

Voices from The Ground Famine In Darfur

By Partners of:

Darfur Speak to the World: Media Network for Information and Advocacy Project



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1. Executive Summary

The Darfur region is facing a worsening humanitarian crisis as a result of the ongoing armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces since April 2023. This has led to widespread famine in the five Darfur states. According to the UN [Famine Review Committee report](#) released in August 2024, millions of people are at risk of starvation due to the ongoing violence. The warring parties are obstructing humanitarian aid access and using hunger as a weapon of war. Against this backdrop, this report was prepared by four local organizations to document the suffering of those affected and convey their voices to the international community. The report relies on field interviews and testimonies from victims in displacement camps, as well as an analysis of open-source data on the crisis. The report highlights that the famine in Darfur is not solely a result of environmental factors but a direct consequence of the violence and the blockade imposed by the warring parties, coupled with a lack of necessary funding from the international community.

The most significant challenges faced in preparing this report were the difficulty of accessing affected areas, communication disruptions, individuals' fear of providing testimonies, and the lack of official data due to the disruption of official and local institutions as a result of the war. Nevertheless, the team managed to present a comprehensive picture of the catastrophic reality facing the people of Darfur, who are resorting to eating locusts and tree leaves in the absence of food.

The report concludes with a call on the international community to increase funding and intensify diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. It emphasizes the need to take urgent steps to open humanitarian corridors and deliver aid. The report also highlights the importance of reviving agriculture in Darfur and providing long-term support for the recovery of the local economy.

2. Introduction

Civilians in Darfur are facing a worsening humanitarian crisis due to famine caused by the ongoing armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces since April 15, 2023. This crisis threatens the lives of millions and puts them on the brink of starvation, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report released by the UN's Famine Review Committee on August 1, 2024.

To shed light on this humanitarian suffering, the SalaaMedia Center, in collaboration with partners of the "Darfur Speaks to the World" project, has prepared this report on the famine crisis in Darfur. The aim is to amplify the voices of the victims and provide accurate and reliable information from the ground. This report is a joint advocacy report on the famine in Darfur, prepared by four organizations funded under the Darfur Step-Up project, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) - under the "Darfur Speaks to the World: Media Network for Information and Advocacy" project. These organizations include the African Center for Justice and Peace Studies, Darfur 24 Newspaper, Darfur Human Rights Network, SalaaMedia Center, and the Justice Acceleration Organization.

This report aims to highlight the catastrophic dimensions of the famine crisis in Darfur today by documenting firsthand testimonies that contribute to increasing the international community's awareness of the scale and consequences of the crisis. The report also seeks to amplify the voices of those affected and convey their stories of daily suffering and their needs to survive the specter of hunger that has haunted them since the beginning of the war. It calls for urgent international action to save lives and alleviate the suffering of the victims.

This report covers the facts related to the effects and consequences of the famine on the five states of Darfur, from the moment the UN declared famine in Darfur on August 1, 2024, until the publication of this report.

3. The methodology

1. Partner reports and previous reports by SalaaMedia
2. Information gathered from open sources,
3. Interviews with those affected in different areas of Darfur

4. Challenges

The preparation of this report encountered several challenges in data collection, the most prominent of which were:

1. *Access to Affected Areas*: Ongoing military confrontations and the resulting insecurity posed a challenge for accessing all affected areas to gather field testimonies and information.
2. *Communication Disruptions*: Poor or interrupted communications in some areas hindered the acquisition of up-to-date data and immediate documentation of events.
3. *Security Pressures*: Some individuals hesitated to provide their testimonies or information due to fear of security forces from both sides of the conflict.
4. *Lack of Official Information*: The absence of data from government institutions led to a lack of understanding regarding the official assessment of the scale of famine and its impact.
5. *Resource Scarcity*: Weak funding or logistical resources necessary for organizing field trips to document data on the ground.

6. *Cultural and Social Environments*: Customs and traditions in some areas impeded the information gathering process, such as restrictions on talking to women, which limited their participation in sharing their stories of suffering from hunger since the war began.

