Strengthening Inclusive Partnerships for Smallholders in Rainfed Areas

(SIPRA Project)

2023 Annual Narrative Report

(Reporting Period: January to December 2023)

Reporting Date:
(30/04/2024)

Donor: Ministry of Foreign Affairs NL

Table of Contents

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION 2

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

3 CHANGES IN CONTEXT 3

4. PROJECT RESULTS 4

5. COORDINATION, PARTNERSHIP, GENDER AND LESSONS LEARNED 9

6: FINANCE 11

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Number	XM-DAC-7PPR-4000006449
Project Title	**S**trengthening **I**nclusive **P**artnerships for Smallholders in **R**ainfed **A**reas (**SIPRA**) Project
Project Start & End Dates	48 months (1 September 2022- 31 August 2026)
Project Overall Objective	By 2026, there is improved household food and nutrition security. & Sustainable, resilient, and fair economic development of smallholders and SMEs in the rainfed agriculture areas in Darfur and Kordofan.
Specific Objectives	• Increased and sustainable income, improved nutrition, and more resilient livelihoods for smallholder farmers & MSMEs. • An inclusive market-driven approach for economic partnerships, job creation, supply contracts, and value chain development adopted by MSMEs & agribusinesses. • A more conducive environment to benefit from economic partnerships. • Capacity development and learning mechanisms
Lead Agency	ZOA
Consortium Partners	• World Relief (WR). • SOS Sahel – Sudan (SOS). • Euroconsult Mott Macdonald. • Wageningen Centre For Development Innovation (WCDI).
Reporting Period	January 1 to December 31, 2023

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SIPRA program is designed to unlock the untapped potential of Sudan's rain-fed agriculture sector. The program aims to empower smallholders, including women and youth, to become entrepreneurs and create transformative change in Sudan's rain-fed sector. The overall goal of the SIPRA program is to contribute to improved food and nutrition security, resilient livelihoods, and economic development in Darfur and Kordofan states.

The outbreak of war in Sudan since April 2023 continues to severely impact the programme implementation and the operations of the SIPRA consortium partners with its unprecedented displacement and widespread collapse of systems, particularly in the Darfur region. The SIPRA consortium partners have positioned themselves to be flexible and respond appropriately as much as possible to the fluid nature of the conflict adopting a scenario planning approach, tracking the risks to guide an adaptive management response.

Despite the challenging terrain, the program made some modest gains, particularly with activities that contribute to accelerating food production.

- 223 Producer Associations (PAs) were reached and supported in various ways
- 64 Producer Associations (PAs) were legally registered with their respective government agencies
- More than 2420 smallholder farmers received training in Climate-Smart Agriculture
- Over 9,038.82 Hectares (21,521 Feddan) of land were cultivated with various crops
- The project distributed over 120.55 MT of improved seeds to over 7,216 farmers to keep them productive during the 2023 planting season
- Average yields include
    - 45 kilograms per Feddan for groundnuts, 45 to 67.5kg kilograms per Feddan for sorghum, and 50-100 kilograms per 0.17 Feddan for okra in East Darfur
    - 315 kilograms per Feddan for millet, 450 kg per Feddan for groundnut, and 520 kilograms per Feddan for sorghum in South Darfur
    - 81.3 metric tons of sorghum produced from 860 Feddan of land in Blue Nile.
- 22 community-based committees established; 18 trained in natural resource management, conflict resolution, cropland and pastureland management, resource mapping, and early warning plan preparation, with a focus on tribal and inter-communal conflicts.

3 CHANGES IN CONTEXT

During the reporting period, there were clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which started on April 15, 2023. These clashes have affected various regions of Sudan and have resulted in the deaths of between 9,000 and 10,000 people (official counts, but the reality is likely much higher). An estimated 6 million people have been displaced within Sudan, and more than 1.2 million people have fled the country. Additionally, between 6,000 to 12,000 people have been injured. As a result of this conflict, the implementation of activities has been impacted

In East Darfur, despite the prevailing conflict, implementation efforts extended to 30 villages, with 10 villages targeted in each of the three project localities. However, the extent of progress was affected by the varying intensity of the conflict, thereby impacting accessibility to project sites throughout the reporting period. Notably, during the second quarter (April to June 2023), limited progress was made due to conflict-related challenges, prompting the rescheduling of activities to the subsequent quarter. In November 2023, the heightened conflict led to the temporary suspension of field operations, significantly impeding implementation progress.

