



The Impact of the War in Sudan on the Land and Real Estate Sector

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The cover image is AI generated.

List of abbreviations

RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
SLR	Sudanese Land Registry
SCB	Sudan Central Bank
DIS	Defense Industries System
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
CEOBS	Conflict and Environmental Impacts Observatory
GIS	Geographic Information System

Introduction: a political economy analysis of land within the war economy

Since the start of the war in Sudan in April 2023, land and property have been an important focus of both warring parties, parties have committed grave human rights violations to dispossess communities and individuals of their homes, farms, and customary land entitlements. This dispossession and the grave weakening of land governance institutions that the war caused, reveal the development of a political economy in which the parties have come to consider land as an economic asset to integrate in their competing war economies. In doing so, they are adding an additional layer to Sudan's long history of land related conflict in Sudan.

To comprehend the shifts in land and real estate dispossession practices during Sudan's ongoing war, this paper posits that land and housing are not treated as passive assets caught in the crossfire, but as primary instruments and objectives in Sudan's war economy. While immediate violations—such as the illegal occupation of public and private residences and the demolition of entire residential areas—are grave on their own, a political economy lens reveals them as structured outcomes driven by three intersecting dynamics:

□ **The warring parties consider land as a revenue engine in their respective war economies** in a process of competitive rent-seeking. The conflict has transformed land into a strategic economic resource essential for financing combat operations and sustaining loyalty. This framework posits that both warring factions utilize distinct modes of “resource capture” based on their competitive advantages: SAF leverages its control over state institutions and historical military-commercial conglomerates, to secure vast agricultural rents and reallocate public urban assets; whereas the RSF prioritizes direct paramilitary control over resource-rich extractive zones (such as gold mining areas in South and North Darfur states) and rewards its fighters through the spontaneous and managed distribution of captured private real estate. These parallel economies of acquisition compete and reinforce the conflict.

□ **State capture allows the warring parties to weaponize administrative and legal institutions.** The widespread erosion and collapse of state institutions recorded in this paper are not conceptualized as a passive consequence of violence, but as an active strategy of “institutional weaponization.” By deliberately targeting the destruction and manipulation of land registry archives—including both physical and electronic systems—the RSF and opportunistic actors are benefiting from the chaos the war created sought to exploit legal uncertainty and construct new, parallel realities of ownership by force. These vacuums enable networks of corruption and intermediaries to forge deeds and legalize illegitimate seizures, systematically stripping marginalized populations of their property claims under the guise of war-related necessity or targeted ethnic demographic collective punishment. This weaponization of the institutions of land management in both SAF and RSF-controlled areas also guts the capacity of the system to address land related human rights violations and dispossession in any post war dispensation.

□ **Sudan's history of conflict is fundamentally about land tenure, specifically the incongruity between formal statutory law (which prioritizes state registration) and traditional customary law**, such as the hawakir system in Darfur. This framework is critical for analyzing how the current war has exacerbated this friction: as the state's formal record-keeping system collapses, marginalized and displaced groups dependent on custom-

ary testimony see their legitimate claims erased. This dynamic is essential for understanding how specific vulnerabilities—such as those of the Kanabi agricultural workers—are manipulated during conflict to reshape local socio-economic hierarchies.

As the paper demonstrates from the record of events, the groups most affected by the intersections of these dynamics in the SAF areas are the displaced populations, Kanabi communities of agricultural laborers in the Gezira state, informal settlers in the capital's poorest neighborhoods, and, in RSF areas, smallholders in farming communities around Al Fasher and the Zaghawa areas in Darfur. Those who benefit the most from the current land dynamics are members of the military and civilian hierarchies and their associates on both sides of Sudan's de facto territorial divide.

The incentives that sustain these practices include the consolidation of the Sudanese army conglomerates' control in the agricultural, real estate, and construction sectors, and the strengthening of the RSF and its associates' control in the mining and urban real estates sectors.

By framing land through these competitive, institutional, and historical prisms, this paper argues that the stability of property rights is not merely a legal or humanitarian challenge, but a strategic challenge striking at the heart of post-conflict recovery, reconciliation, and sustainable development. Recognizing how land has been weaponized as a tool of collective punishment or reward is the first step toward introducing more equitable and durable reform in a post-war landscape.

This paper begins with an overview of some of the key violations related to land since the start of the war, then looks at how both pre-existing weaknesses in the land management systems and war-related distortions have contributed to these outcomes. The paper offers a summation positioning land as an economic asset, used by the warring parties for revenue generation, resourcing patronage networks, and for territorial control and accumulation. It then considers what post-war reform to redress these injustices might look like, considering comparative international experience and ending with recommendations that could better ensure property rights and equitable access to land and housing to both reduce the risk of future conflict and lay the groundwork for sustainable development.

Wartime land abuses

Forced evictions and demolition of settlements

Successive waves of displacement over decades of prior wars led the displaced to establish unplanned settlements on privately and government-owned land on the outskirts of major cities, particularly Khartoum. As the city expanded and developed, the areas, once populated because of the very undesirability of the land they stood on, became desirable. This, combined with concerns about the unplanned nature and potential political restiveness of the sites led to multiple government attempts to demolish informal housing, rezone and reallocate the land. In 1992, for example, the government of Sudan relocated about 750,000 internally displaced persons out of Khartoum to "peace cities" outside Khartoum.¹ By 2023, it was estimated that half of Khartoum's approximately nine million inhabitants lived in informal or slum-like conditions on the city's outskirts.²

After war broke out in Khartoum on April 15, 2023, the poor and marginalized populations in these areas generally stayed, whereas their upper- and middle-class counterparts fled. When the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) regained control of Khartoum State, government authorities launched

1 Human Rights Watch, "World Report 1993," January 1, 1993, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/hrw/1993/en/16573>

2 Sudan Knowledge Centre, "Force Evictions and Demolition of Homes in Khartoum: Multiplied Human Rights Crimes in a Crime," June 2026, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Forced-Evictions-in-Khartoum-June-2026.pdf>



Photo courtesy of UN OCHA

extensive demolition campaigns targeting thousands of unplanned settlements. They also removed dozens of unlicensed markets that had sprung up during the war.³ Among the most prominent demolition operations carried out by state authorities was the 2025 demolition of temporary housing in the neighborhoods of Mayo, Al Siraiha, Ghubush, Galb Al Asad, Umm Badda, and Africa Road east of the central market. According to a Radio Dabanga report, government authorities removed residential settlements in Mandela, Al Siraiha, Al Fatihab, Al Ezba, and Al Khairat in November 2025. This sparked widespread controversy regarding the fairness of these measures amidst the ongoing war.⁴ Recently, in April 2026, authorities demolished approximately 300 homes belonging to IDPs in the Umm Al Gura neighborhood north of Khartoum North.⁵

