

# **Understanding Sudan's Nationwide Famine**

**Alex de Waal**

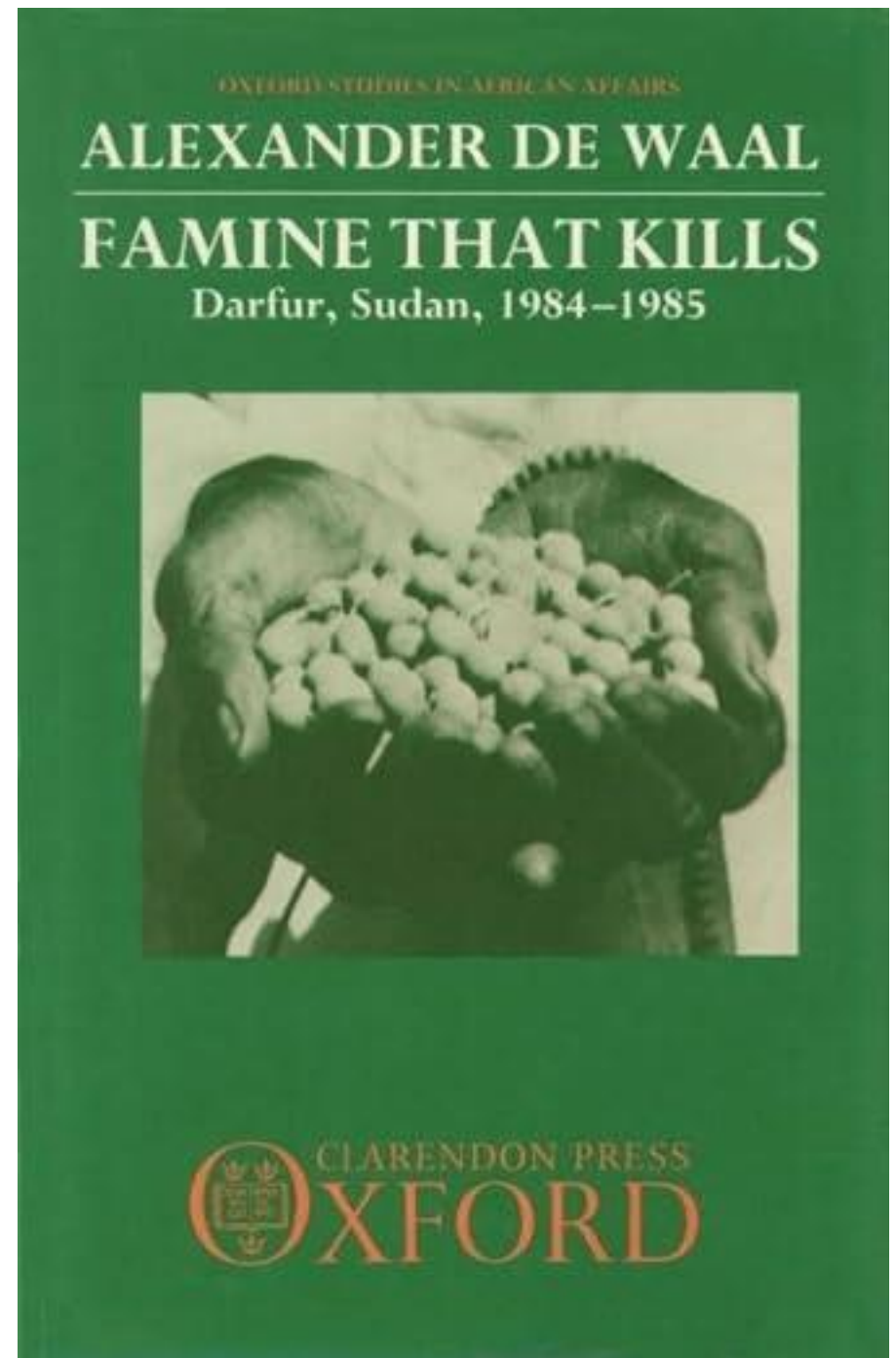
## Cause of famines (1)

