

Northern state: pre-crisis and current situation

HOW HAS THE RECENT CONFLICT AFFECTED NORTHERN STATE?

Since 15 April 2023, violence in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has created a significant surge of people seeking safety in Northern state to attempt to cross into Egypt. Northern state has become one of the largest recipients of IDPs from Khartoum. Refugees and local communities very likely have high humanitarian needs, since over 360,000 people are stranded in Wadi Halfa, Ad Dabbah, Al Burgaig, Al Golid, Delgo, Dongola, and Merowe, and attempting to cross into Egypt. Northern state also lacks the capacity to accommodate the numbers it is receiving. According to the revised 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, there were 107,000 IDPs and 292,000 people in need of assistance in the state as at 17 May (OCHA 17/05/2023). As the number of IDPs had risen to 362,000 by 9 August, the number of people in need has likely increased as well (IOM 15/08/2023).

On 13 April, just before the eruption of the recent armed conflict in Sudan, the RSF deployed their forces in Merowe locality (located in southeastern Northern state, about 330km from Khartoum). RSF had taken over several strategic locations, including gaining short control of Merowe Airport in Northern state, affecting the SAF's air capacity and reducing immediate Egyptian support (ACLED 26/05/2023; Al Jazeera 16/04/2023). The RSF issued a statement saying that their presence in Northern state was part of their mission to combat human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and drugs, but the SAF denied giving their approval of the deployment (Sudan Tribune 13/04/2023). There has not been any recent reports since regarding clashes in Northern state.

Heavy rain and flooding aggravate the situation in Northern state. As at 17 August, over 13,500 people across Northern, as well as North Darfur and White Nile states had been affected by floods. The localities affected in Northern state are Ad Dabbah, Al Burgaig, Al Golid, Dongola, Merowe, and Wadi Halfa, with at least 300 houses damaged (OCHA 17/08/2023). According to weather predictions, Northern state will likely receive above-average rainfall since August until October, aggravating the humanitarian needs in the region (FAO 14/08/2023).

Map 1. Northern Sudan



Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (09/12/2021) and Map action (11/05/2023)

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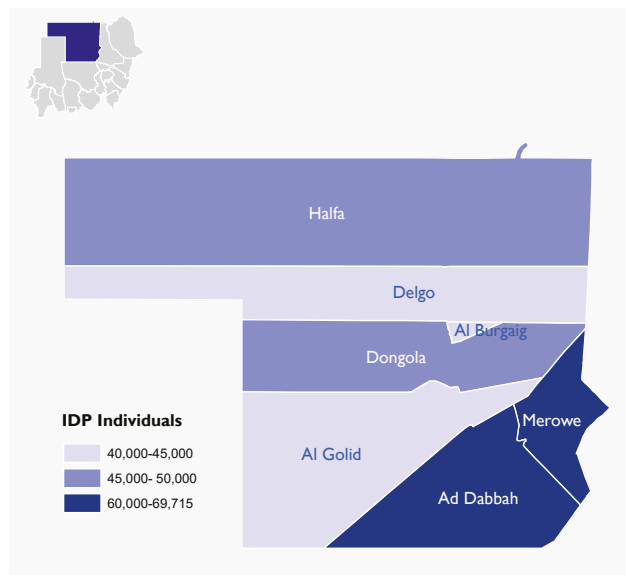
Information gaps

The scarcity of information available and the limited presence of humanitarian responders further worsen the humanitarian crisis. For some sectors, responders are almost non-existent. Both the Sudanese and Egyptian Governments also publish very little information on this border area, making it difficult to know the exact number of refugees and displaced people, their needs, and the possible evolution of the situation. The main information gaps include the following.

- Gender-based information is not available.
- There is no information on how the conflict and displacement are affecting people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- There is no information on recent attacks on civilians in Northern state, but violence, smuggling, and other human rights violations are likely to occur, even if they are under-reported.

