



مبادرة وحدة السودان

Unite Sudan Initiative

*Dignity, Justice, and Peace*

**UNITE SUDAN INITIATIVE**

*Dignity, Justice, and Peace*

**BRIDGING THE URBAN-RURAL  
GAP:  
Equitable Development Strategies for Sudan's  
Diverse Regions**

**DRAFT PROPOSAL DOCUMENT**

*Representing Ethnic, Gender and Regional Diversity  
A Model for a United Africa*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Sudan's urban-rural divide represents one of the country's most deep-rooted structural challenges — and a key driver of the inequalities that fueled decades of conflict. As the country prepares to rebuild after the devastating 2023 civil conflict, there is an unprecedented opportunity not merely to restore what existed before, but to fundamentally restructure how development, resources, and opportunities are distributed across its diverse regions.

This proposal presents a comprehensive, equity-focused framework for bridging the urban-rural gap in post-conflict Sudan. It draws on evidence from Sudan's own history, regional comparisons across Africa, and international best practice in inclusive development to identify priority strategies across economic development, infrastructure, social services, governance, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

## The Core Finding

Sudan's urban-rural gap is not an accident of geography — it is the product of decades of deliberate policy choices that concentrated investment, services, and political power in Khartoum and a small number of urban centers, while systematically neglecting peripheral regions. Reversing this requires equally deliberate policy intervention, backed by sustained financing and genuine political commitment to equity.

The proposal identifies five strategic pillars: (1) agricultural transformation and rural economic diversification; (2) infrastructure and connectivity investment prioritizing underserved regions; (3) decentralised service delivery for health, education, and social protection; (4) genuine fiscal and political decentralization; and (5) inclusive governance ensuring women, ethnic minorities, and rural communities have voice and agency over development decisions that affect their lives.

Total estimated resource requirements stand at \$25–35 billion over ten years, to be mobilized through a combination of international development assistance, multilateral bank financing, private investment, diaspora contributions, and growing domestic revenues as the economy recovers. Implementation is phased across emergency stabilization, early recovery, structural transformation, and consolidation stages.

Sudan at this crossroads has the chance to become a model — demonstrating that post-conflict reconstruction can be a vehicle for lasting equity, not a restoration of the conditions that caused conflict in the first place.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Context: Sudan's Urban-Rural Divide

Sudan has long been characterized by stark disparities between its capital, Khartoum, and the rest of the country. Pre-conflict data indicated that Khartoum state accounted for over 60% of GDP while comprising less than 15% of the population. Rural communities in Darfur, Kordofan, Eastern Sudan, and the Blue Nile region experienced dramatically lower access to education, healthcare, clean water, and economic opportunity. Agricultural communities — representing the majority of Sudan's working population — saw minimal government investment in productivity, market access, or rural infrastructure.

The conflict that erupted in April 2023 dramatically worsened these disparities. Agricultural production collapsed by over 50% in conflict-affected areas. Rural health systems, already fragile, were destroyed. Schools were shuttered or occupied. Population displacement — with over 8 million people forced from their homes — concentrated pressure on urban centers ill-equipped to absorb them, while rural areas emptied of the labor and social capital needed for recovery.

Addressing the urban-rural gap is therefore not simply a development objective — it is a peacebuilding imperative. Historical evidence from Sudan and comparable African contexts is unambiguous: economic marginalization and spatial inequality are among the most powerful predictors of renewed conflict.

## 1.2 Purpose and Objectives

This proposal aims to provide a strategic framework for equitable regional development in post-conflict Sudan. Its core objectives are to diagnose the structural causes of the urban-rural divide; identify priority interventions across sectors; propose inclusive implementation mechanisms that ensure marginalized communities drive and benefit from development; estimate resource requirements and financing pathways; and position Sudan's approach as a replicable model for post-conflict equitable development across Africa.

