

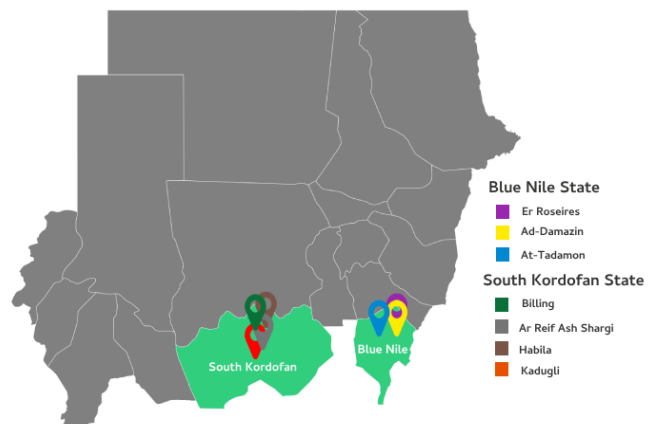


Survey of Farmer Capacities and Intentions in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan August 2023

Summary of Findings

With funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Mercy Corps conducted a survey of 1,397 smallholder farmers in South Kordofan (SKS) and Blue Nile (BNS), Sudan, in June and July 2023 in order to understand the impact of the current conflict on farmers' intentions for the 2023 planting season, which started in July (see map for specific locations). While this survey focused on two states in southern Sudan, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) will conduct a larger survey of the rest of Sudan in August 2023 and produce a countrywide report utilizing both data sets.

In summary, the 2023 rains have been good in South Kordofan and Blue Nile and, at the beginning of the planting period, 90% of respondents had either started preparing their fields or intended to plant. The main crops planned were sorghum, millet, or maize. Lack of funds was cited as the primary reason farmers had not started to plant, intended to plant less, or will not plant at all. However, 31% of farmers who do not intend to plant cited the conflict as the reason. The majority of farmers intend to use local seed varieties from informal sources.



Survey Context

The survey was implemented by Mercy Corps under the Sustainable Agrifood System Approach for Sudan (SASAS) Program, which is led by the International Maize & Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The aim of the survey was to better understand farmers' intentions for the imminent rain-fed growing season, which traditionally begins with planting in July and early August and harvests in November in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The Sudan conflict that flared up in April 2023 significantly affected the functionality of the Sudanese agriculture market system but it was not clear how farmers would respond. Mercy Corps has worked in the two regions since 2019, utilizing market-driven approaches to reduce vulnerability and increase

incomes and food security for male and female smallholder farmers, and needed to adjust program approaches to ensure the 2023 growing season would be as productive as possible.

Mercy Corps' existing partnership with Viamo to provide these farmers with remote services enabled the two organizations to quickly capture high-level farmer information to inform program adjustments and future assessments. During the survey period, the rains started in the target area and some farmers began preparing their fields. Additionally, the security situation worsened in parts of South Kordofan, with reports of looting in some areas and access challenges. Thus, the results should be viewed as a snapshot of the early 2023 growing season and supplemented with additional information later.

Survey Methodology

Over a four-week period from June 23 - July 21, 2023, Viamo conducted the survey through automated phone calls using Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology and employing an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) approach.¹ The list of phone numbers was taken from a database of farmers who received agriculture information messages from Mercy Corps in a previous program. IFPRI will conduct additional surveys to cover the remaining states in Sudan and will publish a more comprehensive analysis of all data in August 2023.

Calls Made:	9,745
Individuals who picked up:	8,641 (89%)
Number who consented to the survey:	8,582
Number who started the survey:	3,107 (36% of those who picked up)
Number who completed the survey:	1,397 (16% of those who picked up)

A total of 1,397 farmers answered all questions on the survey across seven localities in South Kordofan and Blue Nile with the following gender and location breakdowns:

Number of farmers who completed the survey			
	Male	Female	Total
South Kordofan	706	251	957
Blue Nile	336	104	440
Total	1,042	355	1,397

The survey methodology limited some analysis. Automated phone calls have a lower response rate than in-person interviews (16% completion rate is within the standard response range for this methodology). They also produce a limited depth of data as they do not allow for multiple responses to a single question or probing questions. However, this was the only feasible way to conduct a large-scale questionnaire at this time, given the current movement and staffing challenges in these parts of Sudan.