Further, an informed source in Khartoum State reported that the authorities have been encroaching extensively on public lands and squares,⁶ offering them for investment and commercial use to make money. Further, the source reported that the sites where homes were demolished have also been designated for investment.⁷

It is estimated that more than 200,000 people were affected by these measures, which targeted approximately 20,000 housing units across the city.⁸ Furthermore, many citizens lost their livelihoods when their small businesses and makeshift markets were destroyed.⁹ These demolitions have been met with widespread condemnation from activists and human rights defenders in Sudan. They accused the SAF-aligned authorities of failing to meet established international standards relating to evictions. The processes take advantage of war to operate without due process and appear to be ethnically targeted. Settlements have been characterized as hubs for crime and “negative social phenomena.”¹⁰ Further, their populations have been characterized as “social incubators” of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Abdul Aziz Abdullah Ahmed, Director of the Land Protection and Removal of Violations Authority in Khartoum State, reportedly told Blue Nile TV

³ Ibid.

⁴ Radio Dabanga, «Removing unplanned housing in Khartoum: A war waged through government measures,» November 17, 2025, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/%D8%A5%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%86-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%B7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8>

⁵ BBC Arabic, «They demolished our house even though my husband is fighting on the front lines,» April 29, available at the link: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/%D8%A5%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%86-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%B7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8>

⁶ Interview with an engineer at the Ministry of Urban Planning in Khartoum State, 2026.

⁷ Interview with an engineer at the Ministry of Urban Planning in Khartoum State, 2026.

⁸ Sudan Knowledge Centre, “Force Evictions and Demolition of Homes in Khartoum: Multiplied Human Rights Crimes in a Crime,” June 2026, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Forced-Evictions-in-Khartoum-June-2026.pdf>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

that the campaigns against informal housing are part of the current war.¹¹ Destruction of homes or other property on the basis of suspected political or ethnic affiliation would constitute a violation of the international humanitarian law provision on collective punishment.¹² In addition, the effort in effect seeks to re-allocate resources away from IDPs and other marginalized populations seen as politically unreliable to regime allies and supporters.

Gezira State has witnessed similar campaigns with the same justifications, targeting both locals and IDPs residing in the “Shouk” area of the Zamalek neighborhood in Madani and the “Abdullah Masri” village east of the city. An activist in the state reported that, although the stated aim of the campaigns was the removal of irregular and unplanned structures, they disproportionately targeted ethnic groups from Darfur and Kordofan perceived as aligned with the RSF. The number of families affected was estimated at around 5,000, although there are no official or accurate statistics available. The same source noted that at least 750,000 people are living in makeshift shelters across Gezira State.¹³

The impact of land disputes on the “Kanabi” (Agricultural Workers’ Villages) in Gezira State

The Kanabi Conference¹⁴ estimates that there are 2,095 “Kanabi,” or agricultural workers’ villages in Gezira State with a population of 2.4 million people, representing 39% of the total population of Gezira State. Most are of Darfurian or Kordofani origin. The Kanabi emerged with the beginning of the Gezira Scheme in 1925.¹⁵ For decades, the colonial and post colonial governments trucked seasonal agricultural workers, primarily from western Sudan, to the scheme to provide the manual labor that the agricultural cycles required, particularly the manual cotton picking during the harvest season. Many of those workers settled permanently within the vast area of the Gezira Scheme, but were never socially integrated by the local farming communities. The “Kanabi” were built on land at the edge of cultivated areas, and sometimes on land owned by farmers who held the “*hawashat*” (smallholdings).¹⁶

980,000 *feddans*,¹⁷ or about 40% of the Gezira scheme’s total 2.2 million *feddans*, are privately owned under freehold arrangements.¹⁸ Much of the land was forcibly leased by British colonial authorities under the Gezira Scheme Land Act of 1927.¹⁹ This complex land tenure casts a shadow over the status of the Kanabi, many of which were built on such land, leading to disputes between the farmers and Kanabi residents. Tensions have grown as Kanabi settlements expanded over the last century due to population growth. In addition, ownership of the leased land fragmented among hundreds of heirs as the original owners died, further complicating the resolution of disputes through established legal frameworks.

Amid these historical conflicts and legal complexities, the outbreak of war, and the erosion of normal dispute resolution mechanisms and the militarization of society that accompanied it created

11 Athar Newspaper, «Removing Slums in Khartoum and Gezira: A War Within the War,» August 7, 2025, available at: <https://atarnetwork.com/?p=14083>

12 Amnesty International, “Scorched Earth, Poisoned Air: Sudanese Government Forces Ravage Jebel Marra, Darfur, 2016.

13 Interview with an activist working in IDP issues in Gezira State, February 2026.

14 «Kanabi» (singular: «Kanbu»), derived from the English word «camp,» is a term used in Sudan to refer to seasonal or permanent settlements built for agricultural laborers within large-scale farming projects.

15 An agricultural scheme established by the British colonial authorities in Sudan in 1925, it is considered the largest irrigated scheme in Africa, and the largest single-managed farm in the world.

16 Hawasha is a smallholding of land with a square area of 20 *feddans* (each feddan is .042 hectares) allocated for each farmer in Gezira Scheme.

17 A Sudanese measure of land equal to 0.42 hectares.

18 Sudan Tribune, “Al Jazira scheme, landowners clash over property rights proposal,” December 23, 2025, available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article/308559>

19 Anna Goelnitz and Mohammad al-Saidi, “Too big to handle, too important to abandon: Reforming Sudan’s Gezira scheme,” *Agricultural Water Management*, November 2020, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378377420308052>

an environment conducive to imposing a new reality by force. Some residents of farmers' villages exploited this moment to burn and remove several "Kanabi" to reshape control over land. The attacks were further facilitated by hate speech and accusations that the "Kanabi" residents, had collaborated with, or served as "social incubators" of, the RSF.