## 1.3 Scope and Geographic Focus

The proposal addresses development needs across Sudan's full territorial diversity, with particular attention to regions historically most disadvantaged: Darfur (North, South, East, West, and Central), South Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile State, Eastern Sudan (Kassala, Red Sea, and Gedaref), and Northern State. Urban areas — including Khartoum, Omdurman, Port Sudan, and El Obeid — are addressed as nodes of economic activity whose sustainable growth depends on strengthened rural-urban linkages rather than continued concentration.

## 1.4 Guiding Principles

The framework rests on eight foundational principles that distinguish it from conventional development approaches:

- **Spatial Equity:** Explicit resource allocation formulas ensuring historically marginalized regions receive priority investment proportional to need and deficit.
- **Community Agency:** Rural and peri-urban communities identify priorities, participate in design, and own implementation outcomes.
- **Gender Equality:** Women's equal participation as decision-makers, workers, and beneficiaries is non-negotiable and structurally enforced.
- **Ethnic Inclusion:** Sudan's diverse ethnic communities hold leadership positions and see their cultural contexts reflected in development design.
- **Conflict Sensitivity:** Every investment decision is assessed for its contribution to peacebuilding or potential to fuel grievance.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Development pathways are compatible with Sudan's ecological realities and climate vulnerability.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Full public disclosure of budgets, contracts, and outcomes with independent audit and community monitoring.
- **Long-term Commitment:** Development is framed as a generational project requiring sustained political will, not short-term project cycles.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

### 2.1 Economic Disparities

The economic gap between Khartoum and Sudan's peripheral regions represents one of the most extreme spatial inequalities on the African continent. Pre-conflict data from the World Bank and Sudan's Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that poverty rates in Darfur, Kordofan, and Eastern Sudan consistently exceeded 65%, compared to below 25% in Khartoum state. Rural households relied overwhelmingly on subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and artisanal activities with minimal market integration and near-zero access to formal financial services.

Agricultural productivity — the foundation of livelihoods for over 60% of Sudan's working population — remained chronically suppressed by inadequate extension services, poor irrigation infrastructure, limited access to improved seeds and fertilizers, dysfunctional rural markets, and post-harvest losses estimated at 30–40% of production. Sudan's agricultural potential is enormous: the country possesses over 100 million hectares of arable land, major river systems, and favorable climatic conditions across many regions — yet food insecurity remained endemic in rural areas even before the conflict.

### 2.2 Infrastructure and Service Access

The infrastructure deficit in rural Sudan is severe across all sectors. Road density in peripheral regions was among the lowest in Africa, with large areas inaccessible during rainy seasons. Electricity access rates below 5% in rural areas versus over 60% in Khartoum effectively excluded rural communities from the digital economy and limited productivity in processing, cold storage, and manufacturing. Rural water access rates were critically low, with women and girls bearing the primary burden of water collection — often walking several hours daily — directly reducing their availability for education and economic activity.

Health facility density in rural areas was a fraction of urban equivalents, with maternal mortality rates in Darfur and South Kordofan among the highest globally. Rural school completion rates were dramatically lower than urban equivalents, particularly for girls, with teacher shortages, inadequate facilities, and distance-to-school among the primary barriers.

### 2.3 Political and Governance Gaps

Sudan's highly centralized governance model concentrated fiscal resources, administrative decision-making, and political power in Khartoum. State and locality governments in peripheral regions lacked the fiscal transfers, technical capacity, and political authority to plan or implement meaningful development programmes. Revenue from natural resources — oil, gold, agricultural exports — flowed to the center with negligible redistribution to communities of origin. This resource extraction without commensurate development investment is widely identified as a proximate cause of the armed movements in Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and the Nuba Mountains.

## 2.4 Social and Gender Dimensions

Rural women in Sudan face compounded disadvantages. Gender gaps in education, healthcare, and economic participation are dramatically larger in rural than urban areas. Female literacy rates in rural Darfur and Kordofan were below 20% in pre-conflict surveys. GBV rates were high and impunity near-total. Women's participation in community decision-making was systematically suppressed by customary practices reinforced by state neglect. The conflict dramatically worsened these conditions, with widespread sexual violence used as a weapon of war.