Drought and neglect  
of the peripheries

Examples

Darfur, Nile regions  
1913-1914

Darfur and Kordofan  
1984-1985



## Cause of famines (2)

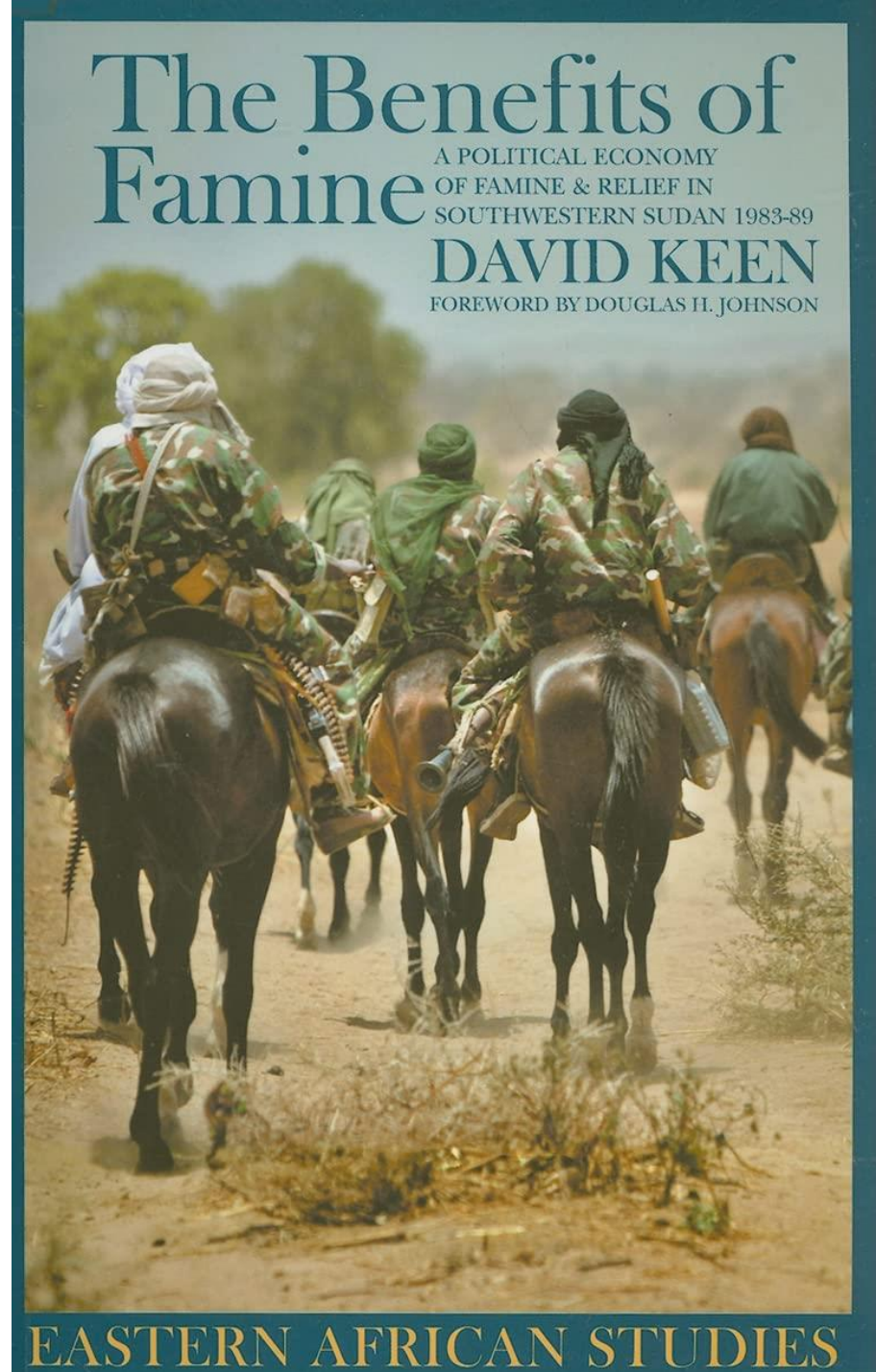
War, pillage, forced displacement

For example

Southern Sudan  
1986-1989

Southern Sudan  
1994, 1998

Darfur  
2003-2005



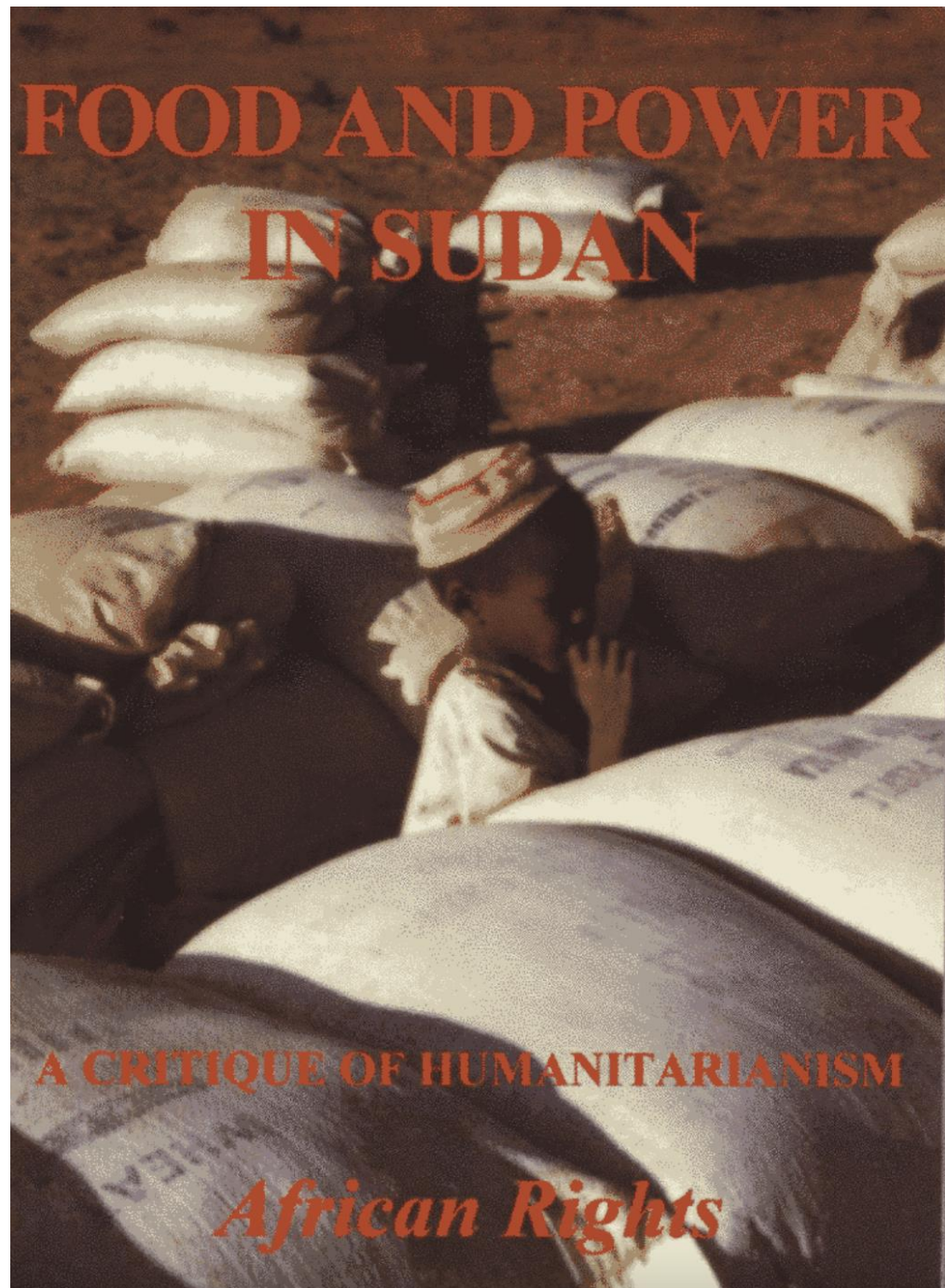
## Causes of famines (3)

Collapse of urban food entitlements

Rare examples

Khartoum 1919

Urban Sudan  
Since 2017



Today:

# ALL OF THE ABOVE

The Intelligence | Global news

**Can the world save Sudan from a nationwide famine?**

# Five Pillars of Sudan's Food Economy

1. Commercial mechanized production
2. Smallholder farming
3. Wheat imports
4. Livestock
5. Food aid

*All are damaged or destroyed in an unprecedented nationwide food crisis*

# 1: Commercial mechanized production

- Mostly sorghum, including for export
- Reliant on credit, fuel, fertilizer, migrant labor
- Environmentally unsustainable, economically exploitative



Credit: IFAD



## 2: Smallholder (village) farming

- Sorghum and millet plus livestock
- Mostly subsistence level, with families often needing to supplement with migrant labour



Credit: FAO



# 3: Wheat imports

- To feed the cities with their taste for bread
- An expensive addiction



Credit (above): Al Jazeera  
(left) IFAD

# 4: Livestock

- Cattle, sheep, camels
- Vast majority owned by merchants & officers
- Exported to Egypt & Gulf



Credit (above): Arab News  
(Left): IFAD

# 5: Food Aid

- Feeding IDP camps (many of which have been there for 20 years) and poor rural areas



Credit (above): World Vision  
(left): WFP



## Hunger in Sudan's Political Marketplace

Edward Thomas and Alex de Waal

### What this means:

Sudan exports commodities, including food, to pay for its addiction to wheat

This system is desperately vulnerable

But successive governments keep it going because it's the basis for their power

# 'The Crisis Before the Crisis'

- Underlying non-sustainability of the production system
- Recurrent wars in the peripheries leading to large scale forced displacement and aid dependent populations, esp. Darfur and South Kordofan plus refugees from South Sudan
- Collapse of national economy and urban incomes from 2016 onwards

# GDP (current US\$) - Sudan

World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files.

License : CC BY-4.0 [i](#)

Line

Bar

Map

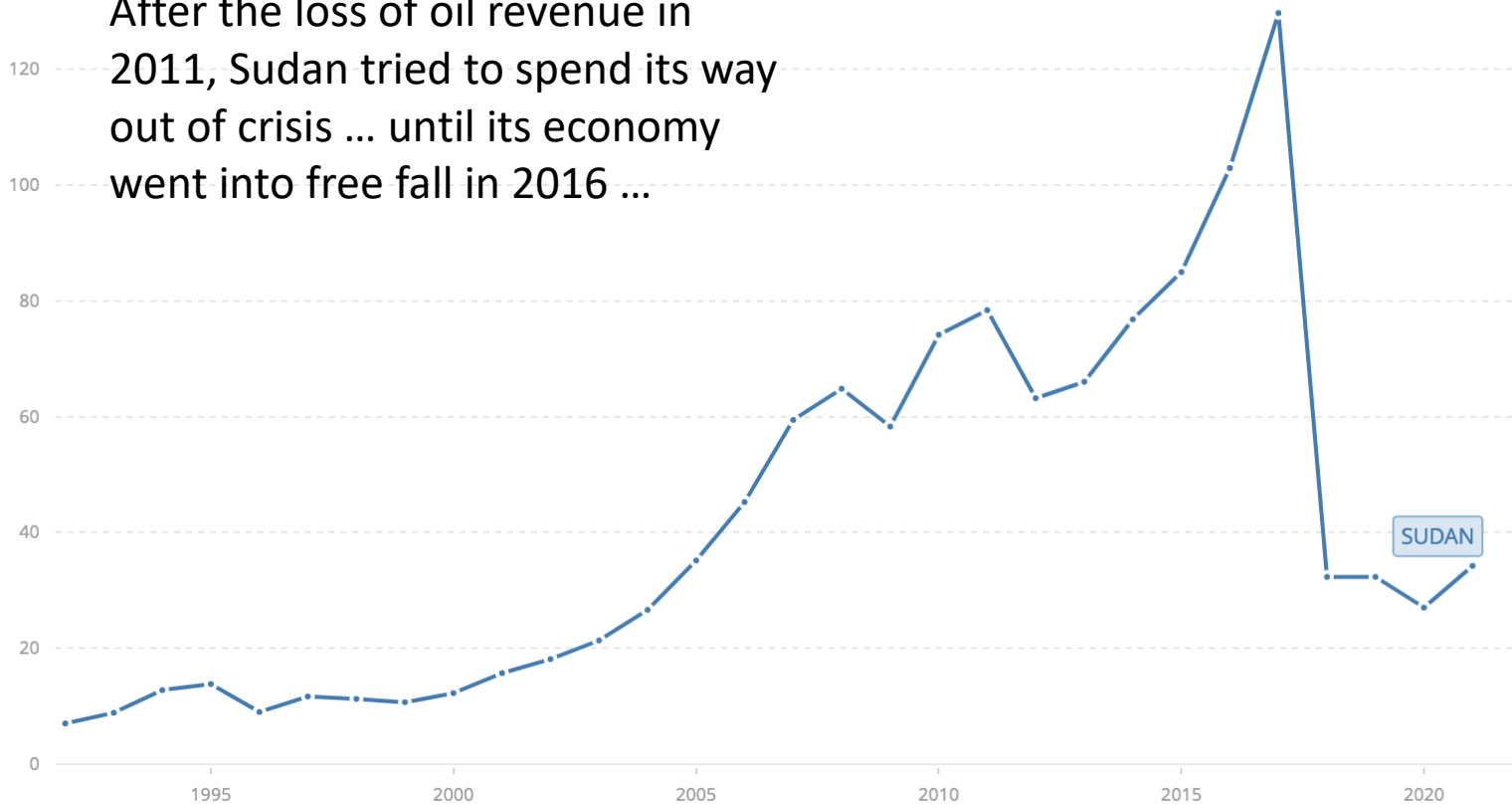
⋮ Also Show

↪ Share

ⓘ Details

LABEL

After the loss of oil revenue in 2011, Sudan tried to spend its way out of crisis ... until its economy went into free fall in 2016 ...



