

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN FOCUS

Delivering Hope in Fragile Times

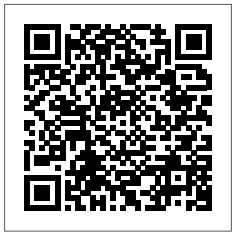
The Story of the Sudan Family Support Program

Suleiman Namara, Endeshaw Tadesse, Alvin Etang Ndip, Kevwe Sylvester Pela, and Yvonne Catherine Kirabo

WORLD BANK GROUP

Delivering Hope in Fragile Times

This book, along with any associated content or subsequent updates, can be accessed at https://hdl.handle.net/10986/44095.



Scan to see all titles in this series.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN FOCUS

Delivering Hope in Fragile Times

The Story of the Sudan Family Support Program

SULEIMAN NAMARA, ENDESHAW TADESSE, ALVIN ETANG NDIP, KEVWE SYLVESTER PELA, AND YVONNE CATHERINE KIRABO

WORLD BANK GROUP

© 2026 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank
1818 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20433
Telephone: 202-473-1000; Internet: www.worldbank.org

Some rights reserved
1 2 3 4 29 28 27 26

Books in this series are published to communicate the results of World Bank research, analysis, and operational experience with the least possible delay. The extent of language editing varies from book to book.

This work is a product of the staff of The World Bank with external contributions. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of The World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent. The World Bank does not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the data included in this work and does not assume responsibility for any errors, omissions, or discrepancies in the information, or liability with respect to the use of or failure to use the information, methods, processes, or conclusions set forth. The boundaries, colors, denominations, links/footnotes, and other information shown in this work do not imply any judgment on the part of The World Bank concerning the legal status of any territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries. The citation of works authored by others does not mean The World Bank endorses the views expressed by those authors or the content of their works.

Nothing herein shall constitute or be construed or considered to be a limitation upon or waiver of the privileges and immunities of The World Bank, all of which are specifically reserved.

Rights and Permissions



This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 IGO license (CC BY 3.0 IGO) http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo. Under the Creative Commons Attribution license, you are free to copy, distribute, transmit, and adapt this work, including for commercial purposes, under the following conditions:

Attribution—Please cite the work as follows: Namara, Suleiman, Endeshaw Tadesse, Alvin Etang Ndip, Kevwe Sylvester Pela, and Yvonne Catherine Kirabo. 2026. *Delivering Hope in Fragile Times: The Story of the Sudan Family Support Program*. International Development in Focus. Washington, DC: World Bank. 10.1596/978-1-4648-2302-2. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

Translations—If you create a translation of this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: *This translation was not created by The World Bank and should not be considered an official World Bank translation. The World Bank shall not be liable for any content or error in this translation.*

Adaptations—If you create an adaptation of this work, please add the following disclaimer along with the attribution: *This is an adaptation of an original work by The World Bank. Views and opinions expressed in the adaptation are the sole responsibility of the author or authors of the adaptation and are not endorsed by The World Bank.*

Third-party content—The World Bank does not necessarily own each component of the content contained within the work. The World Bank therefore does not warrant that the use of any third-party-owned individual component or part contained in the work will not infringe on the rights of those third parties. The risk of claims resulting from such infringement rests solely with you. If you wish to re-use a component of the work, it is your responsibility to determine whether permission is needed for that re-use and to obtain permission from the copyright owner. Examples of components can include, but are not limited to, tables, figures, or images.

All queries on rights and licenses should be addressed to World Bank Publications, The World Bank, 1818 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20433, USA; e-mail: pubrights@worldbank.org.

ISBN: 978-1-4648-2302-2
DOI: 10.1596/978-1-4648-2302-2

Cover photo: © Porstocker / Shutterstock. Used with the permission of Porstocker / Shutterstock. Further permission required for reuse.
Cover design: Debra Naylor / Naylor Design Inc.

Contents

Foreword *ix*
Acknowledgments *xi*
About the Authors *xiii*
Executive Summary *xvii*
Abbreviations *xxi*

CHAPTER 1 **Sudan Context and the Origin of the Sudan Family Support Program 1**
Fragility, economic challenges, and the need for reform in Sudan 1
Economic reform agenda: Origins and objectives of the reform 5
Origins of the Sudan family support program 6
Increasing fiscal space for social spending 8
Conclusion 13
Notes 14
References 14

CHAPTER 2 **Sudan Family Support Program Design and Performance 17**
Objective of the Sudan family support program 18
Cash transfer program considerations 19
Delivery strategy 20
Project performance 32
Implementation strategy 34
Conclusion 40
Notes 41
References 42

CHAPTER 3 **Main Lessons Learned from the Sudan Family Support Program 43**
Strategic collaboration with the national civil registry to expand identity access 43
Development of a unified registration platform 45
Phased approach to systems integration 46

Leveraging information technology expertise 48
Using culturally appropriate communication tools 49
Developing and implementing an automated payment module 51
Sustaining delivery systems beyond SFSP 52
Conclusion 53

CHAPTER 4 **Synthesizing Key Reflections from the Sudan Family Support Program Experience 55**
Balancing central oversight with localized implementation to build resilience in fragile contexts 56
Adapting national social protection programs to diverse conflict-affected contexts for effective delivery 57
Balancing technological innovation with contextual realities 58
Strengthening delivery through strategic partnerships 59
Embedding gender transformation beyond access and inclusion 60
Enabling architecture for integrated social protection systems 60
Developing sustainable and responsive financing mechanisms 61
The way forward 61

Appendix A **The Poverty Situation in Sudan 63**

Appendix B **Project Phases and Financing Components 69**

Appendix C **Microsimulation Analysis of Potential Benefit and Poverty Impact of the Sudan Family Support Program 71**

Appendix D **Insights from Beneficiary Experiences 79**

Appendix E **Sudan Family Support Program Payment Infrastructure Rollout Systems 85**

Boxes

1.1 Rationale for the quasi-universal approach modality 9
2.1 Sudan Family Support Program "one-stop shop" citizen engagement 24
C.1 Microsimulation methodology 72

Figures

1.1 Timeline of Sudan's political developments and internal conflicts 2
1.2 Key economic reform framework 7
2.1 Sudan Family Support Program development objectives 18
2.2 Social protection delivery systems 20
2.3 Strategy and delivery of communication 21
2.4 Basic process flow for benefit paid through a bank/MFI account 30
2.5 Key Sudan Family Support Program stakeholders 35
2.6 Sudan Family Support Program implementation timeline 35

A.1 Poverty incidence (headcount ratio), by locality and year 64
C.1 Simulated poverty rate, by area of residence 75
C.2 Observed and estimated Gini coefficients 75
D.1 Share of females encouraged to register for the Sudan Family Support Program 82

Map

A.1 Poverty incidence (headcount ratio), by state, 2014/15 65

Tables

B1.1 Cost by model and scenario 10
2.1 Types of cash transfer programs 19
2.2 Share of beneficiaries reached by different payment modalities during rollout 31
2.3 Project Development Objective indicators, by outcomes 33
A.1 Demographic attributes of households in the bottom 40 percent of per capita consumer expenditure, 2014/15 65
B.1 Project phases and financing, by component, US$, millions 69
B.2 Sudan Family Support Project revised Project Development Objective indicators and targets 70
C.1 Baseline consumption per capita and transfer size 73
C.2 Baseline consumption per capita and percentage change with transfers, by state 74
D.1 Sudan Family Support Program Beneficiary Feedback Survey, locality and sample size 80
D.2 Profile of Sudan Family Support Program beneficiaries 81
D.3 Sudan Family Support Program beneficiary experience 83

Foreword

In times of profound fragility, when institutions are strained and communities face the daily burden of uncertainty, the imperative to deliver hope becomes a developmental necessity. *Delivering Hope in Fragile Times* chronicles one of the most ambitious and courageous efforts undertaken in such a context—the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP). As Vice President of the World Bank, I am deeply honored to introduce this compelling account of innovation, resilience, and partnership.

The SFSP was introduced in a moment of transition, when Sudan stood at the crossroads of reform and recovery. Amid prolonged macroeconomic instability marked by high inflation, political upheaval, falling living standards, and widespread poverty, the SFSP sought to accomplish what few had attempted at such scale: deliver direct support to millions of vulnerable households to facilitate the government's ambitious reform agenda to stabilize the economy. Key items on that agenda included removing fuel subsidies, unifying the exchange rate, and consolidating public finances to create space for investment in human capital and social protection.

The program helped cushion the social impact of these reforms while simultaneously building the systems and institutions needed for long-term social protection. That the program reached more than 8.7 million people—many of them women and people living in historically marginalized regions—in less than a year is a testament to the power of collective action and to the determination of several partners who supported the program and of those who led its implementation.

This book is more than just a technical account of program design and delivery. It tells a story of how trust can be rebuilt, how systems can be strengthened even in the most fragile environments, and how communities—when engaged with dignity and respect—can become the cornerstone of lasting resilience. It highlights the critical role of partnerships between government ministries, development partners,

civil society, and the private sector. It underscores the importance of adaptive design and inclusive communication, and of the courage to innovate in the face of adversity.

The lessons from SFSP are relevant beyond Sudan. They address a broader global challenge: how to safeguard lives and livelihoods in contexts where fragility is the norm, not the exception. As conflict persists in disrupting development gains, the need for scalable, shock-responsive, and community-anchored social protection systems has never been greater.

I commend the authors for documenting this journey with rigor and empathy. Their insights will serve as a valuable resource for policy makers, practitioners, and partners working to build inclusive and resilient systems in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Most important, this book reminds us that even in the darkest of times, hope can be delivered—if we are willing to listen, to learn, and to lead together.

Ousmane Dione
Vice President, Middle East and North Africa Region
The World Bank Group

Acknowledgments

The World Bank greatly appreciates the close collaboration with the Government of Sudan in the preparation and delivery of the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP) and this book. Similarly, the Bank acknowledges the contribution of the World Food Programme (WFP) to the implementation of the program. The World Bank equally acknowledges the support and contributions of the donor community and the program's development partners for their commitment to supporting the people of Sudan and the technical expertise, advice, and normative guidance extended to the SFSP.

This book is an outcome of the successful implementation of the SFSP, a collaborative effort led by the Social Protection and Labor Global Practice. The book was prepared by a core team led by Suleiman Namara (Practice Manager, Social Protection and Labor Global Practice) and Endeshaw Tadesse (Senior Social Protection Specialist, Social Protection and Labor Global Practice), and comprising Alvin Etang Ndip (Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice), Kevwe Sylvester Pela (Economist, Social Protection and Labor Global Practice), and Yvonne Catherine Kirabo (Consultant, Social Protection and Labor Global Practice).

The book was prepared under the overall guidance of Robert Chase (Practice Manager, Social Protection and Labor Global Practice) and Daniel Dulitzky (Regional Practice Director), in close collaboration with Milena Stefanova (Operations Manager), Yoichiro Ishihara (Country Manager), Maryam Salim (Division Director), and Ousmane Dione (Regional Vice President).

Fareed M. A. Hassan is gratefully acknowledged for providing invaluable contributions to this book. The authors would also like to thank several colleagues for their contributions to earlier versions of the book: Amer Yusuf, Binyam Mesfin Shiferaw, Hibatala Isam Osman Mahjoub, Krishna Pidatala, Mohamed Abdel Jelil, Mohamed Farid Idris, Patience Bulage, Paul Ervin, Peter Pojarski, Selma Elsaeed, Surat Nsour, Maria Gabriela

Farfan Bertran, Tariq Makadi, Vicente Garcia Moreno, and William Sam. The authors are thankful to the peer reviewers of the book for their helpful feedback: Afrah Alawi Al-Ahmai (Senior Social Protection Specialist), Bernard Harborne (Resident Representative, Timor Leste), Ugo Gentilini (Lead Economist, HMAPS), Faizaa Fatima (Head of Strategic Partnerships, WFP Sudan), and Ed Barney (UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office).

Any errors or omissions are those of the authors only.

About the Authors

Yvonne Catherine Kirabo is a consultant in Social Protection and Labor Global Practice at the World Bank. She has over 12 years of experience spanning the areas of social protection, digital development, gender inclusion, and information technology. At the World Bank, she has contributed to the design and implementation of large-scale social protection programs, including the Sudan Family Support Project and the Liberia Youth Employment Program. She has also served in the Information and Technology Solutions Vice Presidency, where she led projects on robotic process automation, annual investment planning, IT business and data analysis, and youth innovation initiatives, including the Youth 2 Youth Innovation Fund winner C2i Project in Uganda. In addition, she supported the Gender Vice Presidency in developing the Bank's five-year global gender strategy launched in 2016. She is fluent in English and Swahili and proficient in French and Russian.

She holds a master's degree in information science and technology from the University of East London, United Kingdom, and a bachelor's degree in computer engineering from Kharkiv National University of Radio Electronics, Ukraine.

Alvin Etang Ndip is a Senior Economist in the Poverty and Equity Global Practice at the World Bank in South Asia and is currently based in Kathmandu, Nepal. He brings extensive experience from several African countries, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Sudan. He specializes in behavioral initiatives for poverty reduction and equity; fragility, conflict, and violence; household surveys; poverty measurement and analysis; and social development. His expertise is reflected in his leadership and technical roles across a range of projects, including the Sudan Family Support Program, the Urban Productive Safety Net Project in Ethiopia, and the Nigeria Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project. He also contributed to the Rohingya Impact on Bangladesh's Development study and led innovative high-frequency phone

surveys to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 and other shocks to vulnerable populations in fragile contexts.

He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Otago in New Zealand and a master's degree from Università Degli Studi Di Bergamo in Italy.

Suleiman Namara is the Practice Manager for Social Protection and Labor at the World Bank in East and Southern Africa, based in Nairobi, Kenya. He leads a multidisciplinary team delivering innovative operations and analytical and advisory services to strengthen social protection systems, expand job opportunities, and enhance resilience across the region.

Before his current position, he was Lead Social Protection Specialist, where he supported the scale-up of systems-based safety nets and jobs programs. He played a key role as part of the World Bank's Sudan re-engagement team, leading the design and implementation of the Sudan Family Support Program and the Sudan Emergency Safety Net Project.

He also has extensive experience working in South Asia, where he led the World Bank's response to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh and contributed to projects aimed at strengthening social protection systems and expanding economic opportunities. In addition, he served as Senior Social Protection Economist in West Africa, where he supported the World Bank's response to the Ebola crisis. Before joining the World Bank, he was Executive Director of the Association of Microfinance Institutions of Uganda and served in the Government of Uganda.

He holds a PhD in economics, a master's degree in agricultural economics, and a postgraduate diploma in education, all from Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Kevwe Sylvester Pela is an Economist with the Social Protection and Labor Global Practice at the World Bank in East and Southern Africa. Her work focuses on country-level jobs diagnostics, labor market transitions, human capital development, green jobs, just transition, and the design and delivery of social protection systems. She has extensive operational and analytical experience across countries in East and Southern Africa, including Kenya, Namibia, Somalia, and Uganda, and she has contributed to cross-regional initiatives in Europe and Central Asia and in the Middle East and North Africa. She is the Social Protection and Labor Africa East Regional Coordinator for climate change–related issues, including working with country teams to ensure that projects meet the World Bank's climate co-benefits requirements.

In 2018, she joined the World Bank Group Africa Fellowship Program—a program that identifies top African scholars and young professionals for careers in development and international institutions by providing hands-on experience in research, policy, and technical assistance at the

World Bank. In 2019, she was selected for the World Bank's prestigious Young Professionals Program. She has coauthored several World Bank reports and has published academic research in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, she serves as a peer reviewer for the *Journal of Development Economics*.

She holds a PhD in development economics and an MSc in innovation management and entrepreneurship from the University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

Endeshaw Tadesse is a Senior Social Protection Specialist at the World Bank in East and Southern Africa. He supports social protection and community development operations across Africa. He has served as task team leader for major projects, including Ethiopia's Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund and community-based programs in Sudan and Uganda—most notably, the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund, which incorporates a scalable disaster risk financing mechanism. In addition to his operational leadership, he has contributed to global knowledge by delivering training on public works as safety nets and co-authoring guidance on implementing social safety nets in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Executive Summary

After South Sudan's 2011 secession, Sudan lost about 75 percent of its oil reserves—its primary source of government revenue and foreign income exchange. This triggered a severe economic shock, plunging the country into prolonged macroeconomic instability marked by high inflation, falling living standards, and rising rates of poverty. Internal conflict, limited fiscal space, a heavy external debt burden, and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges. The most affected groups were vulnerable populations, especially women, internally displaced persons, the urban poor, and rural communities.

In 2019, following the revolution and the end of President Omar al-Bashir's 30-year rule, Sudan's transitional government launched an ambitious reform plan to stabilize the economy. Key reforms included eliminating fuel subsidies, unifying the exchange rate, and consolidating public finances to free up resources for investment in human capital and social protection.

To cushion the social impact of these reforms, the government launched the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP) in late 2020. The program was conceived as a quasi-universal cash transfer, with an eventual goal of reaching 80 percent of the national population (approximately 32 million people), but it was designed to roll out in phases. Phase 1 initially targeted approximately 80 percent of the population in four states—Kassala, Khartoum, Red Sea, and South Darfur—providing US$5 per person per month, with the rollout subsequently expanding to additional states as implementation progressed. Although the program was suspended in October 2021 following political instability, it reached more than 8.7 million people across multiple states, equivalent to about 70 percent of its initial target population. Of those reached, 50 percent were women, and 35 percent were members of female-headed households.

The SFSP's implementation yielded a set of operational innovations and lessons relevant for social protection in fragile, conflict-affected, and low-capacity settings:

- **Expanded legal identity coverage.** Recognizing the need to close the identification gap for vulnerable populations and ensure inclusive access to social protection, the SFSP partnered with the National Civil Registry (NCR) to provide legal identity services to those previously excluded. By deploying mobile registration units, utilizing satellite-enabled connectivity, and simplifying registration procedures, the program facilitated the registration of over 9.5 million individuals. It enabled 524,000 people, many in remote or conflict-affected areas, to obtain national identification (ID) cards for the first time. Having proper identification not only enabled them to receive SFSP benefits but also opened the door to a wider range of public services and social inclusion opportunities.
- **Hybrid staffing and co-location model.** To help bridge technical capacity gaps in Sudan, the SFSP brought together government staff—including information technology specialists, program managers, social workers, and monitoring and evaluation officers—with contracted technical experts and World Food Programme personnel to work side by side in shared offices. This co-location model enabled teams to collaborate in real time, respond quickly to challenges, and jointly develop core delivery systems—such as registration, payments, and grievance redress—and promote institutional learning and capacity transfer to support long-term sustainability.
- **Inclusive, culturally grounded communications.** Recognizing the challenges of operating in a low-trust environment, the SFSP prioritized communication methods that were accessible, culturally relevant, and community-focused. Through community theater, radio drama, folk music, and local gatherings, the program worked to build trust, raise awareness, and dispel misinformation. Behavioral science experts helped create simplified materials with behavioral nudges that improved beneficiaries' understanding of the program and increased engagement among hard-to-reach populations.
- **Unified registration system.** To promote coordination and reduce fragmentation, the SFSP supported the development of a joint registration form created by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The form was intentionally kept simple, with only 10 questions, to ensure ease of use and facilitate rapid scale-up. This standardized approach enabled consistent data collection across the SFSP and other social programs, improving data sharing and minimizing duplication. By building an integrated registration process, the program laid the foundation for Sudan's future national social registry—a major step toward more inclusive and efficient delivery of social services.
- **Phased digital systems integration.** Faced with the urgent need to deliver assistance and limited digital infrastructure, the SFSP began by

manually exchanging data between key institutions, including government ministries, the NCR, and payment service providers. This enabled the program to start quickly while managing risks and aligning systems. As technical capacity improved, the program transitioned to automated data sharing through application programming interfaces, enabling real-time interoperability. This phased approach improved delivery accuracy, minimized duplication, and laid the groundwork for a more integrated and resilient digital system in Sudan.

- **Automated and modular payment platform.** Responding to the need to deliver payment at scale while ensuring transparency, the SFSP developed a centralized payment system integrated with its management information system. This integrated approach enabled the program to securely manage payment instructions, monitor transactions in real time, and reconcile data across providers. As the system evolved, it was incorporated into the grievance redress mechanism to resolve issues more effectively. Beneficiaries were also given a choice of payment channels, including mobile money, banks, and microfinance institutions, enhancing accessibility and user control, especially in remote or underserved areas.
- **Community-based and integrated service delivery.** To improve access and strengthen public trust in a fragile context, the SFSP established "one-stop shop" centers that brought key services together in a single location. These centers offered national ID registration, SFSP enrollment, payment processing, COVID-19 vaccination, and grievance redress, helping citizens, especially in underserved areas, to access support. By establishing a visible, coordinated government presence at the local level, the centers improved citizen engagement and laid the foundation for more integrated, people-centered service delivery systems.
- **Strengthened local accountability.** To improve transparency and responsiveness in a fragile environment, the SFSP enlisted the Zimam modality—a grassroots network of community leaders and youth groups—to support registration efforts, monitor implementation, and help resolve grievances, thus serving as a vital link between citizens and the program. By integrating this trusted local organization into program delivery, the SFSP reinforced community ownership, increased local oversight, and built stronger accountability at the grassroots level.
- **Strategic partnerships with media and civil society.** Amid widespread uncertainty and limited public trust, the SFSP partnered with national broadcasters, journalist associations, and community radio networks to help keep people informed and engaged. These platforms played a vital role in sharing accurate information, managing expectations, and providing calm, consistent messaging during times of uncertainty. By partnering with trusted voices in the media and civil society, the program helped counter misinformation, build public confidence, and maintain a strong connection with communities throughout implementation.

Although the SFSP was suspended before reaching full scale, its delivery systems—digital registries, payment infrastructure, grievance redress mechanisms, and unified registration platforms—remained operational. The SFSP's immediate successor program, the Sudan Emergency Safety Nets Project, leveraged the existing systems to continue supporting vulnerable populations. Other successor programs, such as the Sudan Enhancing Community Resilience Project (Sudan Somoud) and the Sudan Emergency Crisis Response Safety Net Project, also built on these existing systems—demonstrating that building strong, adaptable systems can provide durable infrastructure for future delivery, even amid political disruption.

However, the program also demonstrates the vulnerabilities of social protection systems when reforms face interruption. Following the October 2021 military coup, the SFSP was paused, stopping cash transfers to vulnerable households. For beneficiary households, many headed by women, and for those in historically marginalized regions, like Blue Nile, Darfur, Kordofan, Red Sea, and White Nile states, this sudden loss of support threatened their basic well-being and reversed hard-won progress in resilience. This disruption highlights a structural challenge common in fragile and conflict-affected settings: when political instability happens, externally financed programs may be suspended. The SFSP experience underscores the critical importance of strengthening social protection systems through contingency financing mechanisms and mobilization of domestic resources to ensure that support to vulnerable populations can continue, even in times of crisis. At the same time, in situations where domestic fiscal space lacks the capacity to sustain cash transfer delivery, the goal of social protection must shift from service expansion to service preservation. In such situations, programs should focus on preserving existing systems, institutional memory, delivery infrastructure, and trusted community access points, so all can be reactivated when conditions improve.

Looking ahead, the SFSP experience highlights both the promise and the limitations of large-scale social assistance in fragile settings. While well-designed delivery systems can endure beyond political disruption, ensuring their continued support requires flexibility, resilient financing, and system safeguards. These lessons are especially relevant for fragile settings today, because conflict can escalate or shift without warning. Future programs must be prepared not only for the challenges of reform but also for interruption, adaptation, and recovery.