These Kanabi were systematically targeted as the SAF advanced to retake Gezira in January 2025. Indeed, reporting by Lighthouse reporting and Sudan War Monitor revealed that Kanabi were targeted with arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial killings at this time.²⁰ In January and February 2025, a number of Kanabi villages suffered fire damage understood to be the result of arson attacks.²¹ About 30 Kanabi were estimated to have been affected, the most prominent of which are Al Shakaba, Al Hidaibah, Dar Al Salam, Ronqa, and Hillat Fur.²²

In some cases, the residents reported that they had purchased the land on which the villages were built and covered the costs of planning, electricity, water, and other services. One resident stated that his village was built on a plot purchased from its owners in 1988 and officially planned by the authorities. However, after the SAF regained control of the state, a group of armed men in military uniforms, including recruits from neighboring villages, attacked the village, demolished most of the houses, arrested men and young people, charged them with collaborating with the RSF. The detainees were then held in police custody in Al Managil, and have been unable to return to the village for more than a year.²³

The same source indicated that a significant number of the destroyed Kanabi homes and lands had been officially purchased from neighboring villagers, usually as villagers migrated to cities in response to the decline of the Gezira scheme. This did not protect them from attack and removal. The source accused government authorities of turning a blind eye to ongoing violations against Kanabi, to whom they also refuse to issue ID Documents, claiming that the Kanabi are foreigners.

The forced displacement of residents of the "Kanabi" in Gezira State egregious violations of land, property and other human rights committed in Sudan's war. It highlights how war can serve as a cover allowing the settling of intercommunal conflicts, fueled by hate speech and a war economy that rewards violent expropriation. It also, like the attacks on IDPs in Khartoum, appears to reflect an aspect of the political economy in which assets are stripped and redistributed to loyalists from populations viewed as suspect to allies.

Seizing land by force

Another pattern of violation that has been recorded are systematic land and property seizures, managed and controlled by networks of influence and interest linked to state institutions. A report Ayin indicates that authorities in SAF-controlled areas have engaged in widespread land grabbing that has included public squares, fields, and cultural venues.²⁴ Such seizures have, in particular, targeted real or suspected RSF and other political opposition. In one example, the home of Muhammad Al Faki, a member of the Sumoud civilian political alliance, was seized in December 2025 in a move reportedly justified to family members on the basis of Faki's alleged to have "animosity towards the government."²⁵ Similar property confiscations directed against trade

20 CNN, "Satellite imagery and whistleblowers reveal bodies in Sudan's canals," December 16, 2025.

21 Sudan Witness, "Kanabi settlements burn as violence spreads across Gezira," January 31, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/12/16/world/video/sudan-satellite-imagery-investigation-canals-digvidhttps://www.info-res.org/sudan-witness/reports/kanabi-settlements-burn-as-violence-spreads-across-gezira/>

22 Center for Information Resilience, "Kanabi settlements burn as violence spreads across Gezira," January 31, 2025, available at: <https://www.info-res.org/sudan-witness/reports/kanabi-settlements-burn-as-violence-spreads-across-gezira/>

23 Interview with Kanabi resident, 2026.

24 Ayin News, "Land in Sudan's War: Encroachments and Forgery," January 21, 2025, in Arabic, available at: <https://3ayin.com/land-fraud/>

25 Radio Dabanga, "A campaign against the leaders of Sumoud," December 21, 2025, available at <https://www.dabangasan.org/ar/all-news/article/%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B5%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9->

unions were reported by the US Department of State.²⁶

In late August, General Burhan—acting in his dual capacity as SAF General Commander and Chairman of the Sudanese Sovereign Council—issued a decree ordering the confiscation and direct transfer of all RSF-related assets to the SAF. The scope of the seizure is extensive, covering the real estate, agricultural lands, residential buildings, movable property, vehicles, financial assets, and precious metals of RSF leader Hemedti, his family, and senior RSF commanders. Furthermore, the order extends to the commercial holdings and corporate mining entities of these individuals.²⁷

The August 2026 decree is the latest episode in the Sudanese state economic war against the RSF, expanding earlier similar measures. In May 2023, Burhan ordered the freeze of the local bank accounts of the RSF and the prominent private companies of the RSF commanders and their relatives.²⁸ A September 2023 constitutional decree officially abrogated the 2017 law establishing the RSF as an autonomous paramilitary supporting the army and dissolved it. The decree authorized the CBOS to seize the assets of 22 companies linked to the RSF commanders.²⁹

Despite the strict confiscation of the assets of the RSF, the government reversed the decision to reward senior RSF commanders who defected to the SAF. The property of a senior RSF defector was returned in May 2026.³⁰

In April, Ali Al Sayeid, the Secretary-General of the Sudanese Industries Federation, noted that “the country’s exceptional circumstances require a two- to three-year austerity plan. This would include slashing public spending and ending ‘prestige spending,’ such as luxury government vehicles.” He called on the government to use the confiscated funds from earlier RSF assets seizures to finance industrial development.³¹ Instead, the August decree instructed all government departments and legal bodies to inventory the assets of RSF commanders and of their immediate families and proceed with their immediate transfer to the SAF, rather than to the state.

This latest decision indicates that the SAF considers the acquisitions from the RSF commanders’ accumulated wealth as an economic asset to which the SAF is fully entitled within logic of the political economy of the war.

In addition, vast areas of agricultural and investment land have been granted to military and security companies. SAF authorities have exploited the weaknesses in the land registration system to confiscate large areas of land not officially registered. These lands were traditionally held by local residents and used as grazing land or farms, while the state classified them as government land eligible for allocation to major projects.

Zadna International Investment Limited, a subsidiary of the Defense Industries Systems (DIS), which is controlled by SAF, acquired and estimated 1.2 million acres of agricultural land in Northern and River Nile states. Most of this land was confiscated from residents in the Wadi al Hawad area, south of Berber in River Nile State, in addition to agricultural land around the cities of Atbara and Ad Damir in River Nile State and eastern Sudan.³²

%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF.

26 US Department of State, “2024 country reports on human rights practices,” 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/sudan>

27 The Citizen, “Al-Burhan Decrees Transferring Hemedti and His Family’s Assets to SAF,” August 23, 2026, available at: <https://citizen-sd.com/2026/08/al-burhan-decrees-transferring-hemedti-and-his-familys-assets-to-saf/>

28 Reuters, “Sudan’s Burhan decides to freeze bank accounts of paramilitary RSF,” May 14, 2023, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/commodities/sudans-burhan-decides-to-freeze-bank-accounts-of-paramilitary-rsf-idUSC6N36C00S/>

29 Sudan Tribune, “Sudan dissolves paramilitary RSF, abolishes its controversial law,” September 6, 2023, available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article/276941>

30 Sudan Tribune, “Sudanese army returns seized property to RSF defector,” May 5, 2026, available at <https://sudantribune.com/article/313580>

31 Sudan Tribune, “Sudan industrial body urges austerity and reallocation of RSF assets,” April 20, 2026, available at <https://sudantribune.com/article/313014>

32 Ultra Sudan, “Farmers in Berber Locality protest against «Zadna» company over land issues,” 17 November 2026, in. Ar-

These seizures occur in a context of entitlement of military officers and are likely not limited to political opposition. For example, numerous civilians have reported seizure of their cars by military forces and unwillingness to give them up, even when legal actions are brought.³³ They reflect a similar logic in the political economy of dispossessing outsiders for the benefit of insiders.

