SUDAN INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION MONITORING

Round 1

CRISIS ANALYSIS TEAM
SUDAN

COLLECTIVE
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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BACKGROUND

During and in the aftermath of crises, communities are often their own first responders. Informal support from family, friends, neighbors, and other groups is frequently more essential to households' survival than formal support from aid actors and governments. This is particularly salient in Sudan where IDPs are often hosted by communities, dependent on diaspora contributions and initiatives by Mutual Aid Groups (MAG) such as Emergency Response Rooms (ERR) and Communal Kitchens (CKs).

Informal social protection (ISP) refers broadly to the "care and support ... provided to family, community, and group members through social structures and social networks."[1] These networks may include diaspora groups that maintain close links with home communities, but they may also be highly local. ISP can exist alongside formal social protection – external interventions by the state or official aid actors that are designed to help individuals and households cope – but also in its absence. Other terms may be used to refer to the same concept, or aspects of it, include "mutual aid", "social solidarity", and "social safety nets".

However, protracted crises can exhaust ISP networks, as resources become scarce and households' capacities to share material support erodes. When these networks become strained it may signal worsening humanitarian conditions, as households are left without a crucial source of resilience. This may also lead to increasing reliance upon external assistance.[2]

Not all people have the same level of access to ISP networks. Exclusion from these networks, whether based on socioeconomic, geographic, or political factors, can imply or worsen vulnerability for some. Studies have also shown that ISP networks can evolve and/or be disrupted by crisis and conflict-related dynamics.

Quantifying this type of support can be difficult. Previous efforts to quantify ISP have tended to focus on exclusively measuring economic resources mobilized during times of hardship. However, this narrow definition does not capture other types of tangible and intangible assistance, from market knowledge to lending equipment, debt forgiveness, and psychosocial services. The ISP monitoring mechanism leverages experiences from Mercy Corps Currency of Connections research and the Lebanon Crisis Analysis Team (LCAT) to offer approaches to measuring and evaluating ISP on a regular basis so as to efficiently identify shifts in patterns of need, uncover "hidden" vulnerabilities, and identify changes in humanitarian crisis trajectories.

"From our perspective, support networks have undergone significant changes recently as a result of war, displacement, and deteriorating economic conditions. Previously, families relied more heavily on traditional family and community ties, but as the crisis deepened, many families' ability to support one another weakened due to lost income and rising living costs. Furthermore, certain groups have become particularly vulnerable, with their support networks becoming especially fragile. These include internally displaced people, widows, the elderly, families who have lost their breadwinner, and people with disabilities, who face greater difficulties accessing services and assistance."

Communal initiative member,
Um Kaddadah, North Darfur

1 Calder & Tanhchareun. (2014), p.4.
2 Kim et al. (2020); Kim et al. (2022).

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a mixed-methods design: Quantitative analysis is based on iterative household monitoring surveys, and a complementary qualitative analysis based on longitudinal in-depth interviews (IDIs).

QUANTITATIVE DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

For the ISP monitoring tool we use ten variables across ten dimensions that account for the diverse sources and types of social protectiojn.

Network size

The number of people a household can call or be called upon

Reciprocity

A household's ability to provide help to it's social connections in times of need

Diversity

The different types of social connections a household can be call or be called upon in times of need

Resources

The different types of tangible and in-tangible support a household recieves or provides to social connections in times of need

Reliability

Confidence in a household's ability to call upon its social connections to mobilize resources in times of need

Dynamics

Changes to a household's ability to receive and provide tangible and in-tangible support a household recieves or provides to social connections in times of need

ISP Index Scores are calculated by summing household's scores for the six dimensions, such as that higher Index scores imply stronger ISP newtworks. Each dimension is equally weighted with a maximum score of one, resulting ia a maximum possible index score of six. Further, indicators within each dimension all have the same weight (for example 1/4 if there are four indicators in a dimension).

THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CONSISTS OF FOUR SIMPLE MODULES

- **Demographics**
- **Informal Social Protection**
- **Food Consumption Score**
- **Reduced Coping Strategies Index**

For the household surveys, a statistically representative random sample of households was drawn from select localities leveraging UNFPA population totals with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. Food Consumption Score (FCS) and Reduced Coping Strategies index (rCSI) are both used in the Sudan 2025 MSNA as indicators of vulnerability and are used to understand how the ISP module and components relate to other vulnerability indicators in Sudan.

Locality	Confidence Interval	Margin of Error
Wasat Jabal Marrah	95%	5%
Zalingi	95%	4%
Atbara	95%	4%
Berber	95%	3%

Quantitative data was collected for a total sample of 1,952 households between 23-31 March 2026 across River Nile and Central Darfur states, with one urban and one rural locality selected per state, targeting IDP and host communities.

	River Nile		Central Darfur	
	Atbara (Urban)	Berber (Rural)	Wasat Jabal Marrah (Rural)	Zalingi (Urban)
Female headed households	238	383	251	374
Male headed households	273	244	51	138

QUALITATIVE DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

The qualitative approach aims to understand how Sudanese households rely on ISP to cope with the impacts of the crisis, contextualizing the quantitative data. Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling method, selecting households and groups engaged in providing or receiving social protection across target communities.

The interviews were conducted with **135 host and IDP community members** across River Nile and Central Darfur in the same locations as the quantitative data collection.

Additionally, **11 representatives of mutual aid groups** operating across five Sudanese states: North Darfur, South Darfur, West Darfur, North Kordofan, and South Kordofan were interviewed separately. The interviews explored how these groups were established, what they currently do, who they serve, how they are funded, and how they perceive their role within the broader social protection landscape.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Informal social protection mechanisms** are a reliable and consistent form of support for households across Sudan but struggle with limited resources, with providers pessimistic about their ability to continue providing support over the next 6 months.

- **Food security** has a strong relationship with the type of ISP households' access. Households experiencing worse food security scores are significantly more likely to be dependent on support from communal initiatives, while those with the best scores are more likely to be receiving direct support from friends and family at home and abroad.

- **Most informal social protection** is channeled through direct social connections such as via friends and family, employers or community and religious bodies and leaders. This has left social protection networks fractured along communal and socio-economic lines and risks leaving behind vulnerable groups such as internally displaced people, women-headed households, youth households and un- or under-employed households who have weak or deteriorated social networks and are far more dependent on mutual aid groups.

- **Mutual aid groups often act to fill gaps** left by state support, formal aid and alternate informal protection channels. These groups are dependent on charitable giving and intermittent formal funding, leaving them structurally precarious and incapable of serving the high levels of need in communities.

- **Informal social protection networks** are self-reinforcing, i.e. households that receive certain kinds of support via specific channels are more likely to then provide similar support through those same channels. This effect is particularly strong when resources are channeled by communal initiatives, friends and family within Sudan, employers and community leaders.

- **Small and medium enterprises, play oversized roles** as providers of informal support both directly to staff members and indirectly in the form of loans, credit and services and credit to customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen financial inclusion and reduce transaction costs:

Resource challenges for informal social protection networks can be partially mitigated through the reduction of costs and administrative barriers associated with money transfers that are imposed by financial actors, national regulatory bodies and local authorities, further enabling transfers within the country and from the diaspora.[3]

Ensure consistent flexible funding arrangements for mutual aid groups:

One off or intermittent ad-hoc funding leads to unsustainable growth in service delivery that is difficult to reverse, driving MAGs to shut down either temporarily or permanently. Consistent funding over longer periods may leverage the self-reinforcing nature of communal initiatives to create sustainable service delivery that continues well after funding ends.

Support the development of a variety of communal initiatives such as saving and self-help groups prioritizing women-led groups:

Evidence[4] from similar contexts suggests that savings groups, self-help groups, and other community-based support structures can contribute to improved psychosocial wellbeing by creating spaces for social connection, mutual support, trust-building, and collective problem-solving. Women-led integrated Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA) and GBV prevention groups in particular can strengthened women's social networks, increased access to savings and capital, and build community awareness on gender services.[5]

Social cohesion should be included as a key indicator in resilience and durable solutions programming:

Displaced, unemployed and female headed households most often have weak informal networks that need (re) building. Programs that prioritize resilience and durable solutions must also include elements focused on social cohesion and integration that enable the building of robust social protection networks.