Abbreviations

API	application programming interface
ATM	automatic teller machine
DPF	Development Policy Financing
FCV	fragility, conflict, and violence
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GRM	grievance redress mechanism
HIPC	heavily indebted poor countries
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT	information technology
MFI	microfinance institution
MIS	management information system
MoFEP	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoLSD	Ministry of Labor and Social Development
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRU	mobile registration unit
NBHS	National Baseline Household Survey
NCR	National Civil Registry
NHBPS	National Household Budget and Poverty Survey
NIC	National Information Centre
PACG	Pre-Arrears Clearance Grant
PDO	Project Development Objective
PIOC	inter-ministerial oversight committee
PIU	project implementation unit
POS	point of sale

PSP	payment service provider
PTC	Project Technical Committee
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SD	Sudanese pound
SFSP	Sudan Family Support Program
SIP	Social Initiative Program
SMS	short message service (text message)
SOE	state-owned enterprise
SSNP	Sudan Social Safety Net Project
STARS	Sudan Transition and Recovery Support
UBI	universal basic income
UCT	unconditional cash transfer
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USSD	unstructured supplementary service data
WFP	World Food Programme

1 Sudan Context and the Origin of the Sudan Family Support Program

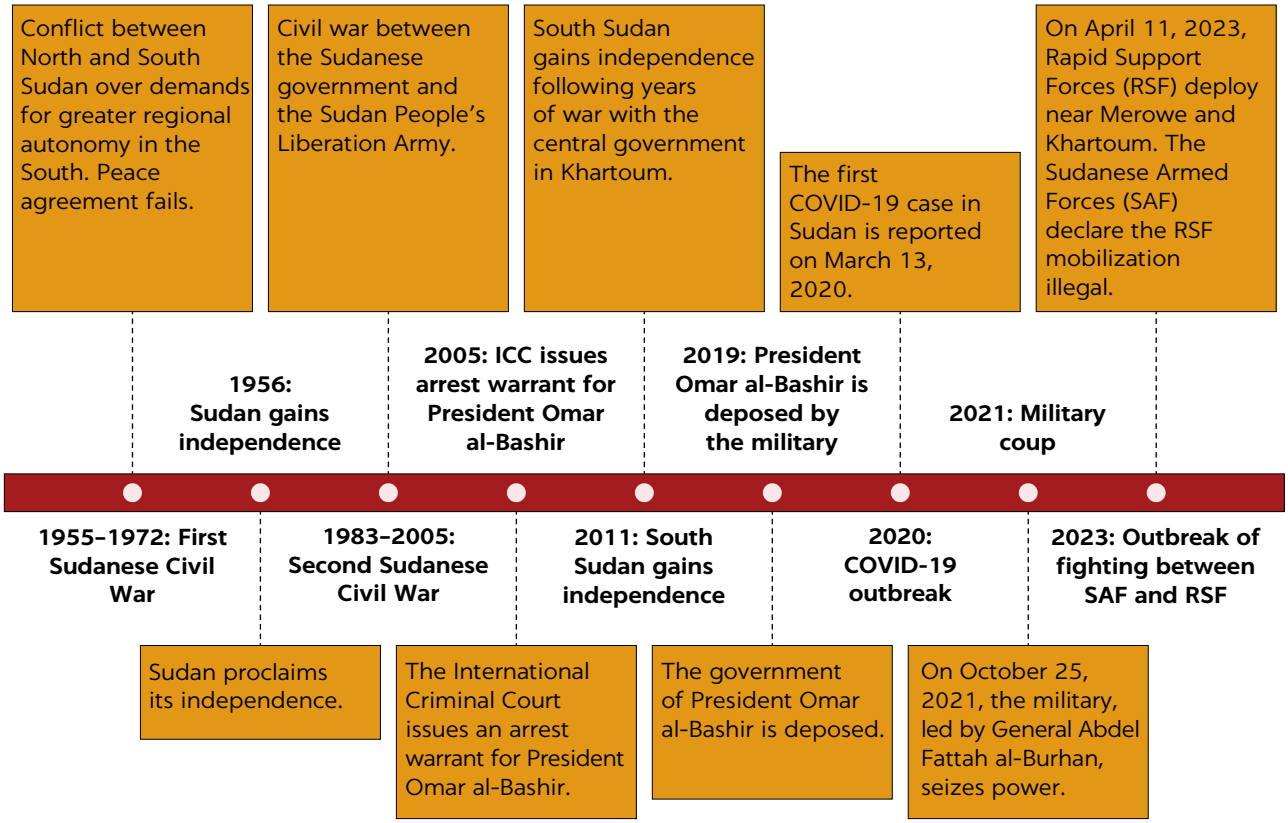
Chapter 1 sets the stage by examining the economic and social conditions that led to the design and launch of the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP), with a particular focus on Sudan's ambitious economic reform agenda launched in 2019. Following years of economic isolation, conflict, and chronic underinvestment in service delivery, Sudan's economy was in a deep crisis by the time of the 2019 political transition. The transitional government faced the dual challenge of restoring macroeconomic stability while addressing Sudan's widespread poverty and vulnerability.[1] Recognizing the need for comprehensive reforms, the government embarked on difficult but necessary measures, including the removal of fuel and commodity subsidies and the unification of exchange rates. While these reforms were essential for restoring fiscal sustainability, they carried significant short-term costs for households, especially among low-income and vulnerable populations. The SFSP was introduced as a measure to help mitigate these shocks. More than a temporary response, the program was designed as a first step toward building a coherent, inclusive, and resilient social protection system capable of responding to future crises and supporting long-term poverty reduction.

FRAGILITY, ECONOMIC CHALLENGES, AND THE NEED FOR REFORM IN SUDAN

By 2019, Sudan was experiencing one of the most severe economic crises in its history. The country had endured decades of conflict, economic isolation, and fiscal mismanagement, which contributed to deep structural weaknesses.[2] Figure 1.1 shows Sudan's political trajectory since it proclaimed its independence in 1956, a path marked by recurring conflicts and critical transitions that have shaped its development path.

FIGURE 1.1

Timeline of Sudan's political developments and internal conflicts



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.

The 2011 secession of South Sudan resulted in the loss of nearly 75 percent of Sudan's oil reserves, triggering a sharp and sustained macroeconomic shock that eroded fiscal space and widened inequality (World Bank 2024a). High and accelerating inflation, a deteriorating exchange rate, and rising debt levels compounded these challenges. By early 2020, inflation had exceeded 70 percent, severely eroding household purchasing power and exacerbating poverty, particularly among vulnerable groups. Fiscal and current account deficits routinely exceeded 10 percent of GDP, leading to an overreliance on monetary financing from the central bank, which further fueled inflation.

At the same time, fuel and commodity subsidies consumed nearly the entire government budget, leaving little to no capacity for investment in health, education, and social protection. Despite the high levels of need, Sudan's existing safety net programs remained limited in coverage and poorly targeted. Only 39 percent of government cash transfers and 47 percent of Zakat Fund[3] transfers reached households in the bottom 40 percent of the consumption distribution, reflecting significant inefficiencies in program targeting.

Poverty was widespread and unevenly distributed across the country. According to Sudan's 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBPS), 61.1 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, up from 46.5 percent in 2009. By early 2021, this number had risen to over 70 percent. Poverty levels were significantly higher in historically marginalized regions of Sudan, including Blue Nile, Darfur, Kordofan, Red Sea, and White Nile states.

Sudan's long-standing international isolation further exacerbated these economic challenges. Although the United States lifted economic sanctions in October 2017, the country remained on the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list until 2020, which discouraged foreign investment and made it difficult to conduct international trade. In addition, Sudan's external debt burden—estimated at over US$56 billion at the end of 2019, with more than 85 percent of that amount in arrears—effectively prevented access to budget support or investment financing from international financial institutions.[4]

Underlying drivers of Sudan's fragility and conflict

Beyond the macroeconomic challenges, Sudan's persistent fragility and its history of conflict stem from deeper structural issues. Fragility, conflict, and violence in Sudan are primarily driven by the capture of power and resources by political and security elites. This power concentration has contributed to regional disparity, a fractured military and security sector, and an economy marked by elite capture and systemic rent-seeking, especially in natural resources such as gold and oil.

These regional disparities are evident in unequal service delivery and exploitative economic practices that have reinforced longstanding patterns of social exclusion. Per capita expenditures demonstrate distinct preferential spending for Khartoum State over peripheral states such as North Darfur, Red Sea, and South Kordofan—in several instances exceeding 50 percent more. According to the 2014/15 NHBPS, poverty rates in Khartoum stood at 46 percent, while exceeding 60 percent in the peripheral states. The disparities are deepened by unregulated economic practices that allow resources produced in the peripheral states to be exploited for the benefit of the center. Most of the country's exports and revenues from oil, gold, and agriculture are generated in Sudan's countryside, while imports and revenues from consumption spending heavily favor urban centers. Sudan's oil boom, which lasted from 1997 to 2011, provided substantial economic gains and political consolidation for the military regime centered in Khartoum; however, oil-producing areas in the south and western parts of the country saw little development benefit and remained impoverished. The conflict in Darfur and the secession of South Sudan exemplify the damaging outcomes of such regional disparities.

The army and security sector's presence across a wide range of commercial sectors, from natural resources, agriculture, and livestock to

telecommunications, manufacturing, and banking presents a significant challenge to Sudan's economy. For example, the army holds an estimated 86.9 percent stake in Omdurman National Bank, Sudan's largest commercial bank. Most of these state-owned enterprises (SOEs) operate off-budget and contribute little to government revenue, despite controlling a disproportionate share of the economy. These SOEs continue to receive preferential treatment from government agencies, thereby avoiding regulatory oversight and taxation while accessing beneficial exchange rates, which effectively undermines the possibility for a transparent and competitive private sector.

The gold sector remains prone to rent-seeking and conflict financing. Between 2012 and 2018, the Central Bank of Sudan reported 205,446 kilograms of gold exports valued at US$8.6 billion, while trading partners reported 404,732 kilograms of imports from Sudan valued at US$12.7 billion—a discrepancy equivalent to 97 percent of Sudan's declared gold export volume and 47.7 percent of its reported export value (Global Financial Integrity 2020). The gold industry is dominated by SOEs owned by the army and security sector, including Sabeyka (owned by intelligence services) and Al Gunade (owned by the Rapid Support Forces leader's family).

In most regions of Sudan, conflict over access to natural resources between pastoralists, agropastoralists, and settled farmers is endemic. Such disputes often escalate to violence due to weak and inadequate regimes and institutions for natural resource and conflict management. Climate change is likely to put further pressure on already fragile ecosystems and the livelihoods that depend on them, potentially leading to further conflict.

Gender dimensions of fragility, conflict, and violence in Sudan

These overlapping drivers of fragility—resource scarcity, conflict, and weak institutional capacity—disproportionately affect women and girls. In Sudan, female-headed households face overlapping constraints that limit their ability to meet basic needs. They are more likely to experience food insecurity, malnutrition, and challenges in accessing water, shelter, and sanitation. These disparities, rooted in entrenched gender norms and economic marginalization, significantly restrict women's opportunities for education, employment, and participation in public life (UN Women 2018, FAO 2018).

Gender inequality is also evident in Sudan's labor market, where women face structural discrimination reinforced by long-standing social and cultural norms. These barriers have limited women's access to decent work, contributed to widespread economic exclusion, and exacerbated their vulnerability, especially during periods of economic reform, crisis, and conflict (Ndip et al. 2021). In conflict-affected and neighboring

regions, where state capacity is weaker, women are often further excluded from decision-making processes, which reinforces cycles of marginalization.

Gender-based violence (GBV) adds another layer of risk for women and girls in fragile environments. Although comprehensive national data on its prevalence are lacking, evidence from humanitarian groups consistently identifies GBV as a widespread concern in Sudan. Incidents of rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, and verbal and psychological abuse are frequently reported across a range of settings—within households, in communities, and at the hands of armed actors. These risks are acute for displaced populations and those living in insecure, underserved areas.

Several factors increase women's risk of experiencing GBV in Sudan, including protracted, ongoing conflict, displacement, economic instability, harmful traditional practices, and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which worsened tensions in already stressed households. In remote and conflict-affected regions, the lack of government protection and limited availability of social services further reduce women's ability to seek support or legal recourse.

Sudan's legal and institutional frameworks for addressing gender inequality and GBV remain limited. Laws are often narrow in scope and are not consistently interpreted or enforced. Access to GBV-related services, including health, psychosocial support, legal aid, and protection, remains insufficient to meet the needs of GBV survivors, especially those in rural or conflict-affected areas. These gaps and shortcomings further deepen exclusion, weaken resilience, and undermine women's capacity for fully participating in social and economic recovery. Strengthening gender-responsive delivery systems, expanding services, and improving institutional protections are therefore essential for fostering inclusive development in fragile environments such as Sudan.

ECONOMIC REFORM AGENDA: ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REFORM

The transitional government that assumed power in 2019 inherited deeply fragile institutions urgently in need of reform. After President Omar al-Bashir was removed from office in April 2019, the transitional government, formed in August 2019 under Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, inherited an economy in crisis. The new administration quickly recognized the need for comprehensive economic reforms to achieve peace, stability, economic growth, and Sudan's reintegration into the global economy. In response to these challenges, the transitional government launched an ambitious reform program aimed at stabilizing the economy

and reversing decades of economic mismanagement. The reform agenda focused on several key components:

- Tackling hyperinflation by strengthening monetary policy and reducing reliance on money creation to finance deficits.
- Reforming energy and commodity subsidies by gradually eliminating fuel and wheat subsidies, which disproportionately benefited higher-income households.
- Unifying the exchange rate by aligning the official rate with market rates to enhance transparency and reduce economic distortions.
- Improving the business environment by removing barriers to private sector growth and investment.
- Reengaging with international financial institutions through clearing arrears and seeking debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.
- Expanding social protection by developing a comprehensive social safety net to mitigate the impact of economic reforms on vulnerable populations.

Anticipated impacts and risks of the reforms

While the reform program was necessary for long-term recovery, it posed immediate social and economic risks, particularly for poor and vulnerable populations. The removal of subsidies and changes to the exchange rate were expected to drive up the cost of basic goods and services, like food and fuel. Rising prices threatened to erode household purchasing power, deepen poverty, and cause more hardship, especially for low-income urban families and those with limited coping abilities.

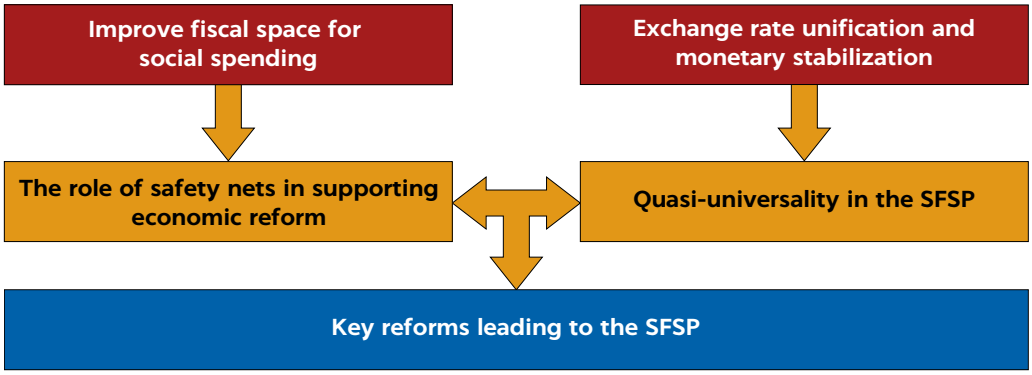
The government also recognized that, without targeted mitigation measures, these reforms could trigger social unrest and erode public trust during a critical transition period. In this context, strengthening social protection became a key priority—not just to safeguard lives and livelihoods but also to help maintain social stability and reinforce the broader reform process.

ORIGINS OF THE SUDAN FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Conceptual development

The SFSP originated during the World Bank Annual Meetings of 2019 in Washington, DC, where Sudan's then-Minister of Finance, Ibrahim Elbadawi, engaged with senior World Bank management to explore the feasibility of introducing a universal basic income program in Sudan. The initiative was designed to complement and support Sudan's broader economic reform agenda. As shown in figure 1.2, the program was strategically aligned with Sudan's key economic reforms, ensuring coherence between efforts to stabilize the macroeconomy and strengthen social protection systems.

FIGURE 1.2
Key economic reform framework



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.
Note: SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program.

The role of the Safety Net Program in supporting the economic reforms

To address macroeconomic instability, the government of Sudan launched an ambitious reform program aimed at stabilizing the economy, reversing decades of stagnation, and tackling the root causes of inequality and poverty. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) supported this program through the Reengagement and Reform Development Policy Financing (DPF) Project for Sudan (P175139), closely coordinated with the IMF's Staff Monitored Program from July 2019 to June 2021. The DPF was central to mobilizing resources for restructuring Sudan's debt, including arrears clearance to the International Development Association (IDA) as part of the HIPC Initiative and restoring Sudan's access to IDA financing, including the SFSP. These frameworks were used to monitor Sudan's progress on economic reforms, including exchange rate liberalization, fuel subsidy removal, budget deficit reduction, and debt sustainability.

A key component of these reforms was the removal of energy subsidies, which had long imposed an excessive fiscal strain on the government. In February 2020, the government initiated fuel subsidy reforms by introducing commercial prices for diesel and gasoline and lifting restrictions on private sector fuel imports. With DPF support, these reforms were continued through successive decrees in October 2020, December 2020, and February 2021, aiming to eliminate all retail subsidies on diesel and gasoline.

The results of these efforts were remarkable: the share of fuel subsidies in total government spending fell from 35 percent in 2020 to 8.2 percent by the end of 2021, surpassing the DPF target by nearly 50 percent. This decline continued into the first half of 2022, with fuel subsidies making up only 6.0 percent of government expenditure. These reductions enabled Sudan to dramatically reduce its public sector deficit from −5.9 percent in 2020 to just −0.3 percent in 2021.

Exchange rate unification and monetary stabilization

Before the reforms, Sudan operated multiple exchange rate systems that created economic distortions, encouraged parallel market activities, and limited foreign exchange availability. In 2021, the government took a bold step toward exchange rate unification by aligning the official exchange rate with the parallel market rate. This measure aimed to improve transparency, attract foreign investment, and restore confidence in the banking system.

While the SFSP was approved on October 8, 2020, the disbursement of cash transfers was contingent on unifying the official and parallel exchange rates—a strategic move aimed at preserving the value of donor funds and strengthening the government's foreign exchange reserves.[5] With support from the Reengagement and Reform DPF (P175139) under Policy Area/ Pillar 1, the Central Bank of Sudan issued a circular on February 21, 2021, unifying the official exchange rate. The exchange rate was devalued from 55 Sudanese pounds per US dollar to an indicative (preliminary, not binding) rate of 375 Sudanese pounds per US dollar. This sequencing was essential—had disbursement occurred at the old official rate, the project would have suffered an immediate loss of nearly one-sixth of its value.

This reform yielded impressive results: remittances tripled to US$1,436.9 million in 2021, and the official and parallel exchange rates remained unified throughout the SFSP implementation period. Additionally, money supply growth declined from 88 percent in 2020 to 46 percent by mid-2022, helping to reduce inflation from its peak of 318 percent in December 2021 to 87 percent by December 2022. This coordination between monetary policy adjustments and social protection measures demonstrated how well-executed fiscal interventions could enhance macroeconomic stability while protecting vulnerable populations. However, following the military takeover, rising conflict, economic contraction, shrinking exports, and a lack of foreign investment led to the collapse of the exchange rate reform, disrupting the hard-won macroeconomic stability.

INCREASING FISCAL SPACE FOR SOCIAL SPENDING

A fundamental shift in Sudan's economic reform was the reallocation of government spending from inefficient subsidies to targeted social spending. Historically, Sudan's fiscal policy prioritized commodity subsidies, especially for fuel and food, which absorbed over 50 percent of government expenditure. While these subsidies provided temporary relief, they disproportionately benefited wealthier urban populations and contributed to fiscal imbalances.

The SFSP emerged as a critical tool in the government's broader effort to increase social spending while addressing macroeconomic distortions. By removing subsidies, the government created the fiscal space needed to

finance direct cash transfers, helping to protect vulnerable populations from the immediate inflationary impact from eliminating the subsidies. The government also lifted restrictions on private sector fuel imports, further promoting market-based solutions and redirecting resources to social priorities. These macroeconomic improvements helped preserve the real value of SFSP cash transfers even as the economy went through significant adjustments.

Given the economic and political stakes, urgent and innovative support from the international community and the World Bank was crucial to Sudan's success in its democratic transition. The program was projected to cover over 80 percent of the population, making it one of the most extensive direct cash transfer initiatives in Sudan's history.

The quasi-universal approach

A distinctive feature of the SFSP was its quasi-universal design, targeting approximately 80 percent of Sudanese households while excluding the wealthiest quintile. This strategy was shaped by several key considerations (refer to box 1.1).

Box 1.1

Rationale for the quasi-universal approach modality

The selection of a quasi-universal basic income (quasi-UBI) targeting the bottom 80 percent of the population was based on a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of different social assistance options for Sudan. This approach emerged from an assessment of several programmatic alternatives (refer to table B1.1) including the following:

- Full universal basic income (UBI)
- A monthly quasi-UBI
- Categorical transfers (child grants and education grants).

After analyzing data from the 2014/15 National Baseline Household Survey, the quasi-UBI model proved to be the most efficient option when balancing impact against cost considerations. This approach was more efficient and effective in reducing inequality, achieving an 8.3 percent reduction in the Gini coefficient compared to 6.2 percent under the full UBI model. This enhanced equity impact was achieved by excluding the wealthiest 20 percent of the population, who had the least need for assistance. Furthermore, the quasi-UBI approach was particularly effective in rural areas, reducing poverty by 21.5 percent compared to 13.9 percent in urban areas. This spatial targeting advantage was especially important given the heightened vulnerability in rural Sudan. The monthly transfer per person was US$5, costing about 5.6 percent of GDP, making it significantly more affordable than a full UBI (US$5 per person), which would cost 7 percent of GDP. The benefit amount of US$5 per person per month was based on nutritional considerations, specifically the equivalent of half a daily caloric requirement

continued

Box 1.1, Rationale for the quasi-universal approach modality, *(continued)*

(1,000 kilocalories). In practical terms, this translates to 240 grams of sorghum, 30 grams of pulses, 15 grams of vegetable oil, and 5 grams of salt per person per day. This food-based calculation provided a concrete, needs-driven foundation for determining the transfer value, ensuring it contributed meaningfully to household food security while remaining fiscally sustainable. The US$5 per person monthly transfer amount aligned with existing transfer levels in Sudan's poverty-targeted cash transfer programs, providing consistency across the social protection landscape.

TABLE B1.1 Cost by model and scenario

MODEL	SCENARIO	TRANSFER PER PERSON (US$)	TRANSFER PER PERSON (LCU)	TRANSFER PER PERSON/ YEAR (LCU)	COVERAGE (INDIVIDUALS)	COST (US$, Billions)	COST (LCU, Billions)	COST + ADMIN (LCU, Billions)	COST (% GDP)
UBI	Fixed monthly transfer (US$5)	5.00	225.00	2,700	40,000,000	2.40	108.0	110.0	7.00
	Fixed one-off transfer (US$5)	5.00	225.00	225	40,000,000	0.20	9.0	9.2	0.58
	Fixed monthly transfer (poverty gap)	5.39	242.50	2,910	40,000,000	2.50	116.3	119.3	7.60
	Fixed budget (US$1B)	2.08	93.74	1,125	40,000,000	1.00	45.0	46.1	2.94
Quasi-UBI	Fixed monthly transfer to bottom 80%	5.00	225.00	2,700	32,005,225	1.90	86.4	88.5	5.60
Categorical	Child grant (monthly, under age 5)	5.00	225.00	2,700	6,964,541	0.41	18.8	19.2	1.22
	School grant (monthly, age 6+ years)	5.00	225.00	2,700	11,611,742	0.69	31.3	32.1	2.04

Note: Admin = administration; B = billion; GDP = gross domestic product; LCU = local currency unit.