Displacement figures for Northern state

Figure 1. Localities in Northern state hosting IDPs

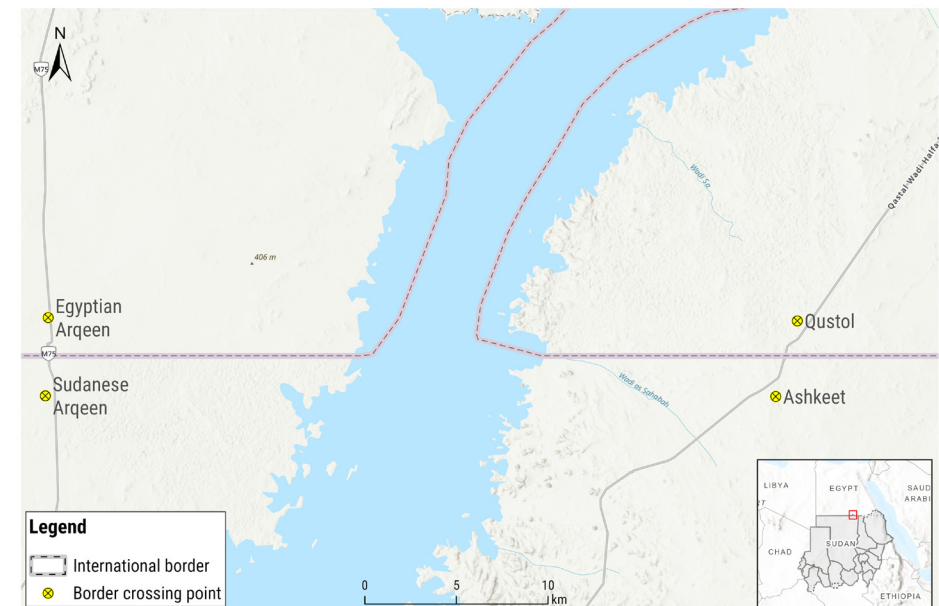


Source: IOM (01/08/2023)

The conflict has displaced more than four million people inside and outside Sudan since the start of April 2023, with approximately 3.6 million internally displaced as at 20 August. Northern state is the third state after River Nile and East Darfur with the most influx of IDPs; over 362,000 IDPs mostly from Khartoum were reported in Northern state (equivalent to 10% of all IDPs countrywide). Around 20% of these IDPs in Northern state intend to move to another location, with the majority indicating intentions to cross the border into Egypt (IOM 20/08/2023; IOM 08/08/2023, 01/08/2023; HOPE 26/07/2023). The majority of IDPs in Northern state have been observed in Ad Dabbah and Merowe localities (about 330km north of the capital city Khartoum) (OCHA 28/07/2023; UNHCR 26/07/2023).

Border with Egypt and entry requirements

Map 2. The Sudan-Egypt border



Source: ACAPS using data from UNHCR 15/06/2023

The border between Sudan and Egypt stretches around 1,280km. The official routes overland towards Egypt are the two border crossings at Arqeen and Ashkeet/Qustal in Northern state. The border is more porous through the desert, where there might be several irregular routes between the two countries (RI 20/06/2023; Al Jazeera 11/06/2023). The Sudan-Egypt border is also the most populated of the Egyptian border regions, with approximately 2.2 million residents on the Egyptian side and almost one million on the Sudanese side (Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020).

Between 15 April and 13 August, over one million individuals sought refuge in neighbouring countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan (IOM 15/08/2023). As at 24 July, an estimated 120,000 people were stuck on Sudan's side of the border awaiting entry into Egypt. As at 8 August, 20% of the 360,000 IDPs in Northern state also intended to continue to Egypt. As at 13 August, over 285,300 (28% of all externally displaced Sudanese) were in Egypt (IOM 15/08/2023, 08/08/2023, and 01/08/2023; VOA 24/07/2023).

