Centre for Humanitarian Change | What Works

Issue Brief
March 2026

ISSUE BRIEF 6

IMPACT OF SUDAN'S WAR ON CEREAL PRODUCTION AND TRADE IN DARFUR

Implications for food security

CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN CHANGE

Introduction

Twenty years of conflict since 2003 had already badly affected cereal production and trade in Darfur. The outbreak of nationwide civil war in April 2023 exacerbated an already tenuous situation characterised by high levels of food insecurity. This brief explores the cumulative impact of the civil war. It starts with an overview of how cereal production (predominantly millet and sorghum) has been negatively affected in Darfur in the last three years. This differs across geographical areas according to conflict dynamics and their impact on social cohesion, and cropping patterns, which have, with some exceptions, become more subsistence-oriented. It then describes and analyses how the cereal market has changed in terms of trade flows and trends, including prices, partly in response to new trade prohibitions, lack of liquidity and reduced purchasing power. The profile of cereal traders has also changed.

Much of the data underpinning the analysis in this brief was collected around the time of the cereal harvest in December 2025 / January 2026. It thus focuses particularly on the implications for food security in 2026, in a region that has been ravaged by hunger in the last couple of years and stalked by famine. It concludes with a number of policy and programme recommendations intended to boost cereal production and trade flows in order to address food insecurity.

The analysis is based on first-hand accounts and predominantly qualitative data collected by researchers in each of Darfur's five states from November 2024 to January 2026, with more targeted data collection in December 2025 and January 2026. This is part of the 'Understanding Markets' project. See Box 1 for a description of the project. The analysis uses earlier

There is a growing number of women engaged in cereal trading, especially as petty traders. Albert González Farrán/UNAMID studies of the cereal trade in Darfur as points of reference and comparison.[1] In the absence of accurate quantitative data on cereal production and trade in Darfur since the war broke out, the focus of this brief is on general trends and changes.

BOX 1 SUMMARY OF THE 'UNDERSTANDING MARKETS' STUDY

'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?

A brief history: the impact of the 20-year conflict in Darfur on cereal production and trade[2]

The Darfur conflict negatively impacted cereal production of millet and sorghum from 2003 onwards. As a result of widespread displacement, some locations simply went out of production as many cereal producers were forced out of their villages and became consumers living in camps and towns (FSTS, 2014). Thus, settlement patterns changed. Conflict and insecurity disrupted trade routes and some cereal trade flows changed direction. Over the period of a decade, transport costs rose by 100 to 1000%, including fees and levies paid at numerous checkpoints. The number of large-scale traders and wholesalers operating in the region fell, particularly those transporting cereals between state capitals. Meanwhile, the number of petty traders of cereals in urban markets, most of them women, increased dramatically. Many of these trends have since been amplified by almost three years of civil war.

Despite the many disruptions to cereal trading during two decades of conflict, the Darfur market did become more integrated with the national cereal market, facilitated by construction of the tarmac road between El Fasher and Central Sudan.

Cereal production

The overall negative impact of the civil war, raging since April 2023, on agricultural production in Darfur is well-known: insecurity plus the low availability and high prices of agricultural inputs. (See, for example, FAO, 2025).[3] But quantifying the impact on the production of millet and sorghum has been guesswork at best. The actors that would usually carry out such surveys (including the state-level ministries of agriculture and FAO) have had little or no access to much of the greater Darfur region. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify which rural areas have been worst and least affected, and why, with a particular focus on the 2025 planting season and 2025/26 harvest.

Worst affected geographical areas and reasons

Targeted attacks on cereal-producing areas, displacement and the siege of El Fasher, early grazing of crops by livestock

Much of North Darfur State has been very badly affected since the war began. This includes all rural areas around El Fasher, particularly those north and west of the town which have traditionally been the breadbasket of North Darfur, like Korma and Dar Semmiyat, and also DarAlsalaam locality south of El Fasher. Other productive areas further afield have also been affected, such as Saraf Omra and Kebkabiya. The principal reason is forced displacement by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF appears to have deliberately targeted communities and farmers of particular ethnic groups regarded as 'unsympathetic' and supporting the Joint Armed Forces along with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), razing those communities to the ground.[4] Researchers on the ground estimate that cereal production in North Darfur is less than 30% of pre-war levels. The fall in production has been aggravated by the

1. In particular, *Against the Grain* by Buchanan-Smith et al (2014).
2. This section is based on Buchanan-Smith et al (2014).
3. See https://www.darfur24.com/en/2025/06/21/challenges-foreshadow-darfurs-agricultural-failure-amid-fears-of-a-worsening-hunger-crisis/.
4. For example, the Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) concluded the RSF intentionally razed at least 41 rural farming communities north and west of El Fasher over a two-month period in 2024 (Yale School of Public Health, 2026).