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## 3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

### 3.1 Agricultural Transformation

Agriculture is the foundation of rural livelihoods and the primary lever for reducing the urban-rural income gap. The proposal calls for a transformative agricultural development programme encompassing: rehabilitation and expansion of irrigation infrastructure including the Gezira and Rahad schemes; a comprehensive agricultural extension service rebuilt on community-based models with gender parity among extension workers; subsidized access to improved seeds, fertilizers, and appropriate mechanization for smallholder farmers; post-harvest infrastructure including rural storage, processing, and cold chain facilities; and livestock development programmes for pastoralist communities including veterinary services, water points, and market access routes.

The goal is to increase agricultural productivity by at least 50% over ten years while ensuring that productivity gains translate into improved incomes for smallholders rather than exclusively benefiting large commercial operations.

### 3.2 Rural Industrialisation and Value Chains

Raw commodity export with minimal processing has consistently failed to generate rural employment or income. The proposal prioritizes rural Agro-processing industries — grain milling, oilseed processing, meat processing, gum Arabic refinement, sesame processing — located in production regions rather than Khartoum. Industrial zones in regional capitals including El Fasher, Nyala, El Obeid, Kassala, and Gedaref can anchor regional economic diversification while creating formal employment for rural youth and women.

### 3.3 Urban Economic Diversification

Sudan's secondary cities — chronically underdeveloped and under-resourced — have enormous potential as economic hubs connecting rural production with national and export markets. Strategic investment in regional commercial infrastructure, logistics, financial services, and light manufacturing in these cities can reduce the gravitational pull of Khartoum while creating proximate markets for rural producers. Special Economic Zones with simplified regulatory environments and targeted incentives for labor-intensive industries can attract private investment to historically marginalized regions.

### 3.4 Digital Economy and Financial Inclusion

Mobile money services, digital agricultural market platforms, and rural fintech have demonstrated transformative potential for rural economic inclusion across Africa. Sudan's relatively young population and growing mobile penetration provide a foundation for digital

financial inclusion even in remote areas. Priority investments include mobile network expansion to underserved rural areas, digital payment infrastructure, mobile money regulation enabling interoperability, and digital literacy programmes prioritizing women and youth.

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## 4. INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

### 4.1 Transport Networks

Transport connectivity is the single most powerful enabler of rural economic integration. The proposal prioritizes a phased rural roads programme targeting the highest-impact corridors linking agricultural production zones to regional market towns and national highways. An estimated 15,000 km of rural roads require rehabilitation or new construction in the highest-priority regions. All-weather road standards — achievable through appropriate local materials and construction technologies — are essential for year-round market access. The rail network, largely defunct, offers significant long-term potential for bulk commodity transport and should be subject to feasibility study for priority corridors including Khartoum-Port Sudan, Khartoum-El Obeid, and Khartoum-Kassala.

### 4.2 Energy Access

Extending the national grid to rural communities over a ten-year horizon is neither technically nor financially feasible in all areas. The proposal therefore prioritizes a dual approach: grid extension where population density and economic density justify it; and off-grid and mini-grid renewable energy systems — primarily solar — for dispersed rural communities. Sudan's solar irradiance is among the highest in Africa, making solar power both technically appropriate and increasingly cost-competitive. Targeted programmes for productive use of energy — powering grain mills, water pumps, cold storage, and workshop machinery — are essential to convert energy access into economic benefit.

### 4.3 Water and Sanitation

Universal access to safe water and basic sanitation in rural areas is both a human rights imperative and an economic development priority. The proposal targets construction and rehabilitation of rural water points, hafirs, and boreholes to achieve 90% population coverage in priority regions within five years; construction of community water and sanitation infrastructure in rural schools and health facilities; and promotion of community-led total sanitation approaches for open defecation elimination. Water governance — through community water management committees with mandatory women's leadership — is as critical as infrastructure investment for long-term sustainability.

