



## The Government-Farmer Conflict in Sudan: A Deepening Crisis in Agriculture

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ongoing struggles faced by Sudanese farmers within the broader context of government policies and socio-political challenges impacting the agricultural sector. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative analysis of government reports, policy documents, and media coverage with interviews conducted with small-scale farmers and agricultural experts, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the issues. The findings highlight how inadequate government support, unresolved land disputes, deteriorating infrastructure, and the growing impacts of climate change have contributed to a cycle of marginalization and unrest in rural communities. Through an analysis of recent farmer protests and state responses, the study reveals that the absence of effective land reforms and insufficient investment in small-scale agriculture have widened the rural-urban divide and exacerbated food insecurity. The research underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms, including secure land tenure systems, targeted rural investment, and adaptive climate strategies, to ensure the sustainability and resilience of Sudan's agricultural sector.

**Keyword:** Sudanese Farmer, Agriculture Sector, Government Policies, Land Reform

## 1. Introduction

Sudan's agricultural sector is the cornerstone of its economy, providing livelihoods for nearly 80% of the population. Despite the vast potential of Sudan's arable lands and favorable climate, the sector has consistently faced significant challenges, many of which are exacerbated by government policies and socio-political issues. Historically, the Sudanese government has allocated less public investment to agriculture compared to other countries in the region, leading to stagnation in productivity (Alhelo et al., 2023). The Sudanese government's inability to adequately support the agricultural sector, coupled with poor governance, unresolved land disputes, inadequate infrastructure,

and the escalating impacts of climate change, has created widespread difficulties for farmers across the country.

The government's approach to agriculture has been characterized by neglect, mismanagement, and a disproportionate focus on attracting foreign investment at the expense of local farmers (Elzubair, 2024). Many governments prioritize foreign investment over the development of local agriculture, resulting in inadequate support for local farmers (Suwardi & Mursyidah, 2024; Tria et al., 2020). This strategy has deepened the divide between the state and its agricultural communities, undermining both food security and economic stability. Furthermore, land ownership remains a critical issue in Sudan, as many farmers have been displaced due to large-scale land leases granted to foreign entities (Mahgoub, 2014). These practices have not only resulted in the loss of livelihoods for countless farmers but have also triggered widespread unrest and protests.

The challenges faced by Sudanese farmers are further intensified by the effects of climate change, including erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, and frequent flooding (Siddig et al., 2020). Despite the severity of these environmental threats, the government has made limited efforts to develop effective climate adaptation strategies, leaving farmers increasingly vulnerable to these changes. Outdated agricultural policies, particularly those related to pesticide use, have exacerbated health and environmental issues, further discouraging investment in the sector (Wallenborn et al., 2023).

In conflict-prone regions such as Darfur and South Kordofan, ongoing violence has displaced thousands of farmers, further destabilizing the agricultural sector (Kirui et al., 2023). The shift from an agriculture-based economy to one reliant on oil has marginalized the agricultural sector, resulting in low productivity despite the availability of fertile land (Bilal, 2018). This paper explores the complex and interconnected struggles faced by Sudanese farmers, with a particular focus on government policies and interventions. By analyzing these challenges, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the decline of the agricultural sector and their long-term implications for Sudan's economy and food security. The paper also offers policy recommendations to address these issues and improve the livelihoods of Sudanese farmers, aiming to foster a more sustainable and equitable agricultural sector.