In another example, landowners clashed with the government and the Gezira Scheme administration, particularly after the government converted some agricultural land within the scheme to residential use without consulting the owners.³⁴

Seizures are not, however, always motivated by an us-vs-them economy, civilians may simply occupy vacant properties, especially in areas that were left nearly deserted. A report by the journalist Israa Al Shaher, published in *Independent Arabia*, indicated that some citizens returning to the capital, Khartoum, found their homes occupied by strangers.³⁵ Similarly, a farmer in Gezira State stated that upon returning to eastern Gezira after the RSF withdrew from the state, he was surprised to find someone else cultivating, and investing in, his farm. The occupier presented a customary lease agreement indicating that the farm had been rented from someone else. The original owner was taking legal action to reclaim his farm.³⁶

Corruption in land management

The war has also fostered new patterns of corruption related to land and real estate, and indeed of weaponization of the legal system. A well-informed lawyer reported that the sale of property and land issued using forged powers of attorney without the knowledge of their owners, many of whom fled because of the war, is widespread. These forged powers of attorney were authenticated with seals looted from lawyers' offices during the RSF's control of Khartoum and Gezira states and appear to rely on a network of intermediaries, land registration employees, and lawyers. The source further pointed to cases of forgery of ownership contracts and data, sales of the same plot or property to more than one person, and administrative corruption within registration offices through the expediting of procedures and favoring of one party over another in exchange for bribes.³⁷

Warnings on social media corroborate the spread of this type of corruption in Khartoum State. One property owner in the Shambat area stated that he thwarted attempts to sell his house without his knowledge. He reported that the forged power of attorney issued in his name contained precise personal data that could not have been obtained without access to the land and electronic registries, indicating complicity from within registration offices.³⁸

The rise of corruption in this sector cannot be understood in isolation from the broader context of the weakening and collapse of state institutions due to the war. The destruction of records and the disruption of judicial and administrative institutions has enabled parties to the conflict and corrupt legal institutions through networks of intermediaries, employees, and influential figures to achieve financial gains by manipulating land and property ownership. Now empowered, these same actors are likely to resist reform efforts after the war.

Expropriation of Resource-Rich Lands

abac, available here: <https://ultrasudan.ultrasawt.com/أخبار/محمد-حلفاوي/راضی-باحتجون-ضد-شركة-إدنا-بشأن-الأراضي>

33 Sudan Tribune, "Sudan's 'Lords of spoils': how security forces seized civilian cars after 'liberation,'" February 6, 2026, available at <https://sudantribune.com/article/310150>

34 Sudan Tribune, "Land expropriation in the Gezira Scheme: A struggle between reform and private rights," December 23, 2025, available at: <https://sudantribune.net/article/308544>.

35 The Independent Arabia, “Khartoum Houses Occupied by Strangers Through «Squatting» / «Hand-Placement» Policy,” July 5, 2025, in Arabic, available at: <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/627252>

36 Interview with a farmer in East Gezira, February 2026.

37 Interview with a lawyer in Medani, February 2026.

Warnings seen by the author on social media.

in Areas under RSF Control

Similar expropriations have been carried out by the RSF. During the RSF control of Khartoum, for example, many private homes and businesses were seized by the RSF for use as accommodation for fighters or military posts.³⁹ They have also seized property for distribution to build loyalty networks and reward fighters. A report by journalists Nafisa Al Tahir and Khalid Abdel Aziz, published by Reuters in August 2024, affirmed that these practices were more common among the RSF than SAF.⁴⁰

According to Darfur 24 reporting, following the fall of Nyala in October 2023 the seizure of private and public land became widespread. Alleged forgeries originating from the local land bureau facilitated the transfer of vacant homes and public real estate to RSF commanders and officials in RSF-affiliated civilian administrations. Despite protests from landowners and local communities and some measures taken to curb the landgrabs, the practice continued.⁴¹

In other cases, RSF has sought to militarily control and seize resource-rich lands, particularly gold mining areas. This is carried out under the direct command of the RSF senior leadership, and benefits them directly by financing combat operations.⁴² One example was the conflict over Jebel Amer in North Darfur. In 2020, Al Junaid Company, affiliated with the RSF, relinquished its mining rights in the region to the Sudanese government. However, RSF quickly took control and resumed mining activities after the outbreak of the war on April 15, 2023. In May 2023, the RSF consolidated its control over the Sungu mines and mining areas in the Al Radom locality of South Darfur State, similarly directly benefitting the group by providing access to resources that can be utilized to finance military operations.⁴³ This expansion occurred in total disregard of the customary law governing land ownership in the region, including traditional land tenure systems (*hawakir*) and associated community rights.

Other patterns are more spontaneous and under the control of local leaders, such as seizing real estate for headquarters or military outposts, as occurred in Khartoum and Gezira. Such seizures may also aim at achieving personal gains for individual leaders and combatants.

Monitoring groups and journalistic reports document a pattern of RSF attacks against farming communities, occurring during the siege of Al Fasher and recent fighting along the border with Chad. RSF attacks on villages and farms near the border towns of Kornoi and Tine systematically targeted civilians, largely Zaghawa people, forcing their flight to Chad. These operations involved the deliberate destruction of water sources and the massive looting of livestock and grain reserves, indicating a strategic effort to induce famine and depopulate the border regions.⁴⁴

Satellite monitoring by the Yale University Humanitarian Lab confirmed similar attacks on agricultural areas surrounding Al Fasher during the RSF's 18-month siege (2024-2025). In both contexts, the ethnically targeted violence intentionally paralyzed food production, leading observers to

39 See for example, Ayin, "Lost homes: How former Khartoum residents are seeing their homes occupied by soldiers," September 10, 2023, available at <https://3ayin.com/en/rsfoccupy-/>; Agence France Presse, "Sudanese who fled war return to homes occupied by fighters," May 12, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/sudanese-who-fled-war-return-to-find-homes-occupied-by-fighters/7091668.html>

40 Reuters, "Rapid Support Forces fighters are spreading chaos in the heart of Sudan's agricultural regions," August 9, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/ar/world/UPWP6XXI7NLR7HLUBW2XTEUHY-2024-08-09/>

41 Darfur 24, "How did land in Nyala become a reward during wartime?" June 13, 2026, in Arabic, available at: <https://darfur24.com/2026/06/13/كيف-تحوّلت-الأراضي-بنيالا-إلى-مكافآت/>

42 The Sentry, "Frontmen for Businesses Linked to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces Identified in the UAE," October 25, 2025, available at : <https://thesentry.org/2025/10/02/80806/frontmen-for-businesses-linked-to-sudan-s-rapid-support-forces-identified-in-the-uae/>

43 Ahmed Soliman and Suliman Baldo, "Gold and the war in Sudan: How regional solutions can support an end to conflict," Chatham House, March 2025, available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/2025-03-25-gold-and-the-war-in-sudan-soliman-baldo_0.pdf

44 Sudan Tribune, "RSF attacks on Darfur villages kill civilians, spark mass flight to Chad," July 5, 2026, available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article/276941>.

label these tactics as the weaponization of starvation.⁴⁵

Land management systems in Sudan prior to the start of the war

The land management system in Sudan was contested even before the war, and indeed as pointed out above, was a main cause of previous conflicts, such as those which occurred in Darfur and Kordofan. Indeed, field work in the early 2000s revealed that the majority of Darfuris saw the conflict then ongoing as primarily about land.⁴⁶ Land is both vital for livelihoods and connected to establishing legitimacy for political representation.