1992 - 2021

III

III

... causing unprecedented levels of food insecurity in  
Khartoum and other urban centres

*Percentage of Khartoum enduring crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC data)*



(note that it needs to hit 20% to figure on FEWSNET food insecurity maps)

# Bread, Freedom and Change

The economic collapse and growth in urban food insecurity in 2016 directly contributed to the protests of 2018 and the overthrow of al-Bashir in 2019

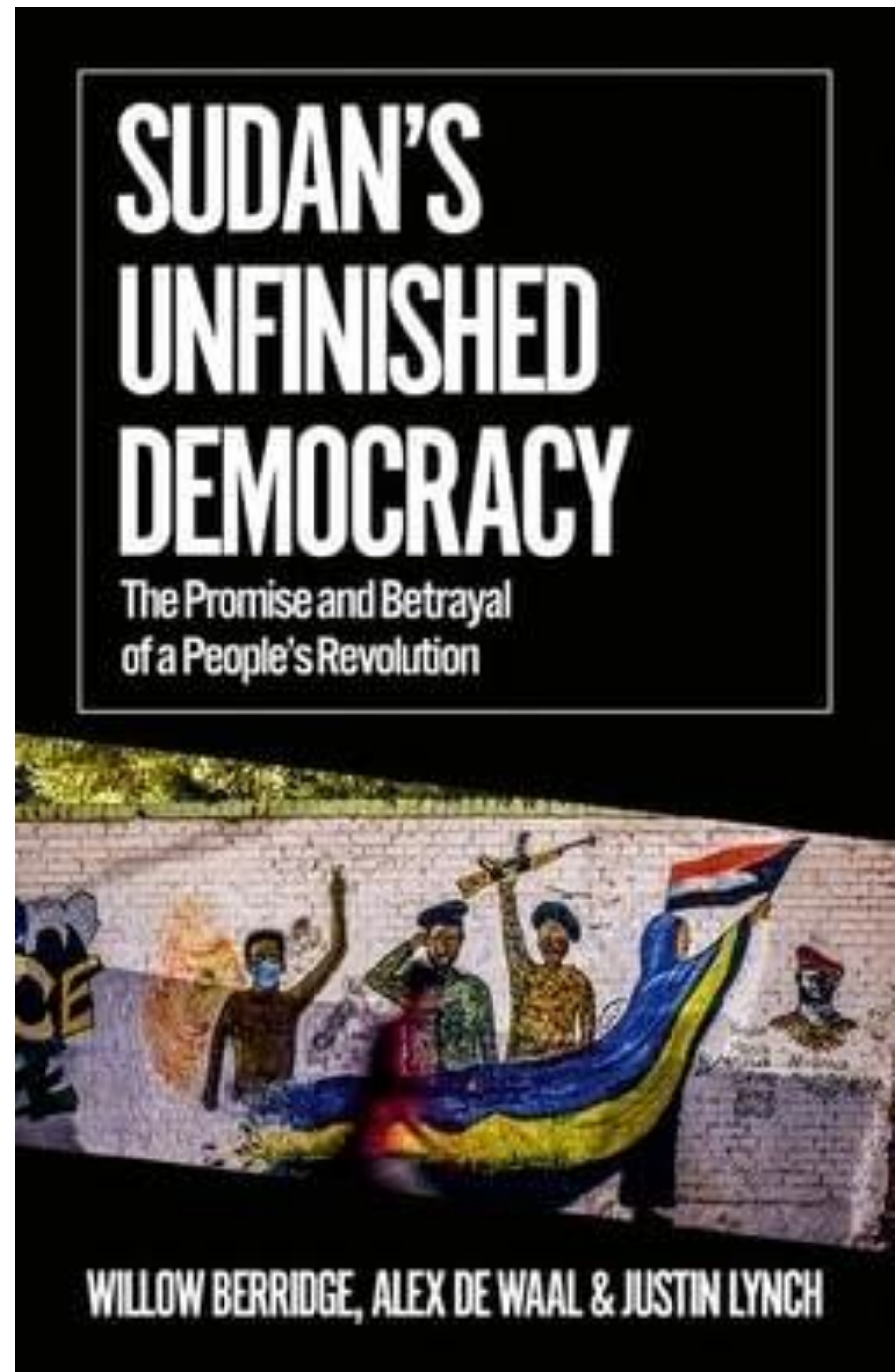


'The Bread Loaf' by AbdulRahman Alnazeer.



Sudan's democratic revolution foundered on the civilian-led government's inability to solve the crisis of poverty and hunger

International donors and creditors bear the largest responsibility for this. Especially the United States, that only lifted the 'State Sponsor of Terrorism' label when Sudan recognized Israel... by which time it was too late



# The five pillars today

1. Commercial mechanized agriculture
  - Under massive strain, production down 50%
2. Smallholder farming
  - Under massive strain, production down 50%
3. Wheat imports
  - Almost completely halted
4. Livestock
  - Controlled by the army and RSF
5. Food aid
  - Shut down almost wholly

# Famine Metrics

## Magnitude:

- Numbers of people affected
- Total count of excess deaths

## Intensity:

- Level of food insecurity in a specific location
- Measured according to IPC scale

## Duration:

- Length of time in crisis
- Trajectory of descent/recovery

IPC phase	Brief description	Cereal consumption (kcal/person/day)
phase 1 (minimal)	Enough food	1,800
phase 2 (stressed)	Enough food, but unable to afford other expenses without resorting to coping mechanisms	1,600
phase 3 (crisis)	High acute malnutrition, or forced to deplete assets / resort to coping strategies to continue to meet food needs	1,400
phase 4 (emergency)	Large food consumption gaps, very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality, or extreme coping strategies to meet food needs (including asset liquidation)	800-1,200
phase 5 (catastrophe)	Extreme lack of food after all coping strategies have been used. No food at all on some days.	600