The situation on the border has become more complicated since May, when Egypt began imposing several new immigration regulations. These included no longer accepting passports with extended validity periods, as well as temporary travel documents for visas, and no longer allowing access for children added to their parents' passports (HRW 13/07/2023). The Sudanese Director of Passports and Immigration Services in Wadi Halfa has also issued new regulations halting the issuance of new emergency documents or passports (RI 24/07/2023). As a result, many Sudanese unable to renew or who have lost their passports in the conflict have been unable to apply for Egyptian visas. On 10 June, the Egyptian authorities also started requiring all Sudanese people to obtain electronic visas, which was challenging given significant internet connectivity and other logistical issues (OCHA 17/08/2023; HRW 13/07/2023; Independent 16/06/2023; Al Jazeera 23/04/2023). Previously, entry visas were only required for Sudanese men ages 16–50, who starting 29 May also needed security clearance to enter Egypt with their visas. The processes are slow, and most displaced people lack the documents and means to cross the border legally and safely (Al Jazeera 27/06/2023; UNHCR 26/07/2023; AI 07/07/2023). This has resulted in increased protection risks, as many resort to using smugglers to cross the border into Egypt. The costs also provide another challenge for Sudanese people, with some smugglers charging over USD 40,000 (BBC 29/04/2023).

Most of the displaced Sudanese who are stranded are in the city of Wadi Halfa, an agricultural and commercial centre serving both Egypt and Sudan (Britannica accessed 28/07/2023). At least 120,000 people are stranded in the city, overcrowding gathering sites and leading to significant shelter challenges (IOM 01/08/2023; Arab News 16/06/2023). An estimated 5,000 people queue daily in front of the Egyptian consulate in Wadi Halfa for a visa. The governor of Northern state, El Bagir Ahmed, has said that the local government is working on designated shelter sites in Dongola, Karima, and Wadi Halfa to relocate people from the Argeen crossing point (Dabanga 27/07/2023 and 27/06/2023).

On 27 July, Egypt deported 350 Sudanese, many of whom were working in mines along the Sudanese–Egyptian border while others were apprehended within Egyptian cities. It is uncertain whether these people arrived in Egypt after the recent conflict erupted in April, but the incident demonstrates the increasing restrictions and persecution of Sudanese refugees in Egypt (Dabanga 27/07/2023; HRW 13/07/2023).

Some Sudanese are starting to return from Egypt to Sudan via Wadi Halfa because of the inability to fund their continued stay, with living costs increasing dramatically in Egypt (France 24 07/2023; Dabanga 27/07/2023; USAID 17/06/2023). Some stranded refugees from Ethiopia and South Sudan have also been redisplaced because of the recent conflict and are in Wadi Halfa waiting for resettlement or aid. According to some testimonies, many Ethiopians are unwilling to return to their country, and only some South Sudanese are open to the option (UNHCR 26/07/2023). There has been civil unrest in Wadi Halfa, such as protests outside the Egyptian consulate, as a result of the new border restrictions imposed by Egypt (HRW 13/07/2023).

Shelter and non-food items

As at 24 July, there were at least 15 gathering sites in Dongola town and around 57 gathering sites in Wadi Halfa town (UNHCR 26/07/2023). The number of people arriving is overwhelming facilities in Wadi Halfa and adjacent towns, and many people are stranded without shelter at the crossing points at Ashkeet/Qustal and Argeen. Around 81% of IDPs are staying with relatives and host communities, 10% in schools or other public buildings, and 9% in rented accommodations (IOM 01/08/2023; AI 07/07/2023). Although there are no exact figures, some refugees have been returning from Egypt to Wadi Halfa because of the lack of means to afford shelter in Egypt. Refugees have reported some incidents of host community rejection and rising economic and housing costs, with some Sudanese being charged triple for rent (France 24 17/07/2023; USAID 17/06/2023).

Health

As at 28 July, Halfa Hospital in Wadi Halfa was still open but was running out of lifesaving drugs and medicine. Services were overstretched to meet the needs of the new arrivals and the local community. The hospital's laboratory had also run out of medical testing supplies, limiting its testing ability, and pharmacies were running low on key medical supplies, including intravenous fluids and insulin for patients with chronic illnesses (OCHA 28/07/2023; UNHCR 26/07/2023; TNH 10/07/2023). People stranded or separated from their families are also likely to experience mental stress, and psychological support is highly needed (UNHCR 30/06/2023). Other health risks for the displaced population include dehydration and heatstroke, since Northern state tends to experience very high temperatures of more than 40° C during the day between June–September (ICPAC accessed 14/08/2023; Climate Centre 2021).