The stage is set by incongruity between customary and statutory law. The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) indicated in 2024 that less than 1% of the land in the Darfur region was registered with the state, with most of it concentrated in the region's main cities. The rest of the land falls under traditional and customary land tenure.⁴⁷

Under the customary *hawakir* system, land is considered to be owned and managed by groups and is generally not registered. This is in marked contrast to statutory law, which generally considers unregistered land to belong to the government, which can then dispose of it as it sees fit.⁴⁸ The *hawakir* system has created conflict among groups by recognizing the land rights of some groups, while denying the same privilege for others. It has also allowed the government to weigh in, favoring some groups over others in land allocation. The two systems also have distinct dispute resolution systems, which can create disputes over how to resolve disputes.⁴⁹

The absence of formal documentation for customary tenure has created additional challenges to property management and the protection of rights, as it relies on the testimony of locals and traditional leaders, who many times are inaccessible due to displacement as a result of the war, increasing the risk of illegal land and property seizures.

Even where land is formally registered, as it is, for the most part, in Central Sudan, there are weaknesses in the land management system that facilitate corruption, including obstacles to marginalized communities registering land, allegations of preferential access to land for preferred groups, and incomplete records, which can open the door to multiple claims on a single plot.⁵⁰

Proving land and property ownership under statutory law relies on a set of legal proofs, which can be ranked according to their probative force and reliability. Priority is given to ownership certificates issued by the state which serves as the strongest and most widely accepted official document for proving ownership. This is followed by title deeds, then binding judicial precedents (case law). Next are receipts for property fees and taxes, considered supplementary evidence in cases of dispute and the loss of original documents. Testimony and neighbors' reports are used to support official evidence but are not sufficient on their own to prove ownership in court. Finally, maps and aerial photographs are used to define property boundaries and are considered supporting, not primary, evidence unless explicitly recognized by the land registration system.

45 The Guardian, "Extraordinary cruelty: images show longterm 'starvation strategy' in Sudan," March 10, 2026, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/ng-interactive/2026/mar/10/extraordinary-cruelty-images-show-longterm-starvation-strategy-in-sudan>

46 Jerome Tubiana, "Darfur: A Conflict for Land," in DeWaal, Alex, *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace*, Justice Africa and Global Equality Initiative, 2007, p. 71.

47 UN-Habitat, "Land assessment in Darfur: Analysis and recommendations," 2024, (in Arabic), available at: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025/01/darfur_land_administration_assessment_analysis_and_recommendations_brief-ar.pdf.

48 Olivia Bueno and Emily Cody, "Developing durable solutions for internally displaced persons in Sudan's conflict zones," Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021, on file with author.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

Electronic land registry

In an effort to address these issues, at least in part, Sudan began a process of digital archiving and the introduction of an electronic land registry system between 2008 and 2012. This aimed to improve efficiency and reduce reliance on traditional paper records. The system was piloted in Khartoum State and gradually expanded to Gezira, Red Sea, and some other urban registration offices. In 2019, the Economic Committee of the Transitional Military Council approved the establishment of a unified electronic real estate registry for Sudan as a whole as part of the National Unified Program for Economic Reform to increase efficiency and clarity and in that way to promote investment in the real estate market.

The impact of the war on land registration

Following the outbreak of war on April 15, 2023, judicial authorities suspended land registry operations, including the electronic registry, as a precautionary measure to protect property rights in the states controlled by the RSF. Land registration offices under SAF control outside of the direct conflict continued operating. This included the eastern and northern states, Blue Nile State, and parts of the White Nile, North Kordofan, and South Kordofan states.

After SAF recaptured Khartoum in March 2025 and the central states months earlier, work gradually resumed in the land registry offices in those states. The registration office in Medani reopened in August 2025. In Khartoum State, work also gradually resumed at the registration offices, with three offices reopened in the Omdurman and Karari localities and four offices in the Bahri locality.

However, in many areas, physical land records were destroyed in the violence.⁵¹ Many of the offices were looted, and their paper files were ransacked. Most land registration paper archives in Khartoum, Gezira, and Sennar states were destroyed. A lawyer in Gezira State reported that upon returning to Wad Madani after the RSF withdrew, he found a huge quantity of important registration office documents strewn in the courtyard of the office building within the civil courthouse in Madani,⁵² and some documents had been swept by the wind into the surrounding streets.

The utility of the electronic registry was limited by limitations in its initial scope, as well as power cuts, network failures and other difficulties that hindered the system's operation and forced some offices to revert to paper records. In July 2025, during a field visit to Madani, the Director General of land registration recognized the need to return to the paper system while a new digital transformation was prepared.⁵³

The Land Registrar General has taken a series of measures to compensate for the loss and damage of records. He formed committees to revive real estate records in war-affected states under SAF control. He also issued a series of decisions and circulars to reduce the impact of document loss on real estate transactions. The Land Registrar General's Circular No. 8, issued on July 28, 2025, indicated the necessity of matching the paper documents held by citizens with the data recorded in the electronic registry.⁵⁴ In addition, Circular No. 2/2026, issued on March 10, 2026, outlawed transferring ownership of lands whose records have been "revived" by the real estate records revival committees until six months have passed from the date of revival for that specific parcel.⁵⁵ These directives mandate strict verification of the paper both electronic records when

51 Abdelazim Hassan, "Reviving Sudan's Land Records," *Sudan Horizon*, July 10, 2026, <https://sudanhorizon.com/reviving-sudans-land-records/>

52 Interview with a lawyer in Medani, January 2026.

53 Sudani net, "The Land Registrar General is making strenuous efforts to restore the real estate [registration] system in Sudan."

