

Sub-region profile of South Kordofan, West Kordofan and Blue Nile

CRISIS OVERVIEW

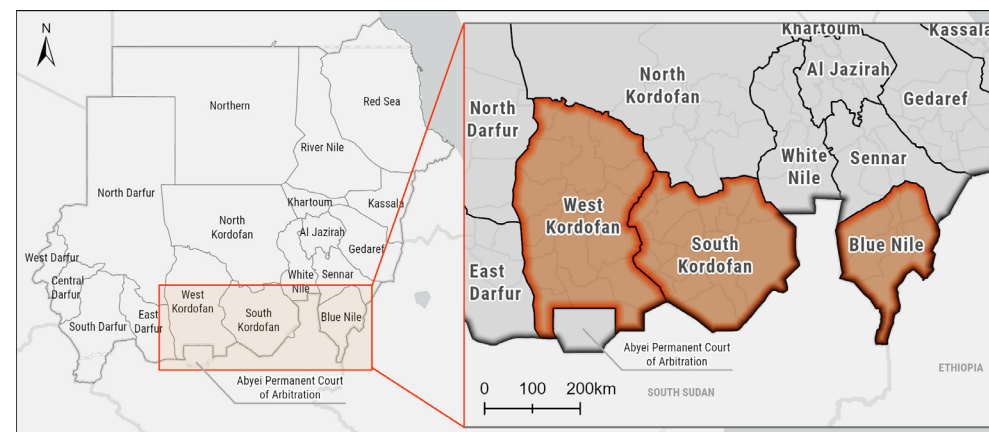
The conflict in Sudan between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on one side and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and supporting militia groups on the other has significantly destabilised the Kordofan regions, particularly South and West Kordofan states, which are experiencing escalating violence, ethnic tensions, and a worsening humanitarian crisis (UNITAMS 20/08/2023; ACLED 11/08/2023 and 12/07/2024).

- **South Kordofan** state, particularly the Nuba Mountains, faces dire humanitarian challenges, including acute food insecurity and malnutrition, compounded by displacement and access restrictions (OCHA 01/11/2024 and 30/10/2024; IPC 22/07/2024).
- In **West Kordofan** state, recurring conflict, tribal divisions, and RSF dominance have put critical oilfields and communities at risk, further straining economic stability (Radio Dabanga 20/03/2024; Sudan War Monitor 13/01/2024).
- **Blue Nile** state has suffered disruptions to aid delivery, road access, and essential services, leading to humanitarian crises, primarily owing to RSF incursions and logistical challenges associated with the rainy season (Radio Dabanga 14/07/2024; ACLED 18/11/2024).

These regions are particularly vulnerable to the cascading effects of climate change, including food insecurity, displacement, and intensified resource conflicts (IPC 22/07/2024). The destruction of critical infrastructure and disruptions to agricultural production have left millions without access to necessities, worsening the humanitarian crisis (KII 22/10/2024; FSMU 08/2024).

Civilians, especially women and children, face heightened risks from targeted violence, gender-based violence (GBV), and displacement. The protection needs of these populations remain unmet, with critical gaps in addressing issues such as unaccompanied minors, child labour, and exploitation in displacement settings (REACH 29/04/2024; SIHA 22/03/2024). In South Kordofan state, hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals have sought refuge in isolated areas with limited access to services (IOM (26/11/2024)). Similarly, in West Kordofan state, tribal violence and conflict have driven significant displacement. In Blue Nile state, transit migration into neighbouring Ethiopia and South Sudan further exposes displaced populations to heightened risks of exploitation and abuse (IOM 15/10/2024; KII 22/10/2024).

Map 1. Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and West Kordofan states



Source: ACAPS with data from OCHA (27/04/2023)

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim of the report

This report aims to provide an overview of the current situation in the three states, focusing on the key factors driving conflict and instability. The report analyses the humanitarian impacts and compounding factors within these regions.

Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of about 50 publicly accessible sources, including documents from international organisations, UN agencies, research institutions, and Sudanese and international media outlets. Interviews with two humanitarian experts complement the secondary data review.

Limitations

- This report does not provide an exhaustive list of all the drivers of conflict in the three states. The analysis does not delve deeply into specific intertribal histories or localised grievances, nor does it examine cross-border influences from neighbouring countries, including South Sudan and Ethiopia, which shape displacement and conflict dynamics. It also does not examine the absence of long-term climate adaptation strategies and the role of informal economies, such as gold mining and smuggling, in aggravating instability.
- The scarcity of information limits the depth of analysis.

Information gaps

- Reporting does not widely cover West Kordofan and Blue Nile states.
- Humanitarian information and contextual analysis of the Nuba Mountains are sparse because of geographic isolation, conflict, and security concerns.
- Granular assessment of the humanitarian impact in the three states is lacking.

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CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Pre-April 2023

The conflict in Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and West Kordofan states has deep roots in historical, ethnic, and political tensions. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the Second Sudanese Civil War, left unresolved issues, particularly regarding governance, resource sharing, the political status of the three states (i.e. in terms of autonomy), and self-determination for regions. The latter included demands for greater regional authority independent of the Central Government, equitable resource sharing, and the Nuba people's aspirations for self-governance under a secular framework (Gramizzi and Tubiana 03/2013). This led to increased hostilities between the Sudanese Government and various Sudanese armed groups, primarily the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). By July 2023, the Abdelaziz Adam Al Hilu faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N/Al Hilu) had escalated its assaults on the SAF in South Kordofan state (ACLED 11/08/2023). This faction has maintained its autonomy from SAF and RSF and has distinct goals, which include a secular state and self-determination for regions such as South Kordofan and Blue Nile (Small Arms Survey 28/03/2024).

