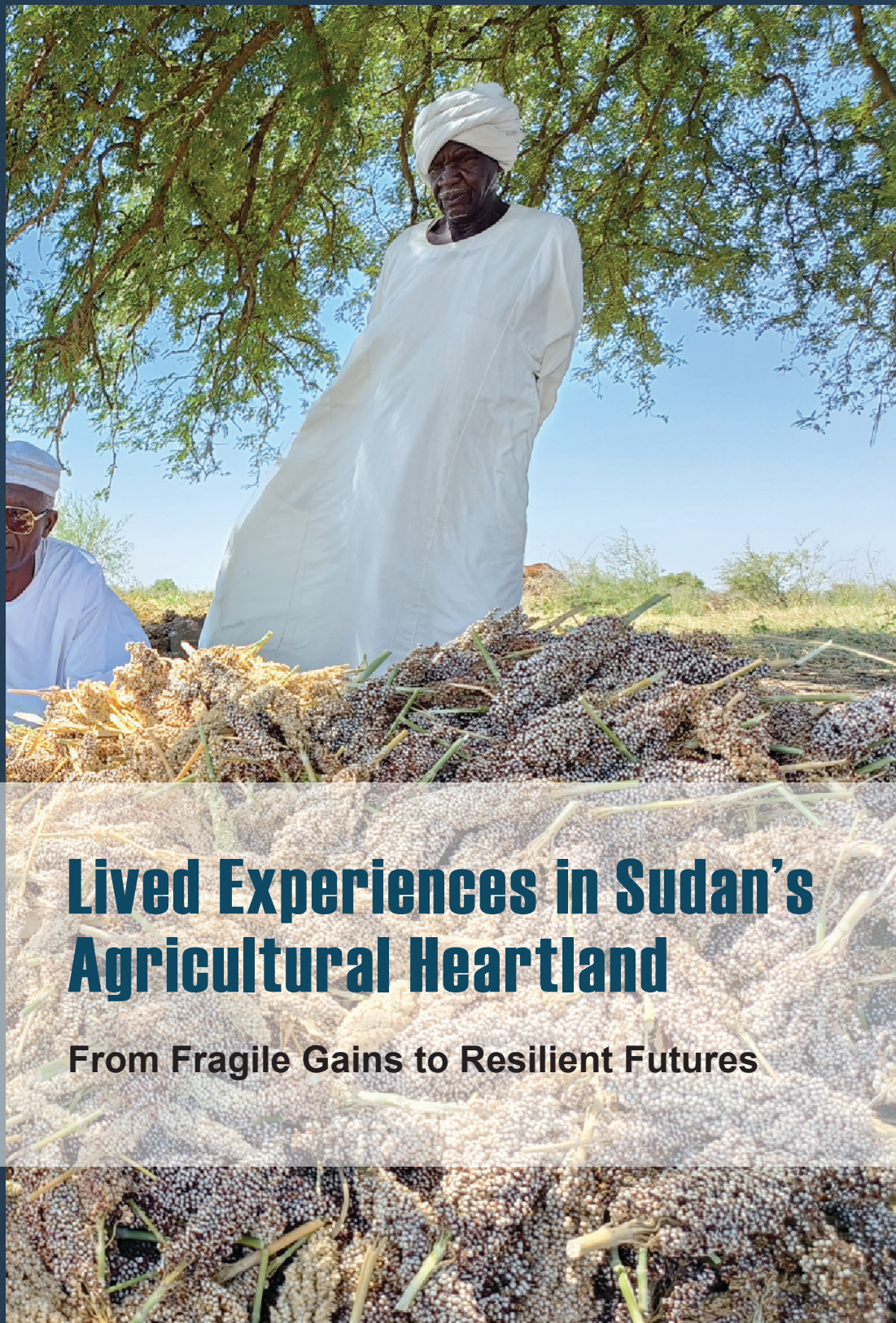
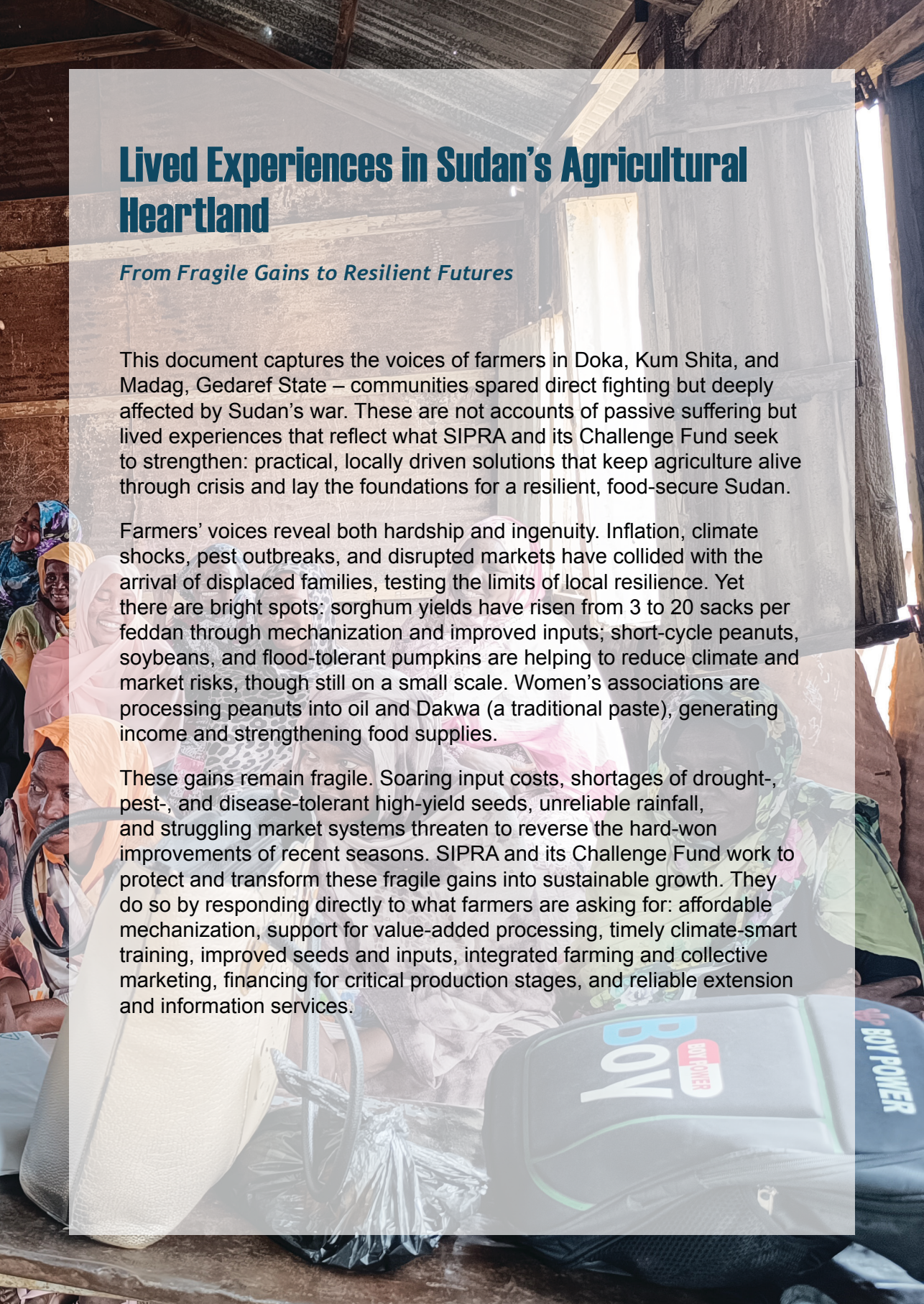