### 4.4 Digital Connectivity

Mobile and internet connectivity are rapidly becoming essential infrastructure for economic participation, access to services, and civic engagement. Sudan's rural connectivity gap is stark: mobile coverage in remote areas is limited and data services are expensive relative to rural

incomes. The proposal calls for mandatory rural coverage obligations on mobile network operators as a condition of licensing, public investment in backbone infrastructure to reduce wholesale costs, community technology centers in rural towns, and targeted digital literacy programmes.

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## 5. SOCIAL SERVICES AND HUMAN CAPITAL

### 5.1 Education

The educational deficit in rural Sudan is both a development challenge and a justice issue. Addressing it requires simultaneous action on supply — school construction, teacher recruitment and deployment, materials provision — and demand — removing barriers including distance, cost, child labor, and early marriage. The proposal prioritizes construction and rehabilitation of primary and secondary schools in underserved communities; a rural teacher incentive programme providing salary supplements, housing, and professional development to attract and retain qualified teachers in peripheral areas; a non-formal education programme for the estimated millions of conflict-displaced adults and youth who missed schooling; girls' education acceleration programmes addressing specific barriers; and community secondary schools and vocational training centers in rural towns.

### 5.2 Healthcare

Rural healthcare infrastructure must be rebuilt from near-zero in the most conflict-affected areas and substantially expanded everywhere else. The proposal prioritizes a tiered approach: community health worker programmes providing basic preventive and primary care at village level; durable primary health care centers at sub-district level; district hospitals with surgical capacity at regional capital level; and referral systems including telemedicine and emergency transport linking the tiers. Prioritizing maternal and child health, nutrition, communicable disease control, and mental health and psychosocial support — chronically underfunded even before the conflict — is essential.

### 5.3 Social Protection

Shock-responsive social protection systems are essential for protecting the rural poor from economic and climatic shocks that perpetuate poverty traps. The proposal calls for a national social protection programme providing regular cash transfers to extremely poor and vulnerable households, with women as primary recipients; a public works programme creating productive rural assets while providing income during lean seasons; and a humanitarian social protection bridge linking emergency assistance to longer-term developmental programming for conflict-affected populations.

## 6. GOVERNANCE AND DECENTRALISATION

No development strategy for bridging Sudan's urban-rural gap can succeed without fundamental reform of the governance architecture that created and sustained that gap. Sudan's extreme fiscal and political centralisation must give way to genuine decentralization — transferring not just administrative functions but real fiscal resources and decision-making authority to state and locality levels.

### 6.1 Fiscal Decentralisation

State and locality governments must receive substantially increased fiscal transfers from central government, calculated through transparent, needs-based allocation formulas that explicitly weight historical deprivation. Revenue-sharing arrangements for natural resource extraction must ensure that communities of origin receive meaningful shares of proceeds. The capacity of subnational governments to plan, budget, and manage public expenditure requires sustained technical assistance and capacity building alongside fiscal transfer reforms.

### 6.2 Local Governance Capacity

Local government bodies in peripheral regions must be supported to develop the technical and managerial capacity to effectively deploy increased resources. This requires recruitment and retention of qualified civil servants in peripheral areas through competitive salaries and career incentives; training programmes in public financial management, procurement, infrastructure management, and community engagement; and peer-learning mechanisms connecting more and less capable localities.

### 6.3 Community Participation

Formal governance reform must be complemented by meaningful community participation mechanisms. Community Development Committees at village and neighborhood level — with mandatory gender parity in leadership — should be formally established as the primary interface between communities and local government. Participatory planning processes at locality level, open budget processes, and community scorecards for public services can transform the relationship between state and citizen in rural Sudan.

## 7. GENDER AND INCLUSION

Gender equality is not a standalone programme add-on — it is a cross-cutting structural requirement embedded in every element of this framework. Rural women in Sudan face the deepest intersection of poverty, exclusion, and insecurity, and must be the primary agents and beneficiaries of rural development, not passive recipients.