## **2. Research Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach, focusing on case studies and interviews to explore the challenges faced by Sudanese farmers in relation to government policies. Data were collected through document analysis, including government reports and previous research, alongside semi-structured interviews with farmers, agricultural experts, and policymakers. The research includes case studies on

the Gezira Scheme and recent farmer protests to examine the impacts of government decisions. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes in the challenges faced by farmers. Ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from all participants.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The analysis of agrarian struggles in Sudan reveals the interconnected nature of government policies, land tenure systems, climate change impacts, and ongoing conflict. These factors not only shape agricultural productivity but also amplify socio-political tensions within rural communities. The results underscore the vulnerabilities of smallholder farmers, particularly in the context of insufficient state support, insecure land rights, and environmental challenges.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive integration of political, environmental, and conflict-related dimensions in understanding Sudan's agrarian struggles. Unlike prior studies that tend to isolate either government policy, climate change, or land tenure issues, this research highlights how the interplay between these factors exacerbates the challenges faced by smallholder farmers. It provides new insights into the dual role of state policies: not only fostering inequality through large-scale agricultural investments but also perpetuating land insecurity through inadequate governance structures. Furthermore, the research underscores the exacerbation of agrarian crises by climate change and ongoing conflict, positioning these factors as mutually reinforcing stressors that systematically marginalize rural communities. This integrated perspective bridges the gaps in previous literature, offering a holistic framework for analyzing agrarian conflicts in Sudan.

#### **1. Government Policy and Smallholder Marginalization**

A significant factor influencing Sudan's agrarian crisis is the government's agricultural policy, which has historically favored large-scale agricultural ventures at the expense of smallholder farmers. Studies by Smalley (2023) highlight that Sudan's agricultural policy has prioritized foreign investment and commercial farming, often sidelining local farmers' needs. As noted by FAO (2018), the lack of state support for smallholders has led to a concentration of land in the hands of large agricultural enterprises, undermining the livelihoods of those dependent on subsistence farming. This exclusionary policy framework has been a source of frustration for rural communities, as farmers struggle to access subsidies, affordable inputs, and markets for their produce.

Interviews with farmers in Sudan's agricultural regions confirm these findings, revealing that many feel disconnected from the state and overlooked in policy-making processes. According to UNDP (2020), government interventions tend to be reactive rather than proactive, with limited investments in rural development and infrastructure that would support smallholder

resilience. As such, government policy continues to foster inequality, hindering sustainable agricultural development and exacerbating rural poverty.

## **2. Land Tenure Insecurity and Dispossession**

Land dispossession is another critical issue that fuels agrarian conflict in Sudan. The shifting of agricultural land from local farmers to large-scale, often foreign-controlled, operations has led to widespread displacement and landlessness. This finding is supported by research highlighting the historical dispossession of rural communities during colonial and post-colonial periods, which laid the groundwork for contemporary land struggles (Martinello, 2013). The weakening of land tenure systems has further intensified these conflicts, as farmers face a lack of clear ownership and long-term security over the land they cultivate.

Furthermore, the increasing encroachment of foreign investors in Sudan's agricultural landscape, particularly in areas like the Gezira Scheme, has left many local farmers fighting to retain their land. FAO (2018) emphasizes that weak land governance structures have facilitated this land-grabbing trend, with little legal recourse for displaced farmers. Land tenure insecurity undermines agricultural productivity and fosters mistrust between the state and its citizens. The ongoing tension between large landholders and smallholders remains a major driver of agrarian conflict (Castro, 2022).

## **3. The Impact of Climate Change on Agricultural Practices**

Climate change is exacerbating Sudan's agrarian struggles, making agriculture increasingly difficult and unpredictable. FAO (2018) notes that erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, and temperature fluctuations are disrupting crop cycles, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions like Darfur and South Kordofan. These environmental changes have forced farmers to adopt unsustainable practices in an attempt to survive, such as over-extraction of water and the overuse of arable land.

As described by UNDP (2020), these practices further contribute to environmental degradation, which in turn impacts agricultural productivity. Farmers in Sudan, especially smallholders, are often ill-equipped to deal with climate challenges due to limited access to resources and knowledge of climate-resilient agricultural methods. The lack of government support for climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practices has left farmers increasingly vulnerable to the unpredictable effects of climate change, exacerbating food insecurity.