deliberate early grazing of farms by livestock, sometimes as early as October, instead of post-harvest in February, exacerbated in 2024/25 by low rainfall and long dry spells.[5] Although rainfall improved in 2025, large waves of displacement associated with the prolonged siege of El Fasher have had a devastating impact on cereal production in 2025/26, which is expected to be even lower than the previous year. Farmers in some areas south of El Fasher were effectively prohibited by the RSF from cultivating during the 2025 rainy season in order to put further pressure on the besieged city.[6]

In South Darfur, the northern areas, the western area between Kas and Nyala, and eastern areas including Beliel and Kalma Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp have been similarly affected as violence has targeted particular ethnic groups. There has been widespread displacement and early grazing by livestock accompanied by heavily armed herders, sanctioned by the RSF. This pattern is repeated in the southern localities of West Darfur state, where researchers on the ground estimate that only about a quarter of agricultural land was under cultivation in the 2025 production season, and in parts of Central Darfur.[7]

Extortion payments

During the earlier Darfur conflict, farmers were forced to pay fees to cultivate in a number of states. These 'protection' or extortion payments were usually demanded by their better-armed and non-farming pastoralist neighbours. This was a serious issue in parts of West, Central and North Darfur (Zahir and Abdul-Jalil, 2015; Jaspars and O'Callaghan, 2008; Buchanan-Smith and Jaspars, 2006). The practice appears to have continued in a number of locations in the last couple of years, affecting some of Darfur's most productive cereal-producing areas. See Box 2.

BOX 2. FARMERS PAY EXTORTION PAYMENTS TO CULTIVATE IN 2025

North Darfur: farmers in DarAlsalaam locality had to pay 50% of their harvest to the RSF in 2025. A number of large farmers who refused to pay left their farms and joined the growing numbers of displaced in Tawila.

Central Darfur: farmers in some locations have had to share 10 to 30% of their harvest with pastoralist groups for protection, with a higher percentage in remote locations more at risk of attack. As a result, farmers are reportedly forced to cooperate more closely regarding cultivation times and areas, and when they travel to market, for collective protection.

Less-affected geographical areas

Areas of relative stability, less violent conflict, and greater social cohesion

Cereal production has been less disrupted in parts of Darfur with greater stability. This includes much of East Darfur State and the southern parts of South Darfur such as Buram, Tulus, Kubum and Gereida. These are all RSF strongholds where the RSF has widespread support and there has been less violent conflict. In East Darfur, herder-farmer conflict is reported to have subsided since war broke out. This is partly due to the mediating role of the native administration and partly a consequence of greater ethnic homogeneity as farmers of minority ethnic groups have been displaced to the cities and former herders are now engaged in farming (amplifying a longer-term trend). It is also reported that young male pastoralists are joining the RSF militia rather than herding.

In West Darfur state, north of El Geneina, local researchers estimate that 80 to 90% of cultivated land was under production in 2025. Reasons include strong social cohesion, low levels of conflict and displacement, and the effectiveness of local committees that mediate between farmers and pastoralists, enabling both groups to use the land and preventing early grazing before the cereal harvest. Further south in West Darfur state, the experience of the Forobaranga Locality Peace Committee is one example of the role that some local committees have continued to play, since the war began, in promoting stability and agricultural cultivation. See Box 3 overleaf.

The south-east corner of North Darfur – Kelemando, Al Lait, At Tawisha and Um Keddada – has also avoided the worst of the conflict and has continued cultivation (albeit at somewhat reduced levels) since 2023. Areas under control of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) in eastern Jebel Marra and west of Tawila have also enjoyed greater stability and better cereal production. Both of these locations were able to take advantage of the good rainy season in 2025.

Lack of agricultural inputs

Where farmers are still able to cultivate, lack of agricultural inputs is cited as a constraint, with shortfalls ranging from tools and mechanised inputs to seed varieties appropriate to the changing climate (such as the

5. See, for example Al Attar, which describes the challenges faced by farmers in North Darfur in 2024/25, ranging from bird and insect infestations without support, to livestock grazing farms before the harvest, by 'Arab militias supporting the RSF'.
6. Some farmers were prohibited from cultivating early in the season. Others were allowed to engage in conditional cultivation – see Box 2.
7. See https://www.darfur24.com/en/2025/10/15/farmers-in-central-darfur-decry-widespread-farm-destruction-by-armed-herders/.