Lived Experiences in Sudan's Agricultural Heartland

From Fragile Gains to Resilient Futures





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This document captures the voices of farmers in Doka, Kum Shita, and Madag, Gedaref State – communities spared direct fighting but deeply affected by Sudan's war. These are not accounts of passive suffering but lived experiences that reflect what SIPRA and its Challenge Fund seek to strengthen: practical, locally driven solutions that keep agriculture alive through crisis and lay the foundations for a resilient, food-secure Sudan.

Farmers' voices reveal both hardship and ingenuity. Inflation, climate shocks, pest outbreaks, and disrupted markets have collided with the arrival of displaced families, testing the limits of local resilience. Yet there are bright spots: sorghum yields have risen from 3 to 20 sacks per feddan through mechanization and improved inputs; short-cycle peanuts, soybeans, and flood-tolerant pumpkins are helping to reduce climate and market risks, though still on a small scale. Women's associations are processing peanuts into oil and Dakwa (a traditional paste), generating income and strengthening food supplies.

These gains remain fragile. Soaring input costs, shortages of drought-, pest-, and disease-tolerant high-yield seeds, unreliable rainfall, and struggling market systems threaten to reverse the hard-won improvements of recent seasons. SIPRA and its Challenge Fund work to protect and transform these fragile gains into sustainable growth. They do so by responding directly to what farmers are asking for: affordable mechanization, support for value-added processing, timely climate-smart training, improved seeds and inputs, integrated farming and collective marketing, financing for critical production stages, and reliable extension and information services.

Preface

In Sudan's rainfed agricultural heartlands, where conflict has displaced millions and cut food production by nearly half, communities are still finding ways to plant, harvest, and keep hope alive. The Strengthening Inclusive Partnerships for Smallholders in Rainfed Areas (SIPRA) programme – funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and implemented by a consortium led by ZOA with SOS Sahel, World Relief (WR), Wageningen Social and Economic Research (WSER), and GOPA-MetaMeta as Technical Assistance Provider for the Challenge Fund, agribusiness investments and related assessments and learning – is working alongside them. Operating across seven states, SIPRA aims to restore resilience, improve household food and nutrition security, and drive sustainable, inclusive economic growth for smallholders and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

At the heart of this *Lived Experiences* publication are the voices of farmers, producer associations, and local stakeholders – not as passive beneficiaries, but as active agents of resilience, innovation, and adaptive learning. Through candid, story-driven dialogues, communities have shared both the hardships they face and the practical solutions they envision, providing a clear roadmap for targeted, high-impact investments.