Prioritize Market Systems Development programs (MSD) that promote employment and self-employment:

Private sector actors, particularly SMEs, play oversized roles in informal social protection despite challenging economic conditions. Strengthening the performance and resilience of SMEs can help sustain and potentially expand the important role businesses already play in providing informal support through employment, credit, goods, services and social networks

Leverage existing business ecosystems to support youth employment and self-employment:

Programs should work through local businesses, business development service providers, financial service providers, producer organizations, and market actors to expand opportunities for young people. Supporting entrepreneurship, enterprise growth, and employment strengthens youth resilience while increasing their ability to contribute to informal social protection networks.

Supporting community-based referral systems:

Improving information sharing strengthens the role of informal social protection networks as connectors to essential services that reduce practical barriers to accessing health, education, protection, and social welfare services.

Programs working through community groups and networks should work with diverse groups within the same locations:

To enable inclusive delivery to all vulnerable populations through potentially fragmented ISP networks.

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3 CGAP, "Can What Remains of Sudan's Financial System Be Used to Fight Famine?", 03 December 2024.

4 Natung, et al, "The role of self-help groups in social capital development: a systematic review", July 2025.

5 CALP network, "Empowering Communities: Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention in Southern Haiti", 29 October 2024.

INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION INDEX

	Network size	Diversity	Reliability	Reciprocity	Resources	Dynamics	ISP index
Total	0.26	0.13	0.42	0.07	0.09	0.41	**0.23**
Central Darfur	0.29	0.17	0.41	0.07	0.08	0.41	**0.24**
River Nile	0.24	0.11	0.43	0.08	0.10	0.42	**0.23**

Analysis across ISP dimensions paints a picture of reliable and consistent social protection mechanisms that nevertheless operate with limited resources, primarily channeled through direct social connections.

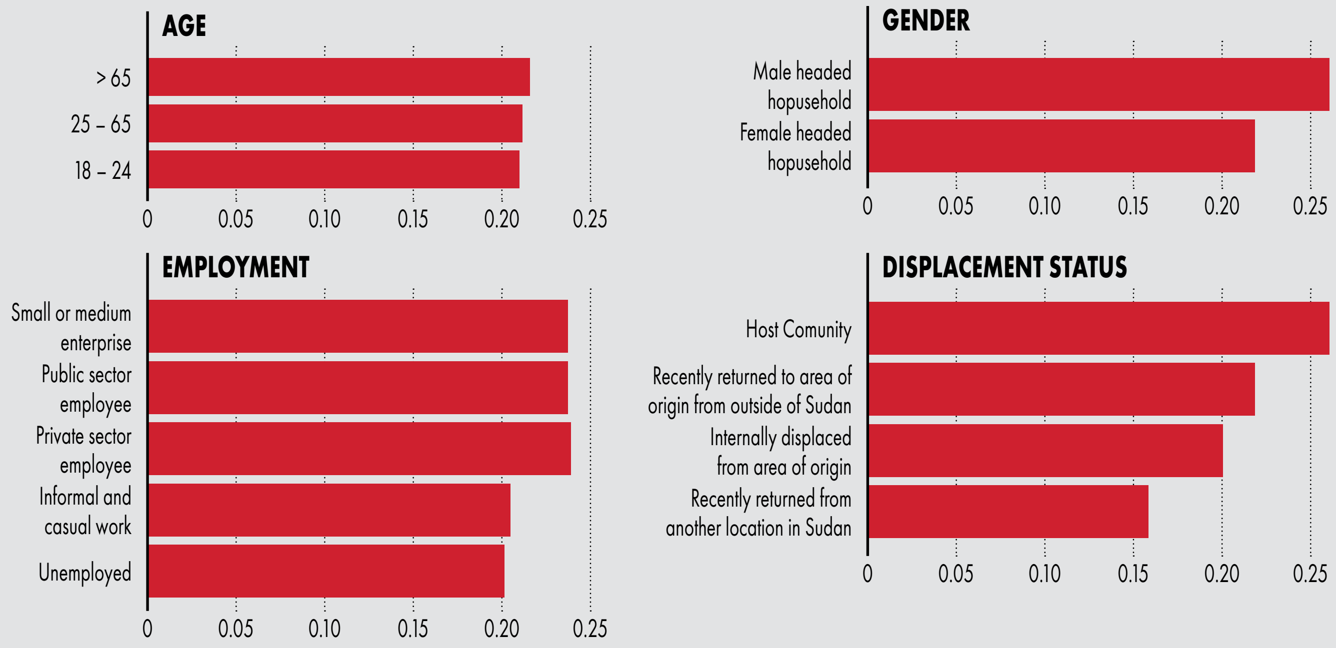
Across all locations, households showed acceptable scores on dimensions of dynamics and reliability. Most respondents felt that their ability to provide or receive support hadn't changed over the last 6 months (66.2% and 63.3% of respondents respectively) and that they are 'somewhat' or 'very confident' in their ability to provide and receive support (61.6% and 65.6%) over the coming 6 months with responses consistent across states and localities. A reflection of relatively stable conditions and dynamics in the states and localities the assessment was conducted in.

