importance after the outbreak of war because most humanitarian aid enters Darfur through this border crossing. Military supplies, especially fuel, also enter through this crossing. For this reason, it was targeted several times by drone strikes by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in March 2026.

## New patterns in cross-border trade since the war began in April 2023

### The reversal of trade flows, and some new commodities

The outbreak of nationwide war brought new patterns in the direction of cross-border trade flows. One significant change is the reversal in the flow of livestock trade

(camels, cattle and sheep). They used to come from Chad to Sudan, through Darfur to Omdurman, and were then exported to other destinations, mainly Egypt and the Arab Gulf countries. Currently, livestock traders take animals from Darfur to Chad, from whence they export them to Libya and Egypt.<sup>4</sup> This is largely due to the fact that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) authorities enforced a ban on moving goods from areas of their control in Kordofan and Darfur to central Sudan in October 2024 (for more details see SPARC, 2025a).

Another notable change is the importation of fuel, sugar, wheat flour and biscuits from Chad into Sudan. These goods are now imported from Libya, which has shared borders with Chad. Much of it arrives at Um Jarass in northern Chad, which has developed recently into an important trading hub. In the pre-war period, these goods were brought from Omdurman to West Darfur, with much of it being traded across the border into Chad. Goods from Libya used to be transported directly to trading hubs in Sudan: Hamrat al-Sheikh in North Kordofan and Mellit in North Darfur. From there they were transported onwards to other towns in Kordofan and Darfur and sometimes even to central Sudan. After the war started, cross-border commercial traffic between Libya and Sudan was disrupted because much of the arms supply to the RSF arrived through this corridor. Thus, it became a military target for SAF and its Allied Joint Forces, comprising Darfur rebel movements, most of which operate from Dar Zaghawa adjacent to the Libya-Sudan border. The route was no longer safe for commercial vehicles; hence traffic has been redirected from Libya through Chad, further boosting the cross-border trade between Chad and Sudan. See Table 2 for a summary of changes in cross-border trade flows since the war began.

The Chadian authorities have recently invested in this reversal of trade by renovating parts of a 470 km dirt road from Um Jarass that follows the border from Tina to Adre and southwards to Omjirima, across the border from Forobaranga, making many border crossings and rural villages in the border areas accessible from the road. New fuel depots have been established at the main border crossing in Adre, adjacent to Adikon on the Sudan side. Fuel now arrives from Libya in big tankers and no longer in plastic containers and barrels as before.

Exports from Sudan to Chad include new types of goods, such as charcoal,<sup>5</sup> and increased quantities of others such as vegetables, fruits and cooking oil. This is due to high demand from the large refugee camps in eastern Chad, with established consumption habits based on

4. Egypt started importing chilled beef from Egyptian-managed farms in Chad in March 2023, with clear plans for expansion (*Egypt Independent*, March 14, 2023).

5. Trade in charcoal is subject to strict regulations intended to ensure the sustainability of forests from which charcoal is made. Under normal circumstances, these regulations are occasionally violated, but under the current war conditions the de facto authorities in Darfur have stopped enforcing federal rules. It is worth noting that the Department of Forestry in Sudan is a federal institution.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF CHANGES IN CROSS-BORDER TRADE PATTERNS IN DARFUR, PRE-2023 AND POST-2023

Dimension	Pre-2023	Since the outbreak of war in 2023
Main supply route	Khartoum → Darfur	Chad → Darfur
Livestock flows	Chad → Sudan → export	Darfur → Chad → export
Fuel supply	Central Sudan → Darfur	Libya → Chad → Darfur
Currency	SDG dominant	USD/CFA dominant
Market control	State/customs-based	Armed actor-based

Darfuri products. Fruits such as mangoes and oranges, produced in Darfur, used to be taken to Khartoum despite the transportation risks during the earlier Darfur conflict (Buchanan-Smith et al, 2014); now this trade is no longer possible. The export of charcoal reflects the increasing demand for cooking fuel by Sudanese refugees living in the semi-arid regions of eastern Chad, which lack forest resources to meet the growing demand for firewood. The illegal export of gold via border crossings from Sudan to Chad has been another new trend since nationwide war broke out. Previously it was transported from Khartoum International Airport directly to Dubai. The war has completely closed this route.