BOX 3: FOROBARANGA LOCALITY PEACE COMMITTEE, PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

This committee, established before the current war, continues to work effectively. The committee comprises 29 members, selected for their wisdom, experience and knowledge of the region and its tribes. Members include representatives from the native administration, religious leaders, youth, women and the Chamber of Commerce. There has been some change in membership due to deaths and displacement since the war began. The committee's primary objective is to maintain peace and stability within the local community. It meets monthly or when there are issues to be addressed. Since the start of the war they have actively contributed to reducing and resolving herder-farmer conflict, particularly during the recent 2025/26 harvest season. They have reactivated the market; led and assisted in resolving disputes and addressing border issues through local social customs and traditions; contributed to security on the roads; apprehended thieves and recovered stolen property and animals; and assisted in resolving complex cases such as killings and the payment of blood money. The challenges currently facing the committee include the highly complex context in which they now operate; the absence of security officials and the negative impact of the war on community relationships and communication, resulting in loss of trust; and reduced contribution of resources to cover their work (such as costs of travel to resolve disputes). Maintaining community awareness and support for their work in promoting peace is also challenging, but the continued financial support from the community indicates that the committee's work is valued.

Source: Personal communication with local researcher

shorter-maturing varieties that used to be distributed by various agencies). A few agencies have distributed inputs, some working through local agricultural groups, but this has fallen far short of need.[8] Now that all banks in Darfur have closed, lack of access to loans and finance is also a major constraining factor, particularly at the beginning of the agricultural season when farmers have considerable financial layout.

Prospects for the 2025/26 cereal harvest

The picture is mixed. Where there is active conflict and continued waves of displacement, as in the southern part of West Darfur, the prospects are very poor. Cereal production in North Darfur State is deeply concerning: the area under cultivation has fallen by an estimated 80% and a very high percentage of the rural population is displaced, especially west and north of El Fasher.

Meanwhile, the parts of South Darfur State that have been able to cultivate are expected to have an above-average harvest. Cereal production looks reasonable in parts of Central Darfur State, where crops have not been destroyed by early grazing, and north of El Geneina in West Darfur. A substantial surplus is expected in East Darfur State. These are all areas that were able to take advantage of a good rainy season in 2025.

How cropping patterns have changed during the war

Changes by farmers to their cropping patterns during the war years have been highly context specific. Few discernible patterns emerge across the Darfur region, with one exception: **the shift towards fast-maturing cereals**. This is partly in response to climate change, but also driven by the need to harvest early in an attempt to avoid destruction of crops by livestock grazing.[9]

In East Darfur State, long known for its groundnut production, there has been a significant **shift away from groundnuts towards cereals.** The reasons are twofold. First, the war and especially the RSF trade embargo with Central Sudan has destroyed the long-distance trade in groundnuts (SPARC, 2025a). Second, disruption to normal cereal trade flows from North and South Darfur to East Darfur caused shortages and sharp price increases in 2024/25. Farmers are now producing watermelons as an early season, resilient cash crop, to replace loss of access to agricultural finance. Sold locally for the fruit (as opposed to the seeds or as livestock fodder), the income from watermelons early in the agricultural season can fund the production costs of cereals. In East Darfur there was also good availability of agricultural labour for the 2025 agricultural season.

In contrast, north of El Geneina in West Darfur State there has been **a shift from cereals (mostly millet) to other cash crops**: groundnuts and sesame as oilseeds; legumes such as lentils, cowpeas and fava beans; and vegetables. This reflects local market conditions: they are sold in El Geneina and especially across the border in Chad (in Adré, Abéché and Amdjarass), where there are many refugees. These cash crops produce a good return; for example, humanitarian agencies are contracting local traders for oilseeds, and cowpeas are used to make falafel as an easy meal for women working all day in the market.

8. FAO, for example, distributed seed to farmers in East Darfur in 2024, but not in any other Darfur states (FAO, 2025).

9. https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/famine-in-sudan-home-grown-corps-provide-some-relief-to-darfur-displaced.

In the southern part of South Darfur State, there had been a pre-war shift from millet to sorghum due to the availability of improved seeds for sorghum and an export market in South Sudan. Since the outbreak of war there has been **a shift from sorghum to cash crops such as potatoes and vegetables**. These are also exported to South Sudan (potatoes and onions) and to Chad, now generating a higher income than sorghum.

In areas where there is still agricultural cultivation in North Darfur, there appear to be **fewer shifts in cropping patterns and cereals, mostly millet, dominate**. (There was some shift away from cereals towards *tombac* [chewing tobacco] production in the Tawila and Shangil Tobay area early in the war as it is more resistant to livestock grazing. However, widespread displacement and labour shortages meant it was not harvested. The trade embargo also means it can no longer be easily traded in Central Sudan, the principal market [SPARC, 2025a].)[10]

Cereal trade flows within Darfur and cross-border since the outbreak of war in 2023

Within Darfur

The disruption of trade routes due to conflict that began in 2003 has intensified since 2023. There has been even less trade between states within Darfur; for example, between North and South Darfur, or North and East Darfur. Overall, the cereal trade has become much more localised as transport costs have escalated with the proliferation of checkpoints and associated fees, the high risk of armed robbery, and high fuel costs. In many places, small vehicles owned by RSF affiliates and animal carts have replaced large trucks, thus also reducing the quantities being transported and traded.