WASH

Despite access to Merowe Dam in Northern state, the region, particularly the shelter sites for IDPs in Wadi Halfa town, has poor access to water. WASH services are scarce. UNICEF has installed sanitation facilities at the border crossings of Argeen and Ashkeet/Qustal, as well as at Kurmuk bus station, but because of the increasing number of IDPs, WASH needs are likely to remain or increase at the crossing points and adjacent towns (OCHA 28/07/2023; UNHCR 26/07/2023; UNICEF 27/06/2023).

Food security

In Northern state, 27% of the population is food-insecure in the period from July to September 2023 (IPC 02/08/2023). Although, compared to other areas in Sudan, Northern state is considered to be one of the least-food insecure states, the presence of IDPs and the challenges along the Sudan-Egypt border means that cases of food insecurity may increase. Regardless, the primary need for IDPs in Northern state continues to be food, especially considering that the cost of essential food items increased by 12% (SDG 70, USD 0.12) in July 2023 compared to the previous month (WFP 31/07/2023). The most affected people are host communities, protracted IDPs, and those stranded at crossing points.

According to IPC estimates from 2 August, around 251,200 people in Northern state were expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and 122,900 to face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity levels between July–September; and over 186,000 are likely to experience Crisis IPC phase 3 and and 62,000 Emergency IPC phase 4 from October 2023 to February 2024 (IPC 02/08/2023). It will likely remain critical for several months as reduced access to agricultural finance and inputs affect planting and production (mainly of wheat) using irrigation. Access to staple food is likely to remain constrained, and prices nationwide are expected to increase by 200–700% above the five-year average and 100–200% above the previous year (IPC 02/08/2023).

Protection

Protection needs continue to rise, especially in the absence of specialised services. There are reports of family separation, as some families cannot afford to travel together or take all their children. The separation increases the risks of gender-based violence and sexual assaults, but cases are underreported (WFP 17/05/2023). A newly formed militia in Northern state called Sudan Shield Forces has also been recruiting young men (ACLED 26/05/2023). The state will likely continue hosting IDPs and refugees as a result of the migration restrictions imposed by neighbouring countries, making human trafficking and other human rights violations at the borders also likely to increase.

Education

10% of IDPs in Northern state are staying in schools, interrupting education in these facilities until other shelters are available. Across the country, around 8.6 million children and young people need education assistance, including approximately 6.9 million out-of-school children. At least 1.7 million children have been displaced, likely having limited access to education and facing additional protection risks (OCHA 17/05/2023; IOM 08/08/2023).

Humanitarian operation and access

Since the conflict, the humanitarian response in Northern state has scaled up quickly, with five humanitarian organisations providing assistance mostly as part of the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan. These are mostly UN agencies, including the UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF, as well as the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) and a national NGO called Collaborative for Peace in Sudan (OCHA accessed 09/08/2023). The UNHCR, WFP, and SRCS are largely operational in Wadi Halfa, while UNICEF and the Collaborative for Peace in Sudan are responding to affected people in Ad Dabbah, Al Burgaig, Dalgo, and Merowe localities. As at 15 July, no humanitarian responders were working on WASH, education, telecommunications, and logistics in Northern state. There was also a lack of refugee response in Northern state despite it being a bordering state. According to OCHA's August 3W (a report on operational locations during an emergency), only two organisations were responding to food security despite food being the most pressing need since the beginning of the crisis; one responding to protection and child protection; and two responding to health needs (OCHA 12/08/2023). According to the June 3W, less than five organisations were responding in Northern state, and neither the WASH, Education, and Logistics Clusters were present in the state (OCHA 25/07/2023). The Egyptian Government and WFP have opened a humanitarian corridor between Aswan in Upper Egypt and Wadi Halfa in Sudan, mostly to provide food assistance to refugees in Egypt (WFP 19/06/2023; Ahran 20/06/2023). There are few assessments being conducted, making it difficult to understand the full extent of their needs. The cross-border responses between Chad, South Sudan, and Sudan are also more widely reported than those between Egypt and Sudan (AI 07/07/2023). Between 15 April and 31 July, nine incidents restricted the response in Northern state. The reports do not specify the type of incidents by state, but countrywide, they include bureaucratic impediments and attacks on humanitarian personnel. Authorities often deny organisations the permit to mobilise, so they have only been able to organise supplies and aid to Northern state during ceasefires. INGOs are also not obtaining visas to deploy aid personnel, further constraining the response (OCHA 15/08/2023 and 07/07/2023).