Scores were worse on the network size dimension, with 54.4% of respondents indicating they had no-one outside of their immediate family they could turn to if the household had a problem and needed help, and 37.7% had a small network they could turn to.[6] This is particularly visible along the diversity dimension, with only 13.8% of respondents indicating they had 2 or more sources of informal social protection. 69.4% of respondents were reliant on a single source of support, most often depending on family members and friends within Sudan (51% of respondents) followed by community initiatives (21%) and community leaders and employers (8%).

The least performing dimensions were resources and reciprocity. When respondents were asked what resources, they were able to access a little over half reported they received or provided a single resource; only 20% had received 4 or more resources and 13% provided 4 or more resources. The top resources people received or provided were advice, food, household commodities, accommodation, cash and loans.

[6] A small network is 3 or less people outside of the immediate family.

ISP INDEX BY HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD



ISP scores can vary significantly based on the status of the head of household across age, displacement status, employment status and gender. ISP scores average lower when the head of household is younger, unemployed or engaged in casual work, internally displaced, recently returned from within Sudan or female.

Female headed households (FHHs) consistently score lower than male headed households (MHHs) across every ISP dimension and in their FCS scores implying they are the most vulnerable households across our sample. 27% of FHHs accessed communal initiatives as a source of support, more than twice as much as men (12%) and half as likely to receive support from employers as MHHs. Despite this dependence on communal initiatives that often target women specifically, 60% of women felt they had no informal support network outside of immediate friends and family, affirming MAGs concerns around gender gaps in informal social protection.

Results are more complex when looking at displacement status, while host communities and returnees from abroad generally perform better on ISP and FCS scores, returnees in general underperform along the dynamics dimension. 46% of all returnees felt that the number of people they could turn to for help had decreased relative to 29% of IDPs and 18% of host community members, potentially reflecting how recent movements can reduce the size and dynamism of a household's ISP networks, how networks have been deeply impacted in former conflict affected areas or both.

Youth headed households also exhibit a complex relationship with ISP, with youth headed households in River Nile state scoring significantly lower on the ISP index than other age groups while those in Central Darfur performing on par with other age groups in their state. This is primarily driven by differences in the reliability dimension, with 42% and 52% of households between 18 and 24 in Atbara and Berber not confident in their ability to continue receiving support relative to 13% and 22% in Wasat Jabal Marrah and Zalingi but little in the data explains this vast difference. What is consistent is that younger households exhibit smaller, less diverse networks and access fewer resources compared to older households across all locations.

Unemployed households and those engaged in casual work consistently score poorly on the ISP index particularly along the reliability and dynamics dimensions, a reflection of their deteriorating ability to access informal forms of support. Similarities between these two households end at the resource dimension, while both are more likely to receive food as a form of support, at approximately 31% relative to 20% for other households, unemployed struggle to access resources more readily available to those engaged in casual work, with casual workers more than twice as likely to receive support in the form of non-food items, accommodation support, help finding work, cash support and services such as tutoring and household help. On the other end of the spectrum households engaged in small and medium enterprises score mostly on par with employed households except along the reciprocity dimension where they on average score 0.12 relative to the approximate 0.075 for the remaining households, indicating the relatively larger role they play in providing informal social protection.