In South Darfur, conflict dynamics have significantly impeded access to project sites within the region. Throughout the reporting period, implementation efforts were predominantly focused on five villages situated solely within the Mershing locality, as access to Asunta and Beliel localities remained restricted.

In Central Darfur, the state remains one of the most impacted by the conflict. Temporary suspension of activity implementation in Nertiti was necessitated by movement restrictions imposed by the prevailing insecurity, with a significant portion of the locality under the control of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and areas along the borders of Kass locality of South Darfur and Zalingi of Central Darfur were under RSF. However, with RSF assuming control towards the end of 2023, a reassessment of conditions in Nertiti is warranted to ascertain the feasibility of resuming operations in the area. Meanwhile, implementation activities during the reporting period were limited to the Golo and Rockero communities.

In South Kordofan, progress on SIPRA implementation was hindered by ongoing conflicts, particularly between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAFs) in the northern regions (Algoaz locality) and between the SPLM/North (A.Aziz Alhelo faction) and SAFs in southern localities. These conflicts impeded access to several villages in Kadugli and Alreef-Alshargi. Notably, RSF control over the Algoaz locality since May 2023 completely restricted access, rendering planned activities, including the mapping of Producer Associations (PAs), unattainable. Consequently, the 2023 work plan was revised to focus solely on the two accessible localities, in light of the prevailing conflict situation.

4. PROJECT RESULTS

In East Darfur State, significant strides were made in agricultural development with a particular focus on food production, with the formation of 100 Producer Associations (PAs) comprising 3496 smallholder farmers across three project localities: Edaein, Abu Karinka, and Adila. Among these, 34 PAs (857 members, consisting of 434 males and 423 females) underwent comprehensive training in PA establishment, financial management, and bookkeeping, facilitated by the Ministry of Agriculture, the University of Edaein, and microfinance institutions. However, legal registration of these associations is pending, as the relevant government office responsible for registration remains inactive due to the ongoing conflict.

Additionally, 877 smallholder farmers (436 males and 441 females) received specialized training in Climate-Smart Agricultural (CSA) practices and post-harvest management through the establishment of demonstration plots and Farmer Field Schools. These initiatives aimed to enhance agricultural resilience and productivity in the state.

Moreover,10 Women Farmer Groups, comprising 90 members from Umrakoba and Hilal in the Abu Karinka locality, were trained in vegetable gardening techniques and provided with essential resources such as seeds (Tomato:10gram/HH; Okra 50grams/HH; Carrot 50grams /HH, Watermelon 40grams/HH), fertilizers (urea fertilizer 50grams/HH), and sprayers(1 for 5 women per each group) to facilitate household consumption of improved dietary diversity as well support the women in their endeavors in market-oriented agriculture.

Furthermore, 1000 smallholder farmer households across 20 villages in Edaein and Adila localities were provided with input support for the 2023 planting season. This included 49,500 kilograms of groundnuts, 6000 kilograms of sorghum, 162.5 kilograms of okra, 24 kilograms of cucumber, and 12.5 kilograms of tomatoes. These inputs facilitated cultivation across a total land area of 4.5 Feddans, resulting in average yields of 45 kilograms (6-8 sacks) per Feddan for groundnuts, 45 to 67.5kg kilograms (0.5-0.75 sacks) per Feddan for sorghum, and 50-100 kilograms per 0.17 Feddan for okra. However, tomato and cucumber yields were adversely affected by locust infestation, resulting in suboptimal yields.

In South Darfur State, despite the challenges posed by the conflict, some achievements were made in the Mershing locality during the reporting period. The Mershing locality was the only area where implementation was possible due to the conflict. Ten Producer Associations (PAs) were established across ten villages in the Mershing locality, consisting of 315 members (165 males and 150 females). Out of these, two PAs were trained in group marketing strategies, group transportation, access to goods, shared storage, and selling as a group. Twenty-one members (9 males and 12 females) of the PAs participated in the development of an action plan for agriculture-linked water harvesting

infrastructures and land management, which is part of the natural resource management strategy to support farmers' production. It's important to note that these PAs are pending formal legal recognition, reflecting the impact of conflict on administrative processes.