PRE-CRISIS CONTEXT

Overview

Northern state has an area of 348,765 km², and its capital city is Dongola. It borders Egypt and Libya to the north, North Darfur to the west, North Kordofan to the south, Khartoum to the southeast, and River Nile to the east. Northern state forms part of the ancient Nubian empire, which once extended over areas of both Egypt and Sudan. This historical connection is evident in places like Merowe, where over 200 pyramids stand as testaments to the shared heritage. However, there is an enduring border dispute, which characterises the relationship between Egypt and Sudan since the colonial era. The political boundary established in 1899 under the Anglo-Egyptian condominium placed a segment of Northern state within Egyptian territory, introducing an enduring source of tension in the form of the mineral-rich Halayeb triangle. Sudan gained independence from Anglo-Egyptian rule in January 1956, and the Egyptian army was withdrawn from the country (Britannica accessed 28/07/2023; UNDP 10/2010; Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020).

The cross-border relationship between Egypt and Sudan has been contentious. Before the opening of the first border crossing in 2014, smuggling was a common practice. People trying to reach Egypt were subject of rape, burning, mutilation, deformation of limbs, electric shocks, and other forms of violence by human traffickers (HRW 11/02/2014; TNH 12/02/2014). The confluence of historical legacy, geopolitical dynamics, and resource implications continues to affect Northern state (Aawsat 26/10/2014).

Population

Northern state is one of the least populated in the country, with around 936,200 people or only 2% of the countrywide population in 2018 (CBS accessed 04/08/2023). The northern region of Sudan, including Northern state, is known to be vast, with its soil filled with nutrients from the River Nile. The river runs through the entire country from north to northeast to south, providing about 77% of Sudan's freshwater. With the drought affecting the river, some communities have moved to other parts of the country with better water sources.

People on the move

In 2004, Egypt and Sudan signed an agreement to secure their respective citizens' freedom of movement, residency, work, and property ownership. This accord has been applied selectively, with Egypt in particular tending to host a higher number of Sudanese individuals (Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020). Before the conflict erupted, only men ages 16–60 needed a visa to enter Egypt. This allowed regular border crossings between Sudan's Northern state and

Egypt's El Wadi El Gedid without complications (Al Jazeera 27/06/2023). Since 2022, there has been a noticeable surge in migration towards Egypt, primarily driven by young men, many of whom migrate irregularly in search of employment opportunities. This trend stems from the Sudanese economy's significant decline, compounded by food shortages that have affected a third of the nation's population. As at September 2022, around 30 buses were transporting about 1,500 passengers daily from Sudan to Egypt. In response to this escalating flow, the Egyptian Government has been working on strengthening the militarisation of its southern border region to curtail migration (The Guardian 29/04/2023; Reuters 26/09/2022). As at 28 February 2023, the population of refugees in Northern state had reached over 1,100 (UNHCR 23/03/2023).

Languages

The official language of Sudan is Arabic, but there are over 100 dialects. Arabic speakers who are either the descendants of groups that entered the region in the 14th century or native peoples who have learnt the language from them presently occupy most of Northern state (Trigger 1966).

Ethnicities

The main ethnic groups present in Northern state are Arabs, Arabised Shaikia, Nubians, the Beja, Ababda, and Basharya (Joshua Project accessed 15/08/2023; Minority Rights accessed 15/08/2023). Most people in northern Sudan (Northern, Red Sea, River Nile) tend to have more Middle Eastern cultural customs; they tend to practice Islam and often have Egyptian or Eritrean ancestry (Cultural Atlas 2018).