These lived experiences reveal a consistent call for enabling partnerships that strengthen, scale, and complement local initiatives with proven best practices. Through its Challenge Fund facility, SIPRA answers this call, deploying small and large grants to close value chain gaps, create jobs, strengthen market systems, and build the capacity of the private sector. The priorities voiced by communities are concrete: agricultural machinery, improved storage facilities, forage packaging, organic fertiliser production, advanced value-addition training, processing plants, knowledge exchange, and market access platforms. By aligning investments with these priorities, SIPRA ensures interventions remain relevant, market-driven, and transformative.

This publication is more than a compilation of community voices – it is a testament to the resilience of the Sudanese people who, despite conflict, displacement, and the loss of nearly half of the nation's agricultural production capacity, continue to protect their livelihoods and support one

another. It is also a practical tool for aligning donor and partner resources with locally defined priorities, ensuring that investments are strategic, impactful, and sustainable. By showcasing these lived experiences, we reaffirm our shared commitment – as implementing partners, funders, and communities – to restoring Sudan’s agricultural backbone, empowering its people, and building a resilient, inclusive food system for the future.

Joseph Ashong
SIPRA Consortium Programme Manager

Acknowledgement

This *Lived Experiences* publication was prepared by GOPA MetaMeta Research on behalf of ZOA, the lead SIPRA consortium partner. It is grounded in the voices, resilience, and aspirations of Sudan's farmers.

We are deeply grateful to the farmer representatives who welcomed us into their homes and shared their stories – speaking candidly about the challenges they face, their determination to adapt, and their vision for the future. Their insights have not only guided this documentation but have directly shaped SIPRA's priorities and the direction of the Challenge Fund interventions.

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Introduction

From Lived Experience to Action

At the core of this lived experience documentation initiative, which is part of the SIPRA Programme and its Challenge Fund, lies a fundamental recognition: communities – and the local institutions and stakeholders that support them – are not passive recipients of aid. They are, in fact, key actors in resilience-building, innovation, and adaptive learning.

Through years of confronting hardship, these communities have developed and refined local knowledge systems rooted in experience and resourcefulness. They are acutely aware of the gaps within their own structures and often propose workable solutions. What they require are enabling partnerships that can strengthen, scale, and complement their efforts with tested best practices, thereby transforming shared priorities into tangible, life-improving investments. Here, the SIPRA Challenge Fund Programme delivers practical and impactful support.

Unlike conventional data collection methods, this approach cultivates open, story-centred dialogues in familiar settings. This fosters a sense of trust, allowing community

members to speak candidly about their experiences – chronicling hardships, sharing solutions, reflecting on lessons learned, and expressing their readiness to co-invest in long-term change. This documentation provides a baseline and identifies actionable priority investment areas for the Challenge Fund. It serves as a practical tool for both reflection and investment planning. The result is a process that deepens connection and reveals clear pathways for collective action.

SIPRA and Its Challenge Fund Programme: Restoring Resilience in Sudan's Food System

Sudan's food system is facing an unprecedented crisis. Since the brutal civil war erupted in 2023, the country has lost over half of its agricultural production capacity. More than 24.6 million people – about half the population – are experiencing acute food insecurity, including around 8 million in emergency conditions and nearly 700,000 facing famine. Sudan currently endures one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. The conflict has displaced over 12 million people, destroyed critical infrastructure, and severely disrupted supply chains, markets, and agricultural inputs, leading to a weakened crop production system and soaring food prices.



Amidst this dire context, the SIPRA Programme operates with a strategic focus to restore and build resilience in Sudan's rainfed agricultural sector and its interconnected livestock, poultry, fisheries, and horticulture systems. It fosters a sustainable, inclusive food system capable of withstanding ongoing shocks while supporting long-term food and nutrition security. Funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by a consortium including ZOA, World Relief, SOS Sahel Sudan, and Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI), with technical assistance from MetaMeta, SIPRA works across seven states – South Darfur, East Darfur, Central Darfur, South Kordofan, White Nile, Blue Nile, and Gedaref – regions deeply affected by conflict and food insecurity.

By fostering private sector engagement, strengthening local support networks, and empowering smallholder farmers – including women, youth, internally displaced persons, and persons with disabilities – as active agents of change, SIPRA enhances productivity, promotes climate-resilient farming, improves household nutrition, and boosts rural livelihoods.



The private sector is central to Sudan's food system and its recovery. Historically responsible for food imports, processing, distribution, and agricultural input supply, private enterprises have suffered immense losses due to conflict but remain vital actors in restoring production and market linkages. SIPRA strengthens this sector through targeted support and partnerships.

At the heart of SIPRA's strategy lies the Challenge Fund – a catalytic financing mechanism that incentivises producer associations and private sector actors to overcome barriers in supply chains by co-investing in innovative and inclusive agribusiness models. The Challenge Fund offers two tracks of grants: small grants (USD 1,000–20,000) to support organised farmers, producer associations, and SMEs in strengthening service provision and food security; and large grants (USD 20,000–100,000) aimed at strategic partnerships capable of addressing multiple

value chain challenges, generating jobs, and reinforcing private sector operational capacities.

Priority investments focus on rainfed cereals, legumes, nutrition-rich crops, livestock, poultry, fisheries, horticulture, agro-processing, agricultural inputs and services, post-harvest management, and market linkages. SIPRA ensures rigorous assessment and ongoing support to guarantee that funded projects connect with farmer networks and can be scaled or replicated to maximise impact.