The import of motorbikes from Libya to Sudan via Chad is another new development. Demand has mainly arisen from RSF fighters who use them for fast transportation on the battlefield, with each bike carrying three riders: a driver and two fighters carrying automatic machine guns. Motorbikes have long been considered instruments of criminal action and were therefore banned in Darfur before the fall of President El Bashir. Ironically, the RSF were tasked with the confiscation of motorbikes at that time.

Flows of some consumer goods previously exported from Sudan to Chad have either stopped or greatly reduced. Two significant examples are dates (produced in Northern State) and *tahniya* (made of sesame in Omdurman and other industrial areas in central Sudan).

Trafficking of narcotics across the Sudan-Chad border has increased. The conflict between SAF and the RSF has reconfigured smuggling routes. As eastern routes have become dangerous, smugglers utilise routes through northern Chad and southern Libya. Chad now serves as a junction for criminal networks with illicit goods, including narcotics and weapons, circulating across Libya, Sudan

and the Central African Republic. The production of hashish (locally known as *bango*) in Alradom National Park has increased dramatically since the RSF took control of Darfur (see latest report by STPT, March 2026).

### Taxes and levies

The new direction of trade flows between Libya and Sudan, through Chad, has impacted the intensity of traffic and the use of feeder roads to smaller markets and consumer centres in the eastern part of Chad and to adjacent Sudanese settlements near the border. Traders have to pay taxes to Chadian authorities twice, once at the crossing point with Libya and again at the border with Sudan. This is in addition to levies at an increasing number of checkpoints within Sudan, some of which are mobile (in the form of an armed car near the roadside)<sup>6</sup>. The border crossings from Chad and the roadside checkpoints are now managed by the RSF authorities, often without uniform, uncoordinated, and influenced by ethnic and personal considerations. These are all significant additional costs for traders and transporters operating between Chad and Sudan.

The established Sudanese and Chadian customs arrangements of the pre-war period have been completely disrupted for traders. Experienced police customs officers are no longer found at border crossings and established means for collecting taxes no longer function. Instead, RSF-appointed civilians accompanied by soldiers evaluate goods subjectively, without reference to any technical standards and regulation, haphazardly deciding how much a trader should pay. Most long-time traders have now left the business because of highly unequal treatment, with preferential treatment for traders aligned with the RSF, resulting in unfair competition.

6. RSF soldiers appear to raise their pay from these checkpoints. Sudan Liberation Movement-Abdel Wahid Nour soldiers have similarly set up checkpoints in areas under their control. In addition, pastoralist groups living in encampments along transport routes have their own checkpoints for passing vehicles. The combined effect is a proliferation of checkpoints, raising the cost of transportation.

## Currency and liquidity challenges

Cross-border trade between Sudan and Chad has been affected by currency challenges when paying for goods imported via Chad. The value of the Sudanese pound (SDG) declined sharply after the start of the war and the CFA franc gained in value and status. As a result, Sudanese traders now have to pay for goods they buy either in CFA or US dollars. This, after dealing with various types of irregular payments before the goods reach their destination, squeezes their profit margins further.

Lack of cash is another major constraint facing traders who need to sell their goods fast to avoid irregular and unpredictable fluctuations in currency exchange. Handling of the old Sudanese currency is becoming rarer as the total volume of cash in circulation has been hugely reduced since the war began. Besides, the RSF authorities forbid using the new 500- and 1000-pound notes issued since the outbreak of war by the SAF-supported government in Port Sudan. *Bankak*, the most popular digital money application in Sudan, is limited to a few people who have accounts in the Bank of Khartoum. Most people in rural areas of Sudan do not have access to banking facilities of any sort (Abd Elkream and Jaspars, 2025), which leaves them susceptible to risk and exploitation in the marketplace. Traders are putting pressure on the RSF authorities to address the cash shortage issue and to unify currencies in its areas. Efforts to find an alternative to the national banking system that collapsed in RSF-held areas after the war began led to the establishment of the Future Bank and its digital transfer application, 'Money Transfer Service', launched in Nyala in January 2026. The Future Bank is currently operating more like the *hawala* system,<sup>7</sup> allowing transfers in SDG within Darfur, with plans to operate between Darfur and South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda via corresponding entities in those countries.