THE CHANNELS AND NETWORKS OF INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

Food Security status has a strong relationship with the type of ISP households access. Households experiencing worse food security scores are significantly more likely to be dependent on support from communal initiatives, while those with the best scores are more likely to be receiving support from friends and family at home and abroad.

Correlation between Food Consumption Scores and support recieved and provided by households

FCS Score ~ p < 0.01	Community kitchens, emewrgency response rooms or other community initiatives	Employers	Religious bodies	Community leaders including tribal leaders and local administrators	Indiviouals associated with political parties	Friends and family living abroad	Friends and family in Sudan
Support provided	-0.28	-0.14	-0.01	-0.03	0.08	0.03	0.13
Support received	-0.30	-0.11	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.16	0.10

Networks are self-reinforcing, i.e. households that receive certain kinds of support via specific channels are more likely to provide similar support through those same channels, particularly resources channeled by communal initiatives, friends and family within Sudan, employers and community leaders. These are also the channels that are most likely to be providing and receiving support to and from the most crisis affected households.

Correlational analysis between FCS scores and the source of ISP shows that households with lower FCS scores were considerably more likely to be providing or receiving support from communal initiatives or their employers, conversely those with higher scores were more likely to be providing or receiving support from friends and family. Households exhibiting poor FCS scores are more likely to access informal support through a wider range of channels, implying that diversity of channels may be a form of coping mechanism.

> *There was a patient suffering from cancer who was the sole provider for a family of 5. He required a long journey of treatment inside and outside the country and had no source of income or savings. Friends and relatives rallied to his aid and met the requirements of his treatment for more than a year."*
>
> Government employee, Berber, River Nile

Informal protection through community mechanisms focuses on those with the greatest needs, with the targeting of beneficiaries articulated with consistency across all interviewed MAGs: internally displaced persons, widows, orphans, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and female-headed households. More direct channels such as friends and family are less likely to reach households with the most acute needs but can have high levels of impact.

Households that receive support from communal initiatives, friends and family,[7] and employers were very likely to then reciprocate with support through those same channels. On the other hand, friends and family living abroad were far more likely to be providing support than receiving it. This implies that households using certain channels, particularly communal initiatives, were often both recipients and providers of support creating a self-reinforcing loop.

This extends to the kinds of resources that are shared, with households receiving or providing food and non-food items across outcomes, displacement status, genders, etc. speaks to the sharing of those tangible resources as more than a social protection mechanism, implying it has additional value in social cohesion and/or the building of social capital. Similarly, resources such as accommodation support, loans, market support, services, etc. are more likely to be shared by households with higher FCS scores, in part a reflection of needs shifting from immediate concerns towards building resilience within their social networks.

This trend reflects a social protection landscape that is localized by geography and immediate social connections, fragmented and heavily dependent on contributions from community members at home or abroad and channeled through informal solidarity networks including through communal initiatives.

This is not universal, with a group interviewed in South Darfur focused on stabilizing conflict-affected families through integration into the host community, framing their response as restoring a sense of normalcy and belonging to conflict affected families providing an example of how to integrate informal channels and networks at a local scale.

> *We receive financial support for our activities from several sources, most notably contributions from people in the region, both within and outside Sudan, through community groups and initiatives known as the "Takiya" system, where individuals contribute regularly to support humanitarian and service activities. We also receive financial support from some humanitarian organizations and agencies, particularly the North Darfur Emergency Rooms Coordination, which contributes to supporting a number of interventions related to food, health, water, and emergency response for affected communities."*
>
> Communal initiative member,
> Um Kaddadah, North Darfur

Overall MAGs were particularly dependent on contributions from the local community, diaspora and intermittent grants from humanitarian organizations. Most groups we spoke to acknowledge that their resources allow them to cover only a fraction of the people who meet their targeting criteria, a form of collective candor that speaks to the scale of the crisis.

[7] Result was not statistically significant at a p-value of 0.35.