In sum, SIPRA's Challenge Fund and complementary initiatives represent a timely and strategic response to Sudan's deteriorating food system. By aligning investments with local realities and scaling inclusive, market-driven solutions, SIPRA helps rebuild the agricultural sector's backbone – empowering communities and enterprises to drive their own recovery and lay the foundation for long-term food and nutrition security.



Sowing Hope in Times of Hardship

Resilience and Adaptation Among Conflict-Affected Farmers in Doka, Eastern Sudan

In the sun-drenched plains of Doka, in Al-Qalabat Ash Sharqiyah locality of Eastern Sudan, farming was once more than an occupation – it was a way of life. The annual cycle of rains, harvests, and market exchanges gave rhythm to the seasons and anchored the lives of smallholder farmers. Despite periodic setbacks, families managed to secure enough food to last the year. Agriculture was not just survival – it was a generational identity.

Since the outbreak of armed conflict in Sudan in 2023, that delicate balance has begun to unravel. The very threads that held together livelihoods, food security, and community resilience have come under strain.

Although Gedaref State has been spared from direct frontlines, armed clashes along its western borders, particularly near Khayari, Al-Fao, and Al-Hawata, along with fighting in Khartoum, Al-Jazirah, and Sinnar States, have triggered mass displacement and severe economic disruption.

In towns like Doka, host communities are under pressure: accommodating displaced families, competing for already scarce resources, and facing steep increases in the cost of agricultural services and inputs. What was once a predictable, if challenging, livelihood has become increasingly uncertain. Yet, the farmers of Doka are adapting, rebuilding, and holding on to the promise of their land.

The EI-Tawasol Farmer Production Network

Founded in 2018 through an EU-funded food security and water supply initiative, the EI-Tawasol Farmer Production Network now unites 13 grassroots producer associations representing over 300 farmers. Each member contributes at least five feddans (about two hectares) of land to be cultivated collectively. Profits are reinvested into the network – used to purchase tools, fund operations, and expand activities – while members may also manage private plots outside the network.

Traditionally, Doka's rainfed farmers produced an average of three sacks of sorghum per feddan – far below the 12 sacks needed to feed a family for a year. Sorghum is more than a staple here; it is essential for survival.

With the introduction of improved seed varieties and modern farming techniques by NGOs, yields have improved. Farmers using the full technical package have achieved 12–15 sacks per feddan, while partial adopters produce 6–8 sacks.

However, high input costs – made worse by inflation and supply chain disruptions – remain a major barrier. In 2023/24, the network planted only 200 feddans, down from a potential of 1,500. Thanks to a local investment from Mahjoub Sons Group, the cultivated area rose to 450 feddans in 2024/25, including 120 feddans of soybeans – a new crop for the area.



Figure 1: El-Tawasul Farmer Production Network headquarter, Doka, Gedaref State



Stories of Strength and Strain

Hanan: Quiet Strength in Crisis

Hanan farms 10 feddans of sorghum outside the network to feed her family. Owning her land shielded her from rent costs, and remittances from her displaced sons covered input expenses. During school closures in 2023, her daughters worked full-time on the farm; when classes resumed, they continued helping after school and on weekends. Despite hardship, Hanan's commitment to her land never wavered.

Muna: The Strain of Resilience

Muna Yaqoub, a farmer, schoolteacher, and board member of the network, rented and cultivated 10 feddans annually using her teaching salary. When the war halted civil servant pay, she lost her main income. Taking in displaced relatives further strained her resources, forcing her to consume and sell seed she had set aside for planting. Unable to cultivate for two consecutive seasons, she and her family turned to informal daily labor to afford food.

Samawal: From Promise to Precarity

Once a model of climate-smart farming, Samawal Qamr El-Din cultivated 20 feddans with modern machinery, producing 7–8 sacks of sorghum and 3 sacks of sesame per feddan. Economic collapse forced him to halve his cultivated area and rely on basic tools and family labor, dropping his yields to 2–3 sacks of sorghum and half a sack of sesame per feddan. In 2024, despite ample rain, persistent cloud cover during sesame's flowering stage caused near-total failure. Without agricultural extension or scientific advice, farmers like him were left without answers.

Othman: When All Else Fails, Try Something New

In a flood-prone area, Othman Omar saw his sesame yields fall to 0.2 sacks per feddan. Rather than give up, he switched to pumpkins — a flood-tolerant crop — which provided modest returns, enough to repay debts and meet basic needs.



Figure 2: A group of farmers gathered to share and discuss their lived experiences and personal stories

Innovation as Survival

Adaptation is becoming a necessity. In earlier seasons, Muna intercropped white cowpea with peanuts – low-maintenance crops that generated income without forcing her to sell her main harvest early. Some farmers have introduced “Abu Al-Qawi,” a short-cycle peanut variety, enabling earlier sales and better prices to cover seasonal expenses.

These may seem small changes, but they reflect a broader truth: quiet innovation and adaptability are keeping smallholder farmers afloat in the face of both economic and climate crises.

The Spirit of Nafir

Nafir, a Sudanese tradition of communal voluntary labor, remains a lifeline. In Doka and surrounding villages, neighbors – often youth – step in to help widows, the elderly without sons, and people with disabilities to plant, weed, and harvest.