State	Locality	Total
Blue Nile	Rosairies	114
	Damazin	160
	Tadamon	166
South Kordofan	Kadugli	53
	Habila	43
	Ar Reif Ash Shargi	663
	Dilling	198
Total		1,397

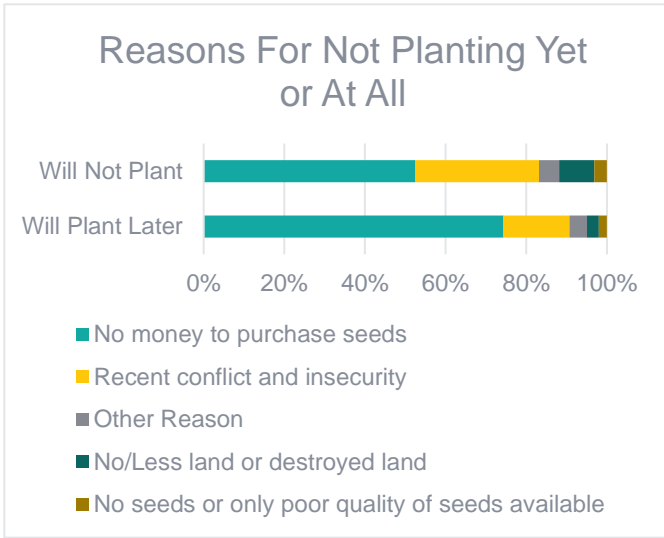
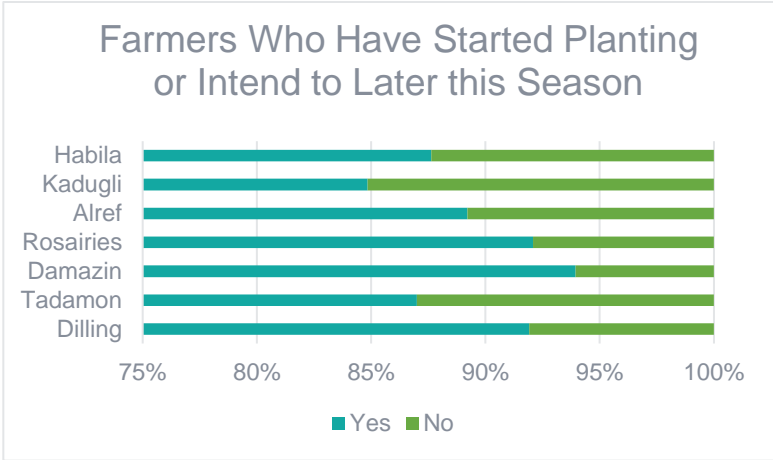
Readiness for the Growing Season

Farmers were asked if the seasonal rains had started in their area and how long ago. Given that the survey period overlapped with the start of the rains, these answers were combined and a total of 81% of farmers reported rains in their area having started at least a week prior. 54% of farmers said they had

¹ Using VOIP technology to make the calls means that farmers received a phone call from a random international phone number.

already started preparing to plant and the numbers were similar across the two states (55% in SKS and 53% in BNS).² Of those who had not started preparations, 82% said they would plant later in the season.