First, the transitional government needed a social safety net that was extensive enough to offset the removal of subsidies while remaining administratively feasible. A narrowly targeted program would have required a well-developed and verified social registry, which Sudan lacked at the time. Instead, a broader approach ensured that the most vulnerable households would benefit while minimizing exclusion errors.

Second, subsidy reform required a highly visible and politically viable compensation mechanism. With over half the population living below the poverty line before the COVID-19 pandemic, many more were expected to struggle due to economic shocks resulting from the subsidy removal. The government needed to reassure the public that the resources freed up from eliminating subsidies were being equitably redistributed. A quasi-universal cash transfer program offered a direct and tangible benefit to citizens, helping to maintain social cohesion during the economic transition.

Third, Sudan's weak institutional and financial infrastructure required a scalable and adaptive approach. Given the country's limited capacity for means-testing, the quasi-universal model allowed a rapid rollout via digital payment platforms while reducing administrative costs and complexity. It also aligned with international best practices in fragile contexts, where broader social protection coverage is often essential to ensure program effectiveness.

The program's design marked a significant innovation in Sudan's social protection landscape, moving away from small-scale, fragmented interventions toward a more comprehensive and integrated approach. By targeting 80 percent of households, the SFSP aimed to provide a safety net for the majority of vulnerable Sudanese households while laying a foundation for a sustainable program.

Previous social safety net systems and their limitations

Prior to 2019, Sudan's social protection system was anchored in the Social Initiative Program (SIP), designed to assist poor and vulnerable households across all 18 states. The program included a mix of interventions:

- Safety net programs, such as unconditional cash transfers and in-kind assistance provided by the government and the Zakat Fund
- Contributory insurance schemes, including pensions, social security, and health insurance
- Subsidized medical care, providing free emergency treatment and lifesaving medicines
- Microfinance programs to support income generation and self-reliance
- Targeted support for vulnerable groups, including rural women; ex-combatants involved in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration initiatives; vocational training for youth; and assistance for returnees from South Sudan.

Unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) under the SIP were the largest form of direct government support, reaching approximately 500,000 of the 2.3 million poorest households identified by the Zakat Chamber in 2011. Coverage grew significantly between 2012 and 2014, increasing from fewer than 100,000 households to over 500,000. During this period, the monthly cash transfer amount rose from SD150 (US$25) in 2012 to SD250 (US$40) in 2014, translating to approximately US$5 per household member, based on an average household size of six.

To improve efficiency, Sudan's Ministry of Labor and Social Development piloted digital payments in Khartoum, improving transparency and delivery speed. In other states, payments were facilitated through Sudan Post (Sudapost) offices, Zakat Chambers, and selected rural branches of state-owned banks or banking agents. This combination of approaches aimed to ensure that cash transfers reached beneficiaries across urban and rural areas, despite logistical challenges.

Despite modest progress in expanding coverage between 2012 and 2014, Sudan's pre-SFSP social protection system faced several significant challenges:

- **Limited coverage.** At its peak, the UCT program reached only 20 percent of households identified as poor—leaving a substantial coverage gap.
- **Funding constraints.** Public spending on cash transfer programs peaked at only 0.2 percent of GDP and 3 percent of total current expenditures by 2014, before declining to less than 2 percent of expenditures in subsequent years. Fiscal limitations prevented the planned expansion to 750,000 households by 2018.
- **Payment irregularities.** Administrative weaknesses and funding disruptions led to inconsistent and unpredictable payments, undermining the program's effectiveness in providing reliable support.
- **Inefficient targeting.** Analysis revealed significant targeting inefficiencies, with only 39 percent of government transfers and 47 percent of Zakat Fund transfers reaching households in the bottom 40 percent of the consumption distribution.
- **Regressive subsidy system.** Meanwhile, Sudan's subsidy system, dominated by fuel and wheat subsidies, consumed 7 percent of GDP in 2018 while disproportionately benefiting wealthier households.

These limitations highlighted the need for a more comprehensive, better targeted, and fiscally sustainable approach to social protection, precisely what the SFSP aimed to provide.

The challenges and inefficiencies in existing social protection systems laid the groundwork for the SFSP, a large-scale initiative designed to address

the immediate impacts of economic reforms while protecting vulnerable households. Recognizing the inequities of general subsidies, the SFSP aimed to deliver timely and predictable cash transfers to those most in need, helping alleviate hardship and foster resilience. By addressing short-term economic shocks, the SFSP sought to do the following:

- Support household welfare amid rising living costs
- Build public trust and credibility in the government's reform agenda
- Lay the foundation for a modern and efficient social protection system by incorporating digital payment platforms and improved targeting mechanisms.

By shifting from inefficient subsidies to evidence-based cash transfers, the SFSP represented a paradigm shift in Sudan's social protection strategy. Leveraging technology and moving toward a quasi-universal system, it aimed to deliver timely and predictable relief to vulnerable populations while promoting long-term resilience and economic stability. This approach balanced the need for broad coverage with fiscal constraints, ensuring that those most affected by economic reforms received support.

CONCLUSION

The SFSP emerged at a pivotal moment in Sudan's history—characterized by overlapping crises of conflict, economic collapse, and institutional fragility. As detailed in this chapter, the transitional government faced the urgent challenge of restoring macroeconomic stability while tackling the increasing hardships faced by millions of Sudanese. Recognizing that subsidy reform could not succeed without protecting those most affected, the government prioritized developing a social safety net capable of delivering immediate support while contributing to long-term systems building.

The SFSP was designed to respond to this need. Built upon a bold economic reform agenda and supported by international partners, the program represented a shift away from inefficient and inequitable subsidies toward a more transparent, targeted, and accountable model of social assistance. It also aimed to fix the weaknesses of Sudan's existing social safety net, which had reached only a small share of poor households and lacked the infrastructure needed to respond at scale. By linking short-term income support with broader efforts to strengthen delivery systems and institutional capacity, the SFSP sought to serve not only as a temporary buffer for households but also as a catalyst for transforming social protection delivery in fragile settings.

NOTES

1. The most recent South Sudan Poverty and Equity Assessment, conducted in 2022, finds that over three-quarters of South Sudanese live below the national poverty line (358,724 South Sudanese pounds [SSP] per person per year); two-thirds of the population live below the national food poverty line (SSP298,478 per person per year), highlighting South Sudan's dire poverty (World Bank 2024b).
2. The country experienced two prolonged civil wars between its northern and southern regions, from 1955 to 1972 and from 1983 to 2005, with only a brief period of relative peace between 1972 and 1983 (Collins 2008). While the Second Sudanese Civil War began initially in southern Sudan, it later spread to the Blue Nile region and the Nuba Mountains. The conflict resulted in over 2 million deaths due to war, famine, and disease, and displaced approximately 4 million people in southern Sudan. The war resulted in one of the highest civilian death tolls since World War II and was marked by severe human rights violations, including mass killings and slavery (Johnson 2016).
3. *Zakat* is the term for charitable almsgiving, one of the "five pillars" of Islamic religious duty. The Zakat Chamber, the main provider of social protection interventions in Sudan, collects Zakat and manages the Zakat Fund, through which Zakat monies are distributed to support the poor through health services, health insurance, and education (Taha n.d.).
4. External debt is estimated to amount to about US$56.3 billion, or 199 percent of GDP at end-2019, rising from 182 percent of GDP in 2018 due to large currency depreciation from SD 45/US$ to SD 72/US$ on a weighted average basis (World Bank and IMF 2020).
5. When the government receives donor disbursements in foreign currency (for example, US dollars), these funds are converted into local currency for domestic use, while the foreign currency remains with the central bank. This helps boost foreign exchange reserves, stabilize the exchange rate, and strengthen the country's ability to manage external shocks—supporting a more stable environment for service delivery and economic recovery.

REFERENCES

Collins, R. O. 2008. *A History of Modern Sudan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2018. *FAO Technical Guide 1—Introduction to Gender-Sensitive Social Protection Programming to Combat Rural Poverty: Why Is It Important and What Does It Mean?* Rome: FAO. http://www.fao.org/3/ca2026en/CA2026EN.pdf.

Global Financial Integrity. 2020. *Analyzing Trade, Oil and Gold: Recommendations to Support Trade Integrity in Sudan*. Washington, DC: Global Financial Integrity. https://gfintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Sudan-Policy-Brief-FINAL.pdf?utm_source.

Johnson, D. H. 2016. *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars and New Wars*. 3rd ed. (expanded), *African Issues* 38. Martlesham, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer.

Ndip, Alvin Etang, Jonna Lundwall, Eiman Osman, and Jennifer Wistrand. 2021. "Sudan's Women and Youth are Severely Economically Deprived: A Study on Sudanese Market Trends." *Africa Can End Poverty* (blog), August 17. World Bank, Washington, DC. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/africacan/sudans-women-and-youth-are-severely-economically-deprived-study-sudanese-market-trends.

Taha, Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed Abu. n.d. "Zakat and Its Economic and Social Impact in Addressing Monetary Inflation and Income Redistribution: A Foundational Study from the Perspective of Islamic Economics." Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). 2018. *UN Women Annual Report 2017–2018*.

World Bank. 2024a. "Sudan: Macro Poverty Outlook." Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank. 2024b. "Republic of South Sudan: Poverty and Equity Assessment." June. World Bank, Washington, DC.

2 Sudan Family Support Program Design and Performance

This chapter explores how the Sudan Family Support Program's (SFSP) ambitious goal of reaching 80 percent of Sudanese households was put into practice—detailing the delivery systems, implementation strategies, and program outcomes. It offers a comprehensive overview of the program's dual objective: delivering timely cash transfers to vulnerable households and building a foundation for a stronger, more inclusive social protection system in Sudan.

The chapter outlines the SFSP's use of a quasi-universal approach, its phased rollout strategy, and the innovative delivery mechanisms the program adopted to overcome operational challenges in a fragile and conflict-affected environment. Key features of the approach include mobile registration units, digital and manual payment options, and the use of "one-stop shop" centers for integrated service delivery. The program's emphasis on accountability and community engagement, particularly through the Zimam modality and a robust grievance redress system—is also explored.

In doing so, the chapter highlights the practical steps taken to expand financial inclusion, improve access to national identification (ID) cards, and reach women and marginalized groups. It also reflects on the program's institutional structure, including the role of government ministries, development partners, including the World Food Programme (WFP), third-party implementers, private sector businesses, and communities, in ensuring coordinated delivery.

Together, these insights offer valuable lessons for policy makers and practitioners designing and implementing cash transfer programs in areas affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). The SFSP experience demonstrates that even in challenging environments,

well-designed, community-anchored programs can offer significant relief while contributing to the long-term transformation of social support systems.

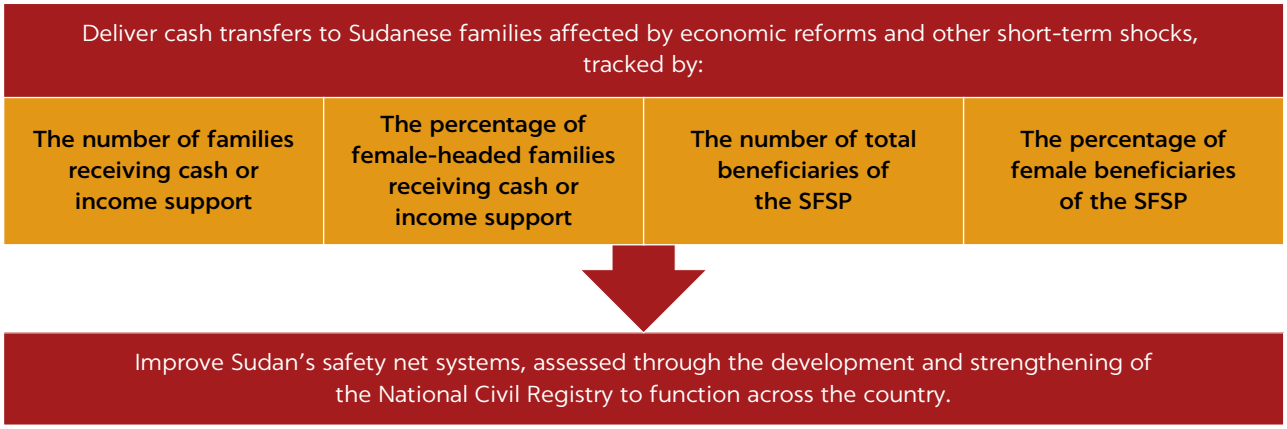
OBJECTIVE OF THE SUDAN FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The SFSP was built around two central objectives, each designed to address both immediate and long-term needs of Sudanese households. The first objective was to provide timely cash transfers to families affected by economic reforms and other short-term shocks. The second objective aimed to strengthen Sudan's national safety net system by supporting the development of a functional and scalable National Civil Registry (NCR) (refer to figure 2.1). The dual focus on both providing immediate assistance and system strengthening was very important in Sudan's context, where previous social protection efforts had been fragmented and limited in scope. By linking cash delivery with institutional capacity building, the SFSP aimed to address urgent needs and create sustainable foundations. Specifically, the program sought to do the following:

- Build institutional capacity for long-term social protection program implementation
- Promote financial inclusion through expanded access to digital payment systems
- Foster trust between citizens and the state through transparent service delivery.

FIGURE 2.1

Sudan Family Support Program development objectives



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.
Note: SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program.

CASH TRANSFER PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

According to Lindert et al. (2020), cash transfers are direct, regular, and predictable noncontributory payments distributed to individuals, families, or households to raise and smooth incomes. They encompass a range of instruments, including social pensions, child grants, public works programs, and both conditional and unconditional cash transfers (refer to table 2.1). Typically designed to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable, cash transfer programs can stimulate local economic activity by supporting recipients' livelihoods and benefiting the wider community. They can also be tailored to different contexts and needs.

TABLE 2.1 Types of cash transfer programs

PROGRAM	KEY CHARACTERISTIC	APPLICABILITY IN SFSP CONTEXT
Unconditional cash transfers (UCTs)	Programs that provide cash transfer benefits to individuals, families, or households without imposing any conditions on the beneficiaries.	Selected as the core design of SFSP to ensure rapid, wide-scale disbursement of funds to households to compensate for the removal of subsidies. Prioritized due to urgent needs and limited administrative capacity.
Conditional cash transfers (CCTs)	Social assistance programs that make receipt of benefits conditional upon beneficiary actions (such as school attendance or health care visits), typically with the objectives of reducing poverty and providing incentives to invest in human capital.	Not selected; SFSP was focused on emergency response.
Social pensions	Noncontributory cash benefits given to elderly individuals who are not covered by contributory pension systems. They serve to address poverty and social exclusion among older adults.	Not selected; SFSP covered entire households regardless of age to maximize coverage and speed.
Unemployment assistance (noncontributory)	Cash benefits are given to unemployed individuals who are not covered by contributory unemployment insurance schemes. These benefits offer short-term income support during periods of joblessness.	Not selected; SFSP was designed as a universal household transfer to stabilize income amid macroeconomic reform.
Public works programs (Cash for Work)	Temporary employment programs where participants receive wages for labor on public infrastructure or community development projects, providing income support and promoting community assets.	Not selected; SFSP was focused on unconditional transfers for immediate household consumption needs.
Child and family allowances	Regular cash payments to families with children to support household income and child development.	Not selected; SFSP covered entire households regardless of child status to maximize coverage and speed.
Disability and incapacity transfers	Cash benefits provided to people with disabilities or long-term illnesses that prevent them from working, aimed at mitigating income insecurity related to disability.	Not selected; SFSP covered entire households regardless of disability to maximize coverage and speed.

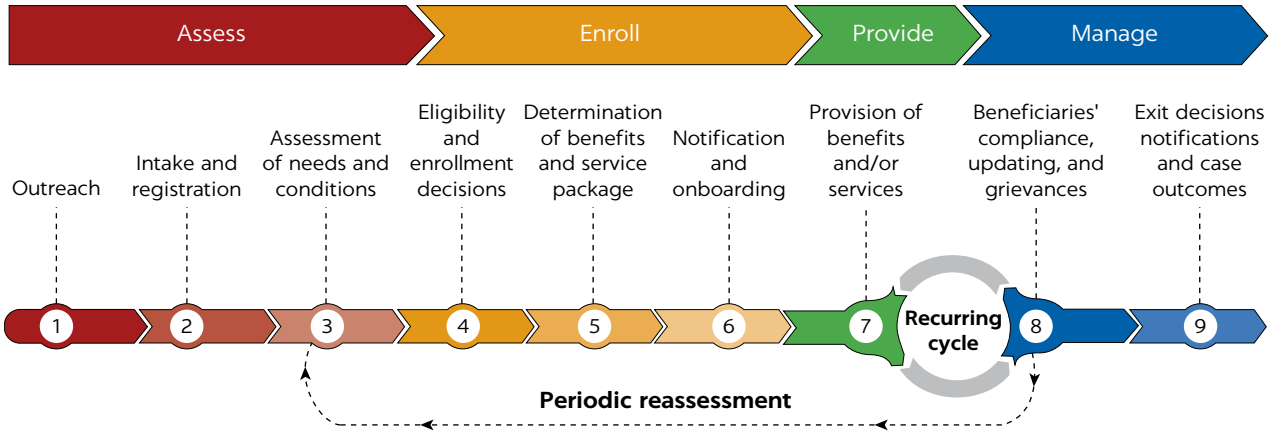
Source: Table is based on Lindert et al. 2020.
Note: SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program.

In Sudan, the SFSP employed an unconditional cash transfer approach, providing direct financial assistance without any requirements. The decision to use an unconditional cash transfer reflected the program's emergency context and the urgent need to reach diverse vulnerable groups quickly. By removing all conditions for cash transfers, the SFSP minimized administrative complexity, maximized scale, and addressed immediate consumption needs during a period of economic instability. Evidence from interventions in FCV contexts shows that cash transfers are a critical lifeline for poor and vulnerable households. They help preserve human capital and build household resilience by enabling beneficiaries to (1) maintain or improve their consumption, (2) increase their ability to withstand economic shocks, and (3) reduce their reliance on negative coping strategies (Kurtz et al. 2021).

DELIVERY STRATEGY

The SFSP's design followed a comprehensive social protection delivery model that spanned the entire program cycle, from outreach to exit (Lindert et al. 2020). The approach was tailored to address the unique challenges posed by Sudan's fragile and conflict-affected environment. The program was structured around four main phases—Assess, Enroll, Provide, and Manage—each comprising specific business processes (refer to figure 2.2). Conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive measures were integrated across all phases to promote inclusivity and reduce the risk of exclusion, particularly for women, girls, and other marginalized groups.

FIGURE 2.2
Social protection delivery systems



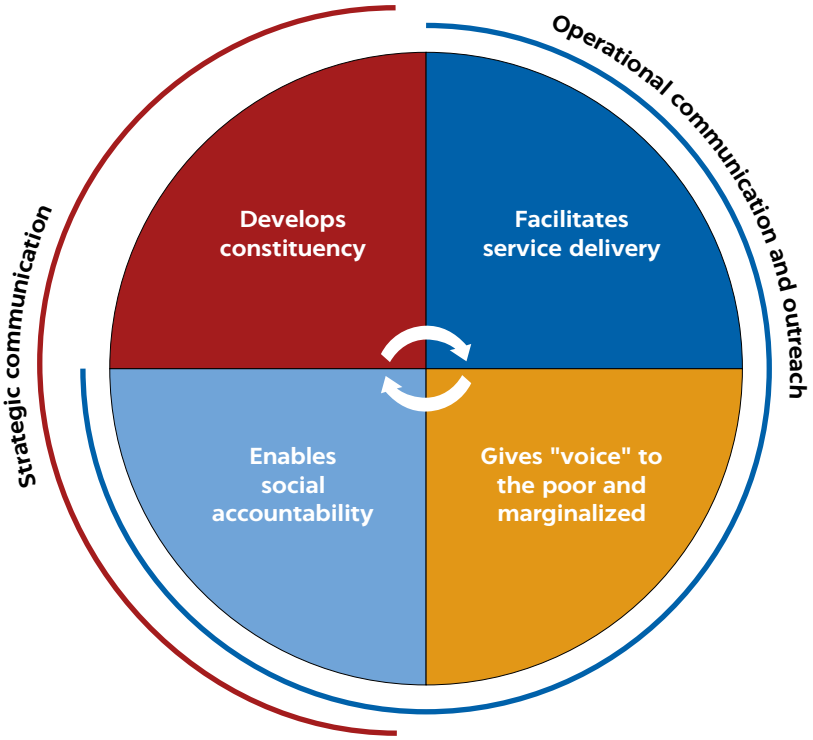
Source: Lindert et al. 2020.

Assess—Outreach and communication

As part of the Assess phase, the SFSP focused on outreach and communication by introducing Thamarat[1] as a national brand to enhance program visibility and build trust. The outreach and communication strategy was developed based on evidence from a rapid assessment (situation analysis) conducted during the design phase, supported by WFP, as well as lessons from both global and local experience—including the Sudan Social Safety Net Project (P148349) and insights from the pilot carried out in Khartoum State in June and July 2020. The team also held extensive consultations with SFSP partners to ensure the approach was relevant and responsive. The communication strategy aimed to inform, educate, and engage vulnerable communities and beneficiaries to enable them to participate in the program fully. Development partners were regularly kept informed of progress and results. Figure 2.3 presents an overview of the SFSP's communication.

The communication strategy was multifaceted, using national media, local partnerships, and behavioral insights to ensure message clarity and cultural resonance. This section highlights key elements of the SFSP's communication and outreach efforts.

FIGURE 2.3
Strategy and delivery of communication



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.

Multilevel communication channels

The SFSP designed its communication activities and channels to operate effectively at both national and community levels, ensuring maximum reach and impact within Sudan's complex social and political landscape. Nationally, the program used mass media channels, including social media, websites, radio and television broadcasts, newspapers, and printed posters, leaflets, and pamphlets. It also partnered with well-known public figures to help spread key messages and increase public engagement. At the local level, the SFSP employed community-based communication methods to improve outreach, build trust, and promote inclusive participation. Local actors, including nongovernmental organizations, community groups, youth associations, resistance committees, traditional birth attendants, and teachers, acted as key intermediaries, particularly in underserved or conflict-affected areas with limited government presence. The program leveraged cultural events and exhibitions to increase visibility and reach diverse populations. These efforts were complemented by printed materials, the mobilization of community leaders, the training of youth volunteers, and radio and television segments featuring key stakeholders explaining program objectives and processes. Social media platforms and a dedicated website further extended engagement.

Recognizing gender-specific constraints, such as limited mobility, access to information, and decision-making power, the SFSP integrated gender-responsive communication strategies. Female social mobilizers, women's associations, and trusted local networks played a critical role in informing women about their eligibility and how to register. These efforts helped mitigate gender-based barriers and fostered a more supportive and inclusive environment for women's participation in the program.

Strategic communication tools and partnerships

At the local level, the SFSP employed community-based communication methods and strategic partnerships to improve outreach, build trust, and promote inclusive participation. Several approaches were taken to improve outreach.

- **Behavioral science and nudges.** To improve the clarity and effectiveness of communication materials, the SFSP partnered with experts and trained government teams to integrate behavioral insights into messaging. Communications were redesigned to reduce complexity and remove common barriers to understanding, resulting in more actionable, accessible messages for beneficiaries.
- **Language and local dialects.** Messages were translated into local dialects to ensure accessibility for non-Arabic speakers or those in low-literacy communities. The communication team and volunteers used participatory methods to inform and engage target populations through culturally relevant tools, such as radio drama, folk songs, rural theater,

and storytelling. These methods increased trust and engagement, especially in underserved communities. While resource-intensive, they proved highly effective in improving outreach outcomes.