# Sudan Acute Food Insecurity

## February 2019 assessed outcomes

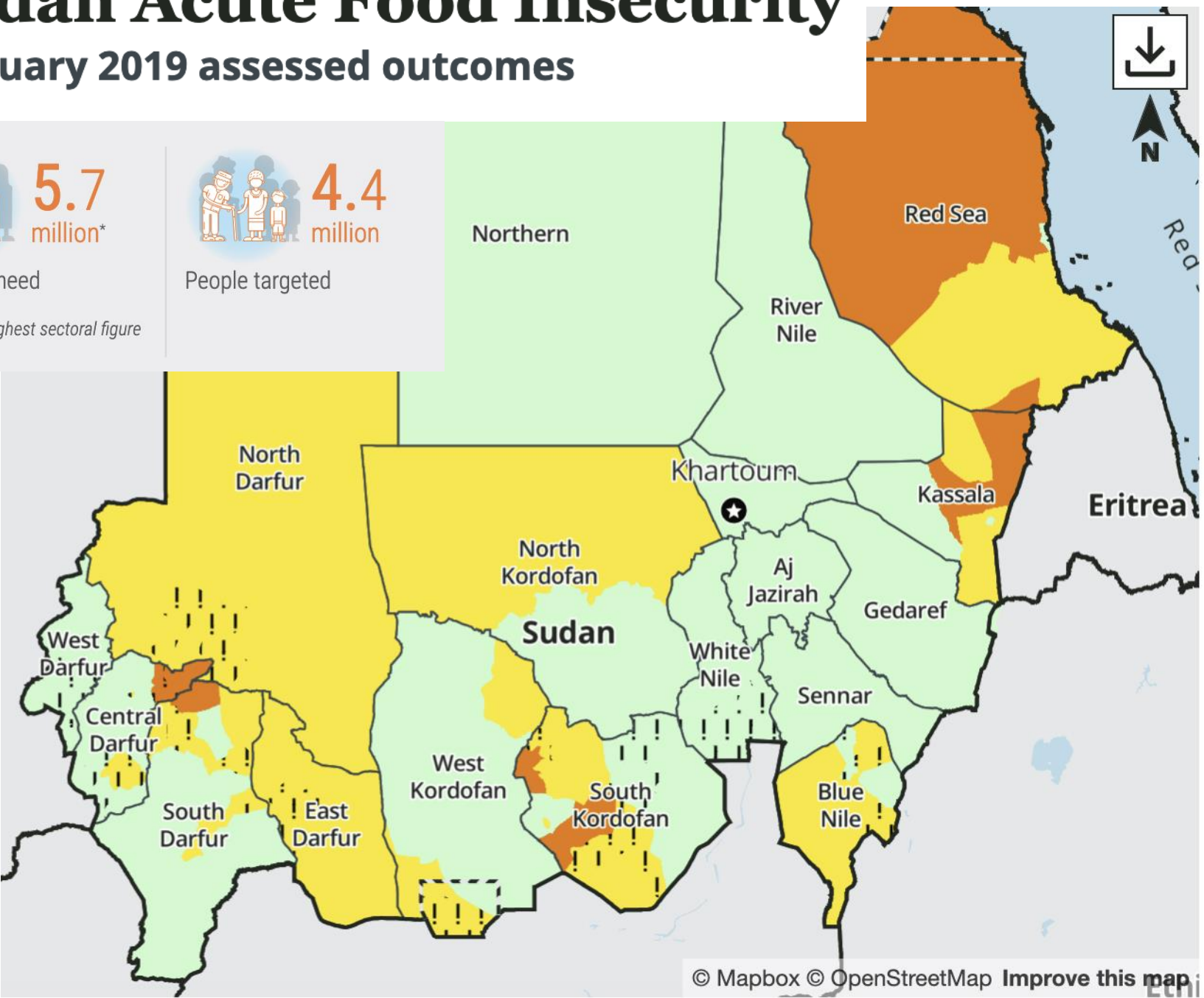


People in need



People targeted

\* Based on highest sectoral figure (FSL)