54 Important Notice from the Registrar General of Lands, July 29, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/429223677524192/posts/2219485308498011/>

55 Al Wattan newspaper, "Suspension of land sales and ownership transfers for six months to protect records following the war," March 14, 2026, in Arabic, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc6m79jn>; Madameek newspaper, "Suspension of the sale

issuing Land Search Certificates as stipulated in an earlier Land Registry directive dated August 2025.⁵⁶

Land registration offices in the RSF-controlled areas have ceased operation since the start of the war. As a result, no registration procedures have been carried out. Many offices were looted and destroyed. One exception is the office in Al-Daein, East Darfur State, which, according to a report by the Salamedia Center, still maintains its records intact.⁵⁷ This has disrupted the ability of citizens to track and record property transactions and increasing the risk of disputes.

The civilian administrations established by the RSF have similarly failed to manage land and real estate registration, due to limited human resource capacity. They have instead focused on providing the bare minimum of basic services, such as education, healthcare, security, and the delivery of humanitarian aid. A further challenge is the lack of a recognized central legal authority and institutional stability, which the RSF lacks.

Implications of the war for land management

The loss and destruction of land records have further complicated the already fraught Sudanese land system. Both the pre-war legal framework and recent regulations cited above, privilege paper records, stymying efforts to resolve property disputes or attempted transactions where those paper records may have been destroyed.

The loss and destruction of land records have disrupted the resolution of civil cases in courts and hindered the enforcement of judgments by making clarification of ownership, land boundaries and locations difficult. A lawyer interviewed for this research stated that many court sessions are being postponed as a result.⁵⁸ A report by journalist Jamal Abdel Qader, published in *“Independent Arabia”* in April 2026, also highlighted the same problem.⁵⁹

The SAF authorities’ conversion of agricultural land into residential areas has negatively impacted agricultural production and sustainable economic development in Sudan. Already before the war, agricultural lands had been shrinking,⁶⁰ for example, the urban area in Khartoum State reached approximately 290,000 feddans in 2022, compared to 51,000 feddans in 1982. This expansion came at the expense of agricultural land and the surrounding rural areas, as agricultural land in the state decreased to approximately 6,828 feddans.⁶¹ The further reduction of agricultural land threatens to negatively impact the stability of production and trade. Uncertainty of land tenure also weakens incentive to invest in agriculture, further undermining productive capacity.

Further, the war has led to a decline in real estate investment in Sudan. In part, this is a direct result of insecurity caused by the conflict, but the uncertainty in the legal environment plays a role as well. A report by Sudan 4 News attributed investor reluctance to directly to the lack of property ownership guarantees brought about by the erosion of the property registration framework.⁶² This uncertainty has also complicated obtaining bank financing for acquiring property. The or transfer of ownership of lands with restored records for a period of six months,” March 14, 2026, in Arabic, available at: <https://www.medameek.com/?p=196309>.

56 Al Sulta newspaper, “Registrar General issues new decisions on Land Search Certificates,” August 30, 2025, in Arabic, available at: <https://alsulta.net/57653>.

57 Salamedia Center, “Escalation of Land Crisis in Darfur,” February 4, 2026, available at: <https://salaamedia.org/news/en/2024/11/04/escalation-of-land-crisis-in-darfur/>.

58 Interview with a lawyer in Khartoum State, April 2026.

59 Independent Arabia, “Land mafia: Forgery stabs Sudanese in the back during wartime,” April 7, 2026, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc77vkdM>

60 Cogent Social Sciences, “Analysing four decades of urban growth in Greater Khartoum, Sudan, using Earth observation data and Google Earth Engine,” December 2025, available at: <https://doaj.org/article/36a5bd1ed2934185a23d1d865f474ade>.

61 Cogent Social Sciences, “Analysing four decades of urban growth in Greater Khartoum, Sudan, using Earth observation data and Google Earth Engine,” December 2025, available at: <https://doaj.org/article/36a5bd1ed2934185a23d1d865f474ade>.

62 Sudan 4 News, “Recession hits real estate market in Sudan,” April 28, 2026, available at: <https://sudan4news.com/?p=31541>.

Central Bank of Sudan in its guidelines for bank financing for 2026 allowed only for microfinance for low-income housing among real estate,⁶³ a recognition that it sees

The erosion of the land registration system has also weakened oversight endangering protections of natural pastures and forests, privileging the interests of individuals connected enough to take advantage over the public good. This has led to deforestation as observed by the Conflict and Environmental Impacts Observatory (CEOBS), as well as environmental degradation, increased drought, and desertification.⁶⁴ Although there is no definitive measure of the total forest area lost during the war, Khartoum State alone has lost approximately 60% of its vegetation cover, and the historic Ghabat Al Sunut (Khartoum Acacia Forest) has been transformed into barren land. Local sources confirm that the indiscriminate logging in Darfur and other regions has accelerated.⁶⁵

When land and property are seized and disposed of without legal basis, taking advantage of the absence of owners and weak oversight, it is the original owners, especially the displaced, who bear the bulk of the consequences.

Revenue incentives from land registry management and preservation policies

Real estate taxes and fees, including property-related taxes and land registration and transfer fees, constitute one of the most important sources of government revenue. The state imposes fees on real estate transfers ranging from 2.3% to 4% of the property value, while some economic estimates indicate that the real estate sector contributes approximately 4% to the country's GDP. Effective land management also increases the efficiency of revenue collection and curbs speculation in the land and real estate markets. This is particularly important as government revenues have witnessed a sharp decline due to the war, with revenues falling from 10% before the war to 4.8% during 2023-2024.

Land Seizures in the War Economy

Land in Sudan's ongoing war has ceased to be merely a physical backdrop to conflict, evolving instead into a central pillar of competing war economies and a direct weapon of military strategy. Both the SAF and RSF actively leverage land seizure and forced eviction to engineer demographic changes and reward loyalists. The warring parties are using resource-rich lands under their control to generate funding for their war efforts.

Rebuilding stability in post-conflict Sudan requires recognizing that land violations are not accidental consequences of war, but deliberate, structural strategies to control economic assets and socio-political power. Addressing these deep-seated grievances demands looking beyond immediate humanitarian relief and legal fixes to confront the entrenched political economy of land capture. Securing durable peace, meaningful reconciliation, and sustainable development will ultimately depend on introducing comprehensive, equitable reforms that restore property rights and dismantle the financial incentives driving land-based conflict.

Challenges of addressing land and property systems in a post-conflict setting

63 CBS website, "Guidelines for bank financing for 2026," available at: <https://cbos.gov.sd/ar/node/24465>.

64 The Conflict and Environment Observatory, "The environmental costs of the war in Sudan," May 21, 2025, available at: <https://ceobs.org/the-environmental-costs-of-the-war-in-sudan/>.