5. Causes of Famine

Many UN and local reports have addressed the causes of famine in Darfur. A [previous report](#) by the SalaaMedia Center dated August 9, 2024, summarized the main reasons behind the famine in the Darfur region as follows: (1) Ongoing fighting between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces, (2) Government obstruction of humanitarian aid delivery, and (3) Natural factors, particularly the onset of the rainy season. According to Toby Howard, the UN representative for humanitarian aid coordination, the warring parties in Sudan have remained the primary factor contributing to famine in Darfur. He added in an interview with Darfur24 on July 21, 2024, that the Jebel Mara area alone had received at least 5 million displaced individuals, according to reports received from the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdel Wahid Mohamed Nour, which controls the area.

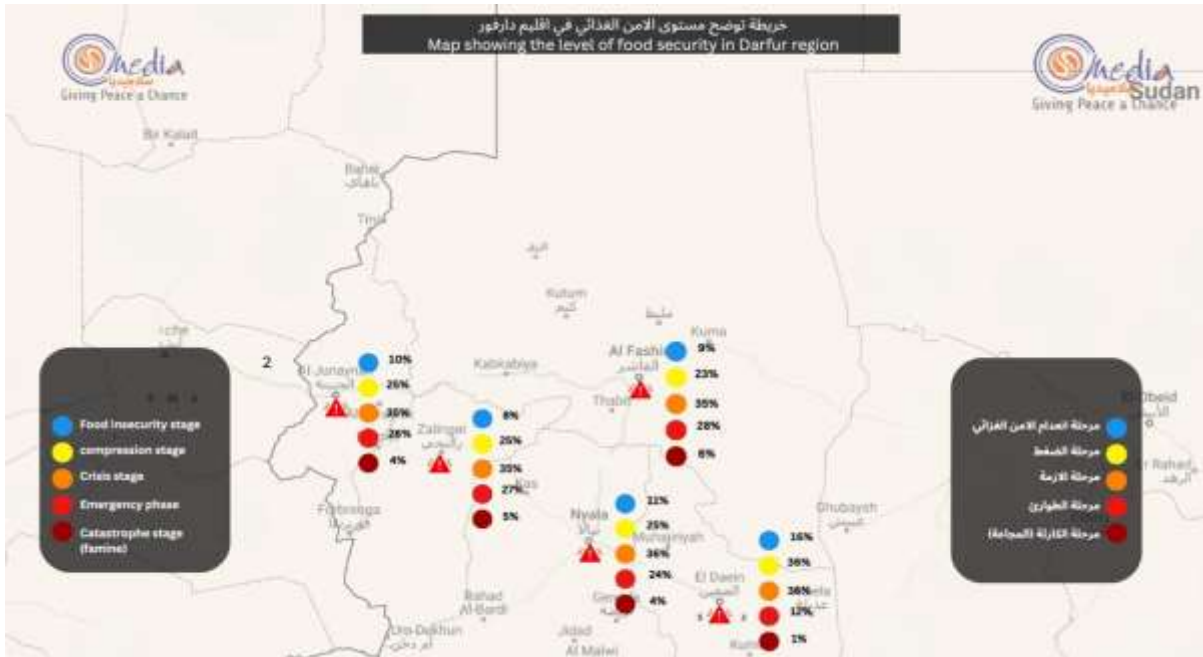
Additionally, issues related to the crossings that were relied upon for transporting aid are among the causes of famine. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, previously stated in a [Security Council](#) session: “Life-saving humanitarian aid was ready to be shipped and sent to the Zamzam displacement camp in North Darfur, but the warring parties did not allow it to pass. Humanitarian workers can no longer access additional supplies in eastern Chad after heavy rains flooded the last border route permitted by Sudanese authorities for aid transport through the Tine crossing to save lives and combat famine.” Howard described the situation in Darfur as catastrophic, adding that the UN organization would make every effort to negotiate with all parties as they needed all crossings and air and land routes to deliver food, medicine, and shelter to all affected areas and those in need.