But *Nafir* alone cannot bear the weight of a prolonged crisis. Formal support must reinforce, not replace, this tradition – channeling resources where they are most needed, while preserving the spirit of community solidarity.



Figure 3: A portion of the machinery available to the network, though limited in quantity relative to the number of farmers it serves.

Hope Anchored in SIPRA: Planting the Seeds of Tomorrow

Farmers in Doka place their hopes in SIPRA. For them, SIPRA is more than a development project; it is a vital partner in their fight to survive, adapt, and rebuild.

Their ask is simple: not charity, but timely, practical support to strengthen resilience and protect livelihoods.

The conflict has not only displaced communities and damaged infrastructure – it has shaken the foundations of rural life. Yet even in this fragile context, seeds of resilience are beginning to sprout.

Farmers like Hanan, Muna, Othman, and Samawal are experimenting with new crops, adapting techniques, and relying on *Nafir*. Sudan's agricultural recovery will be driven not only by resources, but by the resolve of its people.

With the right support, timely information, and innovation, these communities can help shape a sustainable and inclusive rural future.

Stories of Resilience from Kum Shita, Gedaref State

Women Farmers Leading the Way Amid Crisis

Across Sudan, resilience takes many forms, shaped by conflict, climate shocks, and worsening economic conditions. Nowhere is this more visible than in Gedaref State, where agriculture sustains nearly 95% of the population. Here, farming is not just a livelihood – it is a way of life, closely tied to identity, tradition, and community cohesion.

Our journey took us to Kum Shita, a village about 25 kilometers south of Gedaref city, near Kassab town in West Galabat locality. There, we met the **EI-Ruwad Network**, a cohesive group of 15 grassroots, women-led associations formed in 2018 with support from ZOA through a European Union-funded food security program.

Today, the network has grown to 226 members – most of them women – along with around 55 male members, including youth. Together, they cultivate 4,400 feddans of farmland, while each member also tends their own plots.



What we found were not only accounts of hardship but also compelling stories of determination, ingenuity, and leadership – driven largely by women. They are not simply enduring adversity; they are reshaping it. Through managing agricultural enterprises, building community support structures, and responding proactively to risks, these women are redefining resilience. Their stories reveal a powerful truth: in the face of crisis, women farmers in Gedaref are not just surviving – they are leading.

Breaking Stereotypes, Transforming Agriculture

The El-Ruwad Network traces its roots to 2014, when **Ayadi Al-Khair**, a pioneering women-led association, was established in Kum Shita. At the time, skepticism about women's ability to succeed in agriculture was widespread, even among local men. But doubt became fuel for determination.

The turning point came when El-Ruwad received comprehensive agricultural support through the EU-funded Food Security Project, implemented by ZOA. As Mrs. Hanan, the network's chairwoman, recalls, this support “fundamentally changed our trajectory.”





Figure 4: El-Ruwad Farmer Production Network headquarter, Kum Shita village, Gedaref, Sudan

The introduction of a **full technology-based farming package** sparked a dramatic transformation. Sorghum yields jumped from 3 – 4 sacks per feddan to 15–18 sacks. Beyond numbers, this meant economic empowerment, credibility, and renewed purpose.

The project followed a phased model:

- Initially, 75% of input costs were subsidized, with the remaining 25% covered through local bank financing.
- Over time, subsidies were reduced to 50%, then 25%, until members were fully self-financing their operations.

A major milestone came when the women collectively repaid their bank loan on time, without delay – demonstrating both financial discipline and enterprise credibility. Their success won them respect, even from former skeptics. Some men who once doubted them later sought membership and mentorship.

For Mrs. Hanan, even if the project had only helped them move from traditional methods to modern technologies, it would have been a success. But it did much more – it catalyzed a movement that transformed productivity, challenged gender norms, and redefined what women farmers can achieve.



Figure 5: A group of women farmers gathered to share and discuss their lived experiences and personal stories

From Crops to Commerce: Moving Up the Value Chain

Despite their productivity gains, El-Ruwad members faced persistent hurdles, particularly limited storage and transport capacity. These constraints often forced them to sell produce early, at low prices.

To address this, ZOA provided training in value chain development, business planning, and product diversification. With this support, the women secured small grants and invested in key equipment, including a **peanut oil press** and **de-husker**.

This enabled them to launch a modest but integrated processing unit, producing **peanut butter (Dakwa)** and **peanut oil** – marking their shift from subsistence farming to agribusiness.

However, marketing remains a bottleneck. Without physical retail outlets or digital platforms, distribution is currently limited to Gedaref and parts of Kassala. Yet their ambitions are bigger: to reach customers across Sudan and tap into international markets. The economics are clear—while a sack of raw peanuts sells for \$30–40, processed products can fetch upwards of \$100.

In response, the women have approached ZOA to explore **direct-to-consumer channels** and better market access for their products, including peanut goods, okra powder, and chili.



Figure 6: The Small-Scale Dakwa and Peanut Oil Processing Facility Operated by the EI-Ruwad Network

The Human Impact of Conflict: A Strained Agricultural Value Chain

Before the war, agricultural productivity in Kum Shita was on a steady upward trajectory. Average peanut yields ranged from 20 to 25 sacks per feddan – more than enough to keep the women-led processing unit running without reliance on external markets. This level of self-sufficiency was a milestone for the **EI-Ruwad Network**, signaling both economic independence and operational efficiency.