South Kordofan

South Kordofan state, particularly the Nuba Mountains, has a long history of marginalisation and conflict (Gramizzi and Tubiana 03/2013). The Nuba Mountains, a geographically isolated region in south-central Sudan, feature rugged terrain, fertile valleys, and cultural diversity. This area is home to about 100 African tribes collectively known as the Nuba. The population is evenly split between Christianity and Islam, with some following Indigenous beliefs. The Nuba Mountains are historically a refuge for African tribes fleeing Arab slave raiders, and the region's isolation has preserved its unique identity despite sustained efforts by the various Sudanese Central Government to impose Arabic and Islamic beliefs and traditions. The region's fertile farmlands have often been a source of conflict for the Nuba population, with oppressive land policies and disputes with neighbouring Arab tribes aggravating issues (OBS 20/11/2023; Pantuliano 22/04/2008).

Omar Al Bashir's rise to power in 1989 ushered in years of violent oppression against the Nuba people, with Arab Islamist paramilitaries, such as the Popular Defence Forces, spearheading what some describe as genocidal campaigns by attrition in the 1990s. The paramilitary groups executed this strategy by cutting off the population from humanitarian aid, bombing civilian areas, enforcing blockades, and creating conditions of extreme deprivation, effectively eroding the community's ability to survive and thrive over time (OBS 20/11/2023; AR

07/07/97). The Nuba people faced mass killing, displacement into mountain caves, starvation, and cultural destruction (The Conversation 17/07/2017; OBS 20/11/2023). From 2016–2023, South Kordofan state experienced relative calm as successive ceasefires held. That said, sporadic attacks continued, and the region remained tense after the October 2021 military coup, with Nuba leaders preparing for renewed conflict as Sudan's political and economic conditions deteriorated. Rising tensions between the RSF and SAF, along with the failure to secure a lasting peace, showed that the region's fragile stability was breaking down. This forced the Nuba people to prepare for renewed conflict (OBS 20/11/2023).

West Kordofan

Before April 2023, West Kordofan state grappled with intercommunal conflicts, economic challenges, and the lingering impact of decades of marginalisation and violence (Radio Dabanga 19/10/2022). The state, historically aligned with the Al Bashir regime, saw some Misseriya tribes (nomadic Arab groups in the north) join pro-government militias to gain Khartoum's backing in disputes over areas such as Abyei. The disputes centred on territorial claims and competing interests between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka, a primarily pastoralist group in the south of Sudan. The conflict arose over Abyei's strategic importance as a fertile, resource-rich area, crucial for grazing and farming, and its location near oil reserves. After Al Bashir's fall, some of the fighters joined groups such as the RSF or SPLM-N factions, while others turned to criminal activity (UNGA accessed 23/11/2024; SCCU 22/11/2023).

The region also faced frequent tribal clashes, including major conflicts over longstanding resource disputes in 2022 between the Misseriya and Hamar tribes, which displaced over 20,000 people (OCHA 29/03/2023). Unresolved issues led to persistent tensions, including disputes in the Abyei area and the limitations of the Juba Peace Agreement, which aimed to address Sudan's violent conflicts and integrate opposition groups into the transitional government after Al Bashir's ousting. Signed between Sudan's civilian-military transitional Government and opposition groups from the Sudanese Revolutionary Front, the agreement faced significant challenges, as key factions such as SPLM-N/Al Hilu and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Abdul Wahid Al Nur (SLM/AW) refused to participate. It failed to fully resolve grievances, including distrust among parties, the marginalisation of groups outside the 'riverine' elite, and suspicions of narrow self-interest by armed factions (OCHA 29/03/2023; SCCU 22/11/2023; RVI 14/09/2024).

Blue Nile

Blue Nile state is a region with a long history of conflict, displacement, and intertribal tensions (AJ 19/07/2022). Since 2011, clashes between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM-N have intensified, resulting in significant humanitarian crises, including widespread displacement and infrastructure damage (Gramizzi 12/2013). The 2020 Juba Peace Agreement, with the

SPLM-N/Malik Agar faction as a signatory, granted Blue Nile state autonomous status. It aimed to address longstanding grievances and marginalisation by allowing regions such as Blue Nile more authority to manage their affairs (OCHA 13/04/2022). Tribal violence, including the 2022 clashes between the Berta and Hausa tribes over land and political representation, has worsened the situation, leading to hundreds of casualties and the displacement of tens of thousands of people (IOM 28/10/2022 ; Insecurity Insight 31/07/2023).

Since April 2023

South Kordofan

The outbreak of war between the SAF and RSF in April 2023 reignited conflict in South Kordofan state. While the region did not record significant clashes at the beginning of the conflict, unlike Khartoum and other epicentres of violence, escalating tensions between rival armed groups had triggered renewed fighting in the Nuba Mountains by June 2023 (OBS 20/11/2023; RI 22/08/2024). Skirmishes around Kadugli the state capital escalated into full-scale battles involving the SAF, RSF, and SPLM-N/AI Hilu (OCHA 22/08/2024). These conflict events are closely linked through the RSF's exploitation of Arab identity politics, using community grievances to recruit Arab youth and fuelling both broader military confrontations and localised ethnic strife (OCHA 22/08/2023; Small Arms Survey 28/03/2024).

SPLM-N/AI Hilu has attempted to capitalise on the SAF's preoccupation with the RSF by capturing several SAF positions in the state (Kurtz 05/2024). That said, they have been unable to seize control of major towns such as Dilling and Kadugli, with heavy casualties and logistical challenges threatening their ability to maintain control over newly gained territory (Small Arms Survey 28/03/2024; KII 22/10/2024).

West Kordofan

West Kordofan, a state whose primary inhabitants are Misseriya Arab tribe members, has escaped the intense conflict afflicting other parts of Sudan since the outbreak of the SAF-RSF war in April 2023 (Sudan War Monitor 13/01/2024). The RSF have secured significant victories, however, by capturing West Kordofan's capital, Al Fula, and the strategic town of Al Meiram near the South Sudan border. Despite mediation attempts by the Misseriya – who are also prominent in the region – to prevent clashes, brief but intense fighting has led to SAF withdrawal from these cities. These captures have granted the RSF control over key routes to South Sudan, highlighting their growing influence in West Kordofan state (ACLEDD 12/07/2024).