MUTUAL AID AS A RESPONSE TO CRISIS

Interviews with MAGs describe a social protection system that is only just functioning and only because of sustained voluntary effort of community members who are themselves affected by the crisis. The groups in our sample are doing remarkable work under extraordinary constraints, but they are also being asked to substitute for state services, humanitarian systems, and economic safety nets, with funding that arrives irregularly, in limited amounts, and with little predictability. Most groups we spoke to were established in 2023 or 2024, within months of the conflict's escalation, emerging from necessity and responding to what several participants described as a vacuum of formal services, not supplementing a functioning system, but replacing it.

A Permanent funding crisis

Almost every group interviewed identified funding as their most pressing structural constraint. Several groups described receiving international support only once since their establishment, leading many to close their doors, such as a communal kitchen in Um Rawaba, North Kordofan, that had stopped functioning entirely at the time of interview because institutional funding had lapsed.

This is partially because of the dependency of these groups on charitable giving that, while admirable in what it says about community solidarity, is structurally precarious and incapable of sustaining the level of response these groups are being asked to provide.

A pair of illustrative examples comes from South Kordofan: one, a group in Kadugli operates within an urban setting coordinating with state authorities and humanitarian agencies and receiving institutional support and yet constant struggles with securing funding. By contrast, a small community-level initiative based in a rural village around South Kordofan's Nuba mountains, relies almost entirely on personal networks with no formal humanitarian partnerships and no institutional structure. Yet they were the only group we spoke to that did not identify funding as a major barrier, suggesting a level of self-sufficiency that is a product of modest ambitions rather than adequate resources.

Together, these two cases illustrate the range of what mutual aid groups can mean in practice: from an institutionalized organization navigating the formal humanitarian system to a village committee collecting donations from family members overseas to buy food and solve immediate challenges.

Gaps in mutual aid

Women and female-headed households appear at the top of almost every priority list; yet when asked whether women's needs are being adequately addressed, the answer from almost every group was no, even amongst groups that demonstrated a deliberate approach to gender. The gap between the prioritization of women and girls their needs are not being met in practice is one of the most consistent findings in the data.

Alongside gender concerns, healthcare and children's education were mentioned across multiple states and group types as the most critical unmet needs alongside cash assistance and specialized psychosocial support. In Dar Al-Salam, the group described a situation in which even host families had become net recipients of informal support, with special and repeated concerns around the future of children.

LOCALITY LEVEL SNAPSHOTS

Central Darfur

WASAT JABAL MARRAH		
0.09 Network size	**0.49** Reliability	**0.09** Resources
0.19 Diversity	**0.09** Reciprocity	**0.36** Dynamics
ISP Index		**0.24**

Family and friends are seen as the most reliable source of informal protection, leaving displaced households without deep roots in the community less confident they can continue to receive support. In response IDP households seek support from a wider variety of less reliable and robust channels.

Despite more robust ISP networks, host communities are feeling the strain, forcing them to cut back on the informal support they can provide through those networks.

2024 UNFPA data estimates that Wasat Jabal Marrah is home to 245,126 people, while IOM estimates that the locality has seen a 23% increase in the number of IDPs since the end of 2024 bringing the total number of IDPs to 223,670 as of February 2026 as a result of IDP influxes from El Fasher and its environs. As a result, West Jabal Marrah has a particularly high IDP caseload relative to the size of its host community, and while both communities have similar scores on the ISP index there are differences across dimensions.

This is starkest along the reliability dimension, 48% and 70% of host communities were 'very confident' in their ability to receive and provide support respectively, as compared to 15% and 20% for IDPs. This was despite IDPs having more diverse sources of support and larger networks beyond their family and friends, indicating that support from friends and family both within Sudan and living abroad is viewed as more reliable than other sources of informal support including various community initiatives.

In an indication that host community members resources are increasingly strained 60.6% of host community members felt their ability to help those in need had decreased relative to 25.3% of IDPs. Following the receipt of advice and counselling, the most common form of support received or provided by and for host communities was the purchase of goods and services on credit, as opposed to IDP households who were more likely to receive or provide food.