In 2024, that progress came to an abrupt halt. The escalation of conflict brought a cascade of disruptions:

- Fuel shortages stalled land preparation and harvesting.
- Credit access collapsed as banks became increasingly hesitant to lend, fearing Rapid Support Forces (RSF) advances toward Gedaref.

The planting cycle was nearly abandoned, causing a sharp drop in production and breaking the supply chain. Raw material shortages threatened the Dakwa and peanut oil processing unit, placing additional economic strain on members.

Even staple crops were hit hard. Sorghum yields fell from 15 - 18 sacks per feddan to just 7–10, largely due to the lack of fuel and unaffordable or unavailable pesticides.

Kum Shita's main crops include peanuts, sorghum, sesame, millet, while they have also introduced pumpkin seeds recently. Sunflower cultivation was encouraged after the 2021 sesame stem gall midge outbreak, making it a climate-resilient alternative. Likewise, locally adapted sorghum varieties such as *Arfa Gadmak* – well-suited to the central agro-climatic zone – were adopted as part of broader efforts to stabilize production under volatile conditions.

Despite these adaptive measures, institutional support has been limited. Government contributions have generally been confined to seed distribution and occasional technical assistance from research centers. While the EU-funded Food Security Project had provided some tools in earlier years, they were insufficient for the needs of a growing network.



Women on the Frontlines: Farming Through the Crisis

Behind every statistic of declining yields lies a personal story of determination, adaptation, and loss. The women of El-Ruwad are not just producers - they are leaders navigating the frontlines of conflict-induced hardship.

Hanan Ahmed, the network's chairwoman, cultivated 20 feddans before the war, rotating sesame or sunflower with peanuts intercropped with cowpea, millet, and sorghum. She followed sustainable practices – using cowpea to enrich the soil and combat *broomrape* (parasitic weeds that attack the roots of crops like legumes, sunflower, tomato, and tobacco) – based on guidance from JICA and the national research authority.

The 2024 season, however, brought unprecedented challenges. Hosting displaced families depleted her seed reserves. Humanitarian aid from organizations such as Zainab and Mercy offered some relief, but fell short of needs. With high fertilizer and pesticide costs and ongoing fuel shortages, she managed to cultivate only 15 feddans with minimal inputs. Her peanut yields dropped from 30 sacks per feddan to 20, while millet fell from 12 sacks to just 2.

Siddiqa Khalil, another member, typically farms 20 feddans. She persisted during the conflict but, without financing, reverted to traditional low-input techniques. The results were devastating: her sesame crop was completely lost to pests, and late-planted sorghum yielded no grain – only fodder.

Soad Ishaq farms between 5 and 10 feddans depending on her access to credit. In 2023, financing from Bank Al-Ibdaa' enabled her to achieve a moderate sorghum harvest. But in 2024, unable to secure funding, she faced sharp yield declines. Without improved seeds or pesticides, and limited by fuel shortages, she maintained crop rotation to preserve soil health but lacked the capacity for intercropping or diversification – restricting her income options.

These stories mirror the reality for rural women farmers in Sudan's conflict-affected regions. Despite their expertise, adaptive strategies, and unwavering commitment, external shocks – particularly war and market instability – have severely undermined their ability to farm effectively. And yet, they persist, driving recovery and hope in one of Sudan's most vulnerable areas.

Reviving Traditional Solidarity: Nafir

In the absence of reliable external aid, the women of Kum Shita turned to each other –reviving **Nafir**, a traditional communal labor system where members work together to reduce costs and support the most vulnerable.

Through Nafir, households with the fewest resources – elderly women, widows, and families hosting displaced people – were still able to prepare their land, harvest crops, and maintain food security. This informal network kept hunger at bay, even as war reduced incomes and restricted access to agricultural inputs.

Looking Ahead: Community Hopes from SIPRA

The people of Kum Shita – and particularly the El-Ruwad Network – have high expectations for the SIPRA project. Their guiding principle is simple yet ambitious: Training – Production – Processing – Marketing.



Figure 7: A portion of the machinery currently available to the network, though valuable, remains limited in both quantity and capacity relative to the number of farmers it is intended to support.



Already, **SIPRA is addressing critical gaps**. Agricultural machinery for the network has been delivered. New training and partnership programs are also being developed to strengthen resilience and economic sustainability for Kum Shita's determined women farmers.

A Future Rooted in Women's Leadership

Despite war, displacement, and resource scarcity, the women of Kum Shita have never abandoned agriculture. They have continued to till, plant, harvest, and process – not only to feed their families, but also to sustain their communities.

Their message is clear: support is not about charity, but partnership. With timely assistance from SIPRA and others, these women are ready not just to rebuild - but to lead.



“

**We Used to Farm Because
We Had to – Now We Farm
Because We Believe in it**

”

The Lived Experience of Agricultural Transformation and Adaptation in Madag, Gedaref State

Madag Village and the Rise of the
Asham Baker Network

Madag lies 107 kilometers south of Gedaref city and about 30 kilometers from Doka, the capital of Gallabat Sharqiyah locality. Before 2014, farming here followed traditional, labor-intensive methods with low yields and limited market access. Young people often migrated to cities in search of income.