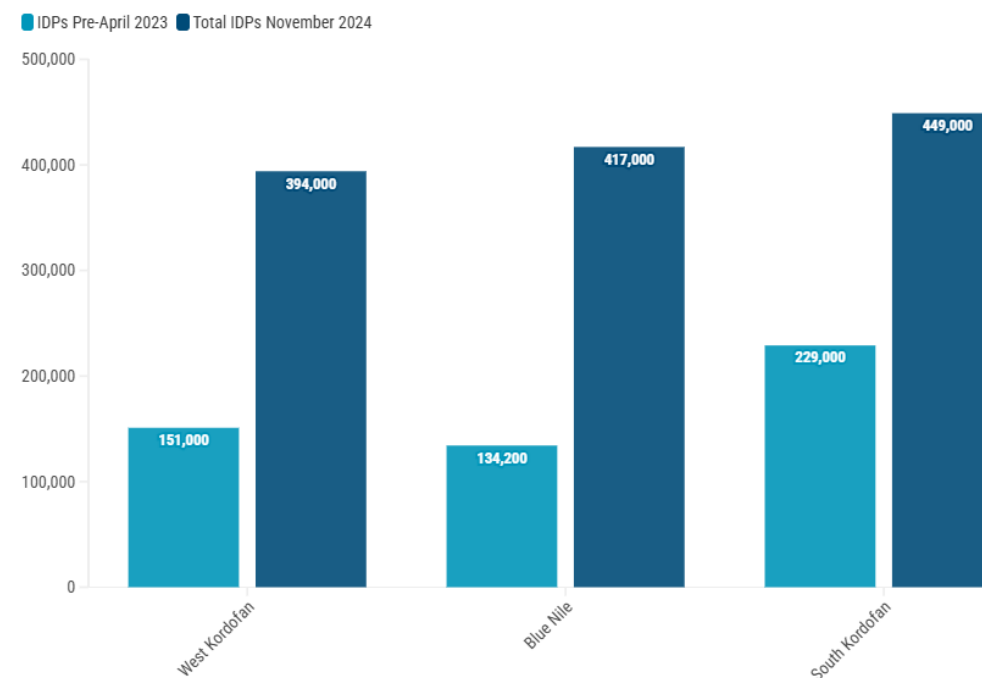
Blue Nile

The outbreak of the SAF-RSF war in April 2023 has aggravated pre-existing humanitarian needs in Blue Nile state. Militarily, Blue Nile has become a contested region, with SAF deployments aiming to defend key areas such as Al Damazine. On the other hand, the RSF are advancing into villages (ACLEDD 16/09/2024). Clashes between the SAF and RSF, compounded by the presence of SPLM-N/AI Hilu in southern Blue Nile state, have created a complex three-way conflict (Sudan Tribune 13/08/2024; ACLEDD 16/09/2024).

CRISIS IMPACT

Displacement

Figure 1. Displacement numbers in the three states



Source: ACAPS using data from IOM (26/11/2024)

In **South Kordofan** state, the conflict has displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, particularly in areas such as Kadugli and Dilling (OCHA 01/11/2024; FEWS NET 05/09/2024; IOM 26/11/2024). Many have sought refuge in mountain caves or areas under SPLM-N/Al Hilu control, where road blockages restrict their movement. These blockages, often created by warring factions or natural barriers such as terrain worsened by the conflict, severely limit access to essential resources and humanitarian aid. IDPs in these areas face heightened vulnerability to critical risks, including food insecurity, health issues, violence, exploitation, inadequate shelter, and mental distress. The barriers not only prevent them from accessing safer regions but also confine them to locations where assistance is scarce (KII 22/10/2024).

In **West Kordofan** state, internal displacement particularly since June 2024 continues to rise, with tens of thousands fleeing intercommunal violence and RSF-SAF clashes, such as in Al Fula in June 2024 (ACLED 12/07/2024; IOM 15/10/2024).

From August–September 2024, heavy rains and subsequent floods in the state led to displacement. Specifically, the impact displaced 120 households from Al Menidra village in August and approximately 30 individuals from six households in Keilak town in September (IOM 22/09/2024 and 14/08/2024).

The RSF capture of Al Meiram in July 2024, besides gaining control of other previously SAF-controlled areas in West Kordofan, has driven both civilian refugees and fleeing Sudanese soldiers into South Sudan. Some SAF troops, such as units including the 92nd Infantry Brigade, crossed into Northern Bahr Al Ghazal, South Sudan, after their defeat, illustrating the conflict's regional spread (Sudan War Monitor 23/07/2024).

In **Blue Nile** state, transit migration is prominent, as the state serves as a passageway for many people fleeing to Ethiopia and South Sudan. Perceived security and access to aid influence people's decisions about where to move. Ethiopia has become a key destination because of its cultural and linguistic ties, such as the presence of Berta peoples, and better market conditions (KII 22/10/2024). The state has also experienced an influx of IDPs from Sennar state, spurred by the RSF advancement in the east since July 2024 (Radio Dabanga 14/07/2024).

Food insecurity

Food insecurity in Sudan

State	Period	Total Population Analysed	Phase 1 (number of people, percentage)	Phase 2 (number of people, percentage)	Phase 3 (number of people, percentage)	Phase 4 (number of people, percentage)	Phase 5 (number of people, percentage)	Phase 3+ (number of people, percentage)
Blue Nile	April–May 2024	1,470,448	270,781 (18%)	464,884 (32%)	558,449 (38%)	176,335 (12%)	0 (0%)	734,784 (50%)
	June–September 2024	1,470,448	184,661 (13%)	403,959 (27%)	624,761 (42%)	248,099 (17%)	8,969 (0%)	881,829 (60%)
	October 2024–February 2025	1,470,448	276,288 (19%)	523,930 (36%)	508,235 (35%)	161,995 (11%)	0 (0%)	670,230 (46%)
South Kordofan	April–May 2024	2,098,395	349,328 (17%)	730,795 (35%)	699,840 (33%)	301,927 (14%)	16,505 (1%)	1,018,272 (48%)
	June–September 2024	2,098,395	255,075 (12%)	624,998 (30%)	791,722 (38%)	403,641 (19%)	22,959 (0%)	1,218,322 (58%)
	October 2024–February 2025	2,098,395	367,400 (18%)	850,029 (41%)	619,761 (30%)	261,206 (12%)	0 (0%)	880,967 (42%)
West Kordofan	April–May 2024	1,823,319	309,295 (17%)	687,115 (38%)	534,412 (29%)	292,497 (16%)	0 (0%)	826,909 (45%)
	June–September 2024	1,823,319	211,500 (12%)	602,578 (33%)	625,578 (34%)	383,663 (21%)	0 (0%)	1,009,241 (55%)
	October 2024–February 2025	1,823,319	316,156 (17%)	730,885 (40%)	498,456 (27%)	277,823 (15%)	0 (0%)	776,279 (43%)