This all speaks to the fragility of IDP support networks, leaving them dependent on communal initiatives, communal leaders and religious groupings.

> *"Family support networks have become weak, increasing people's reliance on communities and emergency rooms because they have lost support due to the war."*
>
> Communal initiative member,
> Dar as Salam, North Darfur

ZALINGI

0.09 Network size	**0.36** Reliability	**0.07** Resources
0.15 Diversity	**0.06** Reciprocity	**0.44** Dynamics
ISP Index		**0.19**

Male headed households tend to have larger and more diverse social protection networks, in part because of the connections they make through employment, leaving female headed households more dependent on communal initiatives and feeling less confident about their ability to continue receiving support.

Across all locations male headed households (MHH) exhibited higher ISP indices than those headed by women (FHH), but the difference is largest in Zalingi, Central Darfur's state capital and urban center. This is particularly stark across the network dimension, where 81% of women respondents had no support network outside of friends and family as opposed to 43% of men. Nine of the eleven groups we spoke to explicitly raised women's needs in their responses. The treatment of this theme was notable for the tension it revealed between stated commitment and available capacity. Women and female-headed households appear at the top of almost every priority list; yet when asked whether women's needs are being adequately addressed, the answer in nearly every case was no.

This is reinforced by analysis along the diversity dimension, with MHHs having access to a broader range of informal support; in particular, 37% of MHHs able to turn to their employers for support while only 6.7% of FHHs respondents were able to do the same. Instead, FHHs were far more dependent on support from communal initiatives such as community kitchens, with 38.8% reporting they received support from those initiatives as opposed to 18.1% of men. This is in part driven by communal initiatives explicitly targeting female headed households. This dependence on communal initiatives for life-saving leaves FHHs particularly vulnerable should limited funding and resources for those initiatives expire, FHHs are keenly aware of this making them more likely than MHHs to have no confidence in their ability to receive support at 39% and 17% respectively.

> *"We strive to incorporate women's needs into our activities as much as possible, since women are among the most affected by the current humanitarian situation. We prioritize female-headed households and facilitating women's access to food aid, health services, and water."*
>
> Communal initiative member, Um Kaddadah, North Darfur

The differences between MHHs and FHHs extends to the types of resources, with FHHs more likely to receive non-food items and household commodities than MHHs at 23% and 7% respectively, while FHHs less likely to receive food as a form of support than MHHs at 16% and 41% respectively.

River Nile

BERBER		
0.14 Network size	**0.41** Reliability	**0.11** Resources
0.09 Diversity	**0.07** Reciprocity	**0.45** Dynamics
ISP Index		**0.21**

Households with younger heads struggle to secure informal support in general and rarely access cash support or loans. Working age households have the most robust and diverse social protection networks, more able to access support from employers and community leaders, leaving households over 65 increasingly dependent on community initiatives.

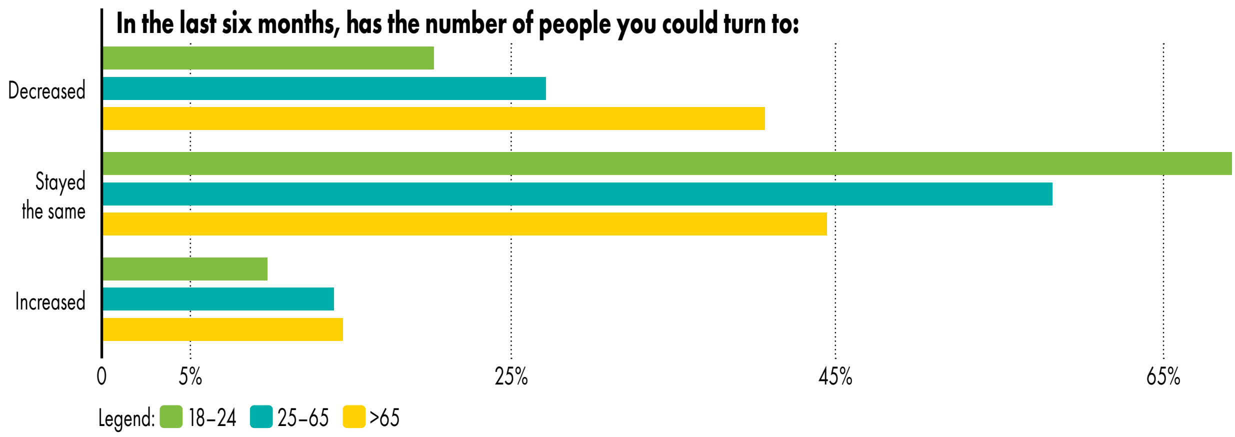
Sudan has a young population and Berber is no exception, with 61% of the population of the locality under the age of 25 according to UNFPA data. While younger households struggle across all locations, households headed by youth under 25 years of age showed the worst performance in Berber locality.