Certain cereal trade routes within states have also been badly affected. Most extreme was the cessation of trade routes within North Darfur associated with the siege of El Fasher; for example, routes from Korma to El Fasher, or Kebkabiya and Saraf Omra to El Fasher, although some of these have since reopened since El Fasher fell to the RSF in late October 2025. Meanwhile a number of trade routes to Tawila, which hosts thousands of IDPs, have opened. The opening and closing of trade routes is also highly dynamic, influenced by shifting conflict dynamics.

The cereal trade within West Darfur, especially the southern part of the state, has also been badly affected. For example, Beida used to be a vibrant agricultural market with a flourishing groundnut and cereal trade. The conflict has decimated this market and the trade in cereals is now negligible. The same pattern is repeated in Kereinik locality, in formerly vibrant markets such as Um Tajouk, Mornei and Kereinik itself, where market activity has almost ceased.

Trade flows beyond Darfur and cross-border

A major change is the cessation of trading with Central Sudan due to trade embargoes imposed by the RSF and more recently by the Governor of Northern State (although there is active smuggling between Ed Debba in Northern State and North Darfur). Darfur can no longer be considered as integrated into the national market for sorghum or wheat. Instead, its market orientation in Central and West Darfur has shifted westward, across the border to Abéché and N'djamena in Chad, and in East Darfur to South Sudan. These cross-border trade flows predate the current war. Chad was an important source of millet for West Darfur during the Darfur conflict, and there has long been a flourishing cross-border trade in sorghum to South Sudan (Buchanan-Smith et al, 2014). The significance of this cross-border trade has amplified in the last three years.

Most of the wheat flour in Darfur used to be sold by the Dal Group from Central Sudan, including into Chad via El Geneina. With the outbreak of war this trade flow stopped abruptly. Instead, wheat flour has been imported from Egypt, through Libya and Chad and into Darfur. Traders aligned with the RSF appear to control most of this trade.[11] It has been a critical source of supply for North Darfur, particularly for the displaced when local cereal production slumped.

Volumes of trade, cereal prices and determining factors

Unsurprisingly, the volume of cereals reaching the market has reduced markedly because of a combination of depressed cereal production; the risks and cost of transportation; the absence of large-scale cereal traders who previously purchased, stored and traded grain, locally and cross-border (see below); trade embargoes; and the impact of cash shortages.[12] Lack of liquidity is a major constraint. When a farmer or small trader brings cereals to market, they want to sell for cash as most do not have

10. See https://atarnetwork.com/?p=19082. There is some evidence of traders affiliated with the RSF now trading in *tombac*.

11. As described in the brief on the war economy in Darfur, RSF-aligned traders are a heterogeneous group, primarily drawn from Arab ethnic communities but also including a smaller number of individuals from non-Arab backgrounds who have been co-opted into the RSF since the fall of El Bashir. See https://www.sparc-knowledge.org/publications-resources/war-economy-darfur-trade-conflict.

12. See https://www.darfur24.com/en/2026/01/27/farmers-in-darfur-forced-to-sell-crops-at-loss-as-markets-stagnate/.

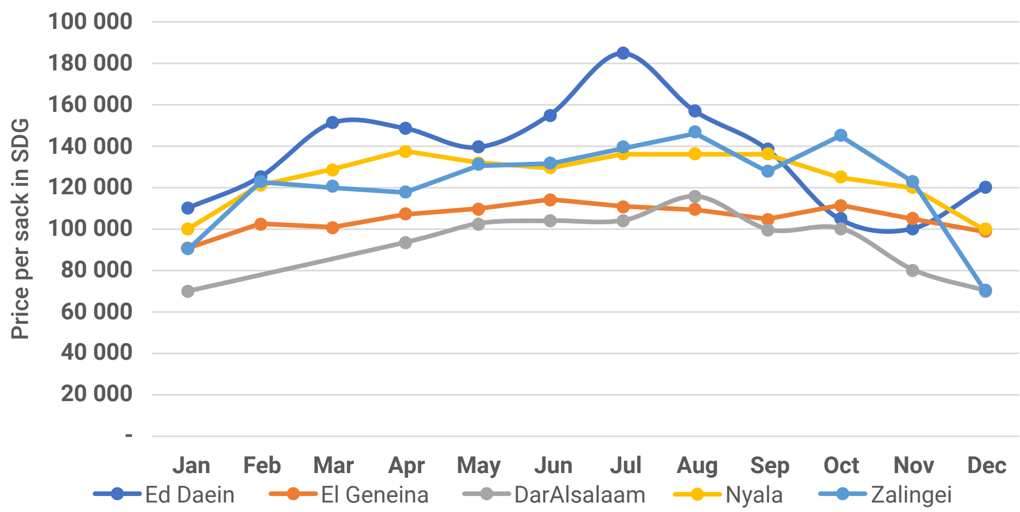
bank accounts and therefore cannot deal on *Bankak*, the Bank of Khartoum's digital platform. But larger traders in urban markets do not have the necessary liquidity. The farmer or small trader therefore has two options: either to sell on credit for a period of one to two weeks, or to reduce the price to the lowest possible level to make a sale. The amount of grain sold is therefore a function of the limited liquidity of traders. Barter is now practised in some locations, like DarAlsalaam, and was used during the siege of El Fasher.