## The impact of war on management and control of markets and trade between Sudan and Chad

### Regulation and control of market

There are many entities vying for control of markets in major cities in Darfur. The new de facto government or *Tasis* and the RSF military commanders all want to assert their authority over big markets and more especially border crossings, where traders are expected to pay customs duties for imports and exports. This is creating tension

with the West Darfur local authorities which stepped in to collect taxes on cross-border trade after the war broke out when the federal customs authorities no longer had access. The RSF is adopting a dual strategy of building some sort of legitimacy and at the same time maximising its access to lucrative resources. While sustaining the flow of trade helps meet community needs for access to basic commodities, it also generates revenue for the RSF. The dual objectives of meeting community needs and advancing the RSF's economic interests propel them to improve security in some areas under their control (for more details, see XCEPT, 2025).

There are four institutions that are supposed to collaborate in managing and controlling markets:

1. The RSF 'forces of command and control'. These are responsible for guarding and securing the market. They also provide protection for tax collectors in the marketplace.
2. The tax collectors who are responsible for different types of taxes (licenses, income tax, rents).
3. The chamber of commerce, which is supposed to represent the interests of traders.
4. The market administrative committee, which collaborates closely with the chamber of commerce to enable the market to function smoothly. Native administration authorities have been co-opted as members in these committees.

(CHC, 2026)

In the current war in Sudan, the distinction between state-facilitated transfers and informal smuggling has become blurred in relation to supply lines. Fighters escort convoys, manage access, enforce payments and stabilise flows when frontlines shift. This often results in intensified competition between the RSF and SAF-aligned forces over border access and logistics infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> The recent drone strikes during March 2026 on Adikon and Tina crossings are a case in point.

### Impact on trader profiles

The outbreak of the war put at risk many long-time traders, who exited the market either because of their unequal treatment by the RSF authorities compared to newcomers or to seek safety outside Darfur (SPARC, 2026b). Many of

7. *Hawala* is an informal, trust-based money transfer system that moves funds across borders without physically transferring currency or using conventional/traditional banks. It operates through a network of brokers who settle balances between themselves later. It is fast, due to lack of regulation, and widely used for remittances in labour-exporting countries in the Middle East, East Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

8. For more nuanced treatment of this issue see the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (Mar 6, 2026).

them relocated to cities in central Sudan where they felt safer and where they continue limited trading activities. Others went to nearby countries such as Egypt and the Arab Gulf states. Ed Debba in Northern State replaced Omdurman as the major trading hub for western Sudan (Kordofan and Darfur) until the RSF authorities enforced a ban on the flow of goods to and from the areas under their control (SPARC, 2025a).

As elsewhere in Darfur, new traders have emerged in cross-border trade. Most of them are from Arab ethnic backgrounds with links to the RSF either as fighters or as relatives and associates. The ethnic groups most negatively affected by this change in trader profile in West Darfur are the Bargo, Eringa and Zaghawa, in that order.

Meanwhile women have emerged as exceptionally active and resilient retail traders in West Darfur. They appear able to navigate difficult transit points and overcome administrative hurdles more successfully than their male counterparts. Women have long played a significant role in the border trade between Sudan and Chad, even before 2023.<sup>9</sup> This is partly because they are not subjected

to inspections and trade regulations in the same way that male traders are, and they pay a lower rate of tax. Women have traditionally crossed the border from Sudan to Chad by donkey, transporting small quantities of agricultural commodities ranging from gum Arabic to cereals and groundnuts (Buchanan-Smith et al, 2014). While this is a positive example of trade contributing to women's livelihoods, there is also a negative dimension as they are exploited by their male counterparts. The wholesale male trader distributes goods among several female petty traders who then register, transport and clear the goods through customs at the border crossing and at checkpoints to reduce the male trader's costs and time. Such an undertaking exposes female traders to harassment and other security risks. Nevertheless, the role of women in cross-border trade appears to have increased since the war began, as many women have become the main income earner in their households, and as a coping strategy to survive the current crisis.