# Sudan Acute Food Insecurity

February 2023 assessed outcomes

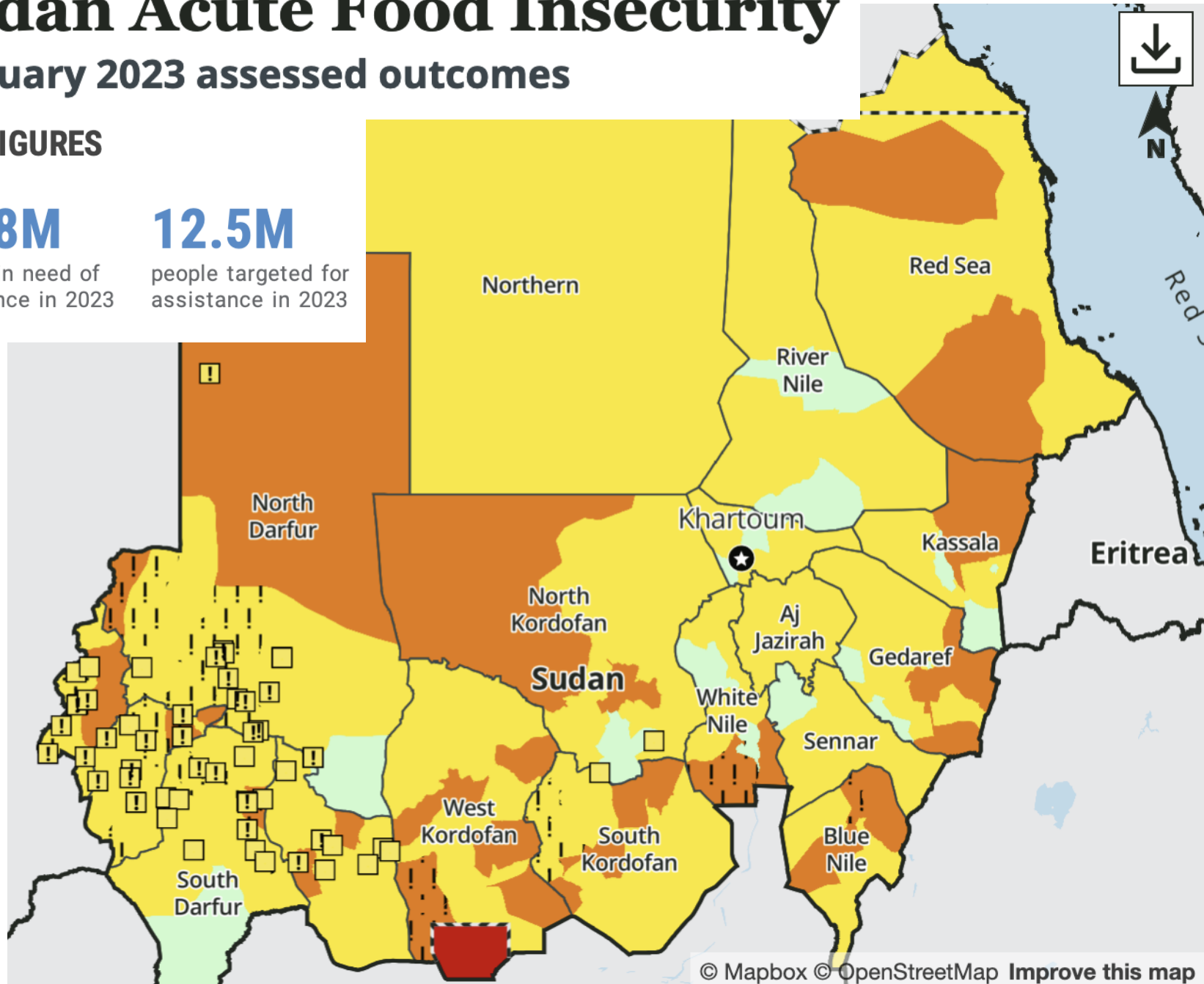
## KEY FIGURES

**15.8M**

People in need of assistance in 2023

**12.5M**

people targeted for assistance in 2023



# Sudan Acute Food Insecurity

## October 2023 assessed outcomes

### KEY FIGURES

**24.7M** 

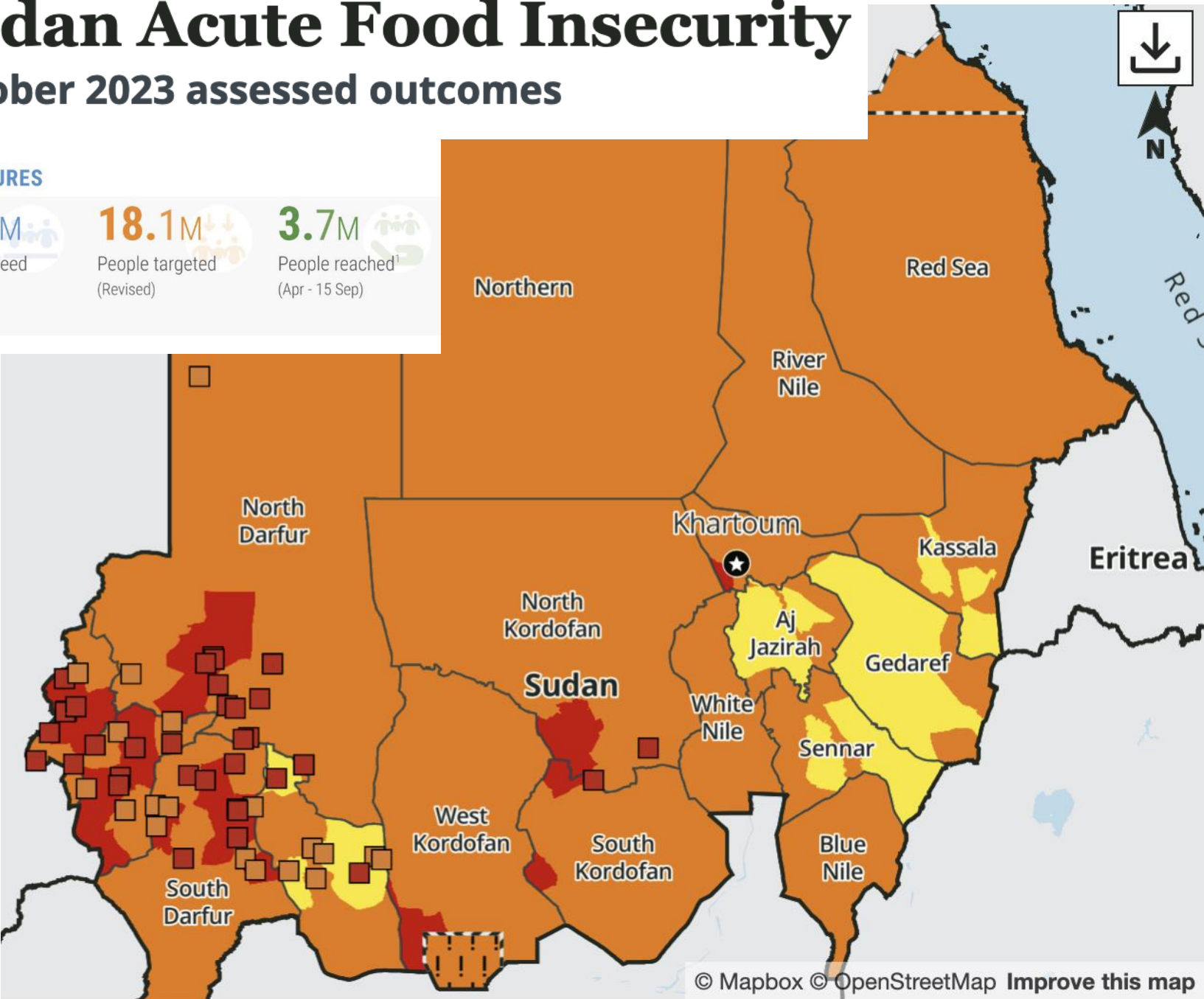
People in need  
(Revised)

**18.1M** 

People targeted  
(Revised)

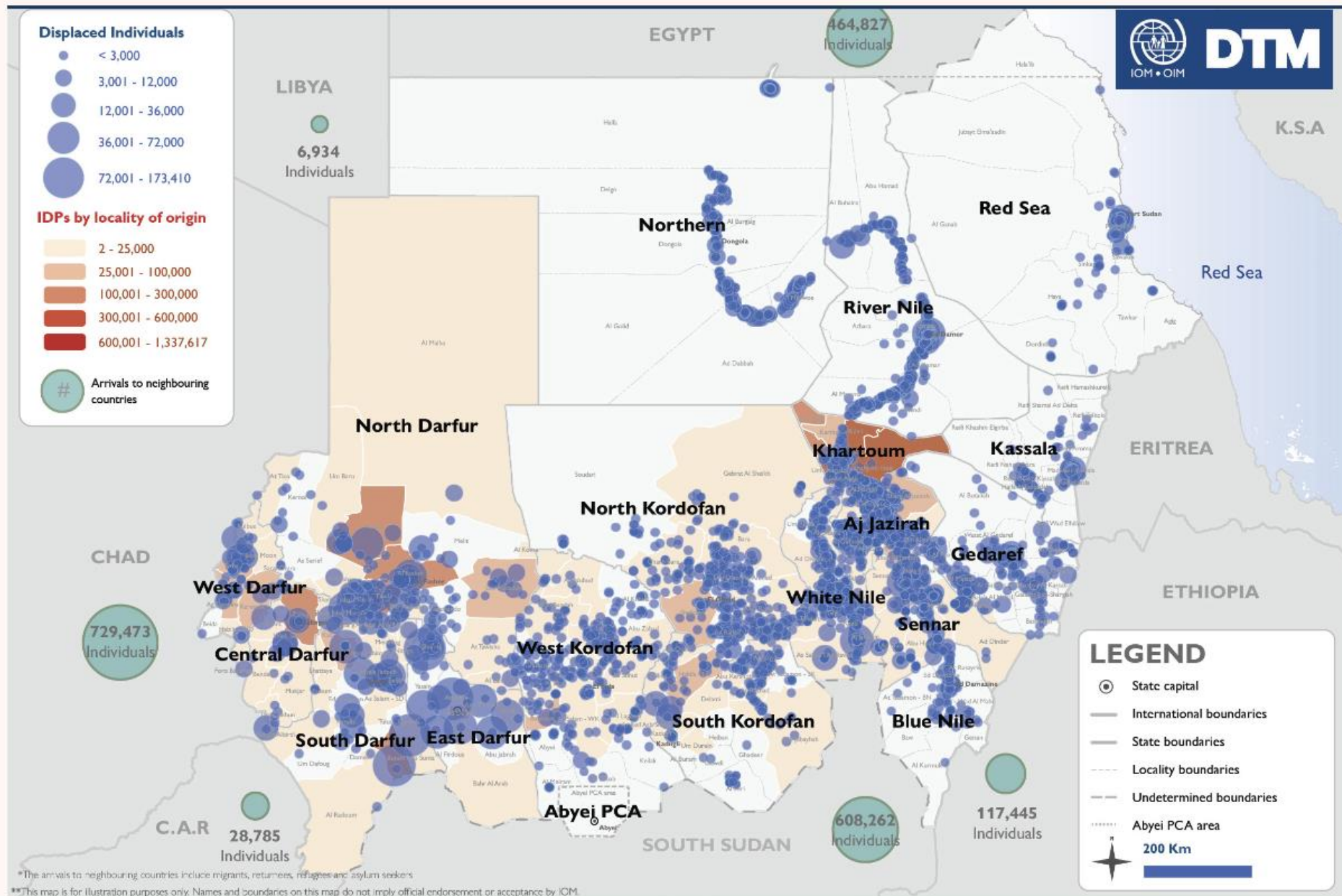
**3.7M** 

People reached<sup>1</sup>  
(Apr - 15 Sep)