Cereal prices rose in most markets after the outbreak of war. The price rise was most severe in 2024/25 in besieged El Fasher, which was starved of cereals for months. In October 2025, shortly before the city fell, the price of millet was SDG 100,000 (USD 27.78)[13] for one *cora* (1.8kg), 17 times the price in Mellit, 90 km away. This was clearly way out of reach of its desperate population, for whom purchasing power had collapsed. In some other markets like Zalingei, prices rose in 2023 but then fell in 2024 as local production of millet and sorghum picked up.

Figure 1 shows millet prices across four state capitals plus DarAlsalaam during 2025. While price levels and trends are similar for some state capitals, like Nyala and Zalingei, there is a striking disparity between the prices in Ed Daein and DarAlsalaam, 300 km away, at least partially explained by the conflict dynamics and breakdown of the usual cereal trade flows between North and East Darfur.

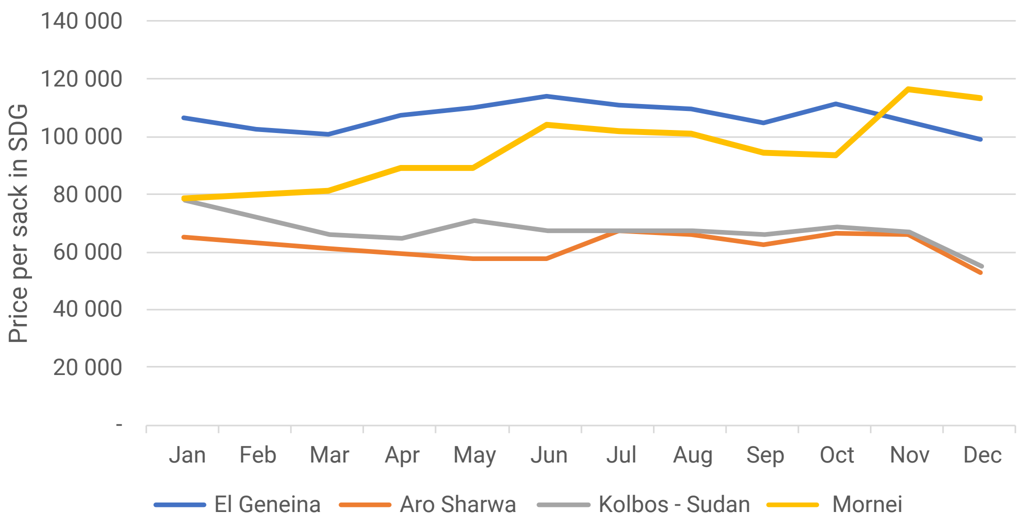
Indeed, in some markets such as DarAlsalaam the price of locally produced cereals has remained surprisingly

FIGURE 1: MILLET PRICES ACROSS STATE CAPITALS PLUS DARALSALAAM IN 2025



Source: Primary data collection

FIGURE 2: HIGH PRICE DIFFERENTIALS BETWEEN MARKETS IN WEST DARFUR STATE IN 2025



Source: Primary data collection

13. This is based on the prevailing black market exchange rate in October 2025 of SDG 3,600 = USD 1.

low considering the low levels of production. In January 2026, a sack of millet cost SDG 700,000 compared to SDG 1,200,000 in January 2025, a fall of 40%. According to local researchers this does not reflect the limited supply, but is a concerning reflection of the weak purchasing power of the local population as well as the insecurity which inhibits the movement of grain to other markets.

Figure 2 provides further evidence of the lack of market integration within Darfur states due to security and other constraints inhibiting the transportation of millet and sorghum between markets.