Created with Datarwrapper

Source: ACAPS using data from (IPC 22/07/2024)

In **South Kordofan** state, the food availability crisis has reached alarming levels, with populations such as IDPs in Dilling and Kadugli facing a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) conditions between June 2024 and February 2025. Conflict, sieges by the RSF and SPLM-N/Al Hilu, and heavy rains have severely disrupted food supply routes from South Sudan, a key source of food in the state, leaving markets with minimal supplies. Food prices in Kadugli are among the highest in Sudan, further worsening household food consumption gaps (FEWSNET 05/09/2024 ;IPC 22/07/2024). By June 2024, sorghum prices had more than doubled compared to the same period in the previous year, reflecting heightened food insecurity and market instability. The price of wheat grain in Kadugli in 2023–2024 also showed a marked increase, surpassing the five-year average and prior-year figures (FEWS NET 01/07/2024). This could be attributed to disrupted trade routes, limited food supply from South Sudan, and inflationary pressures driven by conflict and insecurity. Limited food access and availability means that Kadugli refugees and IDPs are experiencing critical levels of food insecurity.

Data shows that 55% of the population is in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or above. 36% is in Crisis (Phase 3), 16% in Emergency (Phase 4) and 3% in Catastrophe (Phase 5). 25% of households are reducing food intake, and the Household Hunger Score indicates that 3% of IDPs are using hunger-based strategies, such as skipping meals or eating very little, which are catastrophic for such a group (IPC 22/07/2024 and 24/12/2024)

Many families are unable to access food because of displacement, restricted mobility, and economic challenges. Acute malnutrition, especially among children, is a growing concern. By August 2024, the collapse of the food supply system had caused child mortality rates in Dilling to surge to two deaths per day, with over 60 severe malnutrition cases reported (Radio Tamazuj 27/08/2024). Conflict and insecurity have also significantly hindered agricultural activities, leading to reduced cultivation and worsening the region's food insecurity (FEWS NET 05/09/2024; Samaritan's Purse 15/04/2024; KII 22/10/2024).

In **West Kordofan** state, severe food insecurity persists. Approximately 52% of the population (over 700,00) is expected to face IPC 3 or worse conditions throughout the projection period (October 2024 to May 2025). The primary drivers include reduced agricultural production, livestock losses, and skyrocketing food prices caused by conflict and climate challenges, compounded by a decrease in purchasing power and restricted cash access because of disrupted telecommunications. These challenges are worse for IDPs and host communities (IPC 22/07/2024 and 24/12/2024)

Blue Nile state has 46% of the population in IPC Phase 3 or above, specifically 35% in Crisis (Phase 3) and 11% in Emergency (Phase 4) (IPC 24/12/2024). The SPLM-N/AI Hilu has declared famine in areas under its control (Radio Dabanga 03/09/2024). In New Funj area of Blue Nile state and the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan state, approximately 20% of households face food shortages, and 30% of children suffer from malnutrition (Radio Dabanga 03/09/2024). Several nutrition and mortality surveys conducted between December 2023 and February 2024 across seven localities, including Blue Nile, reveal a deteriorating nutrition situation among children ages 6–59 months compared to previous assessments (Nutrition Cluster 05/2024). Conflict and insecurity have significantly disrupted agricultural cultivation, particularly near Sennar state. While calmer parts of Blue Nile are experiencing better farming conditions compared to other regions, the overall area cultivated is expected to be below average. This decline contributes to the broader national food security crisis, as Blue Nile is part of Sudan's agricultural breadbasket (FEWS NET 05/09/2024).

Malnutrition and infant feeding practices are key concerns in areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile states under SPLM-N/AI Hilu control. As access challenges limit the use of other nutritional treatments, particularly in regions such as Lagawa, many children are treated for severe acute malnutrition with native supplements such as dakwa, a traditional Sudanese food made from ground peanuts used as a protein-rich supplement in diets. Internally

displaced children have shown worsening malnutrition rates compared to host communities, with breastfeeding durations shortening as many mothers stop nursing because of repeated pregnancy or insufficient milk supply. Feeding practices further compound health risks, as many infants under six months receive water, porridge, or cow's milk instead of exclusive breastfeeding, particularly in western Jebel region and isolated Blue Nile areas (FSMU 08/2024).

The humanitarian crisis in Al Hilou camp in the Nuba mountains is dire, with people surviving on minimal sustenance, such as sorghum husks and cucumbers, leading to severe malnutrition and deaths. Since March 2024, at least nine children and 13 older people have died of starvation in camps. Medical facilities in the region report alarming increases in malnutrition cases, with Mother of Mercy Hospital noting a 130% rise from the previous year (HRW 27/11/2024).

Protection

The protection situation in **South Kordofan** state remains dire, with widespread violence, displacement, and human rights abuses. From 9–12 February 2024, the RSF and allied militias perpetrated massacres in Habila and surrounding areas. The attacks resulted in the death of over 76 civilians, the abduction of 16 women and girls – many of whom reported sexual violence – and the forced displacement of 40,000 residents (ISHR 01/03/2024). Within the same month, SPLM-N/AI Hilu took control of Habila, triggering violent reprisals by the RSF targeting the ethnic Nuba communities in nearby villages (ACLEL 15/03/2024). In April, armed men allied with the RSF carried out brutal attacks on villages in Al Abbasiya, South Kordofan, leaving over 100 dead – including children – and displacing countless others. The violence, targeting areas under SPLM-N/AI Hilu control, saw homes burnt, widespread looting, and fierce clashes as residents attempted to defend themselves. The incident resulted in injuries that overwhelmed already limited medical facilities (Radio Dabanga 08/04/2024).