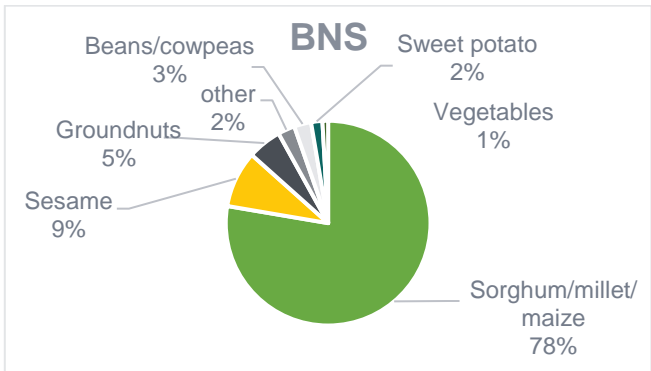
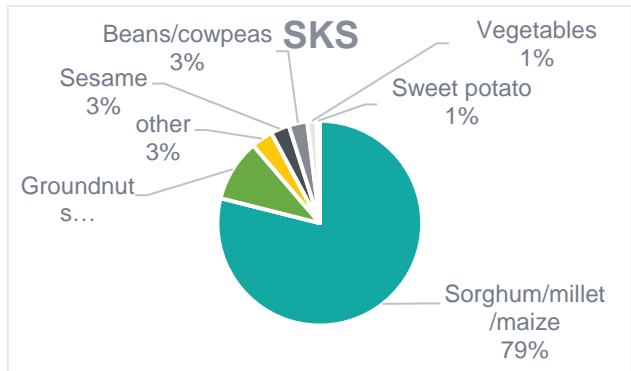
Intention to plant later in the season did vary by location, with the highest percentage of farmers in Rosairies and Damazin intending to plant and the lowest percentage in Kadugli. These results may be connected to localized impacts of the conflict, mentioned above. When the question of whether farmers intended to plant later or not was correlated with reasons for not starting land preparation yet, 31% of farmers who do not intend to plant at all blamed the “recent conflict and insecurity” compared to 16% of farmers who intend to plant later in the season.



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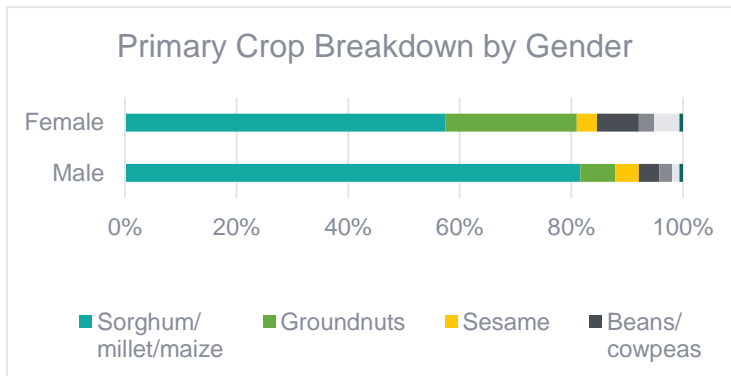
Farmers reported overwhelmingly that their most important crop is sorghum, millet, or maize (79%) followed by groundnuts (8%) and sesame (5%) (see full breakdown by state below). This finding aligns with Mercy Corps’ assessment during the 2022 farming season that showed 75% of farmers planted sorghum. That assessment also found that 65% of farmers planted sesame and 61% planted groundnuts. The difference

between 2022 to 2023 likely relates to the current survey framing, which asked farmers to identify their primary crop, but it also may indicate that farmers are currently prioritizing consumable crops over purely cash crops, such as groundnuts and sesame, as processing capacity has been significantly impacted by the current conflict.



² This number did not change significantly when the earliest respondents were removed from the analysis, increasing by less than one percentage point when only the last week of responses were analyzed.