52% of households headed by the youngest cohort did not receive any form of support in the previous six months, those that did received advice, food, discounted or free accommodation or help finding employment. None of the youth-headed households surveyed received cash support, loans or non-food items that households that older heads were able to access. With only 18.5% of youth-headed households having access to full-time or part-time work it's no surprise that those households perform poorly along the reciprocity dimension, with 55.6% unable to provide any form of social support over the last 6 months.

It is also along these the resource and reciprocity dimensions that households with working age head between 25 and 65 outperform other age groups, with 72% and 54% receiving or providing at least one resource respectively.

While all age groups primary source of support was friends and family in Sudan, households with working age heads were more likely than other age groups to have received support from community leaders, with households with heads over 65 were more likely to have received support from community kitchens and other initiatives. Notably, none of the youth headed households in Berber received support from friends and family outside of Sudan.

The variance across age groups also plays out along the dynamics dimension, with households with younger heads more likely to say their ability to receive or provide informal support has decreased, implying that access to informal support for these households is both limited and decreasing.



ATBARA

0.14 Network size	**0.44** Reliability	**0.09** Resources
0.13 Diversity	**0.09** Reciprocity	**0.38** Dynamics
ISP Index		**0.21**

Predictably, unemployed households and those engaged in casual work had the smallest and least robust networks, while receiving limited support leaving them heavily dependent on communal initiatives. This is particularly concerning as the majority of households interviewed had little or no access to employment, with a little more than half unable to secure work that pays in cash.

> *"We have observed significant shifts in how families are coping with the crisis. Many have become reliant on aid, precarious work, or reduced daily meals as ways to manage the difficult economic conditions. Furthermore, some families who were previously economically stable have fallen into poverty due to job losses, displacement, or market collapse."*
>
> Communal initiative member, Um Kaddadah, North Darfur

Households engaged in small or medium enterprises played oversized roles as providers of informal support. Private sector employers were also far more likely to provide variety support, with public sector employers preferring to provide support at social functions such as weddings and funerals.

Households self-employed in small or medium enterprises (SMEs) scored the highest on the index, with households with unemployed members scoring the lowest. This pattern doesn't hold across all dimensions, with public sector employees scoring the highest along the reliability dimension with only 17% of those households lacking confidence in their ability to receive or provide informal support in the upcoming 6 months. 38% of SME households were not confident in their ability to continue providing support, possibly reflecting a lack of confidence small businesses have with economic conditions.

Most informal support came from friends and family in Sudan, but unemployed households had the least access to this channel with 43% of them receiving support this way, relative to over 60% for other households. Unemployed households were most likely to be receiving support from communal initiatives (18% of respondents), followed closely by those engaging in informal work at 14%. Private sector employees were more likely than public sector employees to have received support from employers at 17% and 8% respectively.

SMEs were the least diverse in terms of who they provided support to, with 90% of SME households only providing support to a single group, primarily friends and family in Sudan (51% of respondents), communal initiatives (18%) and religious bodies (7%). SMEs were also more likely to provide a wide range of resources, with 10% of households delivering 7 or more types of resources relative to almost 0% for all remaining forms of employment, reflecting a more targeted but impactful approach to social protection.

Informal workers were also the least likely to be receiving advice and counselling at 20% of households below the average of 30% for the locality. Unemployed households received a limited variety of informal support, with only 9% of households receiving 4 or more resources as compared to approximately 22% of households across the remaining forms of employment.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.