Another achievement was the establishment and operation of Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and demonstration plots. A total of 7 FFS FFS were set up, promoting collaboration between Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) extension officers and local community extension workers (CEW) to provide extension services to smallholder farmers in the Mershing locality. A total of 162 farmers (89 males and 73 females) actively participated in FFS sessions, receiving comprehensive training on advanced agricultural techniques. Six extension sessions were conducted for each FFS, enabling knowledge dissemination and skill acquisition among the farming communities. Additionally, three demonstration plots were established in two villages, Abuhamra and Juruf, covering key crops such as sorghum, millet, and groundnut. These plots, spanning a total area of 6 Feddan, served as practical training grounds for participating farmers. Farmers received comprehensive support packages, including essential agricultural inputs, and 13 field visits throughout the agricultural season to bolster food production. The support resulted in average yields of 315 kilograms per Feddan for millet, 450 kg per Feddan for groundnut, and 520 kilograms per Feddan for sorghum.

Furthermore, two women farmer groups consisting of 20 members were trained in vegetable gardening and market access, which is linked to FOSRA and business mapping findings.

In Gedaref state (MoFA NL/EKN approved the expansion into two new states for the 2023 planting season support), SIPRA implemented a comprehensive support program for smallholder farmers across five localities, aiming to enhance food production and resilience in the face of anticipated food shortages resulting from the ongoing conflict. The project distributed a total of 62.25 metric tons of improved seeds, along with 9,250 liters of herbicides and pesticides, to farmers in East and West Galabat, Basunda, Al-Fashaga, and Al-Mafaza localities. Additionally, 97,200 packing sacks were provided to assist farmers in proper crop storage, significantly reducing post-harvest losses. A total of 7,477 farmers, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and individuals with disabilities, benefited from this support, with each farmer receiving 13 sacks.

Agricultural inputs were distributed to 5,090 farmers, comprising 2,299 males and 2,791 females, across 64 villages. These inputs, including improved seeds such as sorghum, millet, sesame, and groundnuts, were utilized to cultivate a total land area of 20,650.5 Feddan. In parallel, extension services were bolstered through the establishment of 30 Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and six demonstration plots, showcasing climate-smart agricultural practices. These initiatives reached a total of 750 farmers, with FFS sessions facilitating knowledge-sharing and peer learning among participants from various villages and clusters.

Furthermore, SIPRA provided support to local Agricultural Extension Offices, enhancing their capacity with material resources and facilitating collaboration with community extension workers. This collaborative approach aimed to ensure effective extension services delivery to farmers while fostering sustainability and creating an enabling environment for agricultural development.

The SIPRA program collaborated closely with the Department of Agricultural Extension in Gedaref to launch an extensive integrated extension campaign aimed at equipping smallholder farmers with essential knowledge and practices for the successful implementation of the 2023 planting season. This coordinated effort was designed to maximize outreach and educate as many farmers as possible within a limited timeframe. The campaign featured a tailored package of extension messages focusing on key aspects such as crop maturity indicators, optimal harvesting techniques, proper post-harvest handling, and storage methods for the main crops. Utilizing various communication channels, including drama shows, public symposia, face-to-face mentoring sessions, pictorial posters, pamphlets, and outreach via local radio stations, the campaign effectively disseminated agricultural best practices to the targeted farming communities. This multifaceted approach ensured accessibility and engagement, reaching a total of over 4,370 direct beneficiaries and indirectly impacting an estimated 24,909 individuals. By leveraging diverse communication media and partnering with local agricultural authorities, the integrated extension campaign successfully empowered smallholder

farmers with practical knowledge and skills essential for maximizing crop yields, enhancing post-harvest management, and ultimately bolstering agricultural productivity and resilience in Gedaref.

In Central Darfur State, a comprehensive mapping exercise identified and documented 52 Producer Associations (PAs), with 40 newly established PAs and 12 existing ones across Gollo and Rockero localities. These PAs collectively involve 1,330 smallholder farmers, with women contributing 40% of the membership. Engaged in rain-fed agriculture, particularly focused on crops like potatoes, Egyptian beans, and tomatoes, these farmers operate individually with an average landholding size ranging from 1.05 to 1.47 hectares per farmer. The identified PAs received three days of training on organizational development, facilitated by resource persons trained by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Topics covered included organizational structure, governance, financial management, and marketing, benefitting a total of 1,010 members, including men, women, and youth. PAs for instance in Rockero have made contributions of SDG2000 per member and have started better coordination. Furthermore, support has been provided to 40 PAs to facilitate legal registration, with progress made on fulfilling government requirements, except for the completion of endorsed bylaws, which is currently underway -- when completed legal registration certificate will be issued to the PAs. Amidst challenges posed by the situation in Sudan, registration responsibilities have been assumed by locality-level MoA sub-offices due to the state-level Ministry of Planning and Economic Development's inactivity. Additionally, ongoing coaching support has been provided to 12 PAs, focusing on pre-and post-harvest handling and climate-smart agriculture practices. Led by experts and agricultural extension officers from MoA sub-offices in Gollo and Rockero, these sessions aim to enhance farmers' skills and practices. Despite challenges such as movement restrictions and limited resource personnel, efforts continue to support and strengthen the capacity of PAs in the target localities, albeit falling short of the planned number due to operational constraints.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, support efforts have been directed towards revitalizing extension work by training village-level extension workers, producing extension materials, disseminating messaging through mass media channels, and providing technical assistance to producers. To ensure the continuity and expansion of these services, training sessions have been planned at different phases for both agricultural extension officers and relevant staff at the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as for extension workers and volunteers within the community. A Train the Trainer (TOT) program has already been facilitated for 8 agricultural extension officers, focusing on Producer Associations (PAs) establishment, organizational development, and operational aspects, with further training on improved agricultural extension approaches scheduled for the next phase.