Sources speaking to SalaaMedia earlier from the town of Buram in South Darfur reported that the rainy season had closed trade routes connecting the town to other cities and the Republic of South Sudan, resulting in food shortages and rising prices.

In a report by the [General Coordination of Displacement and Refugee Camps](#), it was stated that ongoing clashes and violence had exacerbated the humanitarian situation in displacement camps, including Shangil Tobay, Tabet, Kasab, Kalma, Otash, Kass, Mershing, Monwashi, Gureida, Hamidia, Khamsa Dagayik, Mukjar, Bandasi, Delij, Ronqatas, Morni, Niertiti, Golo, Dabanira, Sbeinga, Rokirro, Sortoni, Kabkabiya, and Darbat, all of which suffer from a lack of basic

The report indicated that the outbreak of diseases, the threat of famine, and natural conditions such as heavy rains and floods that caused houses to collapse have all exacerbated the humanitarian tragedy, amidst significant international failure to achieve a ceasefire and end the devastating war.

It is also worth mentioning that the [United States](#) had previously expressed concern regarding the decision made by the Sudanese Armed Forces to prohibit the entry of humanitarian aid across the Chadian border, as well as the harassment of humanitarian workers and the obstruction of life-saving assistance.



6. Impact of Famine

Undoubtedly, the ongoing war has played a key role in exacerbating famine among the people of Darfur, resulting in a humanitarian tragedy that intensifies day by day. Millions of citizens in villages and cities, along with both old and new displaced persons in camps around Nyala, Zalingei, Al Fashir, and El Deain, face the threat of death by starvation, including thousands of children, women, and the elderly. As a direct consequence of food shortages due to the war and the closure of routes, many have suffered from malnutrition and associated diseases, as reported in a SalaaMedia report dated July 26, 2024, titled "[Death Knocks on the Doors of Millions of Hungry People.](#)"

6.1. Malnutrition in Darfur

On May 30, 2024, UNICEF published a press release stating that 15.6% of children under five in Central Darfur suffer from severe malnutrition, while the rate reaches 30% in the Zamzam camp in North Darfur. The situation has worsened in recent months, with no signs of improvement given the ongoing conflict and severe hindrance to humanitarian aid access. The same statement reported that Doctors Without Borders (MSF) conducted assessments in the Zamzam camp in April 2024, finding that over 33% of pregnant and breastfeeding women suffer from malnutrition. Zamzam camp has become a vivid example of the malnutrition crisis, where food distribution by the World Food Program has been halted since May 2023. The [UN organization](#), in a report updated on June 27, 2024, mentioned that since the outbreak of conflict in April 2023, it has conducted nutritional screenings for approximately 5.5 million children and provided life-saving treatment to more than 322,000 children suffering from severe malnutrition in Sudan.

6.2. Famine Mortality Rates

In addition to the evidence and data collected by the SalaaMedia team regarding the impact of exacerbating famine in Darfur due to malnutrition, a rise in mortality rates among civilians has also been observed. Reuters identified 14 cemeteries in five residential areas across Darfur that have rapidly expanded in recent months, with [new graves](#) being dug at three times the rate in the first half of this year compared to the second half of last year. These graves serve as an indicator of deaths due to famine. Analysis reveals a disproportionate increase in cemeteries near certain displacement camps, particularly noting a 26% faster growth in Zamzam between mid-December 2023 and early

May 2024, compared to the same period last year. According to interviews with local community leaders, the primary causes of death in the camps were malnutrition and its accompanying diseases. The analysis clearly shows how the blockage of humanitarian aid for food and medicine has led to the loss of many lives, and the situation remains unchanged.

The General Coordination of Displaced Persons and Refugees in Darfur reported to the [BBC](#) that it recorded 443 child deaths in the Kalma displacement camp in South Darfur since the outbreak of war in Sudan in April 2023 until March of this year. Awaatif Abdel Rahman Youssef stated that "the conditions for displaced persons in the Belail locality of South Darfur are extremely dire, with 19 people dying from hunger, in addition to many deaths among children." She added, "Since the outbreak of war until now, no humanitarian aid has reached the state... the situation indicates a major disaster, and death will be the inevitable outcome if food does not reach us."