This changed with the introduction of an EU-funded food security project implemented by ZOA, which brought modern agricultural technologies and practices to the community for the first time. Out of this effort, the **Al-Silat Al-Taybah** grassroots



association was formed in 2014 and officially registered in 2015. By 2018, it became the foundation of the **Asham Baker Network**.

Today, the network brings together 11 grassroots associations with 372 registered members managing around 4,200 feddans of farmland. Farmers have received training in modern farming techniques, crop diversification, environmental conservation, governance, and value chains. Even with limited machinery, new technologies have reduced labor requirements and significantly boosted yields.

The change was so profound that farmers began composing poems and songs about agricultural machinery – celebrating it as a

symbol of empowerment and urging others to adopt innovation. The enthusiasm spread, inspiring neighboring communities to follow suit.

Adapting in the Face of Adversity

The outbreak of war in Sudan, along with economic instability, fuel shortages, and limited access to pesticides and fertilizers, forced the network to scale back cultivation from 3,000 to 2,000 feddans. However, members chose to maintain full technological packages on smaller plots to sustain productivity.





Figure 8: Initial land preparation activities for farmers' agricultural fields in Madag.

The results have been remarkable for a rain-fed system: sorghum yields increased from 2–3 sacks per feddan to 15–20 sacks, while groundnut yields rose from 7–10 to 20–30 sacks.

The network is now registering its own agricultural services company - **Lamsat Baker** – to offer mechanized services to a wider group of



farmers. In partnership with extension services, they have also trained four men and two women as certified agricultural extension agents to serve both their own and neighboring communities.



Figure 9: Asham Baker Farmer Production Network headquarter, Madag village, Gedaref, Sudan

Individual Stories of Transformation

Mutwakil Haroun

Mutwakil, founder of the Asham Baker Network and chair of the Iyadi Al-Khair grassroots association, grew up in a family with over 50 siblings sharing a small 20-feddan plot. Yields were just 3 sacks per feddan, barely enough to survive. At one point, he considered emigrating.

When the EU project arrived, he took the risk of trying modern farming on 5 feddans. His first harvest jumped from 3 to 15 sacks per feddan. The success inspired others, and over time, his cultivated area expanded to 500 feddans. This transformed his family's life—improving food security, enabling education, and securing bank financing.

The war forced him to reduce to 300 feddans due to input shortages, but he maintained high per-feddan productivity by focusing on quality over quantity. His vision is to become one of Gedaref's leading farmers and to make his network a model for Sudan.

Hassan Hamid Adam

Hassan, head of the Afaaq Madag Association and father of eight daughters, initially farmed 10 feddans with low yields—5–6 sacks of sorghum and 3–4 sacks of sesame. Income was barely enough to survive, and he took seasonal jobs in Khartoum.

With project support, he planted all 10 feddans with sorghum and harvested 142 sacks—exceeding expectations. This allowed him to renovate his home, open a shop, expand to 20 feddans, and invest in a small mill for value addition. He educated all his daughters at universities and higher institutes. The war reduced his land to 10 feddans, but he maintained strong productivity.

Hamad Ibrahim Adam

A teacher from nearby Marioud, Hamad initially funded his farming with his modest salary. After seeing Mutwakil's success, he joined the project and harvested 115 sacks of sorghum from 10 feddans - up from his previous 3 sacks.

Today, Hamad farms 15 feddans (groundnut, sorghum, sesame) and owns a traditional oil press, selling oil and cake rather than unprocessed nuts. Despite the war, he has maintained his cultivated area with only slight drops in productivity.



Figure 10: Mutwakil Haroun reflecting their needs from SIPRA



Figure 11: View of sorghum cultivated using the full technological package in Madag, 2024 (Source: Asham Baker Network)

Broader Impact and Future Expectations

Madag is full of similar stories, showing that even when land areas are reduced, farmers remain committed to using full technological packages, now seen as essential to productivity.

The Asham Baker Network plays an active role in outreach – using poets and theater troupes to promote modern farming in schools, fairs, and public events. Members also support vulnerable farmers by sharing equipment and services. The network has helped form over 400 associations in and around the area, contributing to widespread productivity improvements.

“We used to farm because we had to,” Mutwakil reflects. “Now, we farm because we believe in it.”

The Asham Baker Network is living proof that with the right tools, training, and trust, rural communities can turn hardship into opportunity – planting not just crops, but hope for generations to come.

What Are the Farmers Asking For?