The framework mandates: 50% female representation in all community governance structures; 40% female workforce participation in reconstruction and development employment; women as primary beneficiaries of financial services, land registration, and economic development programmes; gender-responsive design of all infrastructure — latrines separated by sex, lighting in public spaces, safe water points positioned to reduce women's exposure to violence; dedicated GBV prevention and response services integrated into health and community programmes; girls' education acceleration including cash transfers conditional on school enrolment; and women's economic empowerment programmes including savings groups, business development services, and access to land and productive assets.

### Gender Equity Target

All programmes under this framework must demonstrate that at least 50% of direct beneficiaries are women and girls, with specific targets for women's participation in governance, employment, and economic development components. Gender audits will be conducted annually by independent bodies with findings publicly reported.

## 8. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Sudan's rural economy is profoundly dependent on natural resources — land, water, forests, pasture — and profoundly vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change. The urban-rural gap has a significant environmental dimension: land degradation, desertification, deforestation, and water scarcity are concentrated in peripheral rural areas, where they undermine agricultural productivity and pastoralist livelihoods while driving rural-urban migration.

The development framework prioritizes environmental sustainability through: ecosystem restoration programmes addressing land degradation, deforestation, and desertification in Darfur, Kordofan, and Eastern Sudan; climate-smart agricultural practices reducing vulnerability to rainfall variability while maintaining productivity; sustainable land use planning integrating farmer-herder conflict prevention; integrated water resources management for major river basins; and green energy solutions reducing reliance on biomass energy that drives deforestation. Environmental impact assessment is required for all infrastructure investments, with community environmental monitoring built into project governance.

## 9. REGIONAL PRIORITISATION

While the urban-rural gap manifests across all of Sudan's regions, the severity and specific character of disadvantage varies considerably. The framework adopts a differentiated regional approach, with investment priorities and programme designs reflecting regional specificity:

Region	Development Priority Focus
<b>Darfur Region</b>	Highest priority region given devastating impact of conflict and decades of marginalization. Comprehensive reconstruction of villages, agricultural rehabilitation, GBV response, land rights resolution, and psychosocial support. Special attention to non-Arab communities and female-headed households displaced by violence.
<b>South Kordofan / Nuba Mountains</b>	Long history of armed conflict and exclusion. Priority for community reconciliation, agricultural development, basic services, and inclusion of Nuba communities in governance. Mining revenues must benefit local communities.
<b>Blue Nile State</b>	Persistent underdevelopment compounded by conflict. Agricultural development, forest management, hydroelectric benefit-sharing, and social services investment. Significant Funj and other community representation required.
<b>Eastern Sudan</b>	Port Sudan expansion and Red Sea economy must generate benefits for Beja and other Eastern communities, not only for Khartoum. Agricultural development in Kassala and Gedaref, pastoral infrastructure, and addressing longstanding Beja grievances.
<b>Northern Sudan</b>	Lower acute crisis severity but significant development deficits. Archaeological tourism potential, Nile agriculture, and youth employment are priorities. Nubian community land rights require resolution.
<b>Secondary Cities Nationwide</b>	El Fasher, Nyala, El Obeid, Kassala, Gedaref, and others serve as regional economic anchors. Targeted urban infrastructure, industrial zone development, and administrative capacity building to reduce Khartoum

dependence.

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## 10. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Implementation is structured across four sequential phases, each building on the preceding one:

Phase	Key Activities
<b>Phase 1: Stabilisation (0–12 months)</b>	Emergency support for displaced populations; rapid assessment of regional development deficits; establishment of coordination mechanisms; mobilization of initial financing; community consultation on priorities; recruitment and training of implementation teams.
<b>Phase 2: Early Development (12–36 months)</b>	Launch of flagship agricultural programmes; priority infrastructure rehabilitation including critical road corridors and water systems; deployment of community health workers and mobile education services; establishment of community governance structures; initial fiscal decentralization reforms.
<b>Phase 3: Structural Transformation (3–7 years)</b>	Major infrastructure construction; rural industrialization and value chain development; secondary city development; comprehensive social service delivery; deepened fiscal decentralization; community ownership of development programmes.
<b>Phase 4: Consolidation (7–10 years)</b>	Transition from externally financed to domestically funded development; strengthened subnational government capacity; performance review and programme adaptation; integration into Sudan's long-term national development plan.