7. Hunger as a Weapon

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the bureaucratic procedures followed by the army, Rapid Support Forces, and the Sudan Liberation Army have impeded humanitarian aid access, particularly in Darfur. UN experts consider this a crime, as the parties on the ground use hunger as a weapon against civilians. Data from these UN experts shows that while over 11 million civilians in Darfur need food, the warring parties in Sudan are, through bureaucratic procedures, effectively obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid.

8. Initiatives and Responses

8.1. Local Initiatives

Numerous local initiatives have emerged to mitigate the effects of the humanitarian crisis left by the war between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces, after international efforts to provide humanitarian aid faced many obstacles, resulting in famine in several states. Among these initiatives are the efforts led by emergency rooms and youth groups in various cities in Darfur, efforts to ensure a successful agricultural season this year, and attempts to open airports in Darfur cities to receive humanitarian aid after the rainy season hindered relief delivery across the region.

8.1.1. Emergency Room Initiatives

The initiatives led by [emergency rooms in Nyala](#), the capital of [South Darfur](#), varied, and in July 2024, projects included distributing drinking water to over 1,400 families, a communal kitchen project benefiting 1,173 families, and food distribution to 200 families. According to the emergency room and health centers in Nyala, these three projects, funded by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), covered around 17 neighborhoods in the city.

Figure 2: Services Provided in Neighborhoods and Localities in South Darfur



SalaaMedia recorded 16 emergency rooms in the neighborhoods of El Fasher and the displacement camps, localities, and villages in [North Darfur](#). These rooms provide services such as communal kitchens for 8,870 families in 96 shelters, food supplies for 1,011 families, and drinking water in seven shelters, while some emergency rooms announced a temporary halt to their services due to funding shortages. There are also initiatives in certain areas of the state that the SalaaMedia team could not quantify in terms of families or individuals benefiting from them.

8.2. International Efforts

Numerous attempts and efforts by UN and international organizations have been made to combat famine in Darfur; however, these efforts are insufficient to face the famine threat in Sudan in general and in Darfur specifically. [Toby Harvard](#), Deputy Representative of the UN for Humanitarian Coordination, stated: "The international organization has called at several local, national, and global levels for unrestricted access to all the most vulnerable people and urged the warring parties to respect international humanitarian law." Meanwhile, the [UN Refugee Agency](#) noted that urgent action is vital to prevent more deaths and suffering in Sudan. Similarly, Carl Skao, [Deputy Executive Director](#) of the World Food Programme, stated that the situation in Sudan has not received the attention it deserves and that there is an urgent need for concerted diplomatic efforts and more resources to enhance the humanitarian response. In the same vein, [Edem Wosornu](#), Director of Operations and Advocacy at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, pointed out that the humanitarian appeal for Sudan is only 32% funded, having received \$874 million out of the required \$2.7 billion.

9. Voices from the Ground

9.1 SalaaMedia's Interviews with Affected Individuals

To convey the voices of those facing the danger of starvation, the SalaaMedia team and a group of partners conducted interviews with affected individuals in various areas of Darfur, as follows:

Interview (1): Conducted by the Darfur Human Rights Network. Displaced person (Z. A.) from Center 8 in the Kalma camp, South Darfur, stated:

"After the agreement between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces to open the crossings and allow aid to reach the citizens and displaced persons of Darfur, they have been eagerly awaiting this assistance. However, they have received nothing so far in Kalma camp. The regular aid that used to arrive at the camp stopped after the outbreak of the war on April 15, coinciding with the increasing number of displaced people in the camp due to the expanding conflict." He added, "Food prices in the markets have become exorbitant and are beyond the reach of many, in addition to their scarcity. Some impoverished families in the camp now go out daily to forage from tree leaves, and it is possible for three days to pass without lighting a fire in their homes." He pointed out that conditions have worsened in the camp since the April 15 war to the extent of lacking tarpaulins for shelter, leaving thousands of women and children exposed to rain without roofs to protect them from heat and cold, which has contributed to the spread of diseases among the displaced within the camp.