- **Crisis communication strategy.** During periods of heightened political uncertainty, the SFSP executed a rapid-response communication plan to counter misinformation and maintain public confidence. The team engaged trusted media outlets, community leaders, and local radio stations to quickly and consistently disseminate clarifying messages. These efforts safeguarded the program's integrity and reinforced its credibility.
- **Capacity building and human resources.** The SFSP recruited experienced communication professionals and conducted targeted training at the state level. These individuals played a significant role in coordinating communication activities and ensuring consistent messaging across all states. In parallel, the program mobilized qualified community volunteers with strong interpersonal skills and local knowledge. Their engagement enabled more responsive, culturally grounded communication at the local level, particularly in areas where government presence had historically been limited, enhancing trust and ensuring that beneficiaries were informed, engaged, and supported throughout the program cycle.
- **Media engagement.** Federal and state-level media institutions, journalists' associations, and individual reporters were engaged through strategic partnerships. These relationships were built through organized outreach activities, regular press briefings, field visits, and the consistent distribution of information materials. Journalists covering economic and social development issues became key allies in promoting accurate, consistent, and transparent reporting.
- **Development partner communication.** To ensure transparency and maintain donor confidence, the SFSP developed a series of concise, visually engaging flyers that highlighted key program objectives, progress updates, challenges, and performance indicators, including snapshots of feedback and experiences from beneficiaries. These materials proved effective for engaging development partners during coordination meetings and contributed to broader efforts in program documentation, learning, and accountability.

Enroll—Intake and registration

The primary method of enrollment under the SFSP was in-person registration at one-stop shop centers. These centers, which provided services including program enrollment, national identification (ID) issuance, COVID-19 vaccination, and grievance redress (refer to box 2.1 for more details), became key locations for citizen engagement, offering a visible and trusted interface between communities and the state. Recognizing the challenges posed by Sudan's fragile, displacement-affected context—characterized by political instability, weak service delivery systems, and large numbers of internally displaced persons lacking formal

identification—the enrollment process was designed to be inclusive and flexible. Staff verified household composition, recorded payment preferences, and referred individuals without identification to National Civil Registry (NCR) offices for support.

Box 2.1

Sudan Family Support Program "one-stop shop" citizen engagement

The SFSP introduced a transformative approach to service delivery through its one-stop shop model, integrating core government services beyond the traditional remit of a social safety net. The one-stop shops were local registration centers for the program but also served as multifunctional hubs where citizens could access a variety of essential services, streamline processes, and foster deeper engagement with the government.

At the heart of this approach was SFSP's emphasis on integrated service delivery. The registration centers not only facilitated program enrollment and payments but also provided direct access to other critical services. Citizens could register for a national identification card through the National Civil Registry, receive voluntary COVID-19 vaccinations administered by the Ministry of Health, and use a citizen complaint desk managed by social workers from the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. These desks not only handled grievances but also offered social and case management services, including guidance on additional support options, hotlines, and grievance mechanisms. This integration ensured that vulnerable populations could address multiple needs in one visit, saving time and fostering trust in government services.

The one-stop shop centers became a visible, accessible face of the government, bridging the gap between public institutions and citizens. A social worker noted, "It's the first time we are reaching out to the public, providing them with all kinds of support, reference services, and advice for their families to improve their situation." This transformation shifted social workers from administrative tasks to meaningful case management roles, enabling them to directly support families' needs.

A critical component of the registration centers was the involvement of payment providers such as MTN Sudan and Zain, which introduced beneficiaries to mobile banking and financial services. Many recipients were opening accounts for the first time or learning to use mobile money, marking a significant step toward financial inclusion. By integrating these payment systems, the SFSP empowered beneficiaries to access modern financial tools, fostering greater autonomy and resilience.

This innovative model of integrated service delivery closely aligned with the principles of the 2004 *World Development Report* (World Bank 2004), which emphasized "Making Services Work for Poor People." The registration centers provided a practical example of how integrated services can effectively address the multifaceted needs of vulnerable populations. In a country long isolated and struggling with systemic governance challenges, this approach demonstrated the potential for responsive and efficient service delivery.

The success of the one-stop shop centers was rooted in two key factors: the strategic use of digital technology and the dedication of public sector workers. Digital platforms enabled seamless integration of services, simultaneously addressing multiple economic shocks and enhancing the efficiency of

continued

Box 2.1, Sudan Family Support Program "one-stop shop" citizen engagement, (*continued*)

delivery mechanisms. More importantly, the collaborative efforts of public sector employees, who for the first time were working together with a shared mission, played a transformative role. Their commitment underscored the potential for government institutions to make a meaningful difference where responsive and effective public service systems had long been lacking.

Through the one-stop shop model, the SFSP not only provided immediate support to vulnerable populations but also laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and integrated approach to governance. It demonstrated how citizen-centered service delivery can build trust, foster financial inclusion, and drive systemic change in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

To further address barriers to access, particularly in remote, underserved, and conflict-affected areas, the program also introduced two supplementary registration channels:

- **Mobile registration units.** The SFSP supported NCR's introduction of mobile registration and enrollment units. The initiative included 150 mobile enrollment stations set up temporarily in villages and settlements, along with 25 specially equipped vehicles capable of registration. To ensure dependable data transmission even in areas with poor network coverage, the units were connected by satellite through VSAT systems. Additionally, 80 dedicated centers were established to assist citizens in updating their identification documents. This mobile strategy played a vital role in reaching marginalized populations who otherwise faced significant barriers to enrollment. Through these efforts, over 9.5 million individuals were registered and enrolled, including approximately 524,000 who obtained national IDs for the first time, enabling their participation in the program and improving their access to essential services and benefits.
- **Digital self-enrollment platforms.** The SFSP also used technology to broaden access and offer more convenient registration options. A call center allowed people to enroll by phone, and a "quick code" option using unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) enabled mobile phone users without internet access to register by dialing *2080#. Web and mobile applications offered digital self-registration. These flexible alternatives were especially valuable for individuals with limited mobility or those living in insecure areas. The fully operational call center played a key role in supporting and guiding applicants through the registration process.

Technical infrastructure

The success of the SFSP's enrollment and payment systems was underpinned by three interlinked components:

1. **Management information system.** The SFSP strengthened its management information system (MIS) to improve service delivery, beginning with enhancements to the registration and enrollment platform. Real-time validation through the NCR application programming interface enabled automated identity verification, which significantly improved data accuracy and increased the pace of household enrollment. However, while registration was largely automated, the generation of payment lists remained a manual task in the initial phases. Payment eligibility data had to be extracted through database queries and processed using Excel files, a time-consuming step that created a bottleneck and limited the speed and scale of payment distribution. To address this gap, the information technology (IT) team prioritized development of a fully automated payment module and undertook substantial database optimization, introducing improved queries and SFSP-specific indexes to enhance performance. These upgrades enabled faster, more reliable payment processing. In parallel, the enrollment module was refined based on staff feedback. Notably, front-end editing capabilities were introduced, allowing supervisors to directly update citizen records. These updates were seamlessly integrated with the case management system (grievance redress mechanism, GRM), facilitating the timely resolution of beneficiary issues and data corrections.

2. **Statistics and reporting.** The program's reporting infrastructure was built around a Grafana-based dashboard (an open-source tool), designed to visualize key metrics from the SFSP database. However, its utility was initially constrained by the limited scope of its data inputs, which were drawn exclusively from registration centers under the SFSP system. This limitation reflected the program's distributed data architecture, in which beneficiary registration was conducted independently by three implementing entities— the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP), the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MoLSD), and WFP, each operating its own system and maintaining separate databases.

   To address these fragmentation challenges, the program prioritized data centralization as a critical operational reform. A coordinated effort was undertaken to integrate the different data streams into a single unified database, consolidating beneficiary information across all three entities. This integration enabled the Grafana dashboard to evolve into a more comprehensive and reliable reporting tool, capable of generating consistent metrics across the program's full operational footprint. Centralized data improved visibility into overall program performance, strengthened coordination among implementing partners, and enabled timely, evidence-based decision-making.

3. **NCR rollout plan.** To address widespread identification gaps and facilitate access to social protection, the SFSP partnered with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to upgrade the NCR system. Under this agreement, the NCR committed to registering at least 5 million additional Sudanese individuals during the program period. To implement this effort, the SFSP deployed mobile registration units to reduce travel distances and streamline ID enrollment, particularly in underserved and remote areas. These units supported individuals in obtaining or updating their national IDs, thereby addressing one of the most significant barriers to program participation. At the time, it was estimated that between 8 and 12 million people, many of them internally displaced and informal residents, were not covered by the NCR system. To prevent the exclusion of these vulnerable groups, the program introduced a temporary, program-specific ID. This enabled individuals lacking official identification to enroll and receive benefits while they pursued formal registration. The temporary ID approach was a critical stopgap measure that expanded inclusion and ensured that documentation challenges did not hinder timely access to support.

Targeting

The SFSP adopted a quasi-universal approach rather than traditional means-testing due to the complex operational challenges and sociopolitical situation on the ground (refer to chapter 1). Establishing detailed eligibility criteria would have been nearly impossible and might have unfairly excluded many people in need, while mistakenly including others. By choosing a quasi-universal approach, the program intentionally aimed to reach nearly all Sudanese—ensuring that all poor and many near-poor households received support. The program's approach targeted 80 percent of Sudan's population, with state-level implementation committees applying simplified criteria to identify and exclude high-income households. The program prioritized reaching the poorest households and those most vulnerable to the effects of subsidy removal and economic instability, especially women. Gender was a core axis of vulnerability. The program explicitly prioritized the enrollment of female-headed households, recognizing their heightened risk of exclusion in both economic and social domains. Once families were enrolled, each person received a standard benefit of US$5 per month, with the total amount adjusted by household size so that larger families received more support.

Geographical targeting and phased rollout

To achieve the desired scale in its fragile context, the program was rolled out in phases. The pilot phase began in October 2020, several months before the program's official launch in February 2021. The WFP-supported pilot program initially reached 20,000 beneficiaries in Khartoum. Additionally, the government conducted a smaller pilot targeting 3,700 families in Karary

District, one of Khartoum State's poorest areas. The WFP provided US$40 million for parallel activities, collaborating closely with the World Bank and the government to coordinate implementation. This collaboration included leveraging WFP's payment systems, grievance mechanisms, and operational expertise. Together, these efforts led to the development of a single Project Operations Manual to streamline program delivery and establish consistent procedures.[2]

Phase 1: Targeted pilot programs

Phase 1 built on lessons learned from pilot initiatives conducted earlier in 2020. The first four targeted states—Kassala, Khartoum, Red Sea, and South Darfur—are home to a combined population of 14.7 million people (about 2.6 million families). These states were chosen based on a combination of factors including population density, poverty levels, geographic representation, and existing project implementation infrastructure. This initial phase aimed to reach approximately 11.3 million beneficiaries (about 2 million families) with six months of support, allowing the program to test and refine its delivery mechanisms before scaling up.

Phase 2: National expansion

Phase 2 aimed to expand the program to 12 states, reaching 24.7 million individuals (4.4 million families)—comprising 11.3 million beneficiaries from the first phase and 13.4 million beneficiaries from the second phase. This expansion required an additional US$360 million, with contributions of US$150 million from the Sudan Transition and Recovery Support (STARS) Multi-Donor Trust Fund and US$210 million from the International Development Association's Pre-Arrears Clearance Grants (PACGs). An alternative funding scenario envisioned an additional US$200 million from the Government of Sudan, enabling coverage of 32.3 million individuals (5.8 million families). This expanded scenario sought to maintain the transfer value and coverage for another six months, incorporating lessons from Phase 1. The military takeover in October 2021 disrupted donor commitments, halting the program's planned expansion and preventing full execution.

Provide—Delivery modalities

Delivery systems were instituted for the purpose of strengthening institutional capacity.

Financial infrastructure and digital readiness

With 77 percent of the population owning a mobile device, Sudan's high mobile phone penetration provided a solid base for expanding mobile money and digital payment systems. However, access to formal banking remained very limited. Across the country, there were only 801 bank branches and 1,650 automated teller machines (ATM), equivalent to just 2.8 bank branches and 5.8 ATMs per 100,000 adults.[3,4] In Sudan, most

banking services were concentrated in urban areas, leaving many rural communities without easy access. Conversely, Sudan's mobile payment network was more widespread. The country had about 70,000 mobile money agents and 33,000 point-of-sale (POS) terminals, providing more opportunities for people to engage with digital financial services. About 3.6 million debit cards, 2.08 million cash cards, and 7.8 million mobile wallets were active at the time the program commenced, reflecting a population increasingly prepared to embrace digital financial inclusion. However, significant challenges persisted despite these strengths. Liquidity issues frequently arose among private agents during payment surges, reducing the effectiveness of cash transfers in rural areas. Infrastructure gaps and uneven geographic distribution of financial services further constrained the reach of digital systems. To address these issues, the SFSP introduced strategic measures, including:

- **Agent prioritization.** Larger agents were prioritized over smaller ones, and multiple agents were engaged in high-demand areas.
- **Bank support.** Nearby bank branches were incorporated to provide liquidity to agents.
- **Advance communication.** Mobile agents were notified to prepare for increased demand before payment rollouts.

Payment ecosystem and delivery modalities

To adapt the approach to Sudan's diverse infrastructure challenges, the SFSP introduced a hybrid payment system that prioritized digital payments where reliable networks and services were available, while maintaining manual payment options in areas with limited access.

- **Digital payment tools.** The SFSP prioritized digital payments wherever infrastructure allowed. Beneficiaries could access their funds through bank or microfinance institution accounts, POS terminals, mobile wallets, or cash cards. The program leveraged mobile money services offered by MTN, Sudatel, and Bank of Khartoum, which were linked via the EBS platform to ensure seamless access across providers. Digital payments proved to be efficient and secure, significantly reducing leakage to 1 to 4 percent, compared to the 4 to 15 percent typically seen with manual cash distribution. Although digital payment systems were prioritized for efficiency, the program acknowledged gender constraints on financial inclusion. Many women lacked access to mobile phones, SIM cards, or independent bank accounts.
- **Manual payment tools.** In areas where digital services were not available or more difficult to access (especially for women), or where people preferred cash, the SFSP provided manual payment options. Cash distributions were organized through Zakat Chambers, Sudapost offices, and WFP distribution centers. In some cases, vouchers redeemable for cash or goods were also offered to ensure that no one was excluded from receiving their benefits.

Payment infrastructure rollout and challenges

The SFSP used widespread mobile network coverage to guide payment delivery strategies. Mapping mobile network coverage revealed that two states, Al Gezira and Khartoum, could fully adopt digital payments without fallback systems while 13 other states[5] relied heavily on digital systems with manual backup. Manual payment systems ensured inclusivity and coverage for remote and conflict-affected regions and areas with weak infrastructure (such as Blue Nile, Central Darfur, and East Darfur). (Refer to appendix E for more on payment infrastructure rollout.)

Cost and system safeguards

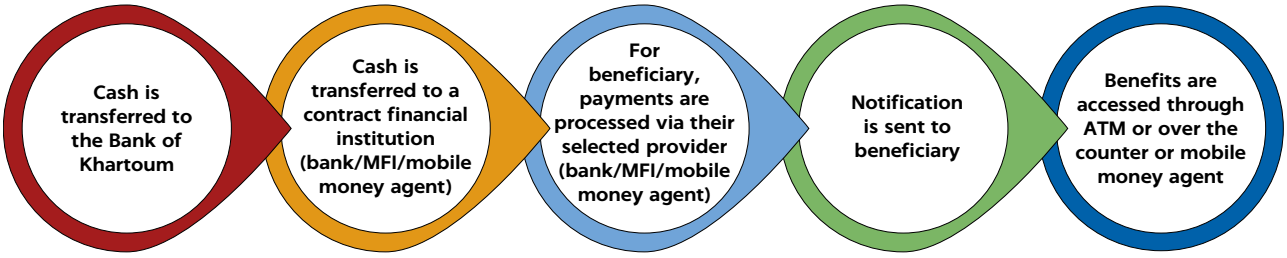
The cost of delivering payments averaged about 3 percent of the overall program budget. While digital payments were generally more efficient, they required higher initial setup investments. The program maintained strict fiduciary controls to ensure accountability, including real-time reconciliation between payment providers and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, regular audits, and the use of MIS tools for monitoring. Importantly, beneficiaries could choose or update their preferred payment method at any point during registration, making the process flexible and more responsive to individual needs.[6]

Flow of funds

SFSP designed its payment delivery process to be clear, fair, and reliable, ensuring that funds reached beneficiaries efficiently and with full accountability. This process brought together several key players, including MoFEP, financial institutions, and, most importantly, the beneficiaries themselves. The channel of funds transfer followed a structured set of steps, as shown in figure 2.4.

FIGURE 2.4

Basic process flow for benefit paid through a bank/MFI account



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.

Note: ATM = automatic teller machine; MFI = microfinance institution.

Beneficiaries reached

The SFSP covered 14 states during its implementation. Phase 1 included four states: Kassala, Khartoum, Red Sea, and South Darfur. Phase 2 expanded to an additional eight states, bringing the total to 12: Blue Nile, Central Darfur, East Darfur, North Kordofan, Sinnar, South Kordofan, West Kordofan, and White Nile. Two additional states were covered by WFP: West Darfur and North Darfur. This brings the total number of states reached by the SFSP to 14. Plans were underway to expand into the remaining four states to achieve full national coverage but were halted by the October 2021 military takeover. The project delivered direct cash transfers to approximately 8.7 million people (about 1.5 million families), reaching nearly 70 percent of its targeted 12.35 million beneficiaries. Women accounted for 50 percent of total beneficiaries (and 35 percent of female household heads), meeting the project's gender target. These significant achievements were realized just eight months before the project was paused on October 25, 2021. A breakdown of beneficiaries reached by payment type during the rollout is presented in table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2 Share of beneficiaries reached by different payment modalities during rollout

STATE	BANK (%)	CASH CARD (%)	MOBILE MONEY (%)
Blue Nile	2	85	12
Central Darfur	3	61	36
East Darfur	4	76	20
Kassala	4	6	89
Khartoum	17	12	70
North Darfur	8	17	75
North Kordofan	1	97	2
Red Sea	0	100	0
Sinnar	0	98	1
South Darfur	3	1	97
South Kordofan	10	58	32
West Darfur	9	15	77
West Kordofan	1	81	18
White Nile	6	40	54

Source: Original table prepared for this publication, based on the SFSP administrative database.
Note: SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program.

Manage

The Manage phase of the SFSP focused on ensuring the program remained responsive to beneficiaries' needs. It kept family information up to date, ensured accurate payments, and addressed all issues quickly and fairly. To do this, the program relied on a strong MIS and a dedicated GRM.[7]

- **Management information system.** The MIS gave staff at registration centers the tools they needed to quickly fix mistakes and update household records, helping to prevent payment delays. This flexibility was especially important in Sudan, where many families faced potential disruptions or displacement and needed a system that could adapt to their changing circumstances. The GRM worked closely with this system, providing beneficiaries an easy and safe way to report problems with their payments or eligibility. The design of the GRM emphasized creating a safe space for reporting sensitive issues, including gender-based violence, so that women and vulnerable groups could speak up without fear.
- **Grievance redress mechanism:** The GRM was an essential part of the SFSP, designed to give beneficiaries a clear, safe, and accessible way to raise concerns, report issues, and seek resolution. In a country where trust in government institutions had often been weak, the GRM played a vital role in building confidence that the program would listen and respond to people's needs. The program utilized the Zimam modality, a community-based governance model that encouraged residents to help monitor the program and address problems. Zimam brought together neighborhood committees, youth and women's groups, and community organizations to give people a voice in how the program worked in their area. Women and marginalized groups were especially supported and given confidence to report any issues, including cases of gender-based violence. By directly involving local communities, Zimam helped strengthen trust between people and the program, showing how grassroots participation can make social protection fairer and more responsive (refer to the latter part of this section for a detailed discussion of how Zimam was used to support program implementation). When the program was paused after the military takeover in October 2021, families were informed clearly and respectfully, which helped prevent confusion and misunderstanding.

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

The results of the SFSP are well documented in the project's Implementation Completion and Results Report (ICR00006326) (World Bank 2025). Table 2.3 summarizes key indicators measured against project performance targets. The project remained highly relevant throughout implementation, responding directly to Sudan's economic and social crises by delivering urgent support to vulnerable households. It closely aligned with Sudan's reform and recovery agenda, as outlined in the 2021–2022 Country Engagement Note (World Bank 2020), and was

responsive to the country's urgent social and economic needs in the context of subsidy reform, the COVID-19 crisis, and ongoing conflict.

In terms of outcomes, the project achieved meaningful progress toward both development objectives. Under Project Development Objective (PDO) 1, the project reached 8.7 million beneficiaries (about 1.5 million households or families) against a baseline of 0. Fifty percent of beneficiaries were female and 35 percent were female family heads, meeting the gender target. Under PDO 2, the NCR platform was upgraded to cover 80 percent of the population in four key regions (Khartoum, Red Sea, South Darfur, and Kassala), improving from a low baseline.

Project efficiency was rated substantial. By leveraging the design and delivery infrastructure established under the predecessor Sudan Social Safety Net Project, the SFSP accelerated implementation and achieved rapid scale-up. Using preexisting systems reduced the time and transaction costs that otherwise would have been incurred if new systems had to be developed from the ground up. The project successfully deployed automated registration tools, digitized payment mechanisms—including mobile money—and established integrated platforms connecting key institutions such as the National Civil Registry.

TABLE 2.3 Project Development Objective indicators, by outcomes

	INDICATOR	BASELINE	ACTUAL ACHIEVEMENT	CLOSING PERIOD TARGET
Deliver cash transfer to Sudanese families affected by economic reforms and short-term shocks				
1	Number of families receiving cash/ income support	June 2020	June 25, 2024	June 2024
		0	1,484,474	2,200,000
2	… of which females are heads of families (percentage)	0.00	34.60	2.40
3	Number of beneficiaries of SFSP	June 2020	June 25, 2024	June 2024
		0	8,667,741	12,350,000
4	… of which are female (percentage)	0.00	50.00	50.00
Improve Sudan's safety net systems				
5	NCRs that function across the country are strengthened.	June 2020	October 25, 2021	June 2024
		National platform is functioning but has low coverage and needs efficiency improvements.	The NCR was upgraded, issuing national IDs to 80 percent of the population in the four regions (Kassala, Khartoum, Red Sea, and South Darfur) covered by the project. The work plan and budget were developed to provide the platform with necessary equipment and mobile registration units.	NCR covers 80 percent of the population in the regions covered by the project.

Source: World Bank 2025.
Note: ID = identification; NCR = National Civil Registry; SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program.

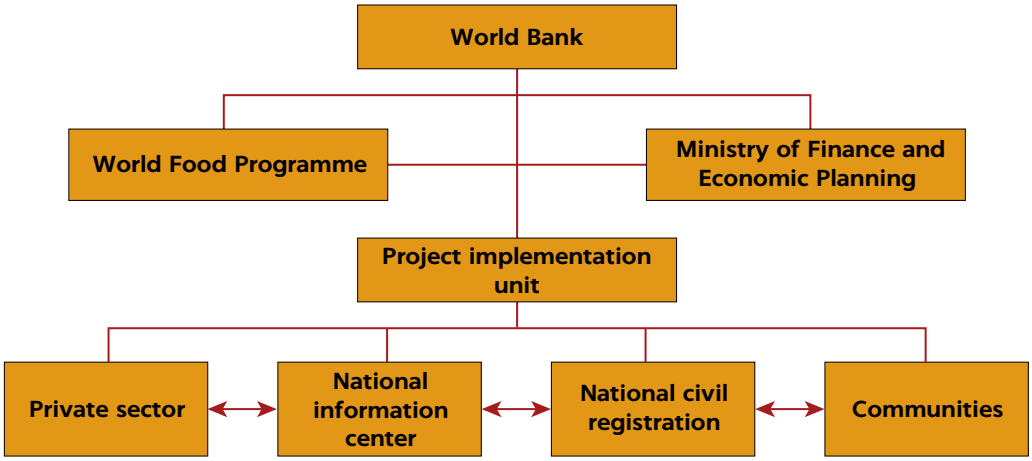
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The SFSP implementation strategy was carefully designed to balance rapid deployment with sustainable systems development in Sudan's challenging operating environment. The SFSP established a comprehensive institutional framework aimed at balancing centralized coordination with localized implementation flexibility—a key requirement in Sudan's diverse and fragmented context (refer to figure 2.5). This structure addressed three core challenges: weak institutional capacity, limited coordination, and diverse regional implementation contexts. The design prioritized clear accountability lines while maintaining sufficient flexibility to adapt to Sudan's dynamic political and social environment. At its core, the framework integrated existing government structures with new project-specific units, avoiding parallel systems that could undermine long-term institutional development. This was essential to maintaining operational continuity even during periods of significant institutional change.