Figure 3 shows the terms of trade between the daily wage rate for labouring in the construction sector and the retail price of a *cora* of millet in three of Darfur's state capitals over a four month period. This shows a considerable difference between cities with the best terms of trade being for male daily labourers in Nyala. There was some improvement after December 2025 when millet prices fell slightly after the harvest.

How the profile of cereal traders has changed during the war

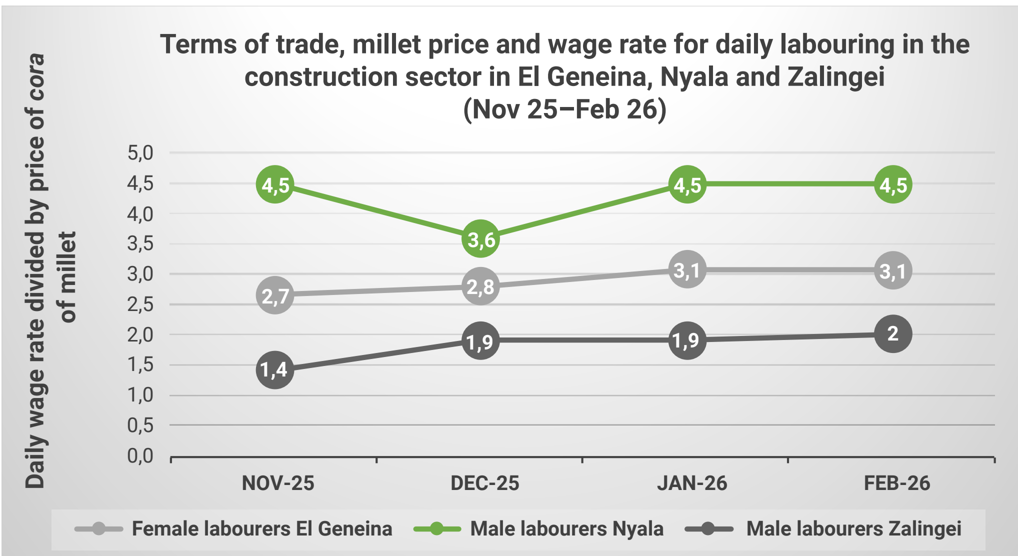
Large-scale established cereal traders have left the sector, and some new groups have entered the market

Early in the war, many large-scale cereal traders left the sector. A few switched to more profitable business in other sectors (for example, importing fuel from Chad to Zalingei in Central Darfur). Many left Darfur completely because of the inability to trade long distance (SPARC, 2025a) and the high risks of storing grain stocks. In Nyala, for instance, a once-vibrant cereal market is now operating on a much smaller scale through small traders. A number of established large-scale cereal traders from El Geneina have relocated to Adré and Abéché in Chad, particularly traders from ethnic groups that have been targeted in the conflict and now fear for their lives in West Darfur. In Ed Daein in East Darfur, only three cereal wholesalers reportedly remain in the market due to the challenges of trading and limited capital, and the withdrawal of *jellaba* (merchants) from Central Sudan. Instead the market is run by small-scale traders who cannot purchase more than one truckload at a time (approximately 100 sacks).

The market chain for cereals has also shortened. Pre-war, some of the large-scale cereal traders had agents who acted as brokers between cereal producers and traders in the main markets. This role no longer exists and farmers sell directly to small-scale traders, who sell to consumers.

There are, however, some new entrants to the market. This has been reported in West Darfur in El Geneina and other major markets such as Forobaranga on the border with Chad. Many new entrants have no commercial background and have appeared suddenly, having accumulated significant wealth since the outbreak of war, most likely from illicit sources. Key informants report that some were involved in the looting of large cereal trucks from Khartoum about a year and a half ago. Commonly referred to as 'hot goods', (i.e., stolen commodities), the looted cereals were sold at abnormally low prices inconsistent with the prevailing market price. Similarly,

FIGURE 3: TERMS OF TRADE – DAILY WAGE RATE FOR MILLET IN 3 STATE CAPITALS



Source: Primary data collection

in Zalingei there are new entrants to the cereal market associated with the RSF and with large amounts of capital, often trading on preferential terms. Arab ethnic groups, who have not traditionally engaged in the cereal market, are now involved. New traders with links to the RSF are also reported in markets in North Darfur. As mentioned above, they also control the cross-border trade in wheat flour from Libya to North Darfur and other states.

The growing role of women in the cereal market

A significant and widespread development is the growing number of women in the cereal market, especially in West, Central, South and East Darfur states. Women have long been petty cereal traders in all Darfur markets, but their participation has substantially increased during the war. This is partly due to the lack of other income-earning opportunities as the market for daily labouring has slumped in many state capitals and other towns, partly due to the loss or absence of male household members: there are now more female heads of households, often widows, engaging in cereal trading to eke out a living. Many are displaced, as in Ed Daein, where they operate on a very small scale in side streets, from temporary shelters or in front of shops. They operate with minimal capital and no storage facilities.