Table 3 summarises the features of different trader categories since the war began.

**TABLE 3: DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF TRADERS IN CROSS-BORDER MARKETS SINCE 2023**

Trader Type	Characteristics	Advantages	Risks	Programming Implications
Established traders	Pre-war networks	Experience, established networks	Loss of capital, exiting market	Loss of stability
RSF-linked traders	Politically connected	Access, preferential treatment by the authorities	Market capture	High risk for agencies
Small-scale traders	Local, informal	Flexibility	Vulnerability	Key for livelihoods
Women traders	Petty trade	Mobility, lower scrutiny	Exploitation	Protection priority

## Conclusion

The Sudan-Chad border has a long history as the theatre for military operations of non-state actors from both sides. In the current war in Sudan, control of the border and especially of goods crossing the border is of major strategic significance as Darfur's economy re-orientates from Khartoum-centred trade and supply chains towards regional trade systems: in this case, with other Sahelian

countries, with Libya, and indirectly with Egypt. There is competition to control regulated border crossings because of their strategic importance and revenue-raising potential. This is indicative of the emerging economic governance in Darfur as the *Tasis* authority attempts to take over regulatory functions and tax and customs collection to finance itself and RSF operations. This, plus

9. Women control the trade in some commodities; for example, traditional perfumes for women such as *dilkah* and *mahalabiya*.

direct RSF involvement in lucrative cross-border trade in commodities ranging from gold and livestock to fuel and processed goods, fuels the war economy.

Ethnicity is a key determining factor of who gains and who loses from war-related changes to the pattern of cross-border trade. Some long-established traders are withdrawing from the market, badly affected by currency and liquidity constraints, and unable to compete with traders affiliated with the RSF that are operating on preferential terms.

Nevertheless, borderland communities in Darfur continue to show remarkable resilience and adaptiveness to the dynamic context in which they live. Ethnic and sociocultural ties between communities on both sides of the border enable them to navigate the complexities of state bureaucracy and to move between sovereign states. Their access to markets is not limited to official crossing points. They know how to move and trade, mostly informally, between smaller markets in both countries. Women play a very significant role, although usually trading in small quantities and facing significant protection risks. In short, cross-border trade continues to sustain livelihoods and food security in Darfur.

## Recommendations

### ■ Move from 'do no harm' to risk management in engagement with the war economy.

Humanitarian actors operating cross-border from Chad into Darfur cannot avoid interacting with market systems that are partially controlled by armed actors, particularly the RSF. Attempts to fully insulate aid delivery from these systems are neither realistic nor operationally feasible. Instead, agencies should adopt a risk management approach, which includes:

- Mapping trader networks and supply routes, including affiliations and exposure to checkpoint taxation

- Avoiding over-reliance on a small number of large contractors, which risks reinforcing monopolies linked to armed actors.

### ■ Prioritise market functionality, not just supply delivery.

Border markets are not peripheral—they are now the primary lifeline for much of Darfur. Humanitarian programming should therefore:

- Support the functioning of key markets (for example, storage, transport coordination, access routes)
- Continue to invest in market information systems to track prices, flows, and disruptions in real time, to inform adaptive programming
- Avoid large-scale in-kind distributions that risk undercutting local traders, particularly for commodities already supplied through cross-border trade
- Where possible, agencies should work with existing and established market actors rather than bypass them, recognising that these systems, however imperfect, are sustaining livelihoods.

### ■ Strengthen protection measures within trade systems, especially for women

Women are playing an increasingly central role in cross-border trade, often under conditions of heightened risk and exploitation. Humanitarian actors should:

- Recognise women traders as key economic actors within supply chains, not just as vulnerable beneficiaries
- Avoid reinforcing exploitative practices where women are used to transport goods on behalf of larger (often male) traders to minimise costs
- Protection strategies (such as those that reduce women's exposure to checkpoint harassment and informal taxation) should be integrated into market-based programming, rather than treated as a separate sector.

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## About Centre for Humanitarian Change

Centre for Humanitarian Change is a Nairobi-based thinktank that aims to redefine the model for aid in fragile areas using evidence of what works in locally driven humanitarianism.



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