Coordination was managed through a multitiered framework that ensured strategic guidance, accountability, and operational efficiency. The project's inter-ministerial oversight committee (PIOC), co-chaired by the ministers of MoFEP, MoLSD, and MoI, provided strategic directions and resolved implementation bottlenecks. This committee reviewed progress toward program objectives, mobilized government support, and disseminated key achievements. Complementing the oversight role of the PIOC was the Project Technical Committee (PTC), which comprised technical staff from MoFEP, MoLSD, and MoI, as well as representatives from participating states. The PTC focused on operational coordination and provided technical support for critical processes, including payment systems, data integration, and beneficiary validation. Day-to-day operations were managed by the Project Implementation Unit (PIU), housed within MoFEP. The PIU included specialists in IT, payments, communications, and monitoring and evaluation. These experts worked closely with state-level units to ensure program standards and timelines were met while maintaining flexibility to address localized challenges. (Refer to figure 2.6 for a timeline of the implementation strategy.)

FIGURE 2.5

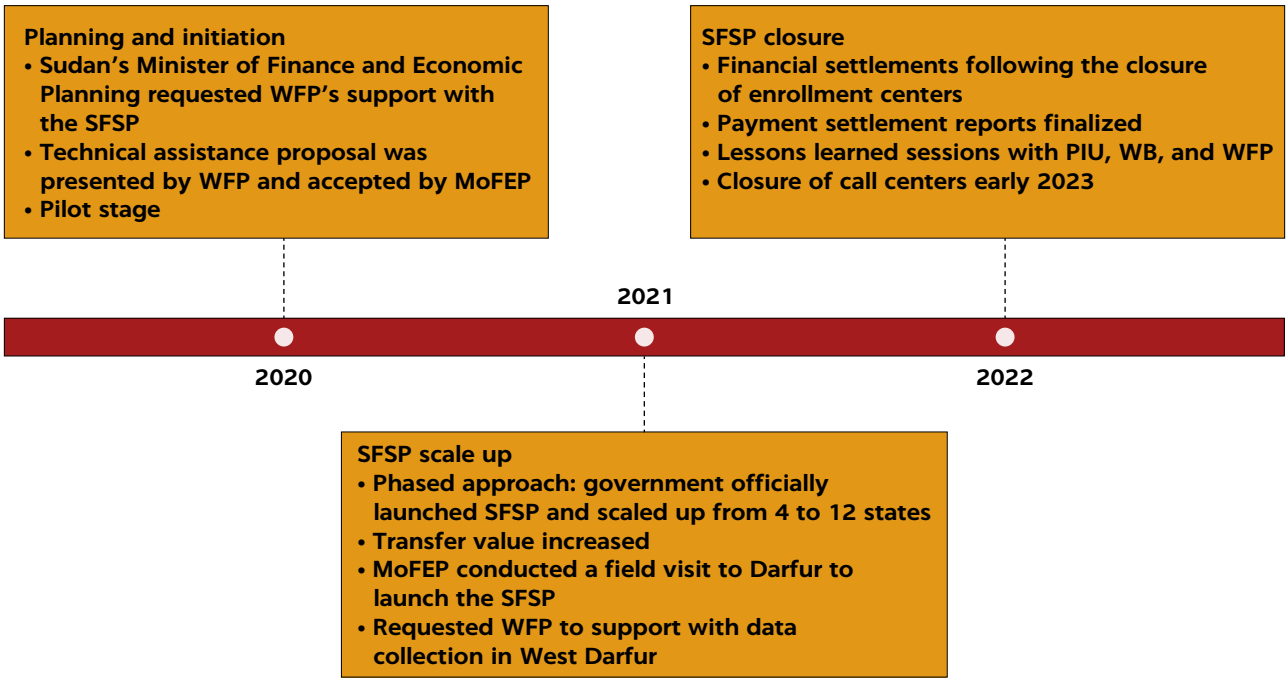
Key Sudan Family Support Program stakeholders



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.

FIGURE 2.6

Sudan Family Support Program implementation timeline



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication.

Note: MoFEP = Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning; PIU = Project Implementation Unit; SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program; WB = World Bank; WFP = World Food Programme.

World Bank as a financier and adviser

The World Bank played a strategic role as a financier and adviser to the SFSP. It mobilized over US$750 million through instruments such as the IDA's PACGs and the STARS Multi-Donor Trust Fund. In addition to providing financing, the World Bank offered technical support and policy guidance, helping to shape the program's core features, including its quasi-universal approach, digital delivery systems, and institutional arrangements. The World Bank facilitated stakeholder coordination, supervised implementation, and ensured compliance with fiduciary and safeguard requirements. It conducted regular missions, reviewed procurement and financial management systems, and helped identify and resolve delivery bottlenecks. Following the 2021 political transition and the application of OP 7.30, the World Bank restructured the program and reallocated resources. The program was scaled down, with revised targets set at 12.35 million beneficiaries (2.2 million families), moving away from nationwide coverage as originally planned.

To ensure continuity of support for vulnerable households, US$100 million of the canceled SFSP funds was repurposed for the Sudan Emergency Safety Nets Project, approved in July 2022 and delivered through WFP. Additional reprogrammed funds supported the Sudan Somoud Project, approved in November 2023 and jointly implemented by WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Sudan Emergency Crisis Response Safety Net Project, approved in December 2024 and also delivered through WFP and UNICEF. These projects collectively aimed to sustain basic assistance to food-insecure and vulnerable households during a period of institutional fragility. The World Bank also emphasized the need to capture lessons from SFSP implementation to inform future programs and strengthen the foundations for a more resilient and inclusive social protection system in Sudan.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning was at the head of this centralized coordination as the lead implementing agency and provided overall coordination and integrated the SFSP with Sudan's economic reform agenda. The ministry was responsible for mobilizing resources, ensuring compliance with the program's guidelines, and reporting progress to the World Bank. The selection of MoFEP as the implementing agency was based on its capacity to align the SFSP with broader fiscal reforms and mobilize external funding for social protection programs. In its implementation MoFEP nonetheless leveraged the MoLSD's grassroot network, which facilitated local level coordination. The MoI was responsible for integrating the NCR with the SFSP database. A dedicated Project Implementation Unit (PIU) was established under MoFEP to manage the program's operational aspects, including procurement, financial management, coordination, and reporting. The PIU was supported by technical specialists and had the authority to make

implementation decisions within the approved operational framework. The SFSP partnered with the WFP, private sector actors (including telecoms and financial service providers), and community-based networks to close delivery capacity gaps. The rationale for these choices was grounded in the urgent need for timely and large-scale support, alongside limited government capacity, especially outside Khartoum.

World Food Programme as a strategic implementation partner

The WFP was engaged as a key implementation partner during the pilot and early phases of the SFSP, based on its longstanding operational presence in Sudan and its proven capacity to deliver assistance in fragile and hard-to-reach contexts. With extensive field infrastructure and experienced staff already in place, WFP was uniquely positioned to support the program's rapid rollout across multiple states. WFP's broad geographic footprint and established systems enabled effective, timely implementation, particularly in regions where government delivery capacity was limited. The agency's role was further reinforced by its compelling reputation among development partners—especially in the context of Sudan's emergence from international sanctions—which facilitated collaboration and enabled funding to flow through United Nations channels. In addition to technical expertise, WFP brought substantial financial resources to the partnership, contributing approximately US$40-US$45 million to the program. Under the MoU, WFP's support focused on several core areas:

- Technical assistance and financing for the development of a digital delivery system and data center, which will serve as the key mechanism for benefit transfers for the government
- Technical assistance on the development of a payments and digital financial inclusion strategy
- Technical assistance for the establishment of a Complaints and Feedback Mechanism, including a call center and Customer Relationship Management software
- Provision of third-party assurance services, including monthly payments reconciliation and anomaly detection
- Establishment of a WFP service delivery platform to deliver cash to families on behalf of the government.

To implement this support, WFP assembled a team of technical experts led by a senior adviser reporting to the deputy country director. The team included expert specialists in coordination and relationship management, payment processes, complaints and feedback mechanisms, digital delivery systems, data analysis, information and communication technology infrastructure, and finance and budgeting. Proposed contributions to design features and operational processes within the initial design document prepared by WFP included the following:

- A draft registration and targeting strategy
- An outline of data process flow between the government and WFP
- Short message service (SMS) support processes for data verification checks of the initial 20,000 families supported in the pilot along with plans for digital data storage and processing
- A technical note on calculating the transfer value to eligible families
- Design of a flowchart for payment processes.

In addition to these core functions, WFP also contributed to strengthening Sudan's digital delivery ecosystem. A rapid assessment of financial service providers was conducted to identify suitable partners for digital payments. Collaboration was established with the National Information Centre (NIC), a newly created body within the Digital Transformation Agency under the Ministry of Telecommunications. WFP's technical assistance to the NIC was designed to support the government's ambitious strategy for creating a digital economy and to improve the interface between citizens and the state. This support included systems development and capacity-building, drawing on WFP's global experience. As part of this broader partnership, WFP staff were placed in the PIU and reported to the government project coordinator. This arrangement was part of the collaboration between WFP, the World Bank, and the government to enhance coordination and leverage operational and technical expertise for the program's implementation.

Engaging the private sector for scalable and inclusive delivery

In addition to ministries and multilateral actors, the SFSP strategically engaged private sector partners to address capacity gaps and ensure timely, inclusive delivery on a scale. Given the limited operational reach of government institutions—particularly outside Khartoum—collaboration with mobile network operators, financial service providers, technology developers, and behavioral science organizations was essential to achieving the program's ambitious goals.

Telecommunications providers such as Zain and MTN played a vital role in building mobile money infrastructure, supporting digital platforms for beneficiary onboarding, and facilitating cash transfers through mobile wallets. For many recipients, this marked their first experience with formal financial services, representing a critical step toward financial inclusion.

The SFSP also partnered with technology and fintech firms to design and deploy tools tailored to low-connectivity environments. This included SMS-based verification systems, USSD interfaces for mobile registration, and backend integration with call center and grievance systems. These innovations were crucial to ensuring access for populations with limited digital literacy or internet access.

To boost citizen engagement and increase outreach effectiveness, the program worked with behavioral science advisers to design user-centered communication strategies. These included simplified enrollment instructions, SMS prompts, and grievance redress mechanisms, all aimed at improving registration completion rates and encouraging the use of support services.

In some areas, mobile money agents and retailers also served as community-level service points, allowing beneficiaries to withdraw payments, update account details, or seek assistance locally, reducing the need to travel long distances for support.

Leveraging the Zimam modality for community-driven and transparent cash transfer

The SFSP built upon the core principles of the Zimam modality to deliver its cash transfer program in a manner that was participatory, transparent, and driven by the local community. Recognizing that trust, local engagement, and governance are essential to the success of social protection programs, SFSP leveraged the existing Zimam framework to improve implementation, expand community outreach, and institutionalize feedback mechanisms. This integration ensured that cash transfers were efficiently delivered while remaining based on a system of local governance, accountability, and collective ownership.

The Zimam modality: A pre-existing governance model in Sudan

The Zimam modality was a long-standing governance and community engagement mechanism in Sudan, widely recognized for its bottom-up decision-making approach. Before the introduction of SFSP, Zimam was used nationwide to facilitate local governance, service delivery, and social accountability, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. The strength of Zimam lay in its ability to mobilize communities, ensure the transparent distribution of resources, and foster trust between citizens and the government. It operated on several core principles that made it particularly effective for large-scale social protection programs:

- **Participatory governance:** Zimam was inherently community-driven, ensuring that local leaders, civil society, and ordinary citizens all had a voice in decision-making. This participatory model fostered a sense of collective ownership and responsibility, making programs more responsive to local needs.
- **Transparency and accountability:** A key feature of Zimam was its emphasis on open communication, grievance redress, and financial accountability. Regular community meetings, sharing of public information, and structured complaint-handling processes ensured resources were distributed fairly and equitably.

- **Community ownership:** Local leaders and governance structures played an active role in implementing programs under Zimam. This decentralized approach enhanced credibility, reduced bureaucratic inefficiencies, and strengthened local leadership in service delivery.
- **Inclusivity**: Zimam focused on engaging diverse community members, including women, youth, and marginalized groups. This ensured that interventions were not only equitable but also culturally and socially sensitive.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** The fluid nature of Zimam allowed it to be tailored to different communities, responding effectively to changing social, economic, and political dynamics. Its decentralized model enabled quick adjustments in response to real-time challenges and feedback.
- **Trust and social contract reinforcement:** Zimam strengthened the relationship between citizens and the government by providing a mechanism for citizen-state engagement, grievance redress, and conflict resolution. This was especially important in Sudan's fragile and conflict-affected environment, where trust in public institutions was often low.

Building on the Zimam modality as a foundation, the SFSP adopted its principles as the core delivery mechanism for its cash transfer program. The first phase of implementation focused on operationalizing these participatory principles by actively engaging local community networks, grassroots committees, and civil society organizations in program outreach and beneficiary enrollment. Despite the evolving dynamics of economic reform and widespread vulnerability, the Zimam modality proved to be an effective and resilient framework for ensuring inclusive participation and transparency in the SFSP. Grassroots committees also facilitated beneficiary registration and community outreach, playing a crucial role in strengthening local governance institutions. By linking these committees with formal governance structures, the program enhanced their capacity to facilitate local development projects while reinforcing participatory governance at the community level. The importance of grassroots committees extends beyond the SFSP, as their role in mobilizing communities, advocating for transparency, and resisting elite capture has been well demonstrated.

CONCLUSION

The design and delivery of the Sudan Family Support Program carefully balanced urgency and institution-building. Amid economic reform and widespread vulnerability, the program demonstrated that reaching people at scale is possible, even in fragile contexts, while also laying the foundations for a more inclusive and resilient social protection system.

By combining digital innovation with manual options, and national strategies with localized outreach, the SFSP reached 8.7 million people in a short period of time. Through mobile registration, one-stop shop centers, and flexible payment channels, the program improved access to timely support, especially for women, residents of remote areas, and individuals without formal ID. It also expanded access to legal identity and financial services, advancing broader goals of social inclusion and empowerment.

At the same time, the program enhanced core systems—such as enrollment, payment processing, and grievance redress—that are expected to support Sudan's social protection landscape beyond the SFSP. These delivery systems were built with a long-term view but grounded in the everyday needs and realities of Sudanese families.

Ultimately, the SFSP experience illustrates that, with the right approach, even a temporary cash transfer program can provide more than just short-term relief. It can also foster trust, strengthen systems, and support a more responsive and accountable state, offering valuable lessons for similar efforts in fragile and low-capacity settings.

NOTES

1. *Thamarat* (Arabic: ثمارات, "fruits") refers to the public-facing name and national brand of the SFSP used to make the cash transfer program easily recognizable to citizens and to present the transfers as the tangible "fruits" of economic reforms.
2. Refer to appendix B for details on the project phases and financing structure, outlining the allocation of resources and disbursement status.
3. By comparison, Kenya had nearly double the number of bank branches and ATMs, while South Africa had some of the highest levels globally with 38.66 bank branches and 43.6 ATMs per 100,000 adults (refer to https://www.itnewsafrica.com/2025/02/how-agency-banking-is-transforming-financial-access-in-developing-countries/?utm_source).
4. The number of bank branches or ATMs per 100,000 adults is calculated using the following formula: number of bank branches or ATMs per 100,000 adults = (total number of bank branches or ATMs ÷ total adult population) × 100,000. For Sudan, this calculation assumes an estimated adult population of 24 million (50 percent of the total population of 48 million), resulting in approximately 2.83 bank branches and 5.8 ATMs per 100,000 adults.
5. Al-Gedarif, Kassala, North Darfur, North Kordofan, Northern, Red Sea, River Nile, Sinnar, South Darfur, South Kordofan, West Darfur, West Kordofan, and White Nile.
6. These costs are based on expert estimates and international standards. A further revision is required. Banks did not charge any fees to beneficiaries opening an account. The cost of using debit and cash cards could increase by 0.5 percent to 2 percent for services delivered in remote locations for POS-based transactions.
7. The program enhanced service delivery through a phased system upgrade, beginning with an improved registration and enrollment system that leveraged real-time NCR application programming interface validation to increase data accuracy and family enrollment. While this significantly improved initial processing, the manual generation of payment lists through database queries and Excel files created a bottleneck that delayed payments. In response, the IT team developed a dedicated payment module in the third quarter, improved database performance through refined queries and new indexes, and upgraded the enrollment module based on staff feedback. New features allowed supervisors to edit citizen information directly, which integrated with the case management system (GRM). This iterative approach addressed immediate operational challenges and laid a solid foundation for future improvements in benefit delivery.

REFERENCES

Kurtz, J., V. Krishnan, V. Leape, V. Jovanovic, M. Ross, and R. Macaranas. 2021. "A Million-Dinar Question: Can Cash Transfers Drive Economic Recovery in Conflict-Driven Crises? Experimental Evidence from Iraq." Mercy Corps, Portland, Oregon.

Lindert, K., T. G. Karippacheril, I. R. Caillava, and K. N. Chávez. 2020. *Sourcebook on the Foundations of Social Protection Delivery Systems*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank. 2004. *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People*. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://hdl.handle.net/10986/5986.

World Bank. 2020. Sudan: Country Engagement Note for the Period FY21–FY22. Washington, DC.

World Bank. 2025. "Sudan Family Support Project, Implementation Completion and Results Report." (Report No. ICR00006326). Washington, DC.

3 Main Lessons Learned from the Sudan Family Support Program

This chapter reflects key lessons learned from operationalizing the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP), drawing on practical field experience. It offers a candid assessment of the innovations that enabled early success and the constraints that limited the program's full potential. In doing so, the chapter seeks to inform the design and delivery of future social protection interventions in settings affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV).

The reflections presented here highlight the importance of adaptability, strong local partnerships, and realistic expectations. Delivering assistance at scale in FCV contexts requires not only technical solutions but also the capacity to navigate uncertainty, institutional fragility, and shifting political dynamics. While perfect implementation may not be achievable, the SFSP experience demonstrates that progress can be made at speed and at scale—even in the most challenging circumstances—when programs are responsive, inclusive, and grounded in local realities.

STRATEGIC COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL CIVIL REGISTRY TO EXPAND IDENTITY ACCESS

One of the most significant barriers to implementing the SFSP was Sudan's fragmented and incomplete national identification system. At the program's outset, an estimated 8 to 12 million (out of 45 million) Sudanese citizens—including between 3 and 5 million internally displaced persons—lacked formal identification documents. This posed a fundamental challenge to the program's quasi-universal targeting approach, risking the exclusion of the very individuals it aimed to reach: the poorest and most vulnerable.

The National Civil Registry (NCR) encountered significant operational challenges—limited geographic coverage, outdated infrastructure, and inadequate human and technical capacity to support large-scale enrollment. These limitations were especially acute in rural, remote, and conflict-affected areas, where state presence was minimal. The lack of reliable identification systems hindered social assistance and broader inclusion, limiting people's access to financial services, education, health care, and civil entitlements. It also increased the risk of excluding citizens the program sought to help, undermining the program's integrity and core objective of equitable coverage. For a program aiming at transparency and credibility, addressing this foundational weakness became a pressing priority.

To close this gap, the SFSP encouraged a collaboration between the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Together, these ministries developed and launched an ambitious national plan to issue legal identification to Sudanese citizens previously excluded from the NCR. The program issued temporary identification (ID) cards to ensure that undocumented citizens could enroll quickly and receive benefits. These IDs were later converted into permanent national IDs once individuals were registered with the NCR, bridging short-term program needs with long-term institutional goals. This initiative enabled Sudanese citizens previously excluded from the NCR to benefit from the project, and it illustrated how social protection programs can strengthen state capacity to reach all groups of people and improve citizen-state relations.

The partnership was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that clearly defined institutional roles, financing arrangements, and implementation milestones. Key innovations in this partnership included deploying mobile registration units (MRU), integrating ID registration with cash transfer enrollment, strengthening infrastructure, and prioritizing ID registration for women.

1. **Mobile registration units.** The program deployed 25 MRUs equipped with the necessary technology to reach underserved and remote areas. These units were strategically positioned to reduce travel times for applicants and streamline the enrollment process. Each unit was designed to facilitate program enrollment and assist applicants in obtaining national IDs where required, addressing a key barrier to enrollment. These mobile units were instrumental in extending the NCR's reach, enabling registration activities to penetrate areas previously considered inaccessible due to geographic isolation or security concerns. By bringing registration services directly to communities, the program reduced the time, cost, and security risks associated with travel to distant government offices.

2. **Integrated registration processes.** Instead of building separate parallel systems, the SFSP combined ID registration with cash transfer enrollment, creating a streamlined "one-stop shop" approach. As detailed in chapter 2, local registration centers not only handled program enrollment and payments but also acted as hubs for other important government services, including national ID registration through the NCR.

   This integration offered several advantages:

   - Reduced administrative burden on citizens, allowing them to complete both processes in a single visit
   - Improved efficiency in resource utilization, as staff and equipment served multiple purposes
   - Increased incentives to participate, as obtaining an ID became a condition for receiving financial assistance
   - Developed a sustainable identification infrastructure that would outlast the current program.

3. **Supporting infrastructure development.** To support this ambitious registration effort, the program made substantial investments in strengthening the NCR's technological infrastructure. The implementation of the NCR rollout plans involved increasing the number of Sudanese individuals with valid national IDs by at least five million during the program, supported by the deployment of MRUs, satellite data links, and centers for obtaining and updating IDs.

4. **Prioritizing women's access to identification.** Through the MoU with the MoFEP and the MoI, the program supported a national registration campaign to issue national IDs with a specific focus on women. The program intentionally addressed systemic barriers faced by women by incorporating female officials into registration teams and simplifying registration requirements to promote women's participation.

DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFIED REGISTRATION PLATFORM

A key institutional innovation under the SFSP was the creation and implementation of a unified registration form jointly created by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MoLSD) and the MoFEP. This unified form served as a foundation for standardizing beneficiary data collection across both the SFSP and the Sudan Social Safety Net Project (SSNP).

Streamlined program operations

Before the SFSP, social assistance programs in Sudan often used inefficient data collection tools and had uncoordinated beneficiary registration processes. The introduction of a unified form addressed this problem. The unified registration form did the following:

- Provided a standardized template for gathering essential demographic, socioeconomic, and eligibility information
- Enhanced field operations by minimizing data entry errors through clearly structured, precoded sections
- Enabled interoperability with digital systems, including the SFSP management information system (MIS)
- Enabled rapid verification and cross-referencing with other government databases, such as the NCR
- Reduced duplication of effort among programs
- Simplified training for registration staff
- Lowered operational costs.

Enhancing data quality and program targeting

The standardized data format allowed for a broader assessment of household vulnerability among different programs. With consistent data, both the SFSP and SSNP teams could use common eligibility filters, track overlaps, and create a shared beneficiary registry. Key benefits included:

- Increased accuracy in targeting by reducing the number of exclusion and inclusion errors
- Enhanced potential for linking cash transfer data with other services, such as health care and education
- Creation of a reliable dataset to inform policy decisions and shape future program development.