In Gollo and Rockero localities, 20 community-based committees have been established across 20 villages, each consisting of 10 members, including 6 men and 4 women, tasked with managing natural resources, preparing early warning plans, and resolving conflicts between farmers and nomads. These committees also aim to develop land-sharing mechanisms, facilitate access to land for demonstration plots and Farmer Field Schools (FFS), and create action plans for water resources management and development. The SIPRA program provides logistical and facilitation support for consultation sessions involving local authorities, community leaders, Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) representatives, and community members. The SIPRA program facilitated training for 18 of these committees, covering topics such as natural resource management, conflict resolution, cropland and pastureland management, resource mapping, and early warning plan preparation, with a focus on tribal and inter-communal conflicts. In the 2023 implementation year, the committees initiated the mapping of water resources and developed action plans for the rehabilitation and development of existing water infrastructure in collaboration with a facilitator from the Peace Studies & Development Center of the University of Zalingi.

In Blue Nile State (MoFA NL/EKN approved the expansion into two new states for the 2023 planting season support), the SIPRA program executed an intervention benefiting 286 smallholder farmers, reaching 1,716 family members, in Bau locality, Blue Nile State, providing a comprehensive package of agricultural inputs and services. This support included improved sorghum seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, seed dressing, and tractor services for plowing and planting, totaling 2530kg of sorghum seeds, 36000kg of fertilizer, 1300kg of insecticide, and 7.74kg of seed dressing. Additionally, capacity building was integrated into the intervention, with 30 agricultural extension workers and volunteers receiving training on Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices to provide ongoing technical support

to farmers. As a result, farmers cultivated 860 Feddans of land and produced 81.3 metric tons of sorghum, significantly enhancing their food security, and contributing to local and regional food supplies. This initiative not only bolstered food security but also strengthened farmers' resilience to climate change through the adoption of CSA practices, including the use of drought and disease-tolerant early-maturing seed varieties. Moreover, the SIPRA program's support enhanced the capacity of extension offices in target localities to deliver quality extension services to smallholder farmers. The relative success of the 2023 planting season support underscores the feasibility of implementing the SIPRA project in the Blue Nile state, leveraging vibrant agro-business sectors, medium and large-scale private sector engagement, and goodwill of existing government structures while harnessing the organizational capacity of producer associations practicing rainfed agriculture to create a fertile ground for inclusive partnership.

In South Kordofan State,.30 villages were strategically chosen, with 10 selected per locality (Kadugli, Elreef Elshargi, and Algoaz), in collaboration with the agriculture department. From these 30 villages, a total of 61 Producer Associations (PAs) were mapped, with 24 PAs legally registered, aiding in community organization and agricultural planning across the targeted areas. From the Food System Resilience Assessment (FoSRA) conducted in the designated localities, groundnuts, sesame, hibiscus, and sorghum were identified as potential cash crops for development. In response to scenario planning and adaptation management, SIPRA efforts focused on empowering communities and strengthening agricultural resilience. The project's impact was tangible, with cash support provided to PAs, training sessions conducted for women farmer groups, and extension cadres equipped with essential skills. This intervention not only addressed immediate needs but also laid the foundation for sustainable agricultural development and community empowerment in the targeted regions. Between July to August 2023, 1500 smallholder farmers (male 872 & female 628) from 24 PAs in Alreef-Alshargi and Kadugli localities were supported with cash (30,000 SDG/Farmer) which enabled them to access family essential needs (food and other priorities).