West Kordofan state has experienced escalating violence, displacement, and alleged violations of international humanitarian law. The conflict has sharply increased civilian casualties, with many women and children killed in their homes or public spaces, highlighting the danger for noncombatants. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers in many states, including West Kordofan, have further aggravated the insecurity, violating workers' protections under international law. This pervasive violence underscores the urgent need for measures to safeguard both civilians and aid workers in the region (Protection Cluster 15/07/2024). Fighting in Al Fula city on 20 June 2024 caused significant civilian casualties, displacement, and disruption, with communication networks ceasing operations shortly after the conflict began (ACLEL 12/07/2024; Protection Cluster 30/06/2024).

Conflict and worsening humanitarian conditions have caused protection concerns in **Blue Nile** state to escalate sharply. For example, in August 2024, nearly 500 unaccompanied and separated children arrived in the region over six weeks. This displacement was a result of escalating violence in Sennar state, emphasising the vulnerability of displaced populations, particularly children at risk of exploitation, trafficking, and violence (STC 22/08/2024).

For all three states, there is limited data available on GBV, unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war, and child labour, highlighting significant information gaps on these critical issues. There is little to no comprehensive information regarding older people and people with disabilities, further emphasising the need for targeted assessments of these demographics.

Economic collapse and market disruptions

South Kordofan state's agrarian economy has been in decline, with the outbreak of conflict further devastating both government- and SPLM-N/ai Hilu-controlled areas, affecting the production and transport of goods, increasing food scarcity, and leading to skyrocketing prices (KII 22/10/2024; FEWS NET 09/10/2024). The conflict has necessitated the creation of new routes for transporting goods in South and West Kordofan states, but they are often dangerous and unreliable. Goods are smuggled into both government and SPLM-N areas, but these alternate routes cannot fully sustain the economy (KII 22/10/2024; FEWS NET 09/10/2024).

The conflict has severely affected South Kordofan's markets, which significantly depend on government salaries as a key source of household income. With many government employees, including police and soldiers, no longer receiving salaries, household purchasing power has plummeted. This, coupled with the conflict's disruption of supply chains and the availability of goods, has contributed to the collapse of local economies. The conflict has also disrupted peace markets – essential trading hubs established to facilitate neutral and safe exchanges between communities – and critical crossline trade between government- and SPLM-N-held areas (Small Arms Survey 28/03/2024; Reuters 15/04/2024; Radio Dabanga 22/09/2023). The control of gold mines, a significant source of revenue, is contested among the SAF, RSF, and SPLM-N/AI Hilu. Despite the conflict, many small-scale miners have continued their operations, as these activities remain a critical source of livelihood for communities (Small Arms Survey 28/03/2024).

West Kordofan state is a critical oil-producing region, and conflict poses significant risks to the oil infrastructure, which is vital to Sudan's economy (Radio Dabanga 20/03/2024). The disruption of trade routes and the IDPs fleeing violence in other parts of Sudan have strained resources, contributing to heightened tensions within communities. RSF's control of Al Meiram has allowed them to secure a critical supply route with South Sudan, further strengthening their position (YDS 23/08/2024). This may have restricted trade and resources

for civilians in the region, potentially leading to shortages in food, fuel, and other essential goods. Clashes in Babanusa and other cities have led to the destruction of neighbourhoods and markets, disrupting local economies and livelihoods (ACLED 12/07/2024).

The war has severely affected **Blue Nile** state's economy, with displacement and conflict-driven destruction disrupting agricultural activities, causing the loss of trade routes, and straining resources (KII 22/10/2024). Despite being rich in natural resources, such as agricultural produce and gold, Blue Nile lacks the necessary infrastructure, services, and economic mechanisms to effectively use these resources for widespread growth and development (UNICEF accessed 12/11/2024). The state, considered Sudan's breadbasket, is a fertile region that contributes significantly to agriculture. Food production remains crucial to the region's economic health. Before the war broke out, governance structures were already weak, and basic infrastructure, including schools, roads, and health services, was either underfunded or non-existent in many parts (KII 22/10/2024). Communication services are also limited, with Starlink, which many cannot afford, being the only available service in the state (Radio Dabanga 14/07/2024).

Limited humanitarian access

Conflict and restricted humanitarian aid access have intensified humanitarian needs in **South Kordofan** state, with food and health identified as critical priorities (REACH 29/04/2024). Between May–September 2024, humanitarian access faced persistent challenges resulting from active hostilities, violence against humanitarian personnel, and the rainy season worsening physical constraints. Road blockages, insecurity, and crossline movement restrictions severely hindered aid delivery, with incidents of staff detention and attacks further complicating operations. Bureaucratic hurdles and the need for coordination with conflicting parties also disrupted humanitarian aid routes, causing delays, operational complications, and resource diversions, as conflicting interests, lengthy approval processes, and unstable systems hindered timely humanitarian delivery (OCHA 05/06/2024 and 30/10/2024).