Foundation for a national social registry

Beyond its direct application in the SFSP and SSNP programs, the unified registration form established the groundwork for a national social registry. This registry would serve as a central platform for coordinating social protection programs, bringing together investments from development partners and supporting government-led poverty reduction strategies. By unifying and standardizing beneficiary data collection, the SFSP helped improve program delivery as well as support longer-term efforts to strengthen Sudan's social protection system.

PHASED APPROACH TO SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

Given Sudan's limited digital infrastructure and the urgent need to launch the program and deliver benefits, the SFSP adopted a phased systems integration approach (refer to appendix B) that enabled rapid rollout while gradually advancing toward more sophisticated data interoperability.

This strategy enabled the program to operate effectively despite initial technical limitations while also creating a foundation for future scalability.

Manual data sharing as an interim solution

In the initial stages of implementation, data sharing among institutions, including the MoFEP, the MoLSD, the NCR, and payment service providers (PSP), was conducted manually. Flat database files and spreadsheets were shared among agencies and uploaded into standalone systems to facilitate enrollment, ID verification, and payment processing. Although this approach required additional manual effort and was susceptible to duplication and data entry errors, it enabled the program to start delivering service delivery without waiting for full systems integration.

Manual processes were backed up by strict data validation protocols and standardized templates to ensure accuracy. Despite its limitations, this interim solution helped to demonstrate early results and build institutional confidence in digital tools.

Transition to automated data exchange and phased systems integration

As implementation progressed and institutional capacity grew, the program shifted from manual file exchanges to automated data transfers using application programming interfaces (APIs). The use of APIs allowed secure, real-time integration between the program's MIS, the NCR database, and PSP platforms. This adaptive strategy enabled the SFSP to balance quick implementation with system development, ensuring that the program could provide immediate support while also building resilient digital infrastructure for long-term use. The transition to API-based systems also established the groundwork for more dynamic program features, such as automated eligibility checks, duplicate detection, and digital audit trails. The phased approach to systems integration demonstrates how social protection programs in fragile contexts can pragmatically sequence their digital transformation—starting with foundational solutions and advancing toward real-time, automated interoperability as capacity expands. Key benefits of this transition included the following:

- Reduction in data entry errors and administrative burden
- Improved speed and reliability of data validation and processing
- Enhanced ability to track transaction flows and monitor performance in real time.

Several factors contributed to the success of this phased integration model. Incremental infrastructure upgrades expanded server capacity, improved the network, and helped to develop the MIS. Information technology (IT)

staff received on-the-job training and expert mentoring. Collaborative governance structures enabled coordinated decision-making and joint problem solving between agencies.

LEVERAGING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EXPERTISE

When the SFSP was launched, Sudan faced a severe lack of technical expertise needed for designing and implementing large-scale social protection programs. Decades of isolation had limited Sudan's exposure to international best practices, while brain drain and underinvestment in the public sector had depleted its pool of skilled professionals. This capacity gap was especially clear in specialized fields such as MIS, digital payment platforms, and data analytics—all essential elements of a modern social protection program.

The program's ambitious scale and technical complexity magnified these challenges. The SFSP aimed to reach 80 percent of Sudan's population across geographically dispersed and often hard-to-access regions, requiring advanced systems for beneficiary registration, payment processing, and monitoring. Traditional technical assistance approaches—heavily reliant on international consultants—risked creating unsustainable dependencies without building lasting local capacity. To fill the gaps in technical and operational capacity, the SFSP took an innovative approach to human resource mobilization and systems integration.

Leveraging government IT talent

Instead of relying solely on external consultants, the SFSP strategically engaged existing IT staff from MoFEP and NCR to design and manage core information systems. This decision ensured institutional continuity, improved coordination, and promoted long-term sustainability by building internal capacity. Government staff were embedded in cross-functional teams that worked closely with program coordinators and technical advisers. To supplement in-house capacity, the program directly contracted IT professionals that were financed by the World Food Programme with specialized expertise in systems design, cybersecurity, data migration, and digital payment solutions. These consultants not only accelerated progress in technical development, they also served as mentors to government staff, facilitating hands-on training and knowledge exchange. This hybrid staffing model was strengthened by establishing a dedicated project implementation unit that co-located government staff, consultants, and development partners. This arrangement fostered real-time collaboration, rapid resolution of cross-functional issues, and informal knowledge exchange through day-to-day interactions. The co-location model proved especially effective during periods requiring rapid adaptation. It enabled:

- Immediate problem-solving without delays from formal escalation
- Peer-to-peer learning and mentoring
- Stronger team cohesion and trust among diverse stakeholders.

Building digital payment infrastructure

The hybrid staffing model and collaborative work environment laid the foundation for the successful development and deployment of the SFSP's digital infrastructure, including registration, grievance redress, and payment systems. Government staff worked closely with contracted experts to ensure that tools were not only technically sound but also aligned with national processes and were adaptable to local needs.

Although a range of systems were developed, one of the most critical was the automated payment module, which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter and in appendix E. This module exemplifies how the staffing and co-location model translated into high-functioning, scalable systems tailored to fragile settings.

USING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Effective communication was crucial to the SFSP's success, especially considering its broad geographic reach, its linguistic and cultural diversity, and the fragile, low-trust environment in which it operated. Recognizing the importance of engaging communities in ways that reflected their lived experiences, the SFSP adopted culturally resonant communication strategies that combined traditional media with localized, community-based approaches to enhance outreach, promote transparency, and build trust among beneficiaries. These strategies included the following:

- Radio dramas and jingles produced in local languages
- Traditional music and folk songs conveying program messages in an accessible and familiar format
- Community theater and storytelling, which facilitated direct engagement with listeners and helped clarify misconceptions
- Village gatherings and information caravans, used to spread key messages and collect feedback.

These tools proved particularly effective in areas with low literacy and limited access to digital technology. By embedding information within culturally relevant formats that included both entertainment and dialogue, the SFSP raised awareness, corrected misinformation, and increased community support and commitment.

Forming strategic partnerships with media and journalists

To ensure consistent and credible messaging, the SFSP formed strategic partnerships with federal and state-level media outlets, journalist associations, and individual reporters. Regular public broadcasts provided listeners with eligibility information and SFSP updates. Journalists received training on how to best report on the program's objectives and progress.

Strengthening credibility through trusted voices

Media partnerships also enabled the SFSP to connect with trusted local voices, including respected community leaders, religious figures, journalists and correspondents, social commentators, and influencers. These individuals acted as intermediaries between the program and the public, helping to bridge gaps in trust and ensuring that program messaging resonated across diverse demographic groups. This strategic use of the media environment boosted the program's visibility and strengthened its legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Adopting a multichannel and inclusive outreach strategy

The SFSP adopted a multichannel approach to promote inclusivity and ensure its reach across both rural and urban areas. This approach included a variety of outreach methods, such as posters, flyers, and brochures printed in multiple languages; hotline numbers and help desks operated by trained staff; and text message and social media campaigns. This layered strategy ensured that communication was not only top-down but also integrated with trusted community structures, reinforcing the perception of transparency and fairness.

Expanding digital access and crisis response communication

The communications team also implemented a data communications protocol that enabled mobile users with supplementary data plans ("quick codes"), particularly those without internet access or smartphones, to confirm payment schedules, report problems, and receive program updates. This was an important channel for direct outreach in remote and low-connectivity areas. Furthermore, to combat misinformation during times of political unrest, the SFSP implemented a dedicated crisis communication strategy, including rapid response messaging through trusted local media and coordination with community leaders to uphold and maintain program credibility.

Leveraging community radio and local reporting networks

To reach underserved communities, the SFSP partnered and collaborated with community radio stations and local media networks. These channels

hosted live call-in shows, where listeners could pose questions or share concerns, and locally produced segments featuring field implementers, beneficiaries, and civil society representatives. These partnerships fostered dialogue, expanded the program's reach, diversified communication channels, reinforced the program's accessibility and transparency, and anchored public discussion on social protection reforms in trusted sources.

Communication was seen as a two-way process between the state and citizens, not as just the dissemination of information. The SFSP invested in feedback channels, including community listening sessions and call center data analysis, to refine messaging and to respond to emerging concerns quickly. Based on insights from the field, messaging strategies were adjusted and adapted to respond to regional dynamics, rumors, and implementation delays. By tailoring communication tools to Sudan's diverse cultural landscape and using both traditional and modern channels, the SFSP enhanced its credibility, promoted equitable access to information, and strengthened its connection with the communities it served.

To improve program understanding and success among target groups, SFSP collaborated with behavioral science experts to develop communication materials, creating "nudges" aimed at reducing enrollment barriers and strengthening trust in the program.

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN AUTOMATED PAYMENT MODULE

The SFSP's automated payment module was a key innovation in a challenging financial environment. The module enabled seamless interaction and communication between the program and PSPs, enabling reliable, efficient, and transparent delivery of cash transfers, along with real-time data exchange, transaction tracking, and reconciliation.

Functional architecture and system capabilities

The payment module was developed to integrate with the broader MIS, enabling automated generation of payment instructions, routing of transactions through preferred PSPs, and reconciliation of transaction records. Key capabilities included the following:

- Real-time tracking of payment status
- Secure issuance of payment reference codes
- Automated reporting for financial audits and operational management
- Integration with grievance redress systems to flag and resolve payment issues.

Multichannel payment system

To ensure nationwide access, the system included various payment channels such as mobile money platforms, banks, microfinance institutions, and cash-out agents. Critically, beneficiaries could select their preferred payment method during enrollment—an innovation that improved flexibility, minimized last-mile barriers, and enabled quicker program rollout. This approach also helped avoid delays often encountered when procuring payment service providers. Flexibility was essential in remote or underserved areas where access to formal financial services was limited. In addition, the system sent short message service notifications to confirm payment issuance, thereby strengthening trust and confidence in transparency.

Program outcomes and benefits

The automated module enabled the program to accomplish the following:

- Reduced processing time and manual errors
- Improved transaction traceability and fraud prevention
- Enhanced user satisfaction through timely and predictable payments
- Strengthened financial controls and real-time operational intelligence.

Sustaining and scaling the payment system

Built on open standards and modular design principles, the module was designed to be scalable and adaptable beyond the SFSP. Government IT staff were trained in system management and maintenance, ensuring local ownership and continuity.

SUSTAINING DELIVERY SYSTEMS BEYOND SFSP

The SFSP made significant progress in establishing essential delivery systems, including a robust MIS, a digital payment infrastructure, grievance redress platforms, and integrated registration tools. These systems were designed not only to meet the program's immediate objectives but also to help build long-term social protection reform in Sudan.

The political transition that followed the military takeover in October 2021 led to a pause in program implementation and raised concerns about the continuity of these systems. Despite this interruption, the core infrastructure built under the SFSP proved resilient. When implementation resumed under such successor programs as the Sudan Emergency Safety Nets Project, Sudan Somoud, and the Sudan Emergency Crisis Response Safety Net Project, these initiatives leveraged the systems and institutional

knowledge already in place, enabling quicker deployment and reducing the need for reliance on parallel processes. These tools supported essential functions such as digital enrollment, beneficiary verification, payment disbursement, and grievance redress, enabling innovative programs to focus resources on reaching vulnerable populations instead of rebuilding operational capacity from scratch.

This experience underscores an important lesson for planning future programs in fragile and conflict-affected settings: even in the face of uncertainty, delivery systems can act as a stabilizing force. Embedding flexibility, interoperability, and government engagement from the outset enhances the likelihood that these investments will be sustained—and reactivated—regardless of the political context.

CONCLUSION

The SFSP experience demonstrates that large-scale social assistance is achievable in fragile settings when programs are built with flexibility, inclusivity, and understanding of the local context. In a country marked by institutional fragility, political change, and widespread poverty, the SFSP delivered support to millions and helped build essential delivery systems. These achievements were enabled not only by technical innovation but also by a flexible approach that allowed the program to adapt to evolving challenges on the ground.

With modular payment systems, hybrid staffing, phased digital integration, and MRUs, the SFSP was intentionally designed to be iterative, starting with what was feasible and scaling up as capacity improved. This flexibility made it possible for the program to operate across diverse regions, respond to bottlenecks in real time, and maintain outreach to marginalized groups, especially women and people in rural communities.

At the same time, the program's limitations, such as data integration challenges, uneven institutional capacity, and political disruptions, demonstrate that flexibility alone is not enough. Durable results require sustained investment, local ownership, and systems that can endure beyond a single intervention.

For governments and development partners operating in FCV contexts, the SFSP experience teaches important operational lessons. Programs must be designed to operate amid uncertainty, adapt without losing focus, and prioritize inclusion even in challenging situations. While the path to success may not be straight, the SFSP demonstrates that meaningful progress can be made when delivery systems are both people-centered and resilient by design.

4 Synthesizing Key Reflections from the Sudan Family Support Program Experience

The Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP) represented a bold effort to deliver large-scale, government-led social assistance in one of the world's most fragile environments. Designed amid profound political transition, economic volatility, and institutional fragility, the program aimed to support vulnerable households while establishing the foundation for a long-term social protection system. This chapter draws together the key reflections from the SFSP experience and offers forward-looking insights for practitioners working in settings prone to fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). Although the program faced critical constraints and an untimely suspension, it proved that progress is achievable when programs are context-aware, locally grounded, and strategically adaptive.

At the same time, the return to widespread conflict in Sudan in 2023 highlights a sobering reality: in fragile situations, fragility can worsen, undoing hard-won gains. Some recommendations in this chapter assume institutional progress or at least continuity—but future programs in Sudan must also prepare for the opposite. In contexts where state institutions collapse—as happened in Sudan, which led to the suspension of cash transfers—and where fiscal budgets are severely constrained, the focus should be not only on expanding new initiatives but also on protecting existing ones. Future efforts should focus on safeguarding institutional knowledge and memory, maintaining trusted delivery channels, and adapting social protection to operate outside traditional systems. In times of crisis, social protection must evolve and adapt—not only to safeguard lives and livelihoods, but also to preserve the foundations for eventual recovery.

BALANCING CENTRAL OVERSIGHT WITH LOCALIZED IMPLEMENTATION TO BUILD RESILIENCE IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

The SFSP demonstrated that even in politically volatile and institutionally fragile settings, it is possible to develop and implement a national social protection system. While the program was suspended following the October 2021 political transition, many of its delivery systems, such as the digital registry, payment infrastructure, and community-based outreach platforms, remained functional and were repurposed by successor programs. This underscores a key lesson from the SFSP experience: when designed thoughtfully, delivery systems can outlast individual programs and ensure critical continuity, even in times of disruption.

Initially, SFSP's delivery model was highly centralized, with most operational responsibilities held by national-level institutions such as the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP) and the National Civil Registry. While this centralized architecture supported early alignment with reform objectives and enabled close oversight, it also created implementation bottlenecks and left the program vulnerable to disruption when central systems were strained or unavailable. For example, delays in registration approvals and payment processing occurred because of overreliance on a few decision points and limited field-level autonomy.

As the program evolved, SFSP introduced additional community-based implementation methods, including mobile registration units (MRUs), community-based grievance redress, and culturally tailored communication approaches. These adaptations improved outreach and responsiveness, especially in underserved and insecure areas. However, the shift toward shared implementation across multiple actors also revealed coordination challenges. The absence of clearly defined roles and overlapping mandates between central ministries, international partners, and local actors led to fragmentation, duplication of efforts, and gaps in accountability.

These experiences illustrate the importance of balancing centralized oversight with well-defined, decentralized delivery arrangements. In FCV settings, institutional structures must be designed to be flexible and adaptable, establishing shared but clearly articulated responsibilities, formal decision-making protocols, and interoperable systems and actors. Without this clarity, even well-intentioned partnerships can result in confusion and inefficiency. These institutional insights complement the delivery-specific adaptations discussed in the next subsection.

The SFSP provides a valuable foundation for future programs. Its innovations—including decentralized outreach, integrated service centers, and a robust digital infrastructure—offer important insights into what is possible, even in highly constrained settings. Future programs can build on

these elements while embedding crisis-readiness, localized delivery capacity, and flexible institutional frameworks from the outset. In doing so, social protection can become not only a tool for addressing vulnerability, but also a platform for fostering social cohesion, institutional resilience, and state-citizen trust in fragile contexts.

ADAPTING NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS TO DIVERSE CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS FOR EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

SFSP's implementation across Sudan's diverse geographic and security contexts underscored a critical operational lesson: conflict is not uniform, and national programs must accommodate significant regional variations in access, risk, and capacity. While standardized systems offered consistency and efficiency, they often lacked the flexibility required for delivery in insecure, hard-to-reach, or institutionally weak settings.

For example, in South Darfur and other conflict-affected states, insecurity limited the movement of registration teams, and the destruction of infrastructure hampered access to payment mechanisms. In response, SFSP experimented with community-anchored registration through local leaders and the World Food Programme (WFP). This demonstrated that even within a national program framework, differentiated approaches are not only feasible but necessary to sustain delivery.

The limitations of SFSP's initial one-size-fits-all model also revealed the need for more robust operational diagnostics and regional risk mapping at the design stage. In several areas, delivery models were unable to adapt quickly to on-the-ground realities—whether due to deteriorating security, population displacement, or local governance vacuums. While some of these limitations were addressed during implementation, the lack of pre-agreed contingency protocols and regionally tailored delivery plans created avoidable disruptions.

Future programs operating in conflict-affected regions must build contextual adaptation into their core architecture. This includes:

- Conducting detailed subnational conflict and access assessments during design
- Establishing modular delivery models with clearly defined triggers for transition
- Formalizing partnerships with international actors for volatile zones
- Training local implementers in conflict sensitivity and adaptive management

- Creating decentralized budgets and procurement frameworks that respond to emergent needs.

SFSP's experience also highlights the value of local legitimacy and trust. The use of respected local leaders to validate beneficiary lists enhanced credibility and mitigated tensions. Adaptation to mobile payment aggregators proved critical in areas with weak formal banking infrastructure.

By embracing differentiated operational models, future programs can ensure equitable coverage across diverse conflict settings. Contextual adaptation is not a compromise on quality; it is a prerequisite for effective delivery in fragile environments.

BALANCING TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION WITH CONTEXTUAL REALITIES

SFSP demonstrated how technology can expand the reach and efficiency of social protection programs, even in fragile and resource-constrained settings. Digital platforms enabled the registration of previously unregistered individuals, streamlined payments, and improved transparency through real-time monitoring. Yet the program also revealed the limitations of a digital-first approach in settings where infrastructure, literacy, and access to services were uneven.

Biometric registration, mobile payments, and automated grievance systems offered substantial gains. However, implementation in areas like West Kordofan and parts of Darfur was frequently disrupted by connectivity issues and power outages. MRUs sometimes functioned inefficiently due to slow satellite connections and a lack of digital literacy among users.

These challenges underscore that technology is just one element of an effective delivery system. Future programs should be tech-enabled, not tech-dependent. SFSP's use of other payment methods and manual grievance logs in areas with poor connectivity served as essential fallbacks. Programs must design hybrid systems that function at all levels of technology—from digital hubs to manual outreach.

Digital literacy also matters. Many beneficiaries, especially those in rural areas, faced barriers to accessing or using mobile technology. SFSP's simplified instructions, female registration staff, and help desks were important factors in effectiveness. Future programs should build on these strategies by codesigning user interfaces, piloting tools before scaling them, and creating feedback mechanisms to adapt technology based on user experience.

Crucially, innovation must be coordinated with infrastructure development and local capacity-building. The SFSP highlighted the dangers of deploying complex systems without sufficient investment in maintenance, training, and decentralized IT support.

STRENGTHENING DELIVERY THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

A key enabling factor in the SFSP's implementation was the strategic partnership formed between the World Bank, the WFP, the Government of Sudan, and multilateral donor partners. This collaboration was essential not only for resource mobilization but also for overcoming the operational constraints posed by Sudan's distinctive geopolitical situation. At the time of the program's design and early implementation, Sudan remained on the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list, restricting certain development partners from directing funds through government channels. To address this, a portion of donor financing—about US$45 million—was routed through the WFP, enabling ongoing delivery consistent with the program's national objectives. This mechanism supplemented the World Bank's own financing through the International Development Association and coordinated additional partner contributions via the Sudan Transition and Recovery Support Multi-Donor Trust Fund.

Despite the split financing arrangements, the SFSP was implemented through a single, unified program implementation unit that brought together staff from all partner institutions under one coordinating structure. This structure reported to a high-level steering committee, co-chaired by MoFEP and the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MoLSD), ensuring political oversight and alignment with broader reform goals. Operational consistency was reinforced by the implementation of a single Project Operations Manual, which standardized procedures across both WFP-managed and Bank-financed states. This enabled a unified approach to registration, payments, grievance redress, and monitoring, while allowing partners to adapt their operational footprint to varying local realities.

This coordinated partnership facilitated the following:

- An efficient rollout of activities across diverse geographic areas
- Ability to leverage international and local expertise while developing local capacity
- A rapid response in states where traditional delivery systems were constrained.

The SFSP experience emphasizes the importance of designing inclusive implementation arrangements that leverages the comparative advantages

offered by different actors. In FCV contexts, where institutional risks are high and delivery capacity is inconsistent, such partnerships can offer essential operational flexibility and help mitigate financing, fiduciary, and logistical barriers to scaling.

EMBEDDING GENDER TRANSFORMATION BEYOND ACCESS AND INCLUSION

The SFSP made significant strides in improving women's access to program benefits by streamlining registration requirements, focusing outreach strategies on female-headed households, and using female registration staff to ensure a more inclusive and comfortable environment. These practical design choices helped overcome immediate barriers to access, but they also underscored the deeper structural challenges that continued to restrict women's full participation.

Future programs should adopt gender-transformative approaches that go beyond access issues to address the underlying social and institutional norms that influence gender inequality. These approaches should include giving women agency through leadership roles in program governance structures, promoting equitable decision-making within households, and ensuring that social protection interventions address care responsibilities, mobility restrictions, and risks of gender-based violence (GBV).

The SFSP's efforts to increase women's enrollment in the national identification system in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior enabled broader inclusion. However, many women still faced constraints related to documentation, digital literacy, and intrahousehold power dynamics. Programs should allocate dedicated resources for gender analysis, ongoing monitoring, and tailored support for groups facing intersecting vulnerabilities—such as widows, adolescent girls, women with disabilities, and survivors of GBV.

A gender-transformative approach to social protection also requires the engagement of men and other stakeholders within the broader community, including women and religious leaders and community groups. Norms evolve gradually, and program impact becomes more sustainable when supported by community dialogue and inclusive design processes. By addressing both practical and strategic gender needs, future programs can improve not only women's access to resources but also their roles as active participants in shaping and sustaining more equitable societies.

ENABLING ARCHITECTURE FOR INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Building on the foundation established by the unified registration platform jointly developed by MoLSD and MoFEP, there exists a broader opportunity—and need—to enhance institutional and legal interoperability

across Sudan's wider social protection system. While the SFSP introduced significant technical integration to streamline data collection and enrollment, the overall system remains fragmented, with separate delivery mechanisms operated by different ministries, humanitarian agencies, and other actors such as the Zakat Fund. Effective delivery architecture requires more than technical fixes; it depends on coherent legal frameworks and clearly defined institutional mandates that enable data sharing, interoperable payment platforms, and integrated grievance redress systems. The lack of such frameworks during the SFSP's implementation contributed to inefficiencies, limited institutional ownership, and duplication risks. Moving forward, coordinating roles and responsibilities, implementing data governance protocols, and anchoring delivery systems within a unified administrative and legal framework will be essential for ensuring sustainability, scalability, and eventual transition to government ownership.

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS

One of SFSP's key vulnerabilities was its heavy reliance on centrally managed donor funding, which became difficult to maintain during the political crisis that followed the October 2021 military coup. Future programs must have mechanisms in place to protect resource flows for social protection if central fiscal systems collapse or become inaccessible. Such mechanisms might include prearranged financial delivery through third-party fiduciaries, advance disbursement arrangements for frontline implementers, and prepositioned emergency funds with simplified disbursement rules. Tools like these can ensure continuity of support even when public financial management systems are temporarily disabled. Strengthening financial resilience must be part of broader shock-readiness planning—not only to maintain trust among partners and beneficiaries, but to safeguard the fundamental right to assistance in times of systemic crisis.