## **4. Conflict, Insecurity, and Land Use Disputes**

Conflict and insecurity have exacerbated the agrarian crisis in Sudan. Armed violence in regions like Darfur and South Kordofan has disrupted agricultural production, displaced thousands of farmers, and fueled competition for dwindling resources (Siddig et al., 2018). The

ongoing violence in these regions has created a vicious cycle where conflict displaces farmers, making it difficult for them to access their land or cultivate crops. This disruption has resulted in a sharp decline in agricultural productivity and a rise in food insecurity.

Furthermore, armed groups often seize agricultural land and use it as a resource to fund their activities, compounding the already existing land disputes. According to UNDP (2020), these land disputes are a major source of conflict in rural Sudan, where farmers are left in direct competition with armed groups and other displaced populations. Insecurity has also prevented many farmers from returning to their land to plant crops, leaving large areas of fertile land underutilized.

## **5. Farmer Protests and State Response**

The agrarian struggles in Sudan are also visible through the growing number of protests by farmers in recent years. These protests are primarily driven by grievances over inadequate support, lack of land rights, and poor agricultural policies. The protests in Eastern Sudan in 2018 exposed the profound dissatisfaction among farmers marginalized by both the government and large agricultural enterprises (Willis, 2011).

The Sudanese government's response to agricultural protests has been largely counterproductive, escalating discontent among farmers. The frequent use of violent suppression against protesters has deepened the sense of alienation within rural communities (Bennet et al., 2010). This confrontational approach undermines the government's legitimacy and perpetuates a cycle of frustration and insecurity. These unresolved issues stem from the government's failure to address key grievances, including land insecurity and the lack of support for small-scale farmers, which remain at the heart of the protests.

The absence of effective land reforms exacerbates the problem, as noted by Abdelrahman (2020), who states that the state's reluctance to enforce fair land tenure policies has led to widespread displacement and loss of livelihoods for many farmers. In addition, the government's focus on attracting foreign investment, as observed by FAO (2018), often overlooks the needs of local agricultural communities. Consequently, this neglect has worsened the socio-economic conditions in rural Sudan, contributing to ongoing cycles of protest and unrest. The situation is further complicated by climate-induced stressors, as the lack of state support in managing climate risks, discussed by UNDP (2020), amplifies the vulnerability of farmers already struggling with inadequate infrastructure and market access.

## **4. Conclusion**

The agricultural sector in Sudan, vital to its economy and the livelihoods of millions, remains

mired in deep crises, exacerbated by ineffective government policies, neglect of rural needs, and ongoing conflicts. The government's inability to address the core issues of land tenure insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of support for small-scale farmers has not only hindered agricultural productivity but also deepened the sense of alienation and frustration among the farming community. As highlighted by several studies, including those by Abdelrahman (2020) and Omer (2021), the Sudanese state has prioritized foreign investments and large agribusinesses over local farmers, leading to land dispossession and escalating agrarian conflicts. The government's response to protests, often involving repression, only perpetuates a cycle of unrest that further destabilizes the rural economy.

Moreover, the challenges posed by climate change, as discussed by the UNDP (2020), compound the difficulties faced by farmers, who are left without the resources or support systems necessary to adapt to environmental changes. This lack of a comprehensive approach to agricultural development has not only undermined food security but also fostered a deepening rural-urban divide, with rural populations feeling increasingly marginalized from national governance processes.

For Sudan to break this cycle of agrarian discontent and build a more resilient agricultural sector, significant reforms are necessary. These reforms must include the implementation of fair land tenure systems, increased investment in rural infrastructure, and a focus on sustainable agricultural practices that account for the impacts of climate change. Additionally, the government must adopt a more inclusive approach to governance, prioritizing the needs and voices of farmers to restore their trust and ensure the long-term viability of Sudan's agricultural sector. Only through these comprehensive and inclusive efforts can Sudan hope to achieve not just agricultural development, but broader social and economic stability.

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