Diminishing resources, including food and medical supplies, coupled with communication blackouts and the collapse of Sudan's health sector, particularly affect people with increased health needs, such as women and girls who require reproductive healthcare (REACH 29/04/2024; SIHA 22/03/2024). Armed groups in the region further complicate access by imposing blockades and checkpoints (ACLED 15/03/2024; REACH 29/04/2024). Efforts to facilitate aid to areas under SPLM-N/AI Hilu control in South Kordofan, such as the Nuba Mountains, have been short-lived, with negotiations breaking down in May 2024 (Sudan War Monitor 23/05/2024). Humanitarian operations have faced constraints, with incidents – such as stray bullets hitting compounds in Kadugli – leading to reduced aid activities (OCHA

22/08/2023; STC 01/09/2023). Nevertheless, in November 2024, an airlift of thousands of tonnes of food items and medicines to both SAF and SPLM-N/AI Hilu-held areas in South Kordofan through the Juba International Airport began (Sudan Tribune 03/11/2024)

In **West Kordofan** state, after capturing Al Fula and Al Meiram in July 2024, the RSF instituted civil administrations to address the collapse of governance and services in the region following prolonged conflict. The RSF promised to focus on justice, governance, and service delivery, including addressing shortages in food, healthcare, and shelter for displaced families (Sudan War Monitor 18/09/2024). Their efforts to assert authority reflect an attempt to stabilise control in the region, but the situation remains marked by power struggles and lawlessness, with underlying instability still unaddressed. Without improved security and coordination of service delivery, access to essential services and humanitarian assistance for specific population groups, including displaced families, remains severely limited (ACLED 12/07/2024; Sudan War Monitor 18/09/2024). The situation in Babanusa, West Kordofan, has been marked by intense SAF aerial bombardments and retaliatory shelling, further aggravating insecurity (Sudan War Monitor 06/05/2024).

Clashes between the RSF and the SAF, particularly around Al Fula, have resulted in the widespread looting of aid, homes, shops, and markets, severely restricting residents' access to essential resources such as food, shelter, and medicine. The targeting of humanitarian workers has also disrupted the delivery of life-saving assistance, leaving many in urgent need of aid that cannot reliably reach them (Protection Cluster 15/07/2024). Accessibility to West Kordofan state also remains limited, impeding the delivery of essential supplies, including cholera kits – needed for response to an outbreak – and emergency health provisions (WHO 31/10/2024). Between May–September 2024, services in some areas remained critically limited, with many people lacking access to humanitarian assistance because of road damage and blockades, security risks, and operational interference, including attacks on humanitarian personnel. The rainy season further worsened physical access constraints, rendering many routes partially or completely inaccessible, while bureaucratic delays in travel permit approvals for humanitarian staff compounded challenges for aid delivery operations (OCHA 05/06/2024 and 30/10/2024).

Security concerns and limited access constrain humanitarian operations in **Blue Nile** state. Only a few NGOs are operating in the region, and those that remain face severe restrictions. Reports of looted aid convoys and the reliance on expensive satellite communications further limit relief efforts (KII 22/10/2024). RSF incursions into northern parts of the state, combined with the rainy season's disruption of roads, have isolated towns such as Al Damazine and Al Roseires, creating shortages of essential goods, fuel, and aid (Radio Dabanga 14/07/2024; ACLED 18/11/2024). Between May–September 2024, insecurity and poor road conditions left many areas inaccessible, with delays in obtaining permits and limited crossline access hindering relief operations (OCHA 05/06/2024 and 30/10/2024).

Breakdown of essential services

Healthcare

Healthcare infrastructure in **South Kordofan** state has suffered significantly from the conflict, which has disrupted healthcare delivery; less than 30% of health facilities are functional in areas experiencing active conflict. Insecurity restricts both patient and health worker access to facilities (WHO 31/10/2024). Over 100 attacks on health facilities have been verified nationwide, with South Kordofan being one of the hardest-hit states (WHO 24/09/2024). Kadugli is among the few areas where healthcare services are functioning (UNICEF 10/10/2024; Radio Dabanga 20/02/2024). The broader region, however, faces a lack of medical supplies, inadequate access to treatment for critical conditions, and disruptions caused by attacks on healthcare workers and facilities (WHO 24/09/2024). Disruptions to vaccine supply routes and a fragile health system have left children vulnerable to preventable diseases, such as measles, rubella, and polio. In March 2024, at least 27 children were found infected with measles among the displaced communities in Dilling (Radio Dabanga 19/03/2024). Despite the challenges, some organisations have successfully delivered vaccine supplies to the state and resumed vaccination services (GAVI 15/10/2024).

The humanitarian situation in **Blue Nile** state remains dire amid the conflict and displacement. The state has received displaced populations from neighbouring regions, placing additional strain on its already fragile healthcare infrastructure (WHO 31/10/2024). The region struggles with inadequate medical services, with patients forced to travel long distances by road through conflict zones, to such cities as Gedaref and Port Sudan, to seek treatment, (Radio Dabanga 08/02/2024). Limited accessibility also continues to hinder the timely delivery of essential healthcare services (WHO 31/10/2024).

The health situation in **South Kordofan** and **Blue Nile** states – particularly in areas under SPLM-N/AI Hilu control – is dire, with challenges in access, infrastructure, and resources. Chronic conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes, are underreported because of limited diagnostic facilities and low awareness, while unaffordability and unavailability hamper access to medication and regular checkups, especially in isolated areas such as southern Al Kurmuk. Long travel times to health facilities – many of which are nonfunctional or lack essential staff and medicine stocks – compound these issues, leaving specific population groups, including mothers and children, at heightened risk of untreated illnesses, complications during childbirth, and preventable deaths (FSMU 08/2024).

Maternal health outcomes in **South Kordofan** and **Blue Nile** states are poor, with high rates of home births, miscarriages, and stillbirths, and child immunisation rates – particularly against measles – remain alarmingly low. Preventative care for malaria and other diseases is inconsistent, with financial constraints and damaged mosquito nets limiting effective protection. The prevalence of childhood illnesses, such as fever and respiratory infections, underscores the urgent need for improved healthcare delivery (FSMU 08/2024).

Cholera outbreaks have affected **South Kordofan** state. In December 2023, there were 346 suspected cases and eight associated deaths in the state (OCHA 04/12/2023). In West Kordofan, no new cases of cholera have been reported since the beginning of the conflict (Health Cluster 01/09/2024). By 31 October 2024, multiple states in the country had experienced three or more outbreaks. For instance, South Kordofan had experienced outbreaks of malaria, dengue fever, and suspected measles, while West Kordofan and Blue Nile states have had malaria outbreaks (WHO 31/10/2024).