THE WAY FORWARD

The SFSP was created during a window of opportunity characterized by reform, political transition, and strong momentum for institution-building. Its early achievements offered hope that national social protection systems could take root even in fragile settings. This experience underscores the importance of building resilient social protection systems through contingency financing, domestic resource mobilization, and adaptive delivery mechanisms—ensuring that support for vulnerable populations can continue, even in times of profound crisis.

Yet Sudan's experience also demonstrates the need to adapt social protection delivery mechanisms when conditions deteriorate and programs

are suspended. Many of the forward-looking recommendations in this report—such as nationally coordinated delivery systems and integrated one-stop centers—became infeasible once conflict escalated and state capacity weakened. Although the World Bank has since reengaged through successor operations, many households that depended on the SFSP were left without support during the interim.

In contexts where core systems like state institutions and service delivery infrastructure stop functioning and fiscal capacity is severely constrained, priority should not be limited to scaling new social protection systems but also to preserving existing ones. Practitioners and policy makers should prioritize the following:

- Documenting lessons learned to prevent loss of institutional memory during periods of disruption
- Maintaining relationships with communities and delivery partners, especially those with operational access in fragile or conflict-affected areas
- Adapting delivery mechanisms to function outside traditional state structures, emphasizing mobility, flexibility, and local trust
- Designing programs for continuity—not just reform—ensuring that even when broad coverage is unfeasible, consistent support reaches the most vulnerable.

Sudan's trajectory illustrates that fragility is not fixed. In moments of crisis, the role of social protection must evolve—not only to safeguard lives and livelihoods, but also to preserve the systems and relationships that enable future recovery.

APPENDIX A

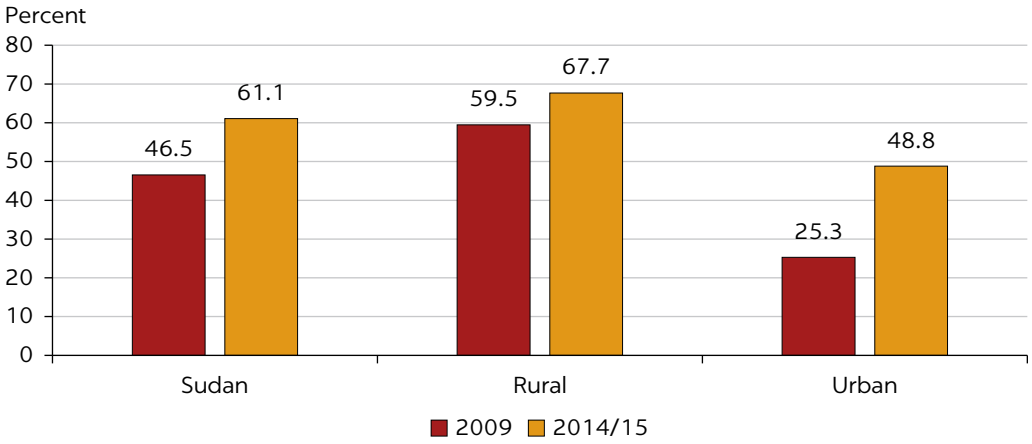
The Poverty Situation in Sudan

Over the past two decades, Sudan's inability to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth has led to a sharp increase in poverty. According to the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBPS) (Central Bureau of Statistics 2015), the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line increased from 46.5 percent in 2009 to 61.1 percent in 2014/15 (refer to figure A.1). During this period, mean consumption per capita declined sharply by 22.5 percent, falling from SD7,639 to SD5,922—an annual average decrease of 4.5 percent. Although poverty was more prevalent in rural areas, urban centers experienced a steeper increase, with poverty rates rising by 23.5 percentage points compared to 8.2 percentage points in rural areas.

The 2014/15 NHBPS remains the most recent source of data, underscoring a critical information gap. Without recent data, assessing the full extent of poverty today is challenging. However, the ongoing economic crisis, compounded by the impacts of COVID-19, has likely worsened poverty and inequality. Existing social safety nets are inadequate and rising food prices have disproportionately burdened the urban poor. These dynamics highlight the urgent need for updated household survey data to better inform strategies for addressing poverty and improving living standards in Sudan.

FIGURE A.1

Poverty incidence (headcount ratio), by locality and year



Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2009 National Baseline Household Survey and the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey, https://datacatalog.ihsn.org/catalog/9268.

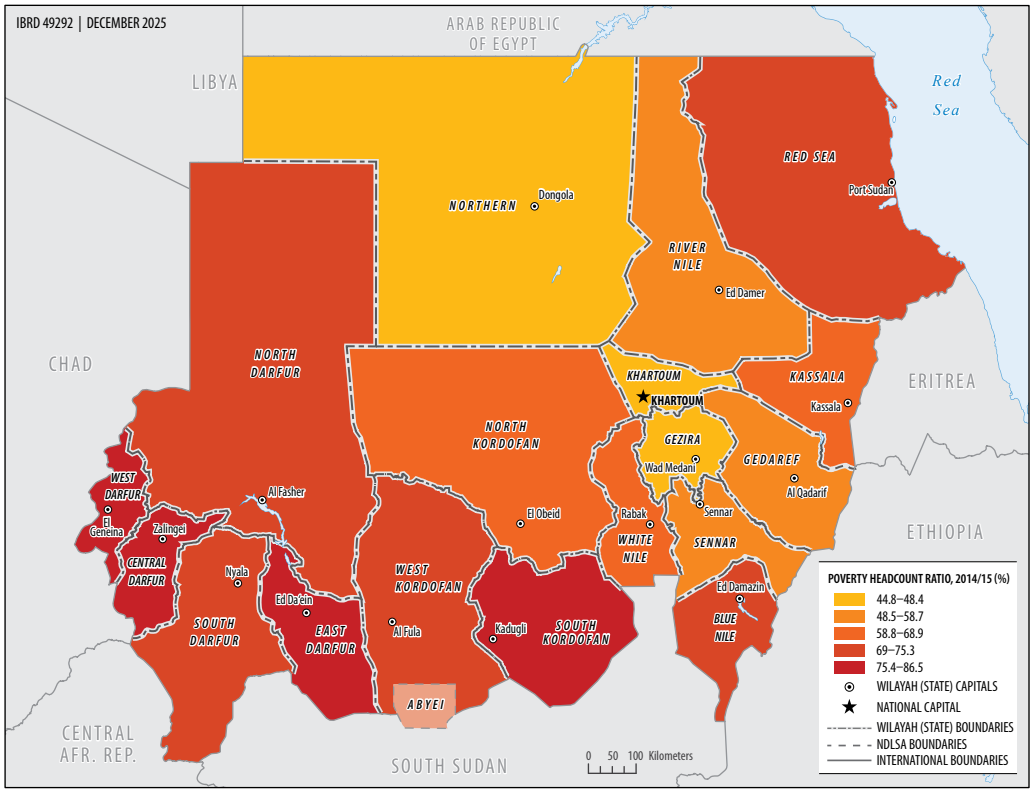
REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN POVERTY

Poverty rates vary widely across Sudan, reflecting stark regional disparities (refer to map A.1). Poverty levels for the western states of Darfur and Kordofan, along with the Blue Nile, Red Sea, and White Nile states, are well above the national average. In contrast, Khartoum and Northern states have significantly lower poverty rates. These disparities highlight the geographic concentration of poverty and the need for targeted interventions in regions most affected by conflict and economic marginalization.

The 2014/15 NHBPS data reveal distinctive characteristics of the poorest households, which tend to be larger, have higher age dependency ratios,[1] and rely more on agriculture for their livelihoods. Table A.1 offers a comparative analysis of households in the bottom 40 percent of per capita consumption expenditure. On average, these households have seven members (compared to five in wealthier households), about half of whom are children under 15. Heads of these households are more likely to be illiterate or lack formal education and to have limited access to basic services such as electricity and safely managed drinking water. Agriculture remains the primary source of income for 44 percent of households in the bottom 40 percent, compared to 25 percent in the top 60 percent.

MAP A.1

Poverty incidence (headcount ratio), by state, 2014/15



Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey.

TABLE A.1 Demographic attributes of households in the bottom 40 percent of per capita consumer expenditure, 2014/15

CHARACTERISTIC	TOTAL	BOTTOM 40%	TOP 60%	DIFFERENCE	SIGNIFICANCE
Average household size	5.76	7.38	5.03	2.36	***
Share of households headed by men	0.86	0.87	0.86	0.01	NS
Age dependency ratio	1.40	2.02	1.11	0.91	***
Share of household members who are boys or men	0.49	0.50	0.49	0.01	***
Share of household members below age 15	0.38	0.50	0.32	0.18	***
Share of household members age 65 and above	0.06	0.03	0.07	–0.04	***
Average age of the household head	47.39	47.01	47.57	–0.56	**
Share of literate household members	0.58	0.51	0.61	–0.10	***
Share of literate household heads	0.65	0.54	0.70	–0.15	***
Share of household heads with some formal education	0.66	0.55	0.70	–0.15	***
Share of households that use public electricity for lighting	0.46	0.23	0.56	–0.33	***
Share of households with improved source of drinking water	0.63	0.51	0.68	–0.17	***
Share of households that depend mainly on agriculture	0.31	0.44	0.25	0.18	***

Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey, https://datacatalog.ihsn.org/catalog/9268.

Note: ** and *** denote statistical significance at the 5 percent and 1 percent levels, respectively. NS = not significant.

In addition to financial hardship, nonmonetary poverty indicators reveal the extent of Sudan's development challenges. These include poor health outcomes, educational gaps, and limited access to essential services—highlighting widespread deficiencies in human capital and opportunity. Sudan ranks 139th of 157 countries on the World Bank's Human Capital Index, with a score of 0.38. This means that a child born in Sudan today is expected to be only 38 percent as productive as they would be with full access to quality education and health care. Sudan's score is well below global and regional averages, and it is lower than what would be expected for countries with similar income levels.

Educational outcomes are particularly concerning. Although progress has been made, access to basic education remains limited. In 2016/17, the gross enrollment rate in primary school was 73 percent, but nearly 40 percent of school-age children remained out of school, most having never attended. Even among those who enroll, only 64 percent complete the eighth grade. Learning outcomes are also poor: 38.7 percent of third-grade students are nonreaders, and the average reading speed is just 15 words per minute, well below the expected standard of 60.

Health indicators reflect similar disparities. Access to health insurance is limited. Maternal and infant mortality rates remain high. Sudan's under-five mortality rate was 68 per 1,000 live births in 2014—well above the Millennium Development Goal target of 41. Public spending on health in Sudan stands at just 2 percent of GDP and 9 percent of government expenditure, which is significantly below the target of 15 percent defined in the 2001 Abuja Declaration.[2]

Access to essential services is also severely limited. Electricity coverage remains concentrated in urban centers, leaving many rural and conflict-affected communities without reliable power for lighting, refrigeration, or income-generating activities. Clean water and basic sanitation services are unavailable in large parts of the country, exposing households—particularly women and girls—to health risks and the burden of water collection. In urban areas, overcrowded living conditions are common, especially in informal settlements, increasing exposure to communicable diseases and lowering quality of life.

FOOD INSECURITY AND CLIMATE SHOCKS

Food insecurity compounds Sudan's poverty crisis. The World Food Programme estimated that 5.5 million Sudanese were food insecure in early 2018, up from 3.8 million in 2017 (FEWS NET 2018). This situation has deteriorated more recently due to economic instability, conflict, and climate-related shocks. According to the United Nations, 24.6 million people are currently experiencing severe hunger, including 8.6 million in emergency conditions nearing famine (IPC 2025).

Weather-related shocks, such as floods and droughts, further exacerbate household vulnerabilities. Poor households, especially those dependent on agriculture, are disproportionately affected by these events. Analysis of data from the 2009 National Baseline Household Survey and the 2014/15 NHBPS indicates that floods or droughts reduce per capita consumption by an average of 5.3 percent, underscoring the limited coping capacity of Sudanese households.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND EXTREME POVERTY

The World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook (October 2024) estimates that extreme poverty—defined as living on less than US$2.15 per day (in 2017 purchasing power parity)—rose from 20.4 percent in 2018 to 56.7 percent in 2024, reflecting the impact of economic deterioration and ongoing conflict. Projections suggest that by 2025, extreme poverty would remain at about 57 percent, driven by infrastructure destruction, limited access to services, and deepening inequality.

NOTES

1. An age dependency ratio compares the numbers of people in a population group who are not of working age to the number of those in the group who are.
2. The Abuja Declaration was a 2001 commitment by African Union member states to allocate at least 15 percent of their national budgets toward health care to combat major diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

REFERENCES

Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan). 2015. National Household Budget and Poverty Survey 2014–15. Ref. SDN_2014_NBHS_v01_M. https://catalog.ihsn.org/catalog/9268/related-materials.

FEWS NET (Famine Early Warning Systems Network). 2018. "Developing Price Projections for Food Security Early Warning." Guidance Document Number 3. FEWS NET, Washington, DC.

IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification). 2025. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis—Country, Period. https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159433.

APPENDIX B

Project Phases and Financing Components

TABLE B.1 **Project phases and financing, by component, US$, millions**

COMPONENT	PARENT PROJECT (PHASE 1)		ADDITIONAL FINANCING (PHASE 2)		TOTAL (ORIGINAL + AF)	OVERALL DISBURSEMENT TO THE RECIPIENT'S DESIGNATED ACCOUNT AS OF OCTOBER 2021
	IDA	STARS	IDA	STARS		
Component 1: Provision of cash transfers	175.00	175.00	207.50	147.50	705.00	140.75
Component 2: Establish delivery systems and build institutional capacity	20.00	20.00	0.00	140.75	40.00	32.52
Component 3: Project management, monitoring and evaluation, and learning	5.00	5.00	2.50	32.52	15.00	8.13
Total	200.00	200.00	210.00	320.77	760.00	181.40

Source: World Bank 2020.

Note: As of October 25, 2021, a total of US$181 million had been disbursed to the recipient's designated account for the project, of which US$100.64 million from the International Development Agency (at the time EUR 82 million equivalent) and US$80.76 million from the Sudan Transition and Recovery Support Trust Fund (EUR 66 million equivalent). As of October 31, 2022, the balance in the designated account is US$71.2 million. AF = additional financing; IDA = International Development Agency; STARS = Sudan Transition and Recovery Support.

TABLE B.2 Sudan Family Support Project revised Project Development Objective indicators and targets

	FUNDING/ CANCELLATION (US$, MILLIONS)	EFFECTIVENESS	NUMBER OF PROJECT BENEFICIARIES (MILLIONS)	NUMBER OF FAMILIES RECEIVING CASH SUPPORT (MILLIONS)	PLANNED STATES COVERAGE	CLOSING DATE
2020: SFSP Phase 1 (US$400 million) (Parent project)	400.00	December 7, 2020	11.3	2.0	4 states	December 31, 2022
2021: SFSP Phase 2 (US$360 million) AF	350.00	March 24, 2021	24.7 (11.3 under Phase 1 + 13.4 under Phase 2 AF)	4.4 (2.0 under Phase 1 + 2.4 under Phase 2 AF)	12 states (4 under Phase 1 + 8 under Phase 2 AF)	June 30, 2023
2023: Restructuring (US$490.76 million) following cancellation	269.24 cancelled under trust fund	November 9, 2023	12.35	2.2	n.a.	June 30, 2024

Sources: World Bank 2020, 2021.
Note: The AF project appraisal document noted, "The overriding principle would be to cover 80 percent of the population of the participating states" (paragraph 23, page 13). AF = additional financing; n.a. = not applicable; PAD = project appraisal document.

REFERENCES

World Bank. 2020. Restructuring Paper on a Proposed Restructuring of the Sudan Family Support Project Approved on October 8, 2020, to the Republic of Sudan. Report No. RES47556. World Bank, Washington, DC.

World Bank. 2021. Project Paper on a Proposed Additional Grant in the Amount of SDR146.9 Million (US$210.0 Million Equivalent) Financed from a Pre-Arrears Clearance Grant and a Proposed Additional Grant in the Amount of US$210.0 Million from the Sudan Transition and Recovery Support Multi-Donor Trust Fund to the Republic of Sudan for the Sudan Family Support Project. Report No. PAD 4353. World Bank, Washington, DC.

APPENDIX C

Microsimulation Analysis of Potential Benefit and Poverty Impact of the Sudan Family Support Program

This appendix presents the results of a microsimulation analysis estimating the potential distributional impact of the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP).[1] Drawing on data from the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBPS) (OAMDI 2015), the analysis models how the six-month benefit package would influence household consumption, poverty, and inequality under a set of structured assumptions. Specifically, it examines three key poverty measures—headcount, depth (gap), and severity—as well as overall inequality using the Gini coefficient. This multidimensional approach offers deeper insights into the program's distributional impact than single-metric evaluations alone (refer to box C.1 for technical details).

Although not a substitute for real-time impact evaluation, the simulation offers valuable insights into the program's expected reach and equity outcomes at both national and subnational levels. It demonstrates how a quasi-universal cash transfer program—like the SFSP—could improve welfare for poor and vulnerable households, particularly in fragile settings where institutional delivery capacity is limited. By simulating outcomes across geographic regions, both rural and urban populations, and varying consumption quantities, the analysis identifies where the program's relative impact is likely to be greatest and which groups stand to benefit most.

Significantly, these estimates are based on best-case targeting assumptions and should be interpreted as upper-bound projections. They are intended to complement field-based evidence and operational feedback, and to inform the design of future safety net interventions in Sudan and other fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Box C.1

Microsimulation methodology

To estimate the potential distributional effects of the Sudan Family Support Program, we simulate its impact on three key poverty measures: (1) poverty headcount, (2) poverty gap, and (3) poverty severity, along with a measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient. These calculations are based on the most recent available data from the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey. The *poverty headcount* measures the proportion of the population living below the poverty line and is the most commonly used indicator. However, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the program's potential impact, we also analyze additional poverty measures. The *poverty gap* quantifies the average shortfall in household consumption from the poverty line, expressed as a ratio of the poverty line (with nonpoor households having zero shortfall). It gauges the intensity of poverty and indicates how much would be required to lift these households above the poverty threshold. *Poverty severity*, the average of the squared poverty gap, places more weight on households further from the poverty line, providing a measure of inequality among the poor. Finally, the Gini coefficient captures overall income or wealth inequality, with values ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality).

For microsimulations, we assume perfect targeting at the national level, allocating the cash transfers to the bottom 80 percent of the expenditure distribution, as defined by national quintiles. This approach allows us to estimate the program's impact based on the 2014/15 official poverty line, with a baseline poverty headcount of 61.1 percent.

The microsimulation follows these steps:

1. Start with the 2014/15 consumption aggregate and the official poverty line, expressed in 2014/15 local currency.
2. Adjust all values to 2020 nominal terms using International Monetary Fund average annual inflation rates, while maintaining the 2014/15 poverty headcount as the reference point (values are expressed in 2020 terms).
3. Simulate the effect of the cash transfer by adding US$5 per person per month to eligible households, up to a maximum of US$30 for households with six members. To convert this amount to Sudanese pounds, we use the exchange rate of 380 Sudanese pounds per US dollar at the time of the simulation.
4. Since the program was designed to run for only six months, we estimate the benefits over this six-month period.

ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL BENEFIT DISTRIBUTION

The microsimulation analysis reveals significant variations in the SFSP's impact across different population segments and geographic regions. At the national level, the six-month benefit package represents 2.7 percent of annual household consumption, though this aggregate figure masks important distribution patterns that emerge when examining specific subgroups and regions more closely.

The rural–urban analysis highlights crucial structural effects in benefit distribution. Rural households, typically characterized by lower baseline

consumption levels, experience a 3.2 percent increase in consumption, compared to 2.0 percent for urban households. This differential impact effectively addresses preexisting economic disparities, providing stronger relative financial support to traditionally underserved rural populations (refer to table C.1). The program's uniform transfer design thus creates naturally progressive outcomes, with more substantial relative benefits flowing to more vulnerable populations.

The analysis of consumption quintiles provides clear evidence of the SFSP's progressive impact. For households in the bottom quintile (poorest), benefits constitute 6.7 percent of annual consumption. This share steadily decreases across higher quintiles to 3.3 percent in the fourth quintile. The stepwise reduction pattern indicates consistent progressivity in benefit distribution, ensuring maximum impact where needs are most acute.

Geographic variations across Sudan's states further demonstrate the program's progressive nature. Central Darfur shows the highest relative benefit at 4.9 percent of household consumption, while Khartoum sees the lowest at 1.8 percent. Similar high-impact patterns emerge in South Kordofan and West Darfur (both at 4.3 percent), contrasting with more prosperous regions such as Al-Gezira (at 2.1 percent) and the Northern and River Nile states (both at 2.2 percent). These regional disparities demonstrate how uniform transfers naturally provide greater relative support to economically disadvantaged areas (refer to table C.2).

The patterns observed have implications for regional development and economic convergence. By providing proportionally larger benefits to poorer regions and households, the SFSP could help reduce regional inequality over time, though sustainable impact would require consistent implementation and complementary investments in local economic development.

TABLE C.1 **Baseline consumption per capita and transfer size**

QUINTILE	BASELINE ANNUAL CONSUMPTION PER CAPITA	CONSUMPTION CHANGES AFTER 6 MONTHS OF TRANSFERS (%)
Poorest	145,969	6.7
Second	214,798	4.9
Third	277,364	4.0
Fourth	359,186	3.3
Richest	612,031	0.0
Urban	379,101	2.0
Rural	291,061	3.2
Sudan	321,839	2.7

Sources: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey; IMF, https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PCPIPCH@WEO/MAE.
Note: Consumption per capita is in 2020 Sudanese pounds.

TABLE C.2 Baseline consumption per capita and percentage change with transfers, by state

STATE	BASELINE ANNUAL CONSUMPTION PER CAPITA	CONSUMPTION CHANGES AFTER SIX MONTHS OF TRANSFERS (%)
Al-Gadarif	327,736	2.5
Al-Gezira	368,857	2.1
Blue Nile	296,017	3.1
Central Darfur	214,014	4.9
East Darfur	263,007	3.4
Kassala	332,984	2.7
Khartoum	398,382	1.8
North Darfur	278,458	3.1
North Kordofan	294,934	3.1
Northern	368,139	2.2
Red Sea	280,950	3.6
River Nile	360,272	2.2
Sinnar	336,833	2.4
South Darfur	283,032	3.3
South Kordofan	220,099	4.3
Sudan	321,839	2.7
West Darfur	239,120	4.3
West Kordofan	270,835	3.5
White Nile	300,027	3.1

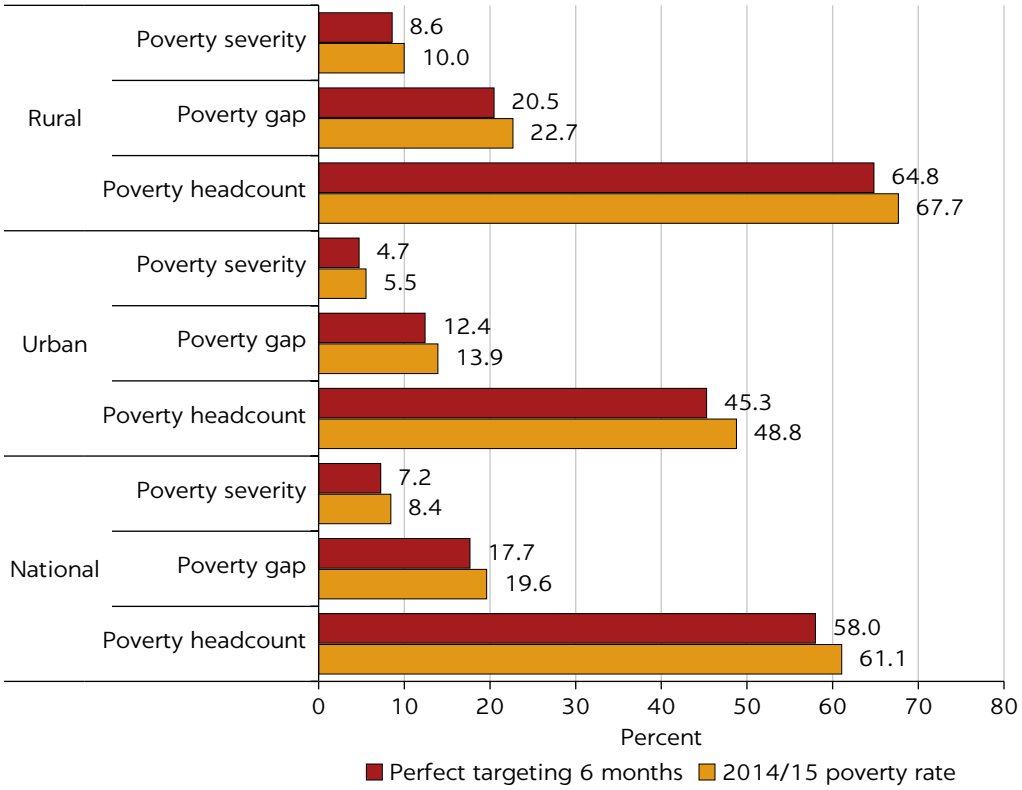
Sources: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey; IMF, https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PCPIPCH@WEO/MAE.
Note: Consumption per capita is in 2020 Sudanese pounds.