# Displacement across Sudan and into neighbouring countries since 15 April 2023

Source: DTM IOM

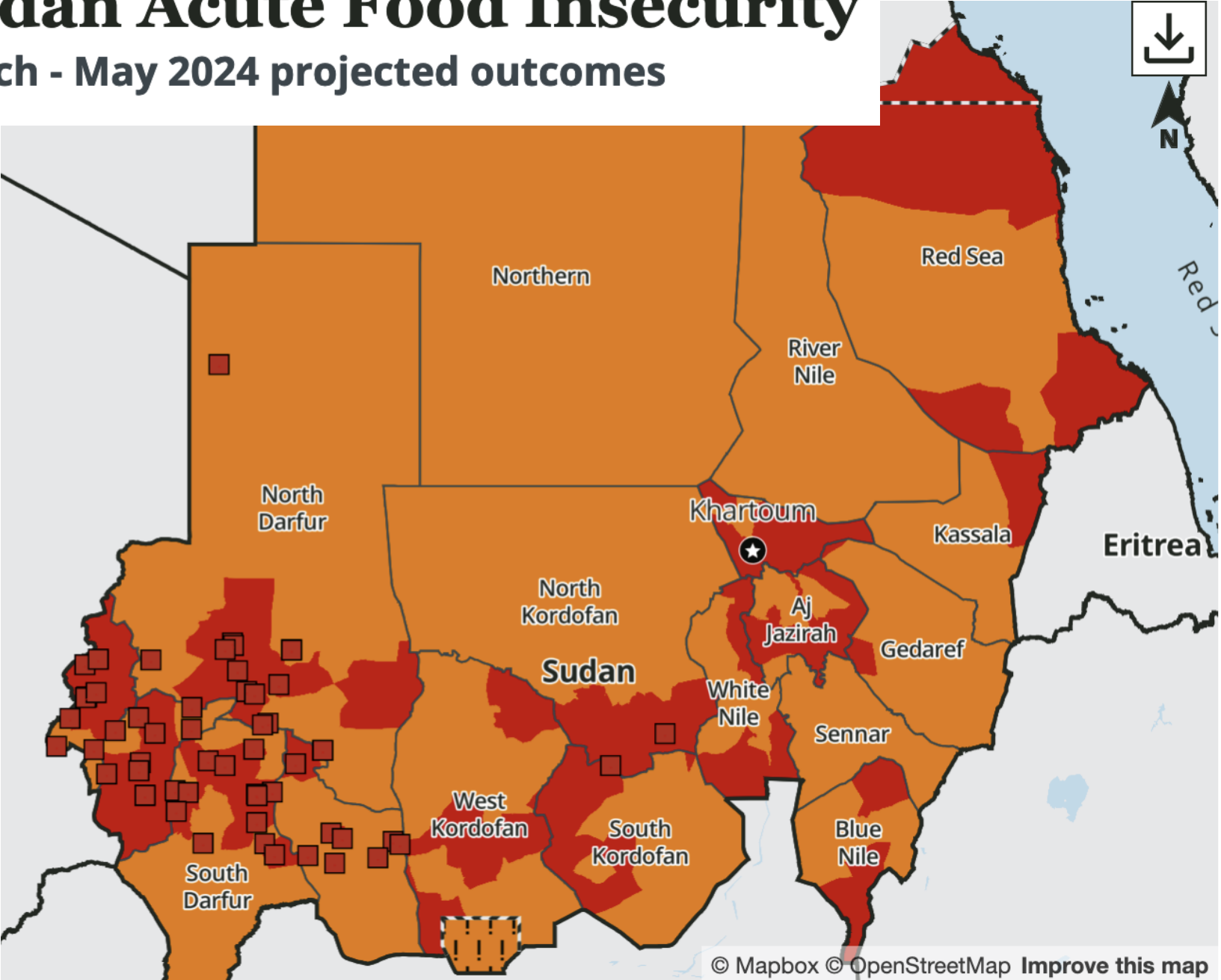


\*The arrivals to neighbouring countries include migrants, returnees, refugees and asylum seekers.

\*\*This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

# Sudan Acute Food Insecurity

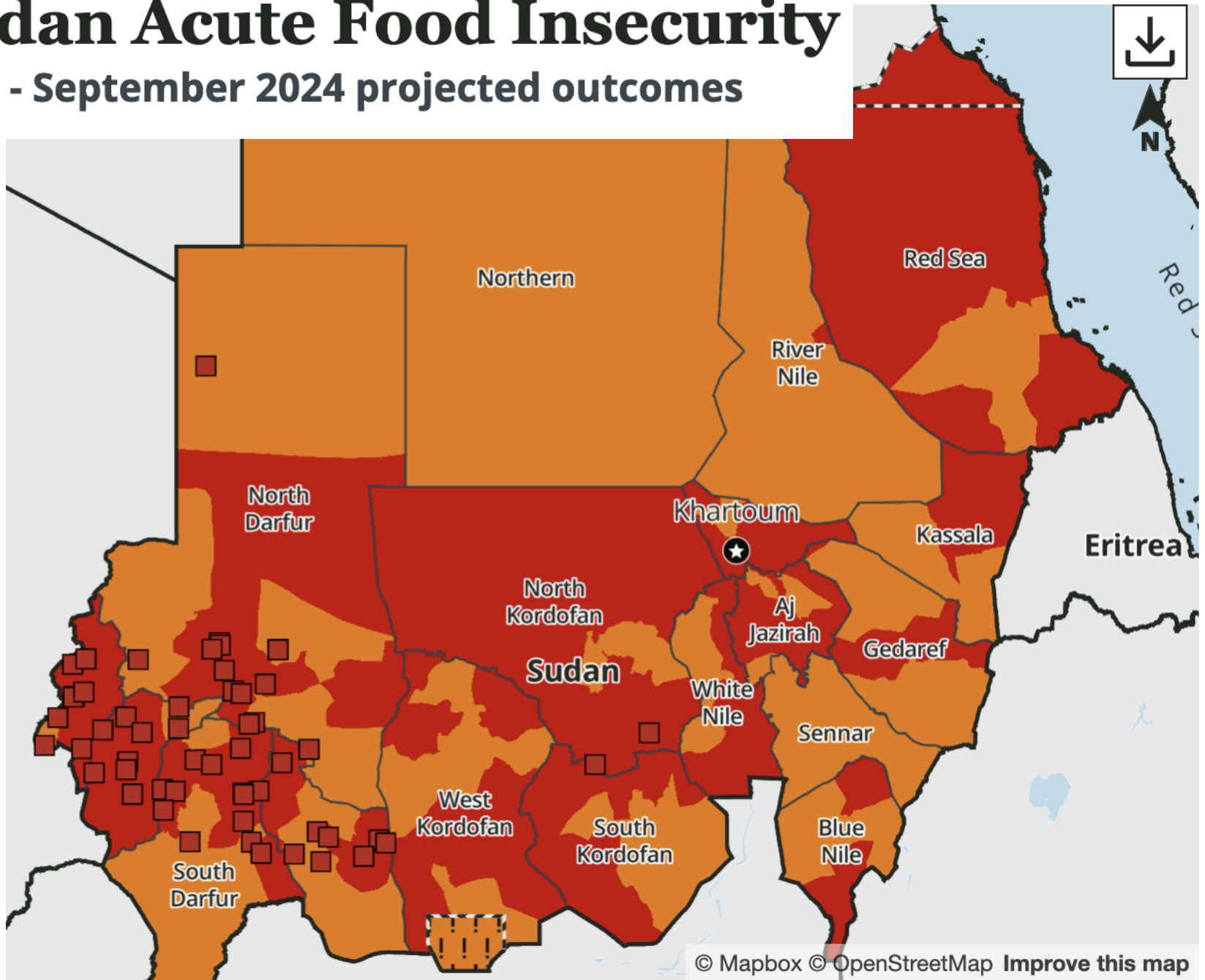
March - May 2024 projected outcomes





# Sudan Acute Food Insecurity

June - September 2024 projected outcomes





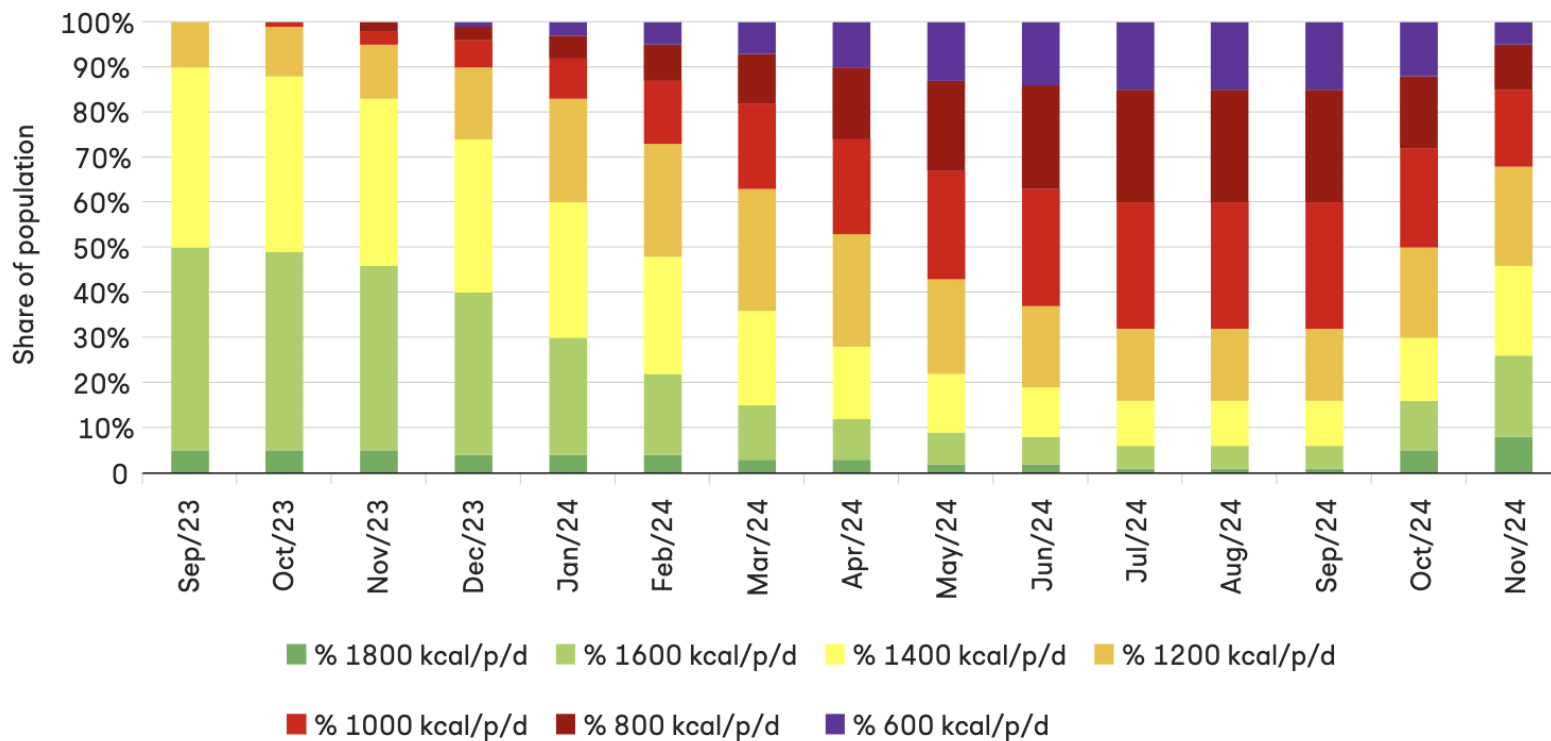
FEBRUARY 2024

### From Catastrophe to Famine

The coming months will be catastrophic

The harvest in October-December may bring some respite... but won't end the crisis