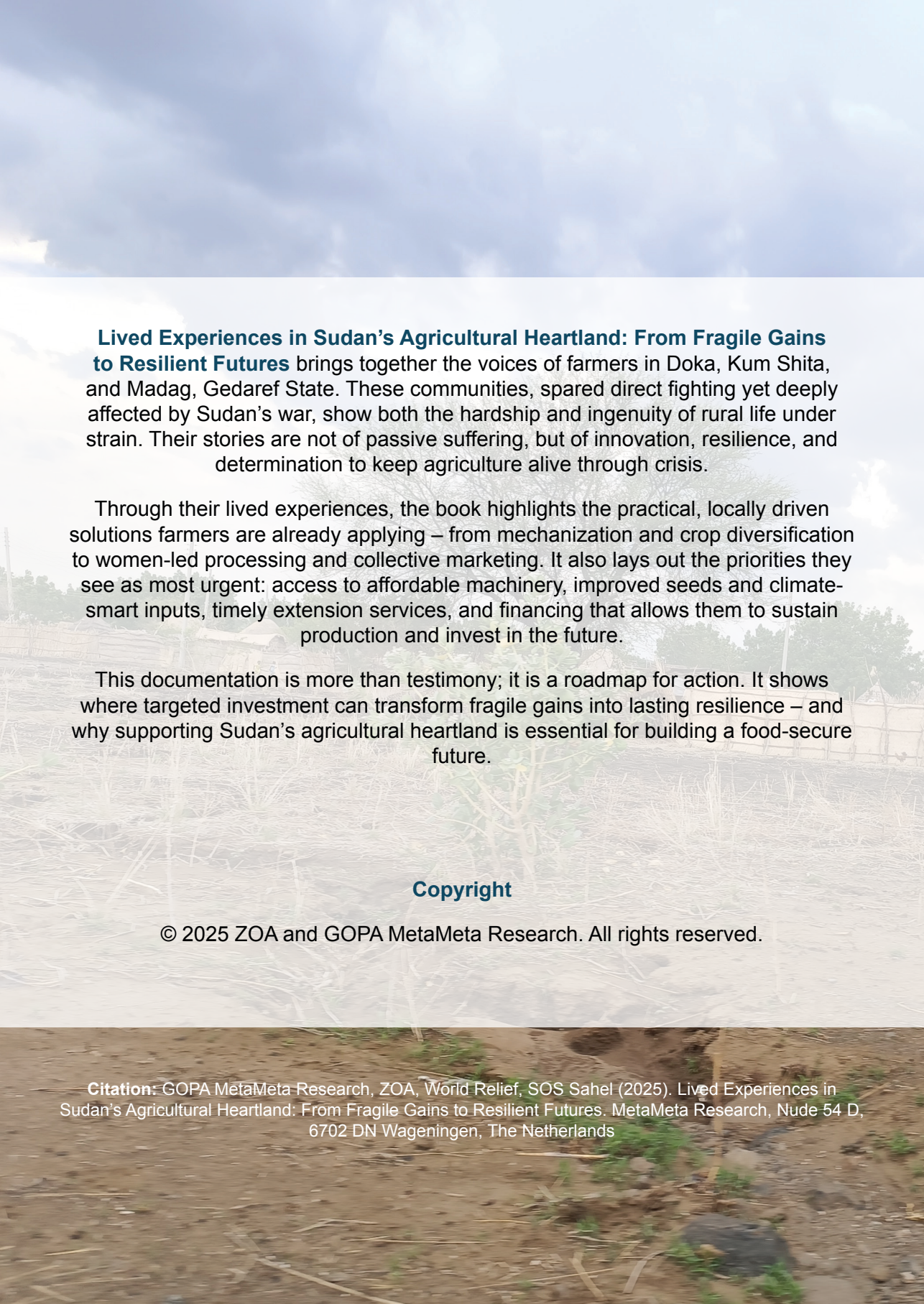
Farmers in Gedaref have been clear: they are not asking for charity, but for the tools and opportunities to secure their own future. Their priorities show both urgency and vision:

- ❑ **Affordable mechanization** to overcome the shortage of agricultural machinery and boost productivity.
- ❑ **Support for value-added production** (such as peanut butter, cooking oils, and poultry) to diversify incomes and reduce pressure to sell crops too early.
- ❑ **Timely, practical training** on climate-resilient farming, organic composting, animal feed processing, post-harvest loss reduction, and market-oriented feasibility studies.
- ❑ **Integrated farming and collective marketing** to align production with demand and avoid distress sales.
- ❑ **Improved seeds and inputs**, especially drought-tolerant varieties, to reduce risks and stabilize yields.
- ❑ **Financing support** – through direct cash or input loans – for critical stages like land preparation, weeding, and harvesting.
- ❑ **Extension services and reliable information**, ensuring farmers receive the right guidance at the right time.

These are not abstract demands. They are practical, grounded requests from farmers who are already innovating under strain – and who, with the right support, can transform fragile gains into the foundations of a resilient and food-secure Sudan.



Figure 12: A group of farmers gathered to share and discuss their lived experiences and personal stories



Lived Experiences in Sudan's Agricultural Heartland: From Fragile Gains to Resilient Futures brings together the voices of farmers in Doka, Kum Shita, and Madag, Gedaref State. These communities, spared direct fighting yet deeply affected by Sudan's war, show both the hardship and ingenuity of rural life under strain. Their stories are not of passive suffering, but of innovation, resilience, and determination to keep agriculture alive through crisis.

Through their lived experiences, the book highlights the practical, locally driven solutions farmers are already applying – from mechanization and crop diversification to women-led processing and collective marketing. It also lays out the priorities they see as most urgent: access to affordable machinery, improved seeds and climate-smart inputs, timely extension services, and financing that allows them to sustain production and invest in the future.

This documentation is more than testimony; it is a roadmap for action. It shows where targeted investment can transform fragile gains into lasting resilience – and why supporting Sudan's agricultural heartland is essential for building a food-secure future.

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