The exception to this trend is some market towns in North Darfur, such as DarAlsalaam, Tabit and Shangil Tobay, where women have actually withdrawn from cereal trading because of safety concerns. However, women did play a very important and risky role smuggling cereals into El Fasher during the earlier months of the siege in 2024. Traders aligned with the RSF brought wheat flour from Libya to rural areas outside El Fasher. They sold it in small quantities to women with donkeys who travelled in groups through the night to the town, providing a vital lifeline to the city. However, the trade ended when the siege tightened towards the end of 2024.

According to our research, female petty cereal traders are operating independently, at small scale. They have no associations or organisations to represent them. Those interviewed have identified their primary need as financial support. Their very limited resources in turn usually limit the amount they can trade to very small quantities – less than one sack.

Impact on trade of RSF directive and other decisions

The biggest impact on the cereal sector has been the RSF trade embargo on the movement of all goods, including cereals, between Darfur and Central Sudan, imposed in October 2024 (SPARC, 2024a). There are two particularly significant consequences. First, during the preceding two decades of conflict, eastern parts of the region relied on cereal supplies from Kordofan and Central Sudan (Buchanan-Smith et al, 2014). Now the greater Darfur region is almost entirely dependent on its own production, plus some smuggled wheat flour from Northern Sudan (E––d Debba) and occasionally from Libya. Second, the massive decline in cash crop trading with Central Sudan particularly affected groundnuts. Significant tracts of land previously under groundnut production are now under cereal production, especially in East Darfur.

Within Darfur, there have been occasional local bans on the movement of cereals, most notably during the siege of El Fasher. In late 2024, for example, there was a ban on the movement of millet from DarAlsalaam market, which depressed local prices.

The RSF's trader tax policy has been neither clear nor consistent across urban markets. There is much unpredictability, rent seeking by tax collectors and evidence that traders associated with the RSF are receiving preferential treatment and avoiding taxes (SPARC, 2025b).

The RSF has had a policy of relocating markets in some of Darfur's state capitals, with mixed results. In Nyala, relocation pushed some long-term traders out of business as newer entrants to the market, affiliated with the RSF, were given preferential treatment (SPARC, 2025b). In Ed Daein, however, reorganising the market infrastructure layout has apparently improved the market environment and is expected to enhance safety within it. Changes include opening streets, relocating local transportation stations and moving the firefighter and sanitation offices out of the market.

Conclusions

Cereal production in Darfur has been badly affected by the war, by conflict and insecurity, near-total displacement of some groups in particular localities, and damage to crops by early grazing of livestock in many areas. The targeting of certain ethnic groups and certain areas indicates this has been a deliberate strategy rather than an indirect consequence. The extortion of payment from some farmers so that they can cultivate is a major protection issue negatively impacting cereal production and food security.

Although the 2025 rainy season has generally been good, our information indicates that only certain areas have been able to benefit from it. Large swathes of Darfur have not, especially in North Darfur and southern parts of West Darfur. The disruption to trade and increasingly localised flow of cereals over short distances means that millet and sorghum can no longer be expected to be transported between surplus and deficit areas. This is causing pockets of extreme food insecurity across Darfur, exacerbated by a collapse of purchasing power amongst the displaced and those unable to farm or earn a livelihood.

Most RSF decisions and rules on trade have caused the cereal market to contract. Cereal trading has traditionally been dominated by non-Arab ethnic groups but there is evidence of RSF-aligned groups, usually of Arab ethnicity, entering the market as new traders in some locations.

Overall, cereal production and trade, once a vibrant commercial sector, has become much more subsistence-oriented in response to war-related food shortages as trade within Darfur has contracted and long-distance trade has reoriented from Central Sudan to neighbouring countries.

Recommendations

Cereal production

- Attacks on cereal producers should be closely monitored as a deliberate war strategy and potential war crime, paying attention to ethnicity and location.[14] Exploitative extortion must also be monitored to understand the extent to which it is an increasing trend. The RSF and its supporters must be urged to allow and facilitate unfettered cereal cultivation.

- Agricultural inputs will be needed in many parts of the Darfur region for the 2026 agricultural season to enable farmers to cultivate and should therefore be planned by humanitarian actors well in advance, in close consultation with local farmer groups. In areas where there is a clear shift from cash crop to cereal production, humanitarian actors should provide an extension package to support production of early maturing sorghum and millet, partly to minimise the risk of destruction by early livestock grazing.

- Ways to sensitively support local committees that can mediate herder-farmer conflict in the next agricultural season should be explored and encouraged, building on positive examples.