To bolster the capacity of government extension cadres in the implementation areas of the SIPRA project, training sessions on Farmers Field School (FFS) and Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices were conducted. Prior to these sessions, consultations with the extension departments in the targeted localities were carried out to identify areas needing improvement. Subsequently, a recommendation was made to enhance the capabilities of extension cadres specifically in FFS and CSA practices. Twenty (20) extension cadres, comprising 11 females and 9 males from the Agriculture Departments of Alreef-Alshargi and Kadugli localities, as well as the state general extension department, participated in two separate training courses. These sessions, held from August 22nd to 28th, 2023, were facilitated by experts from the Agricultural Research Station in Kadugli. The trainings covered various topics related to FFS and CSA practices, including steps to establish FFS, selection of vegetable crops, soil fertility improvement, and agricultural risk management. Participants expressed high satisfaction with the knowledge and skills acquired during the workshops and recommended additional training areas, including Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), food system approaches, and small agribusiness management. This comprehensive training not only equipped extension cadres with valuable skills but also provided a platform for further professional development in agricultural extension services. In addition to capacity building, support was extended to the extension department through the provision of fuel and stationary supplies. During August and October 2023, three barrels of fuel were allocated to the department's fleets, addressing the fuel shortages and high prices experienced, particularly in Kadugli. Furthermore, stationery items, including A4 paper packets, box files, and printer cartridges, were supplied to assist in administrative tasks. This support was especially appreciated amidst challenging circumstances, where operational costs were constrained by limited allocations from the Ministry of Production and Economic Resources (MoPERs).

Fifteen women farmer groups (750 members in total) in Kadugli and Alref-Alshargi received training in vegetable production, accompanied by the provision of agriculture inputs as one package per group. The package included a total of 25kg of Okra, 15kg of Watermelon, 25kg of Cucumber, 25kg of Eggplant, and 25kg of Watercress seeds, along with a set of basic hand tools consisting of 60 shovels, 80 rakes, and 60 digging hoes, all locally sourced from the Ahmed Horticulture Services at the Kadugli market. Monitoring visits conducted jointly by the project team and the horticulture department in January 2024 found that all visited groups had successfully planted the crops and were effectively utilizing the provided hand tools, although some groups had not fully implemented the technical

packages. Despite this, several groups had begun consuming the vegetables and selling the surplus in local markets, particularly Watermelon and Okra. No major challenges were identified during the visits, and overall, the group members expressed satisfaction with the support received, while also requesting improved vegetable seeds for the upcoming winter season and additional tools like wheelbarrows and watering cans for irrigation purposes.

Damba village, situated 7 km southwest of Kadugli town, stands as a testament to the success of the project's targeted interventions. With two Producer Associations (PAs) comprising 71 members, the village received cash support, which instead of being consumed immediately, was strategically invested in establishing a small business for securing food throughout the planting season. The decision was made collectively, leading to the purchase and installation of a flour mill, which not only saved time for farmers who previously had to travel to Kadugli for milling but also generated income through milling tariffs. The impact of this initiative was profound, as articulated by the Damba farmers during a group discussion: they were able to register, become active, and gain recognition, a privilege they had not previously enjoyed. The flour mill now sustainably generates SDG 40,000 per month in net income, empowering the community to explore further agro-business activities. Strengthened by their newfound voice and connections with relevant institutions and project staff, the villagers plan to share their success with neighboring PAs, underscoring the transformative impact of the project.

Euroconsult Mott MacDonald (EMM), played a pivotal role in the SIPRA project, primarily focusing on outcome 2. Their efforts encompassed several key activities, including an assessment of Agribusinesses and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) based in Khartoum with interests in expanding into project regions. Additionally, they conducted a comprehensive mapping exercise of the business environment, both nationally and within project areas, which involved analyzing government regulations and existing corporate partnerships with smallholders. Furthermore, EMM undertook a Political Economy Analysis to gauge the investment climate in the project areas and conducted a desk mapping exercise specifically targeting Agribusinesses and MSMEs in South and East Darfur and South Kordofan. However, Central Darfur was inadvertently omitted from this exercise due to internal administrative reasons at consortium partner organization World Relief WR. Despite planning to validate these mappings, EMM faced challenges due to conflicts and related emergencies, hindering their completion.

Moreover, EMM's contributions extended to identifying and assessing other Challenge Fund/Grants Practices in Sudan, such as Orange Corners and +249 (start-up fund), as well as completing a scoping exercise for a potential Investment Committee. This involved outlining guidelines for both a Large Grant Challenge Fund and a Small Grant Innovation Business Competition, along with proposing a list of 12 potential members for the investment committee panel, including national agricultural and agribusiness experts, financial institutional leaders, academia professionals, and regional youth leaders. Despite encountering obstacles, EMM's comprehensive efforts have laid the groundwork for fostering investment opportunities and promoting entrepreneurship within Sudan's agricultural sector.