Interview (2): Sheikh (A. A.), from Center 7 in Kalma camp, South Darfur:

"We have been suffering immensely in our livelihoods since the outbreak of the war between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces on April 15. Since the humanitarian agreement between the conflicting parties to open the crossings for aid delivery, we have not received any assistance from any party." He added, "World Vision promised us food for 64,764 families with red cards, stating that the food would arrive soon, but it has not arrived yet." He mentioned that "the cards were classified

into three categories: red, yellow, and green based on the nutritional needs of each family in the camp, without any intervention so far, while the suffering of the displaced continues to be immeasurable, to the extent that many families have resorted to eating 'ambaz' and treating it as a main meal to stave off hunger."

Interview (3): Sheikh (A. A.), Darfur Network:

"The number of displaced individuals in the camp has now reached 525,000, with widespread diseases such as malnutrition and occasional deaths due to hunger. He concluded by saying: 'We are in urgent need of aid to arrive as quickly as possible to save what can be saved from the specter of hunger for the displaced.'"

Interview (4): A resident from Unit (Arara), which belongs to the Baiyda locality, about 80 kilometers south of El Geneina, stated:

"The famine began in the area on March 5, 2024, and there has been no intervention from the relevant relief organizations since the onset of the famine, except for Médecins Sans Frontières, which provided support to the health center. Eighty percent of the region's population is still suffering from famine, with the most affected age groups being children, women, and the elderly. He described the current situation as catastrophic, stating that the most basic essentials of life, such as food, health, education, and security, are completely absent, and there are no food aid from organizations, in addition to many agricultural areas not being cultivated. He also pointed out the sharp rise in general price levels, with the price of the smallest unit of millet (koura) reaching 10,000 Sudanese pounds and corn (koura) reaching 9,000 Sudanese pounds."

9.2. Partners' Interviews with Affected Individuals

Interview (1): Omar Sharif al-Din from Kalma camp:

"The displaced persons in Kalma camp (in South Darfur) have no food or drink, and some eat leftover food from garbage... while others consume corn husks, and even to this day, children and the elderly are dying daily from malnutrition." This is how Omar Sharif al-Din, a resident of Kalma camp in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur, described the daily suffering of the camp's displaced individuals in an interview with BBC Arabic News, calling on humanitarian organizations to come to the camp "to save the displaced from hunger and death." Sharif al-Din's family consists of 12 members, who have only one meal a day made up of corn husks.

Interview (2): The General Coordination of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees in Darfur:

"Some residents of Darfur have resorted to eating locusts due to the scarcity of food, which has led to high levels of hunger." Awaatif Abdel Rahman Youssef, head of the Office for Women Displaced Persons in the General Administration of Displacement Camps in Darfur, residing in the Skali camp for displaced persons in South Darfur, confirmed that some residents are eating locusts. She added, "Some people eat locusts, while others eat corn porridge. Those who eat bread do not exceed 20 percent."

Interview (3): Mohamed Younis (pseudonym) from the Jebel Marra area in Central Darfur:

"Most of the citizens here use locusts as their daily food, especially since it is the season for desert locusts. The residents of Darfur eat locusts as part of their culture, but not as a main food dish. Younis continued, saying, 'Here, locusts are used as a substitute for meat, and their taste is not good; it resembles the taste of dried meat that has been stored for a long time.' Most residents of Jebel Marra in Central Darfur catch locusts using pesticides or by burning them rather than buying them. A pile of

locusts (less than a kilogram) costs 1,000 Sudanese pounds (approximately two dollars). Mohamed Younis has warned residents several times about the effects of eating locusts caught with pesticides, 'but to no avail.' It's not just the residents who catch locusts; traders do as well, relying on them as a source of income to display and sell for food. Others in Jebel Marra have resorted to eating tree leaves due to hunger, while some residents there eat a plant called 'bufra.' (BBC).