## 11. FINANCING AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

Total resource requirements for bridging Sudan's urban-rural gap are estimated at \$25–35 billion over ten years, distributed across the following investment areas:

Investment Area	Estimated Cost and Components
<b>Agricultural Transformation</b>	\$6–8 billion — Irrigation, extension, inputs, markets, livestock, post-harvest infrastructure.
<b>Rural Infrastructure</b>	\$8–10 billion — Roads, energy, water, sanitation, digital connectivity.
<b>Social Services</b>	\$5–7 billion — Schools, health facilities, teachers, health workers, social protection.
<b>Governance and Decentralisation</b>	\$1.5–2 billion — Fiscal systems, local government capacity, community structures.
<b>Economic Development</b>	\$3–4 billion — Rural industrialization, secondary city development, digital economy.
<b>Environmental Restoration</b>	\$1.5–2 billion — Land rehabilitation, climate adaptation, ecosystem management.
<b>Programme Management &amp; M&amp;E</b>	\$0.5–1 billion — Coordination, monitoring, evaluation, accountability systems.

Financing will be mobilized through: international development assistance from bilateral donors and UN agencies; World Bank IDA grants and credits; African Development Bank concessional financing; Islamic Development Bank; private sector investment in commercially viable rural infrastructure including energy and agribusiness; Sudanese diaspora bonds and investment vehicles; and growing domestic revenue as the economy recovers, targeting 25–30% domestic financing by Year 7.

## 12. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework is essential both for programme accountability and for adaptive management in a complex, dynamic environment. The M&E system will track progress against a set of headline indicators across each strategic pillar, with data disaggregated by region, gender, ethnicity, and age group to ensure that aggregate progress masks no hidden inequities.

Community monitoring — through trained community monitors empowered to report programme performance independently of government and implementing agencies — is a structural requirement, not an optional add-on. An independent evaluation unit reporting to a multi-stakeholder oversight board, with public reporting of findings, will ensure transparency and continuous improvement. Annual equity audits will assess whether the urban-rural gap is genuinely narrowing across economic, infrastructure, social, and governance dimensions.

## 13. RISKS AND MITIGATION

Risk	Mitigation Strategy
<b>Political instability and renewed conflict</b>	Conflict-sensitive programme design; community engagement reducing local conflict drivers; rapid response protocols for programme adaptation; do-no-harm assessments for all investments.
<b>Elite capture of decentralization</b>	Robust anti-corruption measures; community monitoring systems; transparent fiscal transfer formulas; civil society oversight; independent audit.
<b>Inadequate international financing</b>	Diversified financing strategy; phased programme allowing reprioritization; domestic resource mobilization from Year 3; results-based financing demonstrating impact.
<b>Climatic shocks disrupting agriculture</b>	Climate-smart agricultural design; shock-responsive social protection; ecosystem restoration reducing vulnerability; livelihood diversification.
<b>Capacity gaps in local government</b>	Front-loaded capacity building investment; technical assistance accompaniment; peer learning; realistic programme timelines aligned with capacity.
<b>Gender backlash and exclusion of women</b>	Community-level gender sensitization; legal and policy frameworks protecting women's rights; dedicated women's empowerment programmes; zero-tolerance policies on GBV.

## 14. RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Sudanese Government

- Enact a National Spatial Equity Act establishing legally binding minimum investment standards for historically marginalized regions and transparent inter-governmental fiscal transfer formulas.
- Establish a dedicated Ministry or High Commission for Regional Development with representation from all regions and authority to coordinate investments across line ministries.
- Adopt a National Land Policy resolving customary land rights, protecting communities from displacement, and giving rural women equal land tenure rights.
- Commit to progressive fiscal decentralization targets — 25% of national expenditure at subnational level by Year 3, 40% by Year 7 — with legislated protections against reversal.
- Launch a National Agricultural Transformation Plan with specific regional productivity targets and smallholder-centered investment priorities.