Nubians: the Nubians comprise seven non-Arab Muslim tribes that originated between Dongola in Northern state and Aswan in southern Egypt. Their culture can be traced back to 3100 BC. Many still speak the Andaandi dialect and some others their language, the Nubian, along with Arabic. Their economy and livelihoods are based on agriculture. They grow wheat, barley, millet, beans, peas, and some fruits depending on the season. In the sixth century, the Nubians were Christian, but currently, most of them are Muslim. They still keep some ancient beliefs, such as the power of the Nile River (Joshua Project accessed 04/08/2023; Last Places accessed 04/08/2023). In the 1960s, both Egypt and Sudan displaced their Nubian communities from parts of the border for the construction of the Aswan High Dam (Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020).

Beja community: the Beja people are one of the most prominent groups in northern Sudan. They live in large areas between the Sudan–Egypt border, Eritrea, and the River Setit, and from the Red Sea Coast to the River Atbara and the Nile (Minority Rights accessed 28/07/2023; Trigger 1966). The Beja population is divided into tribes, including the Amamar, Besharin, Hadendawa, Halanga, and Beni Amer, and subtribes: Arteiga, Ashraf, Kamalab, Malheitkanab, Sigolab,

Shailab, Kimilab, Hassanab, Memran, and Habab. They practice Islam but also have very distinctive identities and customs (Sudan Tribune 31/08/2006).

Arabised Shaikia: there are approximately 1.3 million Arabised Shaikia in Sudan mostly in Northern state. Nearly 90% of the group practices Islam and speak Arabic. The Arabisation of many tribes, including the Shaikia, took place during Arab invasions in the 7th and 11th centuries across North Africa, through which their customs and religion were introduced. The Shaikia primarily engage in agricultural, herding, and commercial pursuits. Their staple crops are sorghum and millet. They also grow other crops, such as watermelon, gourd, okra, sesame, and cotton. The group also raises livestock, such as cattle, sheep, and goats. Despite their significance, there remains limited information about the current lifestyles and requirements of the Shaikia community (Joshua Project accessed 15/08/2023; People Groups accessed 04/08/2023).

Ababda: they are considered a subgroup of the Beja community and have retained elements of the Beja language and customs. They are more predominantly Arab Semite, speak Arabic, and are Sunni Muslim. The Ababda practice nomadic pastoralism by grazing their camels and cattle in the more fertile valleys (Abu Ghosoun accessed 16/08/2023; Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020). Because they tend to live on the border between Egypt and Sudan, they link both countries through centuries-old customs and traditions. Considered protectors of the region, the Ababda have been masters of the desert routes since the Roman era. Both the Egyptian and Sudanese Governments tend to disregard the tribe, and recent border restrictions have affected their livelihoods (Fanack 05/08/2022; NoonPost 05/03/2019).

Basharya: also named Bishari, they are also considered a subgroup of the Beja community. The tribe lives in the eastern part of the Nubian Desert in Sudan and southern Egypt. They are nomadic pastors and herders, speak Arabic and Beja language, and are Sufi Muslims (Dbpedia accessed 16/08/2023; 101Lasttribes accessed 16/08/2023; Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020).

Politics

The political landscape in Northern state has long been marked by a contentious relationship with Egypt, rooted in dispute over control and resource rights – primarily for gold – in the Halayeb triangle, which encompasses the Northern state. This dispute dates back to the countries' independence from British rule in 1956. This tension has not escalated into confrontations, but a recurring political tension persists. In 2016, Egypt made an agreement with Saudi Arabia, and the deal included Egypt's acknowledgement of sovereignty over the Halayeb triangle. As a response, Sudan sent a letter to the UN, while Egypt sent troops to Sudan's border with Eritrea. These tensions have affected local political dynamics and the border between northern Sudan and southern Egypt for decades (Al Jazeera 12/01/2018; Reuters 09/01/2018; Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020). In 2004, the border between Sudan and Egypt became more open. The land crossings were opened even though the political leadership did not

initially embrace the decision, which appeared to be pushed by public pressure, particularly from the Nubian community. Since 2013 though, Egypt has also imposed other restrictive border policies; starting 2023, Sudanese men ages 16–50 must have a security permit to cross the border (Carnegie MEC 11/06/2020).