Interview (4): With a woman (name omitted), who said in her mother tongue:

"The aid that has arrived... we hear about it, but we have not seen it with our own eyes."

9.3. Efforts of Affected Individuals with Decision-Makers to Avoid Famine Catastrophe

Amid fears among Darfur citizens of a repeat of the genocide scenario that occurred in 2004, leaders of the displaced camps in the region have attempted to contact various entities to prevent famine. In this regard, Awatif Abdel Rahman stated to BBC: "The leaders of the displaced have sent a letter to the officials responsible for coordinating the delivery of humanitarian aid in South Darfur. They also sent a letter on behalf of the displaced to the governor of Darfur and the head of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Mini Arko Minawi. But the efforts have not been successful... the security situation is the main determinant for delivering aid." Awatif fears that the current conditions resemble what happened twenty years ago in 2004, when the people of Darfur faced genocide due to tribal disputes over food resources. In the same context, Mohammed Younis mentioned: "If humanitarian organizations do not respond and send food aid, famine will occur in Darfur, leading to tribal conflicts within the region for survival."

10. Conclusions

As a result of the intensifying armed confrontations between the warring parties in the region and the worsening famine, the conclusions that can be drawn through comparison and examination of data from various sources and field interviews indicate that the following conditions are likely to occur if the war prolongs and humanitarian aid remains scarce:

- It is likely that cases of famine will extend to other internally displaced persons (IDP) sites in the El Fasher area, particularly in the Abu Shouk and Al-Salam camps.
- The likelihood of increased famine severity is high in the Zamzam camp even after October 2024.
- The spread of acute malnutrition among children and pregnant women has reached 30% in some areas.
- The continued use of hunger as a weapon of war: Given the ongoing obstruction of humanitarian aid access, the most accurate conclusion is that using hunger as a weapon against civilians has become a harsh reality.
- Agricultural collapse: The failure of the agricultural season in most areas of Darfur due to conflict has led to increased reliance on external aid.
- Lack of sufficient international funding: Only 32% of the required funding has been provided to meet humanitarian relief needs in Darfur.
- Outbreak of diseases and rising mortality rates: With food shortages and limited or nonexistent healthcare, the likelihood of increased malnutrition-related health issues in IDP camps is high, further raising mortality rates.

11. Calls Action

In conclusion, based on the data presented and the findings drawn, we emphasize the severity of the humanitarian situation in Darfur due to the worsening famine caused by the ongoing war in Sudan and its specific impacts in Darfur, which could lead to catastrophic humanitarian conditions that are difficult to control.

Therefore, through this report, we call upon donor countries and humanitarian organizations to take immediate action to save the lives of millions in Darfur who face the threat of acute famine, and we urge the conflicting parties to open safe humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid. The necessary practical steps can be summarized as follows:

- Pressure on the warring parties to cease hostilities and achieve peace.
- The necessity of opening safe corridors for humanitarian aid to all affected areas and facilitating the movement of humanitarian workers to provide urgent relief.
- Increase international funding: Urge the international community and donor governments to increase financial assistance to combat famine, focusing on long-term funding that supports economic and agricultural recovery projects.
- Monitoring and evaluation of conditions: Recommend the establishment of mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the humanitarian situation to ensure an effective response to the worsening famine, along with regular reporting to the international community.

12. Brief of Partner Organizations

12.1. Darfur Human Rights Network

An independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in Darfur and other regions of Sudan. We achieve this through monitoring and documenting human rights violations, providing legal assistance to victims, and advocating for change with the Sudanese government and the international community.

12.2. Darfur24

An independent media network with a mission to pursue honest, accurate, comprehensive, balanced, and reliable journalistic stories.

12.3. SalaaMedia Center

The center dedicates its activities to serving Sudanese communities by providing independent, verified, and accurate information. Our commitment is to foster an informed and engaged society through quality journalism that promotes democratic values, supports peacebuilding efforts, and contributes to sustainable development in Sudan.