POTENTIAL POVERTY AND INEQUALITY REDUCTION POTENTIAL: BEST-CASE SCENARIO

Assuming the program reaches its target of 80 percent of the population, with beneficiaries concentrated in the bottom consumption quintiles, the national poverty headcount would fall from 61.1 percent to 58.0 percent after six months of transfers (refer to figure C.1).[2] While a 3-percentage point reduction represents a modest gain from a short-term intervention, it nevertheless reflects the potential for targeted cash transfers to support welfare improvements under constrained conditions. This impact varies across geographic areas. Urban poverty rates are projected to decrease from 48.8 percent to 45.3 percent, while rural rates would decline from 67.7 percent to 64.8 percent. The program's projected impact on inequality also gives encouraging signs. Under conditions of perfect targeting and in the absence of macroeconomic shocks, the Gini coefficient would decrease by 4.3 points, from 28.7 in 2014/15 to 24.4 in 2020 (refer to figure C.2).

FIGURE C.1

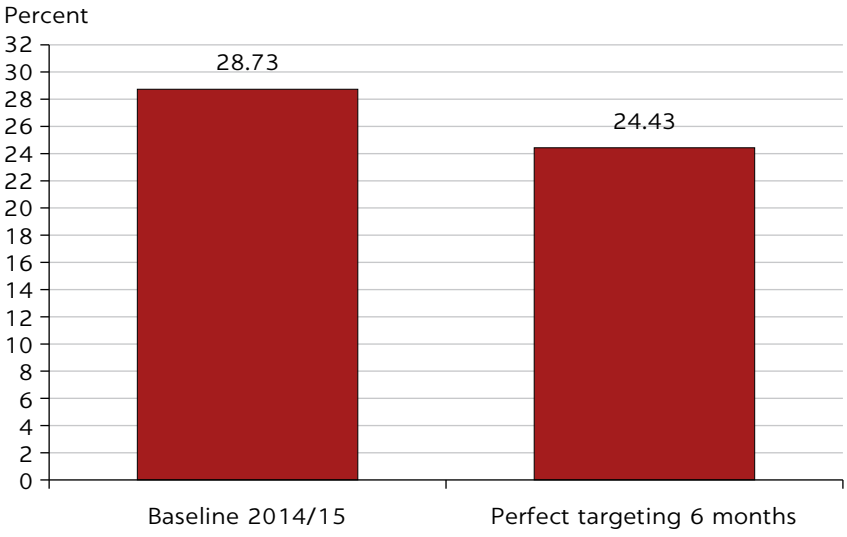
Simulated poverty rate, by area of residence



Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Statistics Norway. North Sudan National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS) 2009. Khartoum, Sudan: Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan).

FIGURE C.2

Observed and estimated Gini coefficients



Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan), FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), and Statistics Norway 2009.

Although these estimates are hypothetical, they underscore the potential for such programs—especially those focused on lower-income households—to advance equity. Even with modest benefit amounts, the SFSP design illustrates how social assistance could help reduce disparities when coverage is high and implementation is effective.

Beyond directly reducing poverty and inequality, the program demonstrates the potential to produce notable secondary benefits that would extend beyond the simulation's scope. Additionally, the program's role in subsidy reform could create fiscal space for increased government investment in social sectors, supporting long-term human capital development in Sudan.

However, the program's ability to achieve its potential depends on the effectiveness of its implementation. Although the program's target of 80 percent coverage theoretically ensures inclusion of all poor households, practical challenges and limitations could hinder it from meeting its objectives. The most vulnerable populations often face multiple barriers to access, including limited connectivity, lower literacy rates, and difficulty reaching service centers. While the national identification requirement is supported through local enrollment centers, it may pose additional challenges, especially in conflict-affected areas. Conversely, the superior access to information and resources among better-off households could lead to their overrepresentation among beneficiaries without careful targeting. These implementation considerations highlight the importance of robust outreach strategies and clearly defined targeting criteria to ensure the program reaches its intended beneficiaries and realizes its full potential for poverty reduction.

MICROSIMULATION LIMITATIONS

Several significant limitations of microsimulation analysis must be considered when interpreting these results. The primary constraint stems from the microsimulation's reliance on data from 2014/15 NHBPS data, which predate significant economic challenges in Sudan. The country's trend since 2016 of declining GDP per capita suggests that actual poverty levels may be substantially higher than those used in the simulation baseline. Although the values have been adjusted for inflation, the rapidly evolving economic conditions in 2020, marked by fluctuating commodity prices and disrupted supply chains, reveal the limitations of static data in accurately reflecting the dynamic nature of poverty and inequality in a highly volatile environment.

Additionally, microsimulation assumes perfect targeting by allocating cash transfers to the bottom 80 percent of the expenditure distribution. In reality, targeting inefficiencies and inclusion errors likely influenced the

program's actual reach and achievements. Furthermore, the program's impact on poverty was estimated based on the outdated 2014/15 official poverty line, which did not reflect current economic hardships or rising cost-of-living pressures.

The simulation methodology also employs intentionally conservative assumptions about benefit levels. Specifically, the analysis caps household benefits at US$30 per month, although the actual SFSP design does not include such a restriction. This conservative approach probably underestimates the program's potential to reduce poverty and inequality. Additionally, the simulation considers only direct consumption effects and excludes potentially significant secondary benefits. Drawing on evidence from similar programs, such as Uganda's cash transfer initiatives, these unmeasured secondary benefits could include improved human development outcomes, enhanced opportunities for productive investment, and gains in children's health and education.

A lack of recent data has limited the analysis of the distributional impact of cash transfers on households. Although microsimulation suggests that the SFSP reduced the national poverty headcount by 3.1 percentage points, its real-world impact remains uncertain in the absence of updated data.

The microsimulation analysis provides valuable theoretical insights into SFSP's potential impact; however, real-world implementation experiences offer crucial complementary evidence. The SFSP Beneficiary Feedback Survey captured on-the-ground implementation experiences and impacts and is discussed in appendix D.

NOTES

1. The microsimulation was conducted after the program's implementation. However, the outbreak of war in the region made it impossible to measure the program's impact on the ground. As a result, most of the assessment relied on analytical rather than physical measurements.
2. Analysis assumes perfect program delivery and isolates SFSP effects from other economic changes.

REFERENCES

Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and Statistics Norway. 2009. "North Sudan National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS)." Khartoum, Sudan: Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan).

Central Bureau of Statistics (Sudan). 2015. National Household Budget and Poverty Survey 2014–15. Ref. SDN_2014_NBHS_v01_M. https://catalog.ihsn.org/catalog/9268/related-materials.

IMF (International Monetary Fund). "2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey. Inflation, Consumer Prices (Annual Percent)." IMF Datamapper. https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PCPIPCH@WEO/MAE

OAMDI. 2014. Harmonized Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HHIES), http://www.erf.org.eg/cms.php?id=erfdataportal. Version 2.0 of Licensed Data Files; NBHS 2009, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Sudan. Egypt: Economic Research Forum (ERF).

APPENDIX D

Insights from Beneficiary Experiences

This section summarizes the main findings from the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP) Beneficiary Feedback Survey, conducted in 2021 by the World Bank in collaboration with the World Food Programme.

The SFSP was part of the World Bank's technical assistance in Sudan to ameliorate the short-term economic impact of removing fuel subsidies and to lay the foundation for a robust social protection system that would tackle persistent poverty, improve targeting of social transfers, and address ongoing food insecurity and unemployment. Although these findings provide valuable qualitative perspectives on beneficiary experiences and implementation dynamics, they are not meant to represent the larger beneficiary population or to serve as a basis for statistical inference. Instead, they complement administrative data and field-based observations by highlighting emerging themes that need further exploration in future evaluations.

The data collected from the SFSP Beneficiary Feedback Survey provided important details on respondents' demographics and economic activities. It also included information on the payment system adopted for the SFSP program and the program's impact. Table D.1 reports on the number of surveys administered by the states. Over 400 individuals across 9 states and 38 localities were surveyed to gather more details about the SFSP program.

TABLE D.1 Sudan Family Support Program Beneficiary Feedback Survey, locality and sample size

	LOCALITY	RESPONDENTS PER STATE
East Darfur State	1	1
Kassala State	1	16
Khartoum State	6	111
North Darfur State	5	25
Northern State	1	1
Red Sea State	7	143
South Darfur State	11	97
South Kordofan State	1	1
White Nile State	5	24
Total	38	419

Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2021 SFSP Beneficiary Feedback Survey.
Note: "Locality" refers to the number of administrative localities (districts) sampled in each district. SFSP = Sudan Family Support Program.

PROFILE OF SUDAN FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

The survey analysis revealed important patterns in household dynamics and program participation, with implications for program implementation and effectiveness. Of the survey respondents, 72 percent were male and 28 percent female (refer to table D.2). This gender disparity also extended to household leadership: 84 percent of respondents were male household heads, while only 16 percent were female household heads. This disparity underscores the program's efforts to reach women despite prevailing societal norms that often limit their representation in household leadership roles. However, the overall program coverage achieved greater inclusivity, with female heads of households accounting for 35 percent of total beneficiaries. This head of household pattern carries important implications for program implementation and effectiveness, as household heads usually manage family finances and make key decisions about program participation and use of benefits.

Household composition varied by the gender of the household head. Female-headed households tended to be smaller, with a median size of four members, compared to five members in male-headed households. This size difference directly affected total household benefits, given that SFSP payments were calculated per family member. Additionally, female-headed households often faced greater economic challenges, underscoring their importance as a priority target group for social protection interventions. This is reflected in beneficiaries' individual experiences, highlighting how the program's design addressed these gender-specific vulnerabilities.

TABLE D.2 **Profile of Sudan Family Support Program beneficiaries**

	MALE	FEMALE	ALL
Respondents (%)	72	28	100
Household head (%)	84	16	75
Median size by household head (count)	5	4	5
Respondents with no formal education (%)	15	21	17
Respondents with incomplete elementary education (%)	8	6	7
Respondents with complete elementary education (%)	11	15	12
Respondents with incomplete secondary education (%)	20	19	20
Respondents with complete secondary education (%)	27	17	24
Respondents with post-secondary education (%)	20	21	20
Overall employment (%)	44	18	37
Sector of employment: public sector (%)	28	70	34
Sector of employment: private sector (%)	14	20	14
Sector of employment: self-employed (%)	56	10	50
Sector of employment: other (%)	2	0	2

Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2021 SFSP Beneficiary Feedback Survey.

A woman from Kassala State who responded to the survey commented, "As a female household head, the program gave me the chance to provide for my children when no other support was available." This personal account illustrates how the SFSP's inclusive design addressed gender-specific vulnerabilities, offering support to households that might otherwise have lacked resources. The program's emphasis on inclusivity not only broadened its reach; it also made sure that the most economically vulnerable households received the support they needed to improve their living conditions and provide for their families.

Educational attainment among beneficiaries was low, underscoring the program's reach into vulnerable populations who might particularly benefit from social support. More than half of all respondents (56 percent) have either not attended formal education or have not completed secondary education. The share is higher among females (61 percent) than among males (54 percent).

Employment patterns among SFSP beneficiaries further emphasized the urgent need for the program's support. Employment rates were notably low, with only 18 percent of female respondents and 44 percent of male respondents engaged in any form of work. Among those employed, self-employment and subsistence activities predominated, engaging 58 percent of employed male beneficiaries and just 10 percent of employed female beneficiaries. These low-income, unstable activities, coupled with high levels of inactivity, underscored the economic vulnerability among beneficiaries and highlighted the SFSP's

critical role in improving household livelihoods and fostering economic resilience.

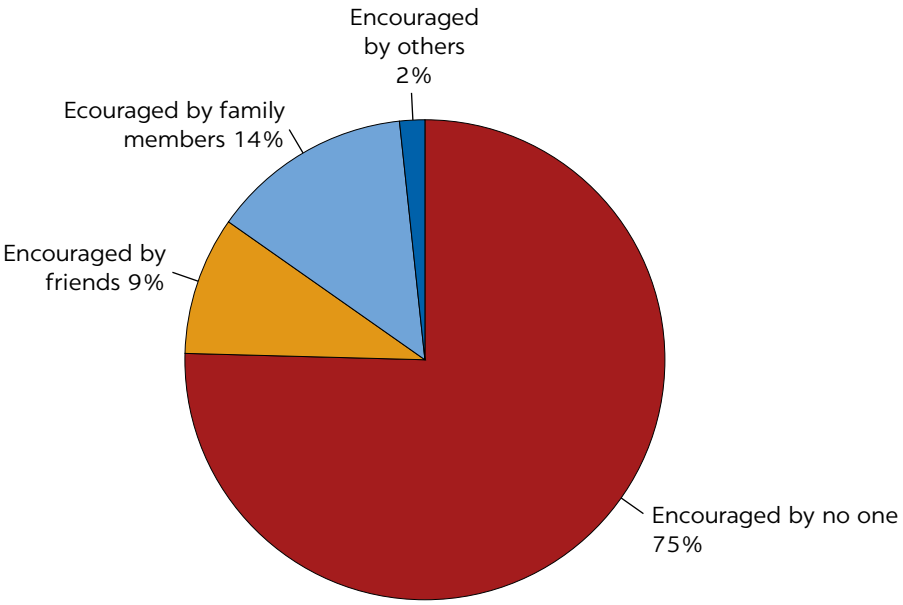
SUDAN FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCE

About 75 percent of female respondents reported receiving no encouragement from friends or family to register (refer to figure D.1). Despite this, female participation in the SFSP was notable, likely driven by the program's community sensitization approach. Additionally, women's lower employment rates and heightened need for social support and the program's cash benefits likely motivated their engagement.

The program demonstrated strong geographic accessibility. Nearly all respondents (99 percent) were able to register within their home state, and 94 percent found registration centers within their own locality (refer to table D.3). The registration process proved efficient. Most participants (83 percent) completed enrollment in a single visit. Only a small percentage required multiple visits: 12 percent visited twice, 4 percent three times, and just 1 percent needed more than four visits. The program's efficiency and accessibility are reflected in this survey comment from a man living in Khartoum State: "The registration center was close to my home, and I managed to complete the process in one visit. The staff were respectful, and I felt safe throughout the process."

FIGURE D.1

Share of females encouraged to register for the Sudan Family Support Program



Source: Original figure prepared for this publication, based on the 2021 SFSP Beneficiary Feedback Survey.

TABLE D.3 Sudan Family Support Program beneficiary experience

RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCE	SHARE (%)
Respondents registering within home state	99
Respondents finding registration centers within locality	94
Respondents completing enrollment in a single visit	83
Respondents completing enrollment in 2 visits	12
Respondents completing enrollment in 3 visits	4
Respondents completing enrollment in 4 or more visits	1
Respondents feeling safe traveling to registration centers	98
Respondents traveling less than 2 kilometers to centers	69
Respondents traveling between 2 and 5 kilometers to centers	24
Respondents traveling more than 5 kilometers to centers	7
Respondents rating center readiness as "good and above"	91
Respondents experiencing significant wait times (more than 30 minutes)	35
Registrations completed in under 20 minutes	71
Centers providing shaded waiting areas	90
Centers with waiting area	73
Participants receiving program briefings during registration	64
Data entered electronically during registration	58
Centers having adequate COVID-19 safety measures	88

Source: World Bank staff calculations based on the 2021 SFSP Beneficiary Feedback Survey.

Safety and physical accessibility also showed positive results. The majority (98 percent) of respondents reported feeling safe traveling to and from registration centers. The distance to centers was manageable for most participants, with 69 percent needing to travel less than 2 kilometers and 24 percent between 2 and 5 kilometers. Only a small percentage faced longer journeys, with 3 percent traveling 6 to 9 kilometers and 4 percent traveling 10 kilometers or more. Most registration centers provided shaded waiting areas (90 percent). Beneficiaries appreciated the conducive environment and efficient service delivery. "The staff were respectful and explained everything clearly. The shaded waiting areas made the process comfortable despite the crowds," commented one female respondent from South Darfur State.

Center facilities and staff performance received favorable ratings from most participants. While 9 percent of respondents gave lower ratings, citing crowding and extended wait times, a majority rated center readiness positively; 45 percent rated it "good," 29 percent "very good," and 17 percent "excellent." Participants mentioned several strengths: easy registration procedures, cooperative staff, adequate seating, convenient locations, and consistent staff availability. This sentiment is echoed in the

words of a male beneficiary from Khartoum State: "It felt organized and respectful. The staff made sure everyone understood the process, and the environment was welcoming."

About 35 percent of respondents reported significant wait times due to crowded facilities (75 percent) or technical issues (21 percent). However, once the actual registration process began, it moved efficiently; 71 percent of respondents completed the process in under 20 minutes, and 13 percent finished within 20 to 30 minutes. Only 16 percent of registrations took longer than 30 minutes. "The process was quick, and I appreciated how the staff managed the crowd," said a female respondent from White Nile State. "It gave me confidence that my registration mattered." Nearly all participants (96 percent) felt they received fair treatment during registration. The small percentage reporting unfair treatment cited concerns about staff favoritism toward acquaintances and a lack of program knowledge.

Ratings of program communication were mixed. Although 64 percent of participants received briefings about the SFSP during registration, the quality of these briefings was inconsistent. Among those briefed, most rated the communication positively: 28 percent rated it "excellent" and 64 percent rated it "good." "The briefing during registration helped me understand the entire process. It made me feel confident that the program would truly benefit my family," said one male respondent from White Nile State. However, 10 percent of respondents rated communication as average or poor. The 36 percent who did not receive briefings either registered through proxies or encountered staff focused more on processing registrations.

The registration process used both digital and manual systems, depending on local conditions. While 58 percent of participants had their data entered electronically, 42 percent were registered manually, typically in response to large crowds or poor internet connectivity. For manual registrations, centers used photocopied identification documents (55 percent) or paper application forms (44 percent). Centers also employed COVID-19 safety measures, such as social distancing, mask requirements, or sanitization facilities, which 88 percent of respondents found adequate.

This feedback illustrates how operational efficiency, accessible facilities, and respectful treatment contributed to positive user experiences, reinforcing the SFSP's effectiveness in serving Sudan's vulnerable populations.

APPENDIX E

Sudan Family Support Program Payment Infrastructure Rollout Systems

1. **Payment via banking transfers.** Direct bank transfers were used for beneficiaries with active accounts at any commercial bank. Beneficiaries could choose their preferred bank to receive funds. However, banking penetration in Sudan was limited. As of the 2014 Financial Inclusion Survey (Demirgüç-Kunt et al. 2014), only 4 percent of women and 11 percent of men reported saving at a financial institution. Consequently, the number of payments by bank transfer was significantly lower than those made through mobile money and cash card transactions.
2. **Payment via mobile money.** Beneficiaries could receive funds directly by creating and activating digital money wallets on any mobile phone. These services, provided by mobile network operators, leveraged unstructured supplementary service data technology, enabling beneficiaries without smartphones or internet access to manage and access their funds seamlessly. The mobile money system played a pivotal role in fostering financial inclusion by integrating underbanked and economically disadvantaged segments of society into the formal financial system.
3. **Payment via cash cards.** Cash cards also served as digital wallets. These cards were used during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic to distribute stimulus packages to vulnerable populations, especially those in the informal sector. The Ministry of Labor and Social Development database played an essential role in facilitating these payments, delivering benefits to roughly 80,000 households across four states during the project's initial phase.
4. **Manual payment.** Manual payments were introduced to promote inclusiveness and accessibility for program beneficiaries, especially for those without access to digital tools or living in remote and underserved areas. This approach was implemented through two main strategies: developing an alternative payment mechanism and building trust in

digital payments. In regions where digital payment systems could not offer complete coverage, manual payment timeframes were established as a reliable alternative. These windows ensured that beneficiaries in remote and conflict-affected areas without digital access could still receive payments. Manual payments also catered to beneficiaries who preferred cash due to mistrust of electronic payment systems. By offering this option, the program ensured inclusiveness while building trust and the gradual adoption of digital payment methods.

REFERENCE

Demirgüç-Kunt, Aslı, Leora Klapper, Dorothe Singer, and Peter Van Oudheusden. 2014. "The Global Findex Database 2014: Measuring Financial Inclusion around the World." Policy Research Working Paper 7255, World Bank, Washington, DC.

Sudan's experience following the 2011 secession of South Sudan offers a compelling case study in the design and delivery of social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The loss of three-quarters of its oil revenue triggered a prolonged economic crisis, marked by hyperinflation, fiscal constraints, and rising poverty. Vulnerable groups—especially women, internally displaced persons, and rural communities—faced deepening hardship. Sudan's transitional government, formed after the 2019 revolution, launched ambitious economic reforms. It introduced the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP) in 2020 to provide monthly cash transfers to nearly 80 percent of the population and lay the foundation for a nationally owned social protection system.

Although the program was suspended in 2021 due to political instability, the SFSP reached 8.7 million people—50 percent of whom were women—before its interruption. Beyond its scale, the program yielded critical lessons and innovations for the delivery of social assistance in low-capacity, high-risk contexts. *Delivering Hope in Fragile Times: The Story of the Sudan Family Support Program* describes these approaches that included strategies to expand legal identity coverage, hybrid staffing models that combined national capacity with international expertise, and the use of culturally grounded communication to build trust and combat misinformation.

Key operational components—such as a simplified joint registration form; phased digital systems integration; and a modular, automated payment platform—allowed for adaptability and real-time responsiveness. The program emphasized community-based delivery and grassroots monitoring via trusted local networks to reinforce accountability and inclusiveness. Partnerships with media and civil society played a vital role in fostering public engagement and managing expectations amid uncertainty.

Although the SFSP was cut short, its delivery infrastructure—including digital registries, payment systems, and grievance mechanisms—remained intact and was leveraged to support vulnerable communities across Sudan today. These developments highlight how investing in durable systems can ensure continuity, even amid political disruption.

Ultimately, the SFSP offers a valuable model for adaptive, inclusive, and resilient social protection in crisis-affected settings. Its innovations in identity, delivery, and communication provide a roadmap for future efforts to build systems that not only respond to immediate needs but also withstand political shocks. As fragility and conflict continue to shape the development landscape, the lessons from Sudan's SFSP are increasingly relevant for governments, donors, and practitioners seeking to protect vulnerable populations in uncertain environments.

ISBN 978-1-4648-2302-2



SKU 212302

WORLD BANK GROUP