Wageningen Center for Development Innovation (WCDI) conducted participatory assessments in the four states, engaging local conflict, gender, and nutrition experts to deepen understanding of conflict dynamics and their impact on food security as part of the Food System Resilience Assessment (FoSRA). The assessment identified key value chains essential for building resilient agricultural sectors, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan, although data quality in South Kordofan was affected by the ongoing conflict. The assessment, conducted in three phases, aimed to evaluate food systems, identify resilience pathways and validate findings. However, political instability hindered data validation and implementation of resilience strategies, delaying the completion of state-level reports. Additionally, planned training courses on Food System Resilience and entrepreneurship were postponed due to the volatile situation. Despite these challenges, WCDI continues to explore opportunities for capacity-building and online learning initiatives, adapting its approach to the evolving context. The FOSRA reports are attached to this report.

In response to the conflict, the SIPRA program adopted a scenario planning approach to guide an adaptive management response. A matrix has been devised to analyze conflict-driven dynamics at the state level, assessing how they influence context, behaviors, and ultimately, food system outcomes. This matrix serves as a dynamic learning tool, allowing for the continual incorporation of additional

criteria over time to enhance its effectiveness. Given the variability of instability levels across different states and localities, the approach enables the consortium to dynamically adjust its strategy in response to evolving instability risks. Attached are the templates. The matrix's left column outlines parameters to be regularly evaluated, facilitating the identification of necessary programmatic changes to adapt effectively to changing circumstances. This iterative process ensures that interventions remain responsive and tailored to the shifting realities on the ground, optimizing their impact on food system resilience.

WCDI participated in The Global Network Against Food Crises conference in Rome in October 2023, where insights from food system resilience were shared. Following this, WCDI organized a workshop focusing on protracted crisis areas and strategies for operating across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus. This initiative aims to leverage practical insights from Pathway 4's learning agenda and advocacy messages from Business-to-Business (B2B) platforms to influence national and international dialogues on food systems resilience. SIPRA plans to disseminate these findings to relevant global networks such as the National Food Systems Dialogue in Sudan and the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC), scaling existing models and fostering further dialogue.

5. COORDINATION, PARTNERSHIP, GENDER AND LESSONS LEARNED

5. 1: Coordination

Throughout the implementation of the SIPRA project, consortium partners have prioritized collaboration with stakeholders, including government line ministries, community leaders, and relevant authorities in the project states and localities. Key stakeholders, such as MOPER, the University of Zalingi, the Agriculture Bank, and the Office of Trade, endorsed the project idea and committed to providing technical support. This collaboration has been vital, with government line ministries like the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Agriculture playing integral roles in planning and executing project activities. MOPER's active involvement, particularly in training farmers and providing ongoing technical support, has significantly contributed to project success. Moreover, the Peace Studies and Development Centre of the University of Zalingi has supported community-based conflict resolution interventions, fostering a conducive environment for project implementation. Close coordination with HAC ensures the safety and security of field staff, enhancing operational effectiveness. Community leaders have been actively engaged in the project, participating in the identification process of producer associations during targeting and community entry sessions. Additionally, SIPRA has established an advisory/support committee comprising relevant government departments and stakeholders to streamline implementation processes and address challenges effectively. Coordination meetings at local administrative units, such as those in Adila and Abu Karinka, provide further technical advice and support. The consortium partners actively participate in sectoral clusters, including Food Security & Livelihoods, Health & Nutrition, WASH, Education, and emergency response clusters, facilitated by various UN agencies. Regular meetings with organizations implementing similar projects help prevent duplication of efforts, enhancing efficiency. Through close coordination with communities, authorities, and organizations, challenges such as limited access to villages and scarcity of essential commodities have been mitigated, ensuring the smooth progress of project activities.

5.2: Implementing Partners

The SIPRA project partnered with local implementing partners to effectively execute activities across project localities. In East Darfur, ZOA worked alongside AL Massar, a local organization, which played a pivotal role in tasks such as selecting SIPRA villages and mapping them out. Similarly, in South Darfur, ZOA partnered with National Humanitarian Aid (NaHA), another national local partner, to execute various project initiatives. These included developing water harvesting action plans, providing support to landless individuals, conducting training sessions for women farmer groups, and organizing awareness campaigns on market information systems. Additionally, World Relief collaborated with HOPE and Friendship Development Organization (HOPE), a national implementing partner, for grassroots-level community mobilization, coordination, and coaching activities during the 2023 implementation year. However, the eruption of conflict across Sudan disrupted the engagement of this partner, leading to challenges in carrying out operations on the ground.