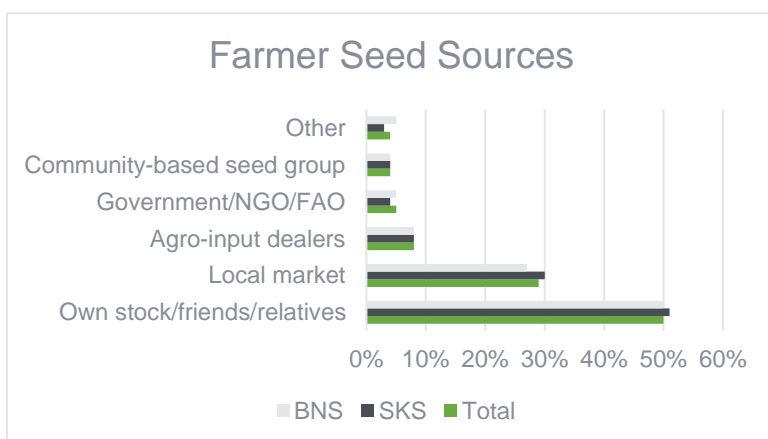
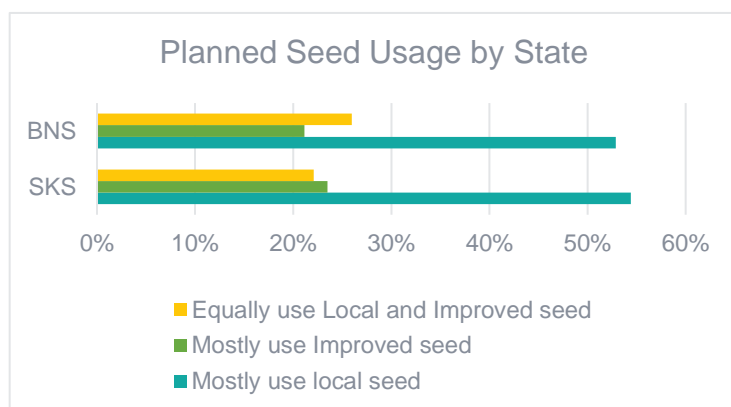
Male and female respondents reported slightly different primary crops, with 24% of women reporting groundnuts as their primary crop compared to only 6% of men. This is not surprising as groundnut cultivation is primarily female managed.



For their primary crop, 43% of farmers reported they intend to plant the same area as they did last year, 37% will plant a larger area and 20% will reduce the size of the planting area. The main reason farmers cited for increasing the amount of cultivated land was that the rains/weather had been good so far, at 65% of farmers, while 16% cited the availability of more or better seeds and 12% cited more available land. The overwhelming reason farmers reported intending to plant a smaller area this season was lack of money, at 62% of farmers,³ followed by 13% who cited poor quality or fewer seeds available, and 10% who blamed poor or late rains. Responses were similar across both regions.

Seed Utilization

Farmers plan to utilize primarily local seed varieties this season (54% local, 23% equal mix of local and improved seed, and 23% improved seed) but these numbers do vary between states. While farmers in both states primarily plan to use local seeds, more farmers in South Kordofan intend to use primarily improved seed rather than a mixture of local and improved seed, which is the opposite situation in Blue Nile.



Farmers reported using a range of sources for their seed stock with a similar breakdown across states. Approximately 79% will use informal seed sources, 50% will use stocks of seed they have on hand or from friends and relatives and 29% will purchase seeds in local markets (both local and certified varieties). Only 8% of farmers will purchase seeds from agro-input dealers and even fewer, 5%, expect to receive free seed from humanitarian distributions.

³ The specific answer was less money/credit/voucher for seeds; but as the other options were no/less land or destroyed land or limited labor, recent conflict, poor/delayed weather/rain, less/poor quality seeds available, and other reason; this answer can be interpreted as lack of funds for all necessary inputs and land preparation costs, not just seeds.

Conclusion

As of July 2023, the majority of farmers surveyed in South Kordofan and Blue Nile were optimistic about the current farming season and 90% had either started to plant or are planning to after solid rains. While they face challenges in access to inputs and funds, they are utilizing informal seed systems and building on their existing capacities. Where they can draw on existing seed stocks and access their land, they can farm. There is also a minority of farmers who do not intend to plant this season and it is important to continue monitoring these households to understand their evolving situation and whether they need humanitarian aid.

Given the range of contexts across the surveyed area and the rest of Sudan, some localities are more affected by the recent conflict than others. This suggests the situation is volatile and additional flareups may still hinder farming activities but it also indicates that, in calmer areas, farmers have the capability to farm this season and should be supported to maintain their activities.

It is important to continue to monitor on-farm activity as the season progresses and gather additional information that enables the humanitarian and development community to support agriculture production and food security in ways that enhance farmer capacity and resilience rather than undermining it and to support the coping and recovery of the agriculture market system. This support should include efforts to help farmers store quality seed for next season, especially in case certified seed prices continue to rise or remain difficult to access. Prior to the next growing season, it will be important to conduct a more in-depth Seed System Security Assessment to clearly identify and prepare for specific localized seed needs.

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