### For International Partners and Donors

- Provide long-term, predictable development financing with at least 60% directed to regions outside Khartoum, verified through independent tracking.
- Align assistance with Sudanese-owned regional development frameworks rather than imposing parallel project structures that fragment effort and undermine national capacity.
- Invest substantially in governance and public financial management support at subnational level — the critical missing link in most previous Sudan assistance.
- Maintain a ten-year financing commitment, recognizing that structural transformation of this depth cannot be achieved in standard 3–5-year project cycles.

### Practical Recommendations for Implementation

#### Recommendation 1: Establish Regional Development Compacts

Each of Sudan's major regions should negotiate a Regional Development Compact — a multi-year agreement between the federal government, regional authorities, communities, and international partners specifying investment commitments, targets, and accountability mechanisms. This gives communities enforceable entitlements, donors assured alignment, and government clear performance obligations. Compacts should be publicly available and subject to annual public review.

### **Recommendation 2: Create a Rural Infrastructure Fund with Community Procurement**

A dedicated Rural Infrastructure Fund, capitalized by international donors and channeled through a multi-donor trust fund, should finance rural roads, water, energy, and digital infrastructure. Critically, procurement should prioritize community and local contractor participation over national and international contractors, maximizing local employment and economic benefit. Community infrastructure committees should have co-signatory authority on expenditures.

### **Recommendation 3: Launch a Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Programme**

A targeted programme providing rural women with integrated packages of financial services (savings, credit, insurance), business development support, land registration assistance, and market linkages — delivered through women's cooperatives and savings groups — would address the single most powerful lever for rural household income growth. Evidence from comparable programmes in Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Kenya demonstrates that women's economic empowerment generates multiplier effects across household nutrition, children's education, and community resilience.

### **Recommendation 4: Invest in an Agricultural Extension Revolution**

Sudan's agricultural extension system must be rebuilt from the ground up with gender parity among extension workers, community-based rather than state-farm-focused orientation, digital tools for knowledge dissemination, and direct linkage to input supply chains and output markets. A target of one extension worker per 500 farm households — with at least 50% female — should be established as a ten-year milestone with immediate action in the most underserved regions.

## 15. CONCLUSION

Sudan's urban-rural gap is simultaneously a humanitarian crisis, a development challenge, and a political emergency. It is the accumulated product of decades of deliberate marginalization — and reversing it will require equally deliberate, sustained, and courageous policy action.

This proposal provides a roadmap grounded in Sudan's realities, informed by international best practice, and committed to the principle that development must reach and empower every Sudanese citizen, regardless of where they live, what ethnicity they belong to, or what gender they are. It is not a technocratic exercise — it is a political and moral statement about what kind of country Sudan chooses to become.

The evidence is clear: Sudan cannot achieve lasting peace without equity, and it cannot achieve equity without fundamentally restructuring how development resources and political power are distributed across its diverse regions. The urban-rural gap did not emerge by accident. It will not close by accident. It will close through deliberate investment, genuine decentralization, community empowerment, and the political will to prioritize those who have been most marginalized.

### **The Central Message**

Bridging Sudan's urban-rural gap is not merely a development objective — it is the foundation of sustainable peace. The investment required is large, but it is far less than the cost of continued conflict. The political commitment required is significant, but it is the only viable path to the stable, equitable, and united Sudan that all Sudanese deserve. The work begins now.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>AfDB</b>	African Development Bank
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>CHW</b>	Community Health Worker
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FCV</b>	Fragility, Conflict and Violence
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information System
<b>IDA</b>	International Development Association (World Bank)
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IsDB</b>	Islamic Development Bank
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MFI</b>	Microfinance Institution
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>PFM</b>	Public Financial Management
<b>RSF</b>	Rapid Support Forces
<b>SAF</b>	Sudanese Armed Forces
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SEZ</b>	Special Economic Zone
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium Enterprise
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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