5.3: Participation of and Accountability to Affected Population

The SIPRA consortium partners actively engaged community leaders throughout the project cycle including inception for their buy-in, and the implementation process leveraging their influence to disseminate project-related information and ensure transparency and participation at all stages. The consortium has prioritized the participation of community members throughout the project cycle, ensuring that the diverse perspectives of different ethnic, gender, age, and disability groups are considered in project activities. Transparent and participatory communication with beneficiaries, community leaders, and local authorities has been maintained, facilitating informed decision-making and fostering accountability. Through validation processes involving open and participatory meetings with authorities and humanitarian systems, ZOA has ensured that community voices are heard and incorporated into project planning and implementation. Additionally, key partners, including government departments, community leaders, and heads of Producer Associations (PAs), have been consulted to define roles and responsibilities, establish coordination mechanisms, and facilitate access to project areas, demonstrating a commitment to accountability among all stakeholders involved in the SIPRA project. Despite challenges due to security restrictions, efforts to establish Complaint and Feedback mechanisms and conduct consultation sessions with community leaders are ongoing, with plans to resume these activities in the first quarter of the 2024 implementation year. This consultative and inclusive approach aims to maximize accountability to stakeholders, ensuring that target community members are informed about project plans and any delays in implementation, allowing for informed decision-making and active participation in project activities.

5.4: Risk Management

Conflict and political instability were identified as major risks, with a potentially high impact of disrupting the SIPRA project. The outbreak of war in Sudan since April 2023 continues to directly affect the SIPRA programme implementation and the operations of the SIPRA consortium partners with its unprecedented displacement and widespread collapse of systems, particularly in the Darfur region. The SIPRA consortium partners have positioned themselves to be flexible and respond appropriately as much as possible to the fluid nature of the conflict adopting a scenario planning approach, tracking the risks to guide an adaptive management response. During the reporting period, Nertiti in Central Darfur, Algoaz in South Kordofan, and Asunta and Beliel in South Darfur states were inaccessible due to the conflict. Consequently, no activities were implemented in these areas.

5.5: Gender

The SIPRA project has taken deliberate measures to address gender inequalities, recognizing the patriarchal nature of the operational context. The project made sure that gender sensitivity was considered in all community structures and activities, with a focus on promoting equitable representation of both women and men in decision-making processes, particularly within PAs and women's groups. The project also made sure that women and youth were actively engaged in project decision-making processes, with a target of 30% membership for women in PAs. Additionally, agribusiness interventions specifically targeted women and youth, with reserved seats for women in PA management committees. The small grants (15k-20k) available for innovative business ideas as start-up capital for rural entrepreneurs are focused on women and youth entrepreneurs in Darfur and South Kordofan. Training programs were designed to address inequalities, and monitoring and reporting data was disaggregated by sex and age, allowing for a tailored approach to bridge gender gaps. Throughout project activities, deliberate efforts were made to include women and girls, fostering an environment where their voices were heard and valued. This inclusive approach, embraced by both men and women, saw increased participation of women in various project activities, such as FFS, PAs training, and seed distribution. The project also extended its efforts to other vulnerable groups like persons with disabilities and the elderly. Through these concerted efforts, SIPRA aims to create an inclusive environment where women and youth have equal access to project resources, opportunities, and protection, ensuring the meaningful participation and representation of all community members.

5.6: Environment:

The SIPRA project incorporates environmental protection measures to mitigate conflicts over natural resources and enhance community sustainability. Through training and technical support, the project aims to ensure the sustainability of interventions while addressing environmental concerns. SOS Sahel's expertise in natural resource management informs the project's approach to analyzing

environmental risks and implementing community-led initiatives to mitigate negative impacts. Community participatory planning allows stakeholders to discuss environmental concerns and devise strategies for mitigating them, while community-led monitoring and evaluation processes assess the real environmental impacts of project interventions, particularly regarding water sources. The project also addresses environmental challenges such as soil erosion, drought, and pest infestations, which threaten agricultural productivity and natural resource sustainability. The consortium partners implement extension packages for small farmers, focusing on environmental factors in vegetable production, soil fertility improvement, irrigation systems, pest management, and post-harvest techniques. By collaborating closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Research institutions, consortium partners ensure adherence to standards and guidance for sustainable agricultural practices. Through these efforts, the SIPRA project aims to mitigate environmental degradation, promote sustainable resource management, and enhance resilience to climate-related challenges in conflict-affected areas.