Figure 2 Share of population (month by month) by per capita cereal energy intake (scenario 2)



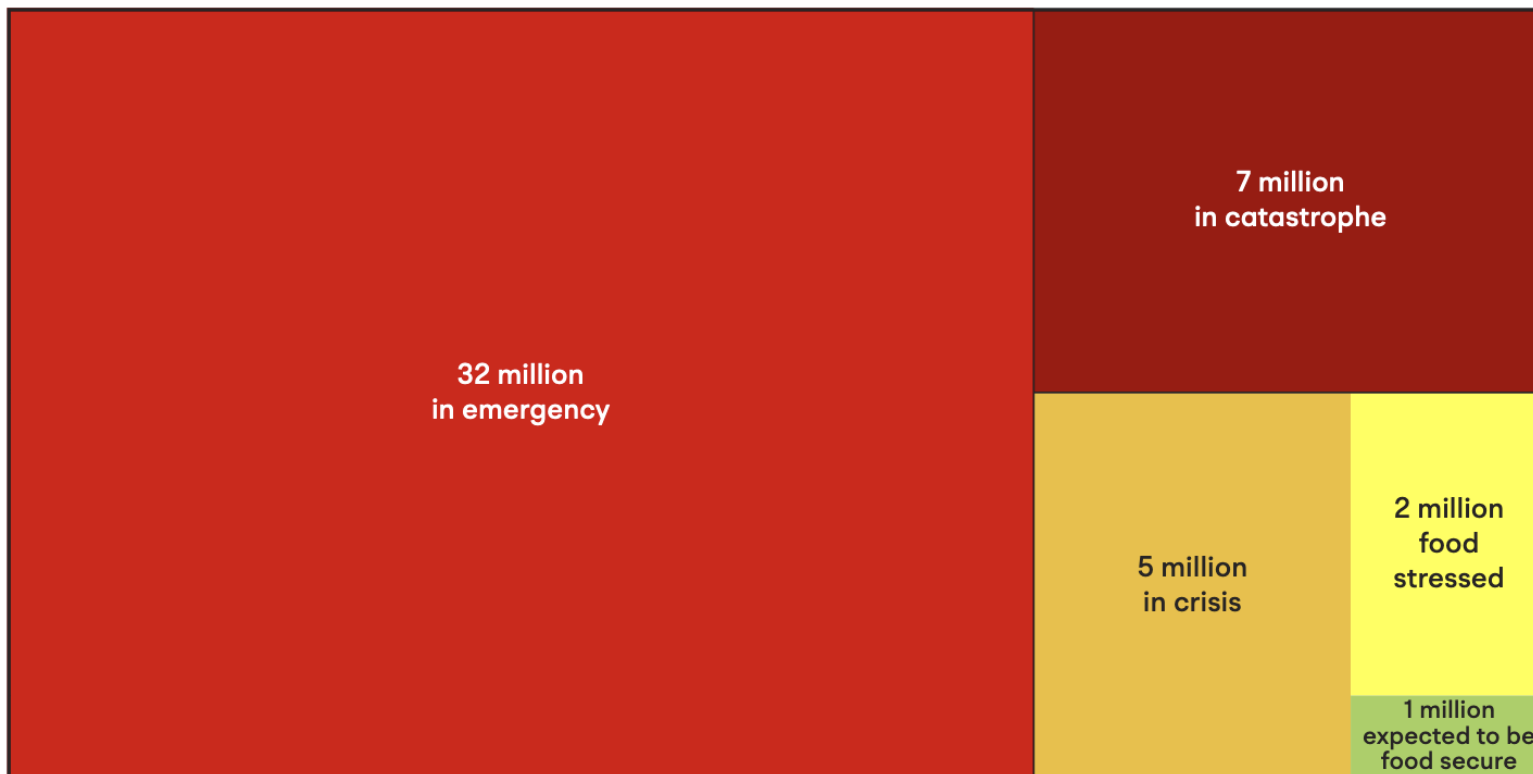


FEBRUARY 2024

## From Catastrophe to Famine

From Catastrophe to Famine

**An estimated 7 million people in Sudan are likely to experience catastrophic levels of hunger by June 2024**



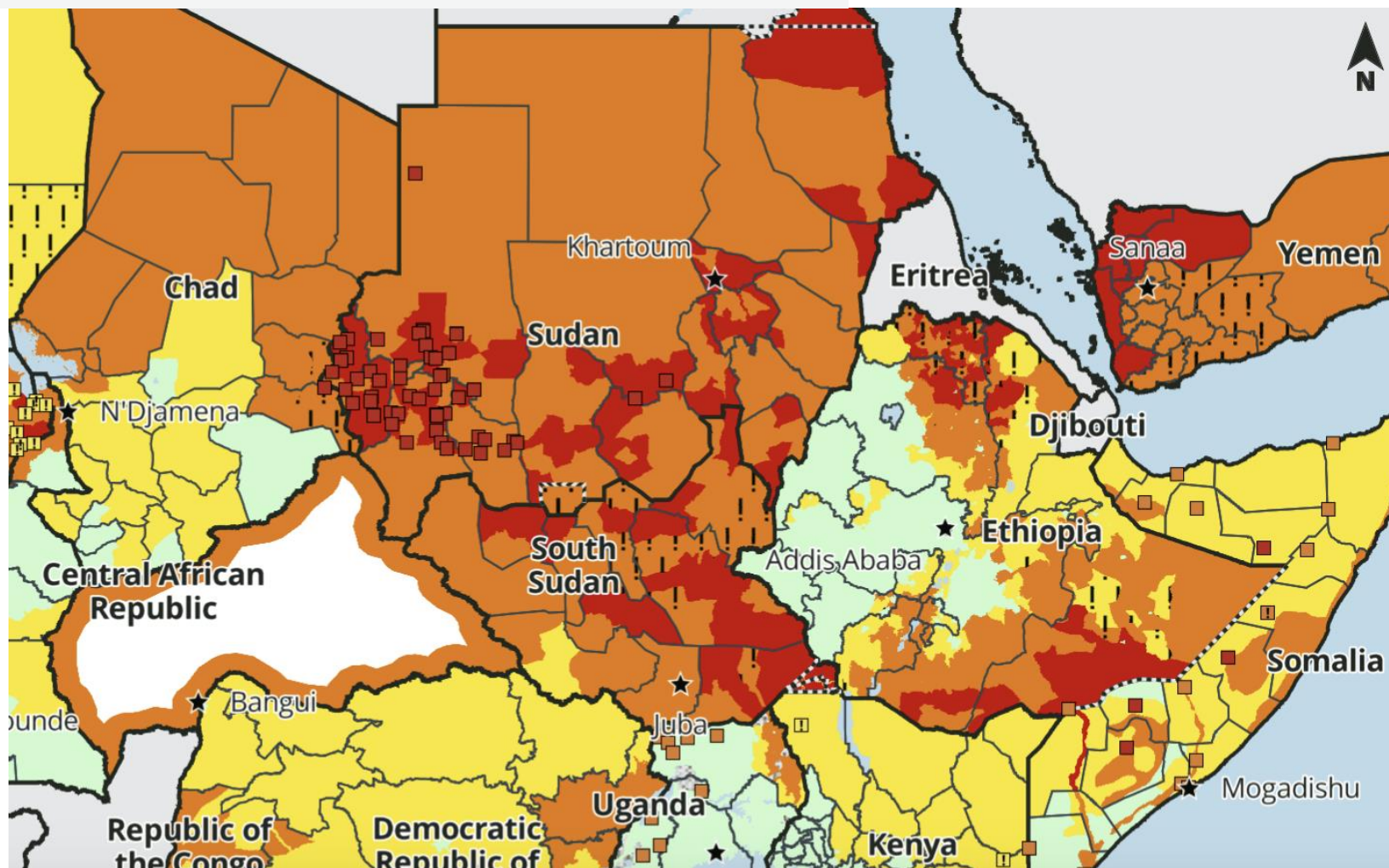
“Catastrophe” = famine

This implies mass mortality on a scale equal to or surpassing 1984/85

# Acute Food Insecurity Area Classification

February - May 2024 Near Term Projection

What's exceptional:  
all Sudan's neighbours are  
in crisis too

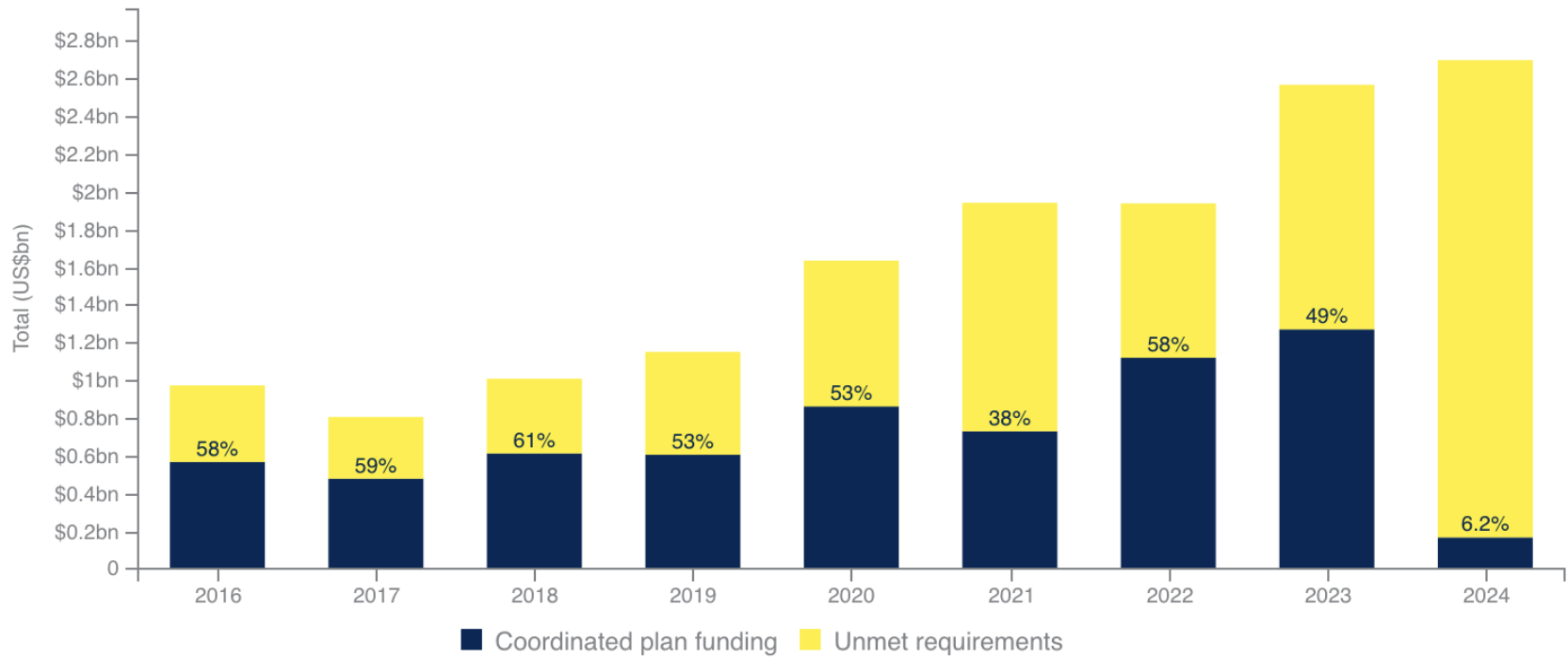




As of last month: UN annual appeal just 6% funded