Education

In all three states, schools have been repurposed to house displaced populations, disrupting education for children. The conflict has further eroded access to education infrastructure. In May 2024, **West Kordofan** state announced the resumption of academic activities, but this was met with resistance from teachers owed unpaid salaries (Radio Tamazuj 21/05/2024). In Nuba mountains region of **South Kordofan** state, educational institutions face acute shortages of educational materials, with supplies expected to run out in February 2024 (Radio Dabanga 15/02/2024). **Blue Nile** state resumed schooling for the 2023–2024 academic year in May 2024 amid severe challenges stemming from the conflict. Schools are struggling with teaching material shortages, the repurposing of infrastructure to host displaced people, and the lack of payment for teachers. The influx of displaced students has further strained limited resources, with overcrowding and inadequate supplies being common issues (Radio Tamazuj 14/05/2024).

WASH

The conflict has affected access to clean water and sanitation across the country. Attacks on infrastructure, combined with displacement and rising humanitarian needs, have strained efforts to maintain hygiene, drinking water access, and disease outbreak prevention (OCHA 01/11/2024).

In areas of **South Kordofan** and **Blue Nile** states under SPLM-N/AI Hilu control, most households rely on hand pumps for water, though isolated areas such as Kau Nyaro and Zozak frequently use unfiltered surface water. Many water points are either broken or nonfunctional, significantly limiting access, especially in remote areas. Households spend hours collecting water daily, with travel times taking between 30 minutes to an hour per trip. Sanitation facilities are scarce, with 70% of assessed households resorting to open defecation and only a small fraction accessing basic pit latrines. Shared facilities are common, with overcrowding further diminishing sanitation standards. Soap availability is also low, limiting effective hygiene practices. These deficiencies are acute in IDP and isolated areas (FSMU 08/2024).

ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENTS UNTIL DECEMBER 2025

South Kordofan: escalating clashes between the SAF, RSF, and SPLM-N/AI Hilu are expected to intensify, particularly in areas such as Kadugli and Dilling (ACLED 15/03/2024). This will likely aggravate humanitarian needs, with limited aid access worsening food insecurity and displacement (REACH 29/04/2024).

West Kordofan: tensions between tribal groups and RSF-SAF clashes will likely persist, particularly in key areas, including Al Fula and Al Meiram, in a struggle for control (Protection Cluster 15/07/2024; Sudan War Monitor 18/09/2024; ACLED 12/07/2024). The RSF's expanded influence stands to deepen intercommunal violence, while restricted trade routes and food shortages will likely aggravate humanitarian needs (YDS 23/08/2024). Annual flooding and poor infrastructure could worsen displacement trends (IOM 22/09/2024 and 14/08/2024).

Blue Nile: the state will likely remain a hotspot for conflict as the SAF, RSF, and SPLM-N/AI Hilu factions vie for control (Sudan Tribune 13/08/2024; ACLED 16/09/2024). Displacement and transit migration routes into Ethiopia and South Sudan will likely increase (KII 22/10/2024).

Overall, the collapse of health infrastructure and limited access to essential medicine will leave specific population groups, especially women and children, at risk of preventable deaths and untreated illnesses (FSMU 08/2024). Civilians will likely face heightened risks of violence, including targeted attacks, looting, and GBV (ISHR 01/03/2024; Radio Dabanga 08/04/2024; STC 22/08/2024). Aid workers will also remain vulnerable to attacks, impeding humanitarian efforts (WHO 31/10/2024; Protection Cluster 15/07/2024).

COMPOUNDING FACTORS

Deep-rooted conflicts

These states have a history of conflict rooted in ethnic, political, and territorial disputes.

South Kordofan: the Nuba Mountains have been a flashpoint for decades, marked by possible genocidal campaigns against the Nuba people in the 1990s and renewed violence following the 2023 war (OBS 23/06/2023). SPLM-N/AI Hilu has consistently resisted central government control, with recent clashes between the SAF, RSF, and SPLM-N/AI Hilu escalating violence (Insecurity Insight 31/07/2023; Radio Dabanga 18/07/2023; Small Arms Survey 28/03/2024; Sudan War Monitor 23/05/2024).

West Kordofan: the Misseriya and Hamar tribal conflicts, coupled with disputes over oil-rich Abyei region, have led to violence in the state (Sudan War Monitor 12/11/2024; UN 07/05/2024; The Guardian 26/10/2023). The RSF's recent control over key cities, such as Al Fula and Al Meiram, has aggravated intercommunal violence and further destabilised the region (ACLED 12/07/2024; YDS 23/08/2024).

Blue Nile: since 2011, **Blue Nile state** has experienced conflicts between the SAF and SPLM-N/AI Hilu factions, compounded by intertribal violence, including the 2022 Berta-Hausa clashes (AJ 17/07/2022; Almak 24/03/2024). RSF advances into northern parts of Blue Nile state highlight its vulnerability to conflict, increasing the likelihood of clashes, violence, and unrest spilling over into areas that might otherwise have remained unaffected (ACLED 14/10/2024).

Unresolved issues from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement

The 2005 CPA failed to resolve key issues regarding governance, resource allocation, and regional autonomy, leaving a legacy of instability.

South Kordofan: the CPA was not able to clarify the status of South Kordofan state, particularly regarding the Nuba people's demand for self-determination (Gramizzi and Tubiana 03/2013). This ambiguity has fuelled continued resistance by SPLM-N/AI Hilu factions and their demands for secular governance.

West Kordofan: the CPA's failure to address disputes over oil-rich Abyei region has left the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities in contention, with tensions spilling into West Kordofan state. Marginalised communities have felt excluded from the peace process (CEIP 04/01/2011; Radio Tamazuj 01/12/2023).

Blue Nile: although the CPA allowed for regional consultations, it did not address Blue Nile state's demands for greater autonomy or infrastructure investment. The region's calls for the development of infrastructure – such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities – went unheeded in the CPA, perpetuating underdevelopment and economic neglect. This lack of attention to Blue Nile's specific challenges has kept the region economically disadvantaged and socially marginalised. These conditions have made it more prone to instability, as unresolved grievances, coupled with underdevelopment, create fertile ground for conflict and discontent among its population (BTI 19/03/2024; CEIP 02/10/2024).