5.7: Lessons Learned:

- In a fragile operational context like Sudan, the SIPRA project identified the importance of contingency planning for long-term development initiatives, especially in conflict-affected areas where the government-established systems may not be fully functional. Adaptive program management strategies, including frequent reviews against context-specific indicators, proved critical in navigating such challenges.
- In light of an impending crisis that the world has not witnessed in decades, the SIPRA program must focus on enhancing food production. This may include adjusting and in some cases, dropping some outputs and activities, targets, and focusing on activities that contribute directly and significantly to the current needs and context of Sudan within the program objectives.
- To respond to the current situation and need, it is important to bolster household dietary diversity and nutrition among smallholder farmers and their families.
- Addressing gender inequalities emerged as a key lesson learned, with deliberate efforts made to empower women through participation in project decision-making processes, such as the selection of PA members and involvement in FFS activities. Enhanced participation of women and girls was observed throughout project activities, reflecting a shift in cultural norms and perceptions regarding women's roles.
- Furthermore, lessons highlighted the challenges of managing the challenge fund amidst conflict situations, necessitating a shift towards smaller grants to mitigate risks associated with inflation, cash-flow disruptions, and political tensions.
- Another option to maximize the impact of the Challenge Fund is to use its resources to initiate agricultural subsidies. In this case, subsidies could be offered to farmers too poor or with cash-flow issues to locally buy inputs or incentivize farmers to take a risk on new, better products (eg. seeds or crops) that they may be unfamiliar with. This might include the use of vouchers for products redeemable at local agro-dealers. This form of promotion can enable farmers to purchase from the local market and incentivize agro-dealers to increase their offerings to gain new customers. This would allow the local private sector to develop a functioning market that can provide goods and services to smallholder farmers at affordable (albeit subsidized) prices but also strengthen the resilience of local agri-markets in the absence of capital inflows and government interventions from Khartoum.
- The high inflation rate and continuous rise of commodities prices such as fuel and accordingly increased operational costs will impact the overall budget of the project.
- There is a need to explore technology and other innovations to facilitate farmers' productivity.

6: FINANCE

As described above, the onset of the conflict has profoundly impacted the project's implementation, leading to significant challenges that affected expenditure levels.

Delays in recruitment processes and strict travel restrictions within Sudan hindered the execution of planned activities. Moreover, the security situation necessitated the temporary displacement of staff and hindered movement to project locations, thereby impeding progress across various initiatives. Constraints on procurements of assets and equipment, as well as limitations on monitoring activities,

further contributed to the low expenditure. Additionally, contextual changes disrupted the implementation of planned and budgeted studies, such as baseline survey and conflict analysis.

As a result of these challenges, the overall expenditure on the SIPRA project fell short of the original work plan and budget for 2023

However, despite these challenges, the approval for the planting season support enabled the consortium to provide pivotal support to many smallholder farmers in both original SIPRA states, and Gedaref and Blue States. Of the approved budget of EUR 1,237,896, EUR 801,146 was expended, representing 65% utilization. The planting season support budget will be deducted from the original budget line: *II-A-II-3 Market-driven, innovative, and inclusive business models between PAs, agro-SMEs, and agri-businesses are designed, implemented, and scaled by the Challenge Fund.* The original 3.5M budget for the Challenge fund (large grants will be debited against the actuals of the planting season support 2023), and thus distributed over multiple other budget lines in accordance with the appropriate budget lines of the original budget.

In the forthcoming financial report, the consortium will present separate reports for the original SIPRA project, the planting season support, and a consolidated financial overview. These reports will be assessed by individual consortium partner audits and by a meta-audit.

The total expenditures for the SIPRA project, inclusive of the planting season support, up to 31 December 2023, amount to EUR 2,563,101.39, which constitutes 44% of the original budget for the years 2022 and 2023.

While audits of consortium partners are currently underway, the financial report is pending submission. Upon completion, the financial report, along with the audit findings, will provide details of the final expenditure levels.

ANNEX 1: SIPRA Updated Log Frame Matrix



SIPRA
Program_Update the l

ANNEX 2: Risks and Risks Management



SIPRA Program_Risks
Management_Jan_De