65 The Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS) and the Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF), "The Environment, Conflict and Peace in Sudan: From Response to Recovery," October 2025, available at: <https://ceobs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/The-environment-conflict-and-peace-in-sudan-from-response-to-recovery.pdf>

Establishing transparency, accountability, and efficient record management in the land management sector, is a key factor in leveraging public lands and real estate assets, enhancing confidence in the real estate market which in turn, increases the value of land and properties and boosts government revenues from property fees and taxes. It is also a key part of post-war justice and accountability.

There are, however, a number of challenges to achieving this in practice. These include the scope of the problem. With millions displaced and illegitimate seizures widespread, there are likely to be a huge number of post-war cases, challenging the state's capacity to adjudicate them. Further, the multiplicity of actors and decision-making centers, conflicting political, economic, and military interests, and the weakness of judicial institutions, exacerbates the problem. Furthermore, corrupt networks hinder reform efforts, and it is difficult to persuade IDPs and refugees to return to their original areas for a number of reasons, including the lack of guarantees against future land and property seizures.

The impact of war on the land registration systems is likely to exacerbate these problems by making verification of ownership difficult due to the damage and destruction of physical records, and the absence of a reliable electronic which could be used to rebuild them. Additional factors the shortcomings of the legal and regulatory framework for addressing post-conflict situations, particularly regarding dispute resolution and the re-establishment of ownership; security challenges and limited access to certain areas; the risks of corruption and manipulation during the processes of reconstructing records; and the absence of integrated, secure, and scalable digital systems. All of these factors indicate that reforming the land registration system requires a comprehensive approach. This approach should focus on strengthening governance and oversight, modernizing legal frameworks and reforming laws, building institutional capacity, and adopting sustainable technological solutions.

An additional demand is likely to be for compensation for destroyed property. No official public statements have been made regarding compensation for property owners whose holdings were damaged by the war, except those made by the Governor of Khartoum State in an interview with Aljazeera in February 2025.⁶⁶ In that interview he indicated the government's willingness to develop compensation and that authorities were working to assess the extent of the losses and to redress the damage to the extent possible. However, no practical measures, nor official plans or programs have yet materialized. Furthermore, the scale of property damage exceeds the state's resources, meaning that comprehensive compensation would need support from regional and international bodies.

Similarly, neither the RSF nor "Tasis" has announced any clear compensation programs for property owners. Meanwhile, civil society organizations and other groups emphasize the need for a transparent and fair mechanism to compensate all those affected, regardless of which side controls their areas during the conflict.

Postwar land reform: comparative perspective

Sudan is far from the first country to have experienced wartime disruption of its land and policy frameworks. In this context, comparative analysis of the experiences of other countries can be instructive for designing policy interventions for Sudan.

Land reform after the Rwandan genocide

Following the civil war and genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the country faced a significant challenge

⁶⁶ Aljazeera, "Khartoum Governor told Aljazeera Net: The announcement of the complete liberation of the capital is imminent," February 13, 2025, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y224w9m6>



Photo courtesy of UNHCR

in protecting land ownership. Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and at the time of the genocide had few non-agricultural livelihoods opportunities, creating intense pressure on land resources, which are understood to be one of the root causes of the genocide. These pressures were exacerbated by the population upheavals that involved in the genocide. An estimated 10% of the population was massacred, only to be numerically replaced in short order by their ethnic brethren returning from abroad. Another third of the population was displaced, leading to many plots being subject to multiple claims. Further complicating the matter, prior to the genocide, 90% of land was held under customary tenure,⁶⁷ meaning that claims were dependent on testimony from individuals and leaders who were all the more likely to be displaced.

This led to:

1. An increase in land disputes. According to the government, in 2001, 80% of cases before the courts were linked to land disputes, primarily among families.⁶⁸
2. Determining the true landowners became a crucial political and legal issue to mitigate social tensions, address the high population growth rate, and facilitate the return of IDPs to lands not listed in official state records.

The Rwandan authorities undertook a variety of efforts to reform the land tenure system to make it more just and transparent. This included the Rwandan Constitution of 2003, the Land Policy of 2004 and the Land Law of 2005. The government launched the Land Tenure Regularization (LTR) Program in 2009 to ensure that all land was titled. By 2012, it had ensured that 10.4 million parcels of land were registered. The program focused on mapping, listing, and registering more than 10 million plots of land in the National Land Registry; registering ownership under a unified system; enabling women to own land for the first time; strengthening the legal security of landowners; facilitating real estate transactions; and providing protection against future disputes.⁶⁹

67 Thierry Hoza Ngoga, "Land reforms can heal old wounds and bring economic benefits," *The Africa Report*, April 3, 2019, available at: <https://www.theafricareport.com/11324/land-reforms-can-heal-old-wounds-and-bring-economic-benefits/>

68 Tenuresecurity.org, "Protecting Land, Rights, and Livelihoods," May 2017, available at: <https://tenuresecurity.org/country-profile/rwanda/>.

69 Center for Public Impact, "Public Impact Fundamentals Land Reform in Rwanda," December 21, 2017, available at:

The program was accompanied by significant outreach and education, which increased public participation in the program.⁷⁰

Land reform in post-war Liberia

As in Rwanda, land conflicts have been recognized as a root cause of Liberia's civil war. Unresolved inconsistencies between statutory and customary systems contributed.⁷¹ The war (1989–2003) resulted in the widespread destruction of land records, leading to chaos, complex legal disputes, and illegal land occupation. The displacement of populations and the destruction of documents made proving ownership difficult, necessitating long-term efforts to reorganize land tenure and resolve disputes between returnees and former combatants.⁷²

During the conflict, Liberia saw an erosion of its land management systems, in particular:

- **Destruction of official records:** many land registration archives and documents were destroyed, misplaced or otherwise disturbed by the conflict in Liberia. The disruption of institutions made what records existed in accessible.⁷³
- **Land ownership chaos and disputes:** Some individuals exploited the war to seize others' land, issuing multiple deeds and selling the same plot to multiple owners,⁷⁴ creating intense post-war conflicts between original landowners (returning refugees) and new occupiers (former combatants).⁷⁵
- **Land insecurity:** Formal transactions and land registration were suspended for an extended period, leaving ownership based on status quo rather than officially documented records.
- **Weakness of state institutions:** The judicial and administrative system responsible for land registration collapsed, making the reconstruction of a reliable system extremely difficult.⁷⁶

Reforming this system required years, during which the state implemented a series of institutional and legal reforms, most notably:

- A Land Commission was established in 2009, which conducted national consultations, cross-country studies, and studied regional and international land governance to propose new mechanisms.⁷⁷
- The legal framework governing land was reformed with the enactment of the Land Rights Act In 2018, which formally recognized customary land ownership rights, provided legal mechanisms to establish ownership in the absence of official documents, and established clear procedures for resolving disputes.⁷⁸
- Community documentation and participatory mapping were implemented through field surveys and mapping involving villages to determine customary land boundaries. Witness and elder testimony were used to rebuild land records. Central databases were created, remaining paper documents were archived, and Geographic Information

<https://centreforpublicimpact.org/public-impact-fundamentals/land-reform-in-rwanda>.