In 2020, the Juba Peace Agreement, which aimed to create some stability and involved the transitional government and armed groups, included a chapter dedicated to northern Sudan called Northern Track. This chapter aspired to lay the groundwork for creating suitable conditions and essential infrastructure for the return of IDPs to their historical locations in Wadi Halfa and around Nubia Lake. It aimed to guarantee access to both residential and agrarian land. The recognition of the Nubian language and the construction of the two canals of Merowe Dam, along with the repatriation of nomads in Northern state, were components of this document (Dabanga 22/01/2020; ConstitutionNet 03/10/2020). The conflict has challenged its implementation.

Northern state has also demonstrated a revolutionary posture against Omar Hassan al-Bashir and the military Government. In 2019, when al-Bashir was overthrown, the local resistance committees (LRCs), including the one in Dongola city, Northern state, played a key role. The LRCs are groups created mostly by young people from all socioeconomic classes to defend the revolution. They were formed in different cities in poor, middle-class, and upper-class neighbourhoods, and they demanded a shift in Sudan's political path. The LRC formed in Dongola, Northern state, was one of the strongest and remains active, demanding democracy and a civilian government. In September 2022, the Dongola LRC marched in front of the military hospital to demand the overthrow of the coup in solidarity with the doctors' strike that month. The police and military often attack these public demonstrations (Dabanga 30/09/2022; CMI 2021). Most of the recent clashes have not occurred in Northern state but have directly affected the region's economy and increased humanitarian needs for both IDPs and host communities (ACLEd 14/04/2023).

Economy

A large part of the Sudanese economy is dependent on agriculture. Another part is based on a combination of mobile and sedentary pastoral and agropastoral production by farming and herding households in almost every region and state. Sorghum and wheat are some of the most common crops in Northern state (FAO 21/03/2022; Tufts 11/07/2012; Elhaj et al. 03/10/2019). Cattle are also raised. The livestock population in Northern state in 2014 was estimated to be around 256,600, which has likely decreased given the effects of drought and desertification on the state (Elhaj et al. 03/10/2019).

Colonies have exploited Northern state for centuries, and foreign companies see the conditions of the terrain as an opportunity for agriculture and mining, particularly gold. As at

2018, there were more than 40,000 gold-mining sites in Sudan (Mining Technology 03/04/2023; EJ Atlas accessed 13/08/2023). A Russian–RSF joint venture headquartered in northeastern Sudan largely owns the gold-mining industry. Revenues have not benefited the Sudanese people and instead created a dispute over territory and resources. There are some domestic owners, but the military dominates the sector, with stakes owned by both the RSF and SAF, as well as security-related companies driven by gold as a source of hard currency (The Nation 02/08/2023; RVI 10/2019).

Despite gold mining being a common activity in Northern state, it is not always executed with adequate security measures. In April 2023, a gold mine in al Jabal al Ahmar collapsed, killing 14 miners and injuring more than 20. In 2021, another accident in the mines of east Semna, 60km south of Wadi Halfa, killed 12 men and injured an additional seven (AllAfrica 28/08/2021). There have been a lot of protests against the indiscriminate exploitation of gold in the region, but the local government has violently opposed these protests. The mining areas in Northern state are likely to be disputed between the RSF and SAF, which are guarding their vested interests, putting communities in these areas at risk of violence (RVI 10/2019).

Infrastructure/access to services

Northern state is mostly rural, with few urban areas. It experiences electricity shortages despite having Merowe Dam, which was built on the Nile between 2003–2009. The dam created a reservoir with a length of 174km and doubled Sudan's electricity generation, but it also displaced at least 50,000 people and still does not provide equal access to electricity in Northern state. There have been several protests between 2021–2022 against the increasing price of electricity (Dabanga 14/01/2022; International Rivers accessed 31/07/2023). The dam has also severely affected the soil, which is no longer suitable for many crops and is less fertile than in other parts of the country. This has led many people to move towards other states (Bloomberg 02/04/2019).

PRE-CRISIS LIVING CONDITIONS

Poverty

In 2022, 8% of the population in Northern state faced multidimensional poverty, 2% were in severe poverty, and 20% were vulnerable to poverty (OPHI 09/12/2022). In 2015, Northern state had the lowest poverty incidence in Sudan, with less than 20% of the population below the global poverty line (AfDB 06/2018). Some countrywide causes of poverty have been and still are the presence of conflict, a weak economy, low employment opportunities, and climate change affecting agriculture and livelihoods (The Borgen Project 03/06/2015).