Cereal trade

- Ways to support and protect the growing numbers of female traders should be found, ranging from help in organising themselves into groups and associations to increase their collective negotiating power, to providing business grants or loans.

- Support, such as business grants, to long-established cereal traders is needed to enable them to stay in business (and possibly re-engage those who have left the business).

- Humanitarian diplomacy should exert pressure on the RSF to lift trade embargoes, especially any locally imposed restrictions on cereal trade flows within the Darfur region, so cereals can be transported from surplus to deficit areas. Similar pressure should be brought to bear on governors imposing trade embargoes from SAF-controlled areas.

References

Abdal-Kareem, Z. M. and Abdul-Jalil, M. A. (2015) 'Contested Land Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Mornei: Scarcity of Resources or Crises of Governance?', in Casciarri, A., Assal, M.A.M. and Ireton, F. (eds.) *Multidimensional Change in Sudan (1989-2011). Reshaping Livelihoods, Conflicts and Identities (West Darfur): Scarcity of Resources or Crises of Governance?* New York: Berghahn Books. pp. 69–86.

Atar Network (2025) 'Fey Shemal Darefwer: Nazhewn men Alefasher yezr'ewen reghem alherb'. 4 March. https://atarnetwork.com/?p=8002.

Atar Network (2025) 'Aletumbak: Tejarhun fey mheb'. 25 December. https://atarnetwork.com/?p=19082.

Buchanan-Smith, M., Abdulla Fadul, A.J., Tahir, A.R., Ismail, M.A., Ahmed, N.I., Zakaria, M., Kaja, Z.Y., Aldou, E.H.A., et al. (2014) *Against the Grain. The Cereal Trade in Darfur*. Tufts University, Feinstein International Center. https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/cereal-trade-darfur/.

Buchanan-Smith, M. and Jaspars, S. (2006) 'Conflict, camps and coercion: The continuing livelihoods crisis in Darfur'.

Dabanga Sudan (2024) 'Famine in Sudan: Home-grown crops provide 'some relief' to Darfur displaced'. 11 September. https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/famine-in-sudan-home-grown-corps-provide-some-relief-to-darfur-displaced.

14. See https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977/article-14?activeTab=.

Darfur 24 (2025) 'Challenges foreshadow Darfur's agricultural failure amid fears of a worsening hunger crisis'. 21 June. https://www.darfur24.com/en/2025/06/21/challenges-foreshadow-darfurs-agricultural-failure-amid-fears-of-a-worsening-hunger-crisis/.

Darfur 24 (2025) 'Farmers in Central Darfur Decry Widespread Farm Destruction by Armed Herders'. 15 October. https://www.darfur24.com/en/2025/10/15/farmers-in-central-darfur-decry-widespread-farm-destruction-by-armed-herders/.

Darfur 24 (2026) 'Farmers in Darfur Forced to Sell Crops at Loss as Markets Stagnate'. 27 January. https://www.darfur24.com/en/2026/01/27/farmers-in-darfur-forced-to-sell-crops-at-loss-as-markets-stagnate/.

FAO (2025) *Special Report. FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Republic of the Sudan. 19 March 2024*. CFSAMs Special Reports, 01/2024. Rome. https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/8e198344-f214-46c5-bf37-26404fccbc9f/content.

FSTS (2014) 'Assessment Mission Report 2013/2014: Annual Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission for Sudan'. Ministry of Agriculture, Sudan. January 2014.

ICRC (no date) 'Article 14 – Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population'. *International Humanitarian Law Databases*. Available at: https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977/article-14?activeTab=.

Jaspars, S. and O'Callaghan, S. (2008) 'Challenging Choices: Protection and Livelihoods in Darfur'. *HPG Working Paper*, December. https://odi.org/en/publications/challenging-choices-protection-and-livelihoods-in-darfur/.

SPARC (2025a), 'Darfur's long-distance trade: impact of war and Rapid Support Forces' trade embargo', April. Issue Brief. London: SPARC Knowledge. https://www.sparc-knowledge.org/publications-resources/darfurs-long-distance-trade-impact-war-and-rapid-support-forces-trade.

SPARC (2025b) 'The war economy in Darfur: distorting trade and fueling conflict', October. Issue Brief. London: SPARC Knowledge. https://www.sparc-knowledge.org/publications-resources/war-economy-darfur-trade-conflict.

Yale School of Public Health (2026) 'The impact of systematic razing of agricultural communities around El-Fasher: a remote sensing study', March. https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/0667d53f-af67-415c-99ce-bd9b2f32bc0e.

Acknowledgements

This issue brief is published through the 'Enabling Environment' programme funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), with support and collaboration from the Cash Consortium of Sudan.

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.

Funded by

UKaid from the British people

This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.