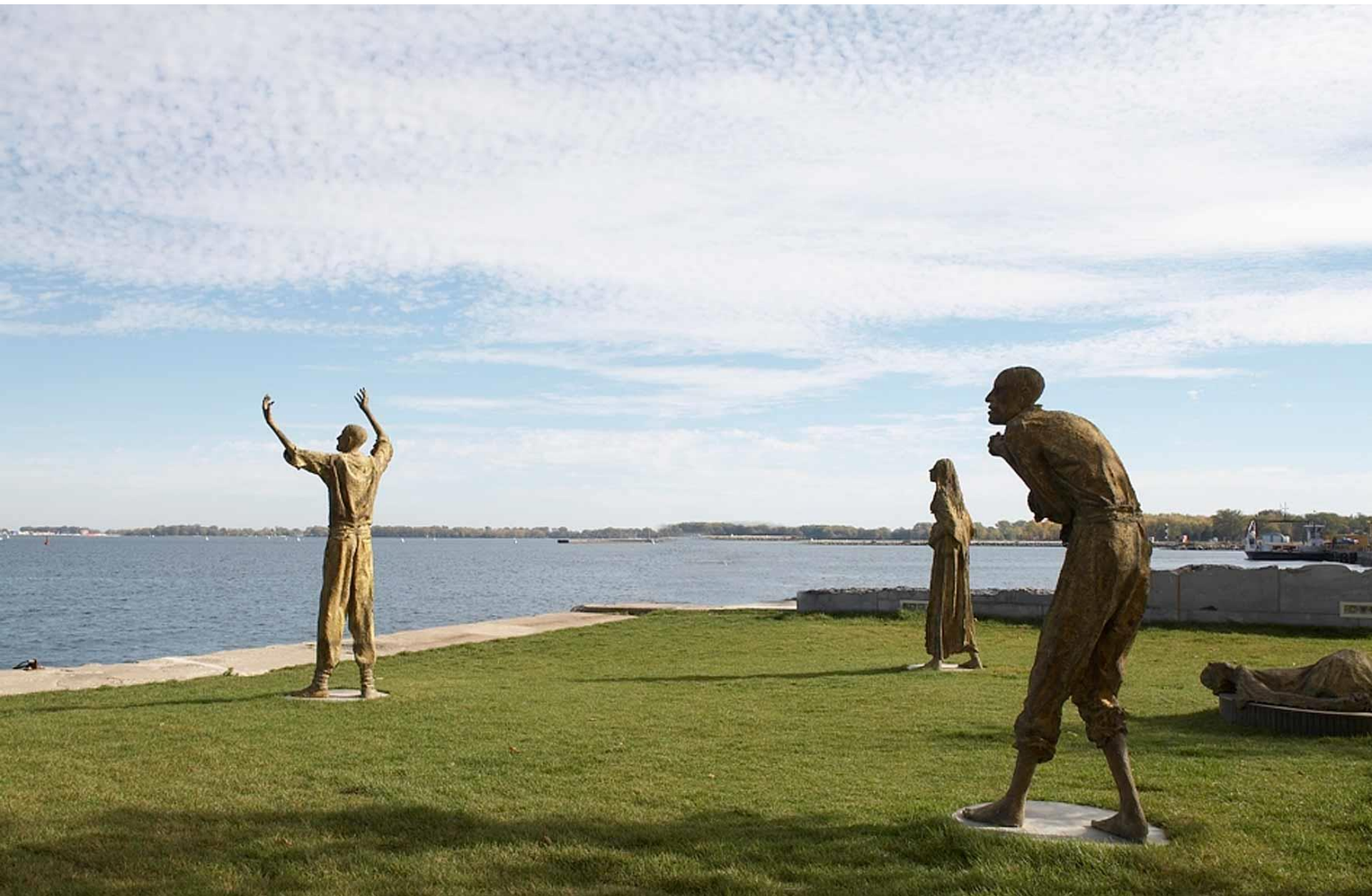
## Trends in coordinated plan requirements



# Famine is a Societal Trauma

*Famine is more than very many people going hungry*

- It is economic devastation and mass asset transfer from the poor/vulnerable to the richer/better armed
  - Famine has its architects, its perpetrators, its beneficiaries
- It is a societal trauma, the end of a way of life, with generational consequences
  - Just as the famine of 1984/85 planted the seeds of war and atrocity 20 years later, today's famine will have unknowable consequences
  - It took 150 years before the Irish could publicly memorialize the Great Hunger



*Arrival*, Rowan Gillespie 2007  
Credit: Ireland Park Foundation