

How Sudan's Floods Are Undermining Food Security

Suleiman Abdel-Hakam stands helplessly before his farm in the village of Mina, near the city of Sennar in southeastern Sudan, watching floodwaters destroy the crops he and his sons had painstakingly planted. The flood breached the earthen barrier they had built, and there is nothing he can do to stop it.

Abdel-Hakam says that, like most farmers in Sudan, they receive no early climate information from the authorities to help them take preventive measures to protect their crops. Instead, they rely on experience, which tells them that the level of the Blue Nile typically rises between August and mid-September each year.

Speaking to Noon Post, he explained that he planted vegetables and banana seedlings in mid-September after observing that the Blue Nile had not risen. But he was soon taken by surprise when the water level began to rise and submerge parts of his farm. He also expressed concern that mango and guava trees could be next.

Climate Shifts and Official Inaction

Unlike previous years, the government failed to implement large-scale preventive measures during this year's flooding season. Apart from minor interventions by the Civil Defense in Khartoum, there was little response even as floodwaters impacted six states, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

In the past, Civil Defense teams backed by the government would build earthen barriers in low-lying areas and issue evacuation warnings through the media. But this year, such efforts were virtually nonexistent, even as the disaster worsened day by day.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation reported that inflows from Ethiopia dropped from 750 million cubic meters to 382 million, causing a decline in Blue Nile levels from Roseires in the south to Khartoum. However, water levels rose from Khartoum to Kajbar in northern Sudan.

In a statement issued Wednesday, October 1, the ministry noted that the floodwaters were concentrated in the states of Khartoum, River Nile, and White Nile. A day earlier, the ministry had attributed the flooding to a shift in rainfall patterns, with the rainy season delayed into late October.

The ministry also reported that rainfall over the Ethiopian highlands the source of the Blue Nile, which supplies 80% of the Nile's water had exceeded average levels. Meanwhile, the White Nile, originating from Lake Victoria, has seen a 60–100% increase in inflow since 2020, all attributed to climate change.

It added that the rise in water coincided with the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) reservoir, which began on September 10, 2025. As a result, floodwaters merged with dam discharge flows, reaching a peak daily discharge of 750 million cubic meters.

Some continue to insist that the dam is to blame for the flooding. This may explain why Prime Minister Kamil Idris announced his intention to conduct detailed reviews of the dam in coordination with Ethiopia and Egypt to avert future disasters though he has yet to specify how these reviews would be carried out. This comes despite Sudan having signed an agreement with Addis Ababa on October 26, 2022.

Widespread Impact

The full extent of damage to agricultural land from the current flooding and heavy rains in recent months remains unclear, but it is undoubtedly vast. Last year's floods destroyed four million acres of cultivated land.

According to a report by Anadolu Agency, floodwaters submerged large swathes of farmland in areas north of Khartoum, River Nile, and Northern State, in addition to regions in Blue Nile, Sennar, and Gezira.

A government official from Gezira State told Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that more than 3,000 acres of farmland were submerged in the villages of Deem al-Mashayekh, Umm Dulkah, and Qandal some consisting of orchards, others of seasonal crops.

Farmer Abdullah Yaqoub described the situation as a "catastrophe," saying the floods had compounded the losses farmers already suffered due to war. "For us, farming isn't just an economic activity measured in profits and losses," he said. "It's the foundation of our families' survival and the source of the bread we hoped to provide for our displaced families. But the floods have destroyed all our hopes."

Yaqoub warned that villagers who lost their farms now face an acute shortage of staple grains, which they depend on heavily. Despite the massive damage, the authorities have largely stayed on the sidelines.

The floods have devastated Sudan's agriculture and livestock sector, which employs roughly 80% of the country's labor force. This sector contributed 31.8% of Sudan's GDP which totaled \$34.3 billion at the end of 2021, according to World Bank estimates but that figure has since plunged due to conflict that has decimated most productive industries.

Aftershocks of a Delayed Flood Season

Floods, once a lifeline for winter farming, are now a threat. Farmers usually begin preparing land in mid-September in anticipation of the winter season, especially

in northern Sudan. But this year's delayed floods have upended those plans.

Farmer Talal Al-Hassan told Noon Post that he relies on flood-based agriculture, "like most residents of Fadlab village near Atbara in northern Sudan. We grow onions, garlic, cilantro, and more. But this year, we need at least a month after the floodwaters recede for the land to dry. That means we won't be able to plant, as winter is already approaching."

He noted that residents of northern Sudan depend on fixed seasonal cycles to plant onions, spices, and harvest dates but these timelines have been upended. Local governments, he added, have provided no solutions to protect food security, even after it became clear that planting would be impossible within the coming month.

Most Sudanese farmers whether along rivers or in rain-fed areas rely on short-term loans from merchants secured by post-dated checks or loans from commercial banks against land or home mortgages. If they default, they risk jail time or having their collateral auctioned off.

Abdel-Hakam said he borrowed money from a merchant to buy vegetable seeds, fertilizer, and fuel. Now, unable to repay his debt, he fears the consequences.

This year's floods have dealt a severe blow to the agricultural sector, especially after 89% of farmers in Darfur and Kordofan saw a decline in production due to ongoing conflict, collapsed supply chains for seeds, fertilizer, fuel, and equipment.

Those who managed to plant crops despite the lack of security also faced insufficient rainfall at the start of the season.

With Sudan requiring 7.7 million tons of grains annually, the drop in production will necessitate more imports pushing prices even higher. But most Sudanese, having lost their livelihoods and with the national currency in freefall, simply cannot afford imported food.

Relief Cannot Be the Sole Answer

The floods compounded by ongoing war pose a grave threat to food security. The crisis is deepening in the absence of a strong governmental response or innovative solutions in a country where 30.4 million people 64% of the population are in need of humanitarian aid this year.

The United Nations initially planned to assist around 21 million Sudanese in 2025, but later reduced the target to 17.3 million due to funding shortages. As of the latest update from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, only \$1.05 billion 25.2% of the \$4.2 billion needed has been secured.

While aid agencies struggle to raise funds for war victims amid access restrictions, the flood crisis adds yet another burden one that relief groups may not be able to ease. Millions could be left without food.

The government must act urgently to rehabilitate damaged farmland, supply farmers with seeds and fertilizer, and finance farming operations. Without such support, Sudan risks a full-scale collapse of its agricultural sector and a long-lasting hunger crisis.

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