70 Ibid.

71 US Department of State, "2014 Investment Climate Statement – Liberia," June 2014, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2014/227147.htm>

72 Thomson Reuters Foundation News, "Liberia at a crossroads: recognizing land rights can safeguard against violence," August 19, 2016, available at: <https://news.trust.org/item/20160810131830-5ex4j>

73 Geospatial World, "Liberia: Through war and peace," April 17, 2013.

74 US Department of State, "2014 Investment Climate Statement – Liberia," June 2014, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2014/227147.htm>

75 Jairo Munive Rincon, "Ex-Combatants, returnees, land and conflict in Liberia," DIIS, April 27, 2010, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/ex-combatants-returnees-land-and-conflict-liberia>

76 Geospatial World, "Liberia: Through war and peace," April 17, 2013.

77 Linus Pott & Stanley N. Toe, "Reflecting on a decade: Lessons from Liberia's Land Rights Policy," August 22, 2023, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/sustainablecities/reflecting-decade-lessons-liberias-land-rights-policy>

78 Ibid.

Systems (GIS) were introduced to document boundaries. International technical and financial support, provided by organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), was utilized to fund land surveys, capacity building, and the development of digital systems.

□ Local committees to resolve land disputes were established, and community mediation was promoted instead of relying solely on the courts. Despite ongoing challenges, such as complex conflicts, weak infrastructure in Liberia, and limited implementation, these measures yielded the following results:

○ A significant portion of Liberia's land registration system was rebuilt, rural communities' rights were officially recognized, and conflicts related to lost documentation after the war were reduced.

Applicability to the situation in Sudan.

The experience in both Rwanda and Liberia have shown that recovering from a history of land mismanagement and war takes years. In Sudan, war is ongoing and this process has not yet begun.

In terms of the legal status before the war, all the aforementioned experiences share a reliance on customary and local practices in rural areas for land registration and are context within which tension over land has contributed to conflict.

The Rwandan experience shows the possibility of mapping and registering a large number of parcels in a short time, such a comprehensive and systematic registration system will be needed in Sudan. The experience of Liberia shows the possibility of formal recognition of customary tenure. A similar framework could provide legal recognition of customary land and *hawakir* ownership rights. Both experiences show the value of the establish a digital database for land and property registrations to prevent future data loss; establishment of dedicated mechanisms for resolving land and property disputes, linked to peaceful conflict resolution and transitional justice processes; and leveraging international technical and financial support from organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for funding land surveys, capacity building, and the development of digital systems.

As the Rwanda and Liberia examples show, addressing both how land issues may have contributed to war and how war may have exacerbated weaknesses in land management systems is a complex, long-term project.

Recommendations

The war in Sudan has resulted in profound shifts in land and property ownership patterns, spurred by both systematic seizures and individual opportunism. The war has undermined existing land ownership systems, giving rise to a reality based on power and influence. It has also caused massive losses.

Land issues will be among the most complex issues in the post-war period. Reforming and rebuilding the land registration system in post-war Sudan requires more than recovering lost documents. It must be based on institutional decisiveness, recognition of social diversity, and clear redress mechanisms to establish a foundation for long-term stability and rebuild trust between the state and society. In this context, this paper seeks to lay out some initial recommendations for what such a process would look like.

Phase one: Preventive freeze and damage assessment

As an initial step, the authorities on both sides should temporarily freeze major land transactions until the situation is reviewed and clear procedures for restoring what can be restored and dealing judiciously with what cannot be restored are set out. Such procedures should be calibrated to prevent legalization of land seized during the war.

In addition, an independent national mechanism, comprising all relevant stakeholders and representatives from local communities, should be established to document and record violations related to land and property, including the forced displacement of residents and the removal of informal settlements. This mechanism should develop and recommend a comprehensive legal and administrative framework to address reform the land management system, including proposing solutions to mitigate the consequences of the loss or destruction of real estate records and documents.

The national mechanism should also review all agricultural land allocation contracts and mining concessions concluded during the war period to ensure their legality, transparency, and freedom from corruption and abuse of power.

Phase two: Institutional and legal reform

The recommendations of the mechanism can form the basis of a broad reform of the legal framework governing land and property management in Sudan, including the legal recognition and formalization of customary and traditional landholdings within a clear legal framework. Such a reform should also establish legal frameworks to ensure equitable outcomes where land and property documents may have been lost or damaged.

Post war authorities should also establish simplified and expedited judicial process for resolving land disputes and restitution claims. This mechanism should include local committees and legal experts, along with measures to raise public awareness and facilitate participation. The relationship of these expedited processes with regular judicial processes will need to be clearly defined in order to prevent confusion related to the availability of, and possibly incongruent decisions of, multiple processes.

Such comprehensive reform should:

- ☐ Ensure that land and property is not used as a political tool for reward or collective punishment.
- ☐ Be designed in collaboration with local communities and traditional administrations, especially farmers, agricultural workers, and marginalized groups, to ensure that post-conflict land management policies minimize conflict and promote the equitable and sustainable use of resources.
- ☐ Enhance transparency, oversight, and anti-corruption mechanisms in the land and real estate sector, particularly in land registration, investment concessions, and the allocation of government land. This includes publishing public ownership data while protecting privacy and implementing a digital tracking system for all land and real estate transactions.
- ☐ Integrate conflict analysis to ensure that resource redistribution and reconstruction projects do not exacerbate existing conflicts.
- ☐ Establish mechanisms for monitoring and early management of land and natural resource conflicts, including to enable early intervention and mediation where necessary.
- ☐ Ensure the equitable and transparent distribution of land and resources.

- Enhance transparency and accountability in the management of economic resources by supporting independent oversight mechanisms to monitor registration and redistribution processes and prevent the exploitation of resources and their use to finance the war economy.

Phase three: Reinforcing national systems

Once comprehensive legal reform is in place, launch programs to ensure its implementation and clarification of property rights nationwide. This could include establishment of a comprehensive central digital database for land and property in Sudan, including the electronic scanning and archiving of all documents, and linking the records to a Geographic Information System (GIS).