Marginalisation and governance challenges

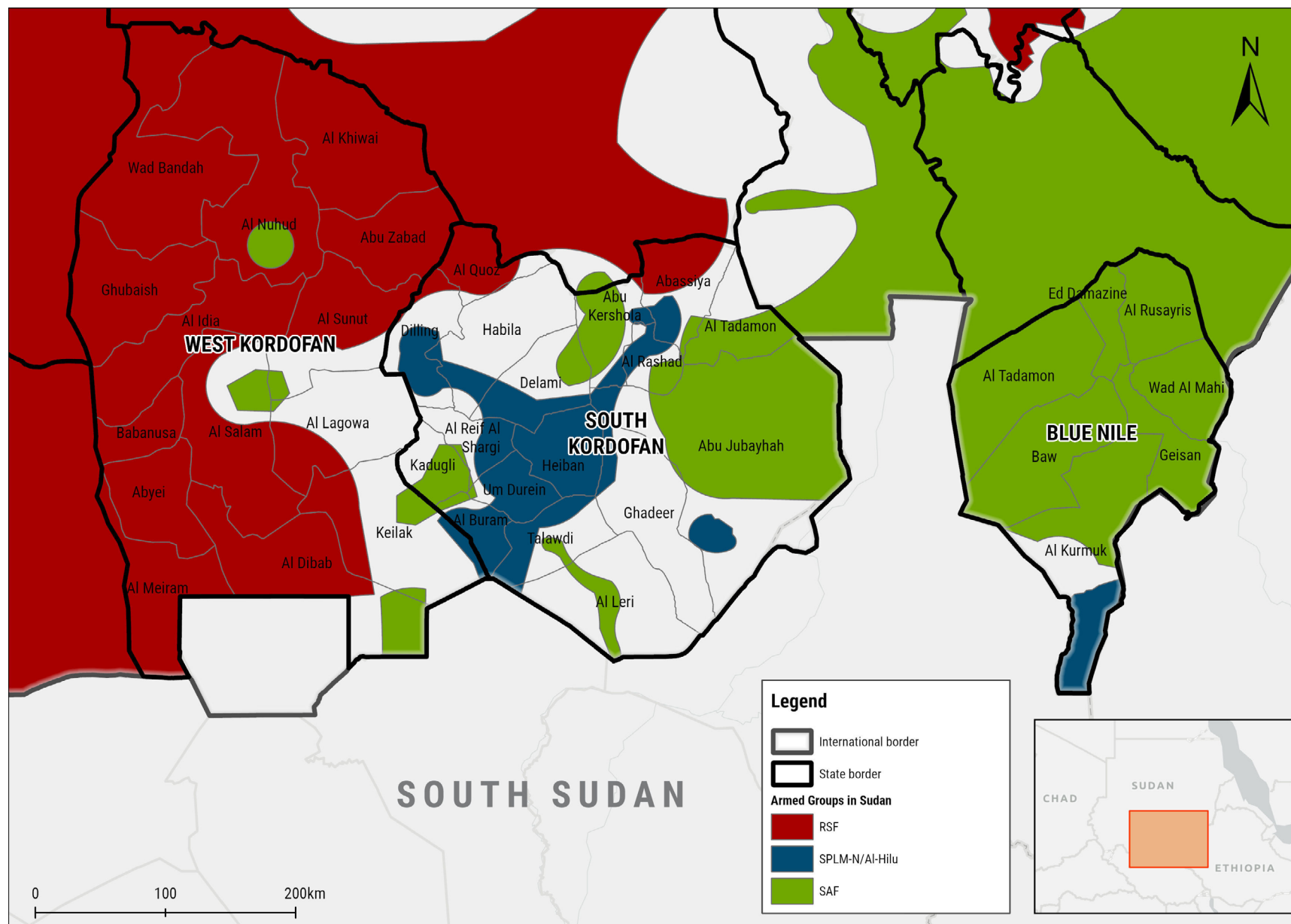
Decades of marginalisation and systemic neglect by the Government have fuelled alienation, creating fertile ground for insurgencies, interethnic violence, and governance failures.

In **South Kordofan** state, prolonged neglect has left the Nuba Mountains underdeveloped, with poor infrastructure, healthcare, and education services, worsening economic marginalisation and resentment against the Government (UNDP 26/08/2024; INEE 18/05/2020). This governance vacuum has allowed armed groups such as SPLM-N/AI Hilu to control some territories, though they struggle with limited resources, undermining peacebuilding and service delivery efforts (KII 22/10/2024).

Similarly, in **West Kordofan** state, rural communities have faced economic hardships owing to neglected development, driving some groups to align with armed factions such as the RSF or SPLM-N. The RSF's efforts to establish civil administrations in areas such as Al Fula highlight attempts to address governance voids, but unresolved issues such as intercommunal tensions and insecurity persist, further destabilising the region (ACLED 12/07/2024; Sudan War Monitor 18/09/2024).

Despite **Blue Nile** state's rich agricultural potential, underdevelopment and poor governance have left communities struggling with inadequate service delivery (Practical Action 18/09/2024). Ethnic groups such as the Berta and Hausa clash over resources because of a lack of government intervention, while Malik Agar's authoritarian leadership consolidates power through repression and limited civic freedoms. Agar's alignment with the SAF and his role as deputy chair of the transitional council have created political tensions in the region (Radio Dabanga 07/08/2023). This has alienated parts of the population and deepened tensions, particularly with the rivalry between SPLM-N factions – Agar's faction (aligned with the SAF) and Abdelaziz Adam Al Hilu's faction (opposed to the SAF) – complicating regional stability and governance (Insecurity Insight 03/07/2023; KII 22/10/2024; TJF 08/08/2023).

MAP 2. AREAS OF CONTROL IN BLUE NILE, SOUTH KORDOFAN, AND WEST KORDOFAN STATES



Source: ACAPS using data from Sudan War Monitor (01/06/2024)