Education

The adult female literacy rate in Sudan is 56%, while the male literacy rate is 65%. In 2020, the school closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic affected over 8.1 million students across Sudan. Historically, girls drop out of school more than boys, mostly because of economic reasons but also from pregnancy, early marriage, and female genital mutilation (WB accessed 04/08/2023; UNICEF 07/2020). Information on education in Northern state is limited.

Livelihoods

Many of the people of Northern state are dedicated to agriculture and cattle. There are two agricultural seasons: juruf farming, which is winter cropping after flood season usually from November–March, and the second season from April–August, mainly known for the production of watermelon and vegetables. The harvesting and marketing of second-season watermelon crops take place in August. Trade in foodstuffs tends to be the greatest during the peak marketing and lean seasons between February–August. The main markets for all goods in the state are in Ed Damer and Atbara, followed by Dongola and Merowe markets (FEWS NET 29/01/2015).

WASH/health

WASH access is limited in Sudan, including in Northern state. In 2021, the multisector needs analysis revealed that 46% of the households in Northern state had problems related to access to or quality of water. Access to water in Northern state is limited and likely to worsen with climate change. Northern state has the lowest annual precipitation in Sudan and has been experiencing desertification. It was one of the most drought-affected states of 2015 (WB accessed 15/08/2023; The Borgen Project 24/03/2020). Waterborne diseases are also common along the River Nile. Diarrhoea causes around 12% of child deaths, and the rainy season can increase risks of vector-borne disease outbreaks, such as cholera, dengue fever, rift valley fever, and chikungunya (OCHA 17/08/2023).

Mining processes using mercury and cyanide have also polluted the Nile and other water courses in Northern state, putting people's lives at risk, particularly for miners (RVI 10/2019).

Table 1. WASH in Northern state, 2014

INDICATORS	NATIONAL	NORTHERN STATE
Use of improved drinking water	68%	94%
Water treatment	4%	8%
Use of improved sanitation	33%	79%
Place for handwashing	26%	33%
Availability of soap or other cleansing agents	55%	76%

Source: UNICEF et al. (2014)

Humanitarian response

As at December 2022, the only organisation providing humanitarian aid in Northern state was the SRCS (OCHA accessed 09/08/2023). In 2022, the localities prioritised were Ad Dabbah, Al Burgaig, and Dongola (OCHA 14/12/2022).

PRE-CRISIS HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

Food security and malnutrition

Around 80% of Sudan's rural population relies on subsistence agriculture, but this is more challenging in Northern state because a large part of it is desert, with rocks at or near the surface covered by thin soils of low fertility (The Borgen Project 22/07/2020; FEWS NET 29/01/2015). There are few commodities, with sorghum, millet, and wheat being the most important foods in northern Sudan, including Northern state. Wheat is most often used as a substitute across northern Sudan, but it is a staple food for all northern states (FEWS NET 01/03/2023; FAO 22/12/1995). According to IPC predictions from June 2022, an estimated 153,000 people were predicted to experience Crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above) between October 2022 to February 2023; and over 423,000 people were experiencing Stress (IPC phase 2). These people are likely to be experiencing phase 3 or above because of the humanitarian needs exacerbated by conflict and the conditions are likely to be worst than projected. The increase in temperatures has also affected essential crops (IPC 21/06/2022).

Climate conditions and environmental hazards

Northern state experiences extreme climate, meaning either poor rainfall because of its desert conditions or heavy rainfall. From June–September, Northern state has its hot season, when it can experience several sandstorms, and temperatures can range from 20° C at night to over 40° C during the day. In recent decades, droughts have increased, affecting the livelihoods of its people. Since the 1970s, droughts have led the people, mostly Beja communities, to shift their livelihoods from camel-rearing to breeding smaller animals and working in Port Sudan as dockers and other labourers (Minority Rights accessed 28/07/2023; Climate Centre 2021). Agriculture in Northern state is highly dependent on the Nile River, but increasing droughts and a possible decline of the river are likely to affect the state and the country in the future (Climate Centre 2021).