

Struggle for Scarce Resources by Different Tribes in Darfur and the Conflict in Darfur 2003 – 2009

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Abstract: *This article aimed at finding out the relationship between the struggle for scarce resources by the different tribes and conflict in Darfur region. The study revealed that the struggle for scarce resources by the different tribes in Sudan contributed to the conflict in Darfur region. The study contends that resolution to the Darfur conflict should be proceeded by reconciliation between different tribes in the region. The root causes of the conflict should also be dealt with by way of promoting environmental rehabilitation and empowering the people to do things for themselves.*

Keywords: *Tribes in Darfur, Struggle for Scarce Resources, Darfur Conflict, Economic Competition and the Darfur Conflict, Causes of Conflict*

I. Introduction

Darfur crisis which involved various factions began in February 2003. One side of the conflict was composed mainly of Sudanese military and police and the Janjaweed, a Sudanese militia group recruited mostly among Arabized indigenous Africans and a small number of Bedouin of the northern Rizeigat; the majority of other Arab groups in Darfur remained uninvolved. The other side was made up of rebel groups, notably the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), recruited primarily from the non-Arab Muslim Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit ethnic groups. Though the government of Sudan denied supporting the Janjaweed, but there are instances that it not only provided weapons and financial assistance but also planned and organized joint attacks, some against civilians.[1]

The conflict was caused by combined factors of desertification, drought, marginalization and oppression as a result of overpopulation.[2] The region lacked basic infrastructure and social services. Some people opined that the aims for the conflict were exclusion from political power, schools, lack of roads, and water infrastructure. The Darfur rebels' grievances are similar to those of armed groups in the south of the country and elsewhere. Tribes used to own lands. At least 36 main tribes existed in the region. Majority of the Arab people felt discriminated from a system that gave more "dars" (districts) to non-Arab communities. Encroachment of the expanding Sahara Desert and Droughts forced the Arab herdsmen from the north into competing for lands with village based farmers. Again, ethnic differences between the two groups, who used to co-exist peacefully– were exaggerated by local leaders in the battle over resources. Constant ethnic rivalries and clashes for land, clashes between farmers and herdsmen were prevalent in the region which added to unpleasant insecurity challenges in the region.[3]

African Union's intervention in 2004 in Darfur crisis in line with its charter and responsibilities, was as a result of the escalation of the crisis in the early part of 2003.[4] One of the primary aims for forming the AU was to promote peace, security, and stability in the continent [Article 3(f) of the Constitutive Act]. Among its principles is peaceful resolution of conflicts among Member States of the Union through such appropriate means as may be decided upon by the Assembly [Article 4(e) of the Constitutive Act]. The primary body charged with implementing these objectives and principles is the Peace and Security Council [PSC], which has the power, among other things, to authorize peace support missions, to impose sanctions in case of unconstitutional change of government, and to "take initiatives and action it deems appropriate" in response to potential or actual conflicts. The PSC is a decision-making body in its own right, and its decisions are binding on member states. Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act, repeated in article 4 of the Protocol to the Constitutive Act on the PSC, authorizes the Union to intervene in member state in circumstances of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Any decision to intervene in a member state under article 4 of the Constitutive Act will be made by the Assembly on the recommendation of the PSC.[5]

As a result of the foregoing, the PSC has continued in its attempt towards resolving the Darfur crises since 2004, it adopted resolutions creating the AU peacekeeping operations in Darfur, yet the Darfur crises continued unabated. This paper thus, is an attempt to find out whether struggle over scarce resources by different tribes in Sudan contributed to the Darfur conflict of Southern Sudan between 2003 and 2009.

Conflict

There is no single agreeable definition of conflict, but the following factors are prevalent: there are at least two independent groups, the groups perceive some incompatibility between themselves, and the groups interact with each other in some way.[6] Two examples of the definitions are, "process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party"[7] and "the interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities." [8]

The very important hierarchy of conflict emanates with a contrast between substantive (also called performance, issue, task, or active) conflict and affective (also called relationship) conflict. If one could make a contrast between good and bad conflict, substantive would be good and affective conflict would be bad. Substantive and affective conflicts are related.[9]

Substantive conflict is associated with different opinions among group members about the content of the tasks being performed or the performance itself.[10], [11] This type of conflict occurs when two or more social entities disagree on the recognition and solution to a task problem, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions [12],[13] Affective conflict is associated with interpersonal relationships or incompatibilities not directly related to achieving the group's function.[14], [15] Both substantive and affective conflicts are negatively related to team member satisfaction and team performance. [16]

Organizational conflict, (substantive or affective) is divided into intra organisational and interorganisational. Interorganisational conflict takes place between two or more organizations [17], for instance, when different businesses compete against one another. Intraorganisational conflict is conflict in an organization, and is divided on scope (e.g. department, work team, individual).

Other divisions are interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup conflict. Interpersonal conflict is conflict between two or more individuals (not representing the group they are a part of). Interpersonal conflict is classified into intragroup and intergroup conflict. Intragroup personal conflict occurs between members of the same group. Intergroup personal conflict occurs between groups[18]

Conflict is associated with different interests, or a notion that the desires of those concerned cannot be achieved at the same time.[19] Three kinds of disagreements that have led to conflicts are as follows; management disagreement, interest based disagreement i.e. disagreement over decisions, and disagreement over the allocation of basic needs or fundamental values.[20] However, greater emphasis was placed on the interest-based disputes and that of "apparently irreconcilable difference" among stakeholders i.e. values, identities, conceptions of rights and cultures as the main type of disagreement.[21]

Four typologies of conflict have been distinguished as follows;

- Conflict episodes (isolated incompatibility articulation related to a particular issue).
- Issue conflicts (persistent incompatibility over a contested issue),
- Identity conflicts (explicit disaccord and the hostile motives); and
- Power conflicts.[22]

Studying conflicts around the World, shows that there is a shift away from interstate conflicts toward "internal" or "intrastate" wars and armed conflicts, involving armed factions or contending social groups (sometimes receiving direct or indirect assistance from a third state). This intrastate conflicts, have always evolved through debates (involve attempts to convince and convert the opponent), games (involve attempts to outwit the opponent), and fights (associated with efforts to defeat, harm or eliminate the opponent).[23]

Differing from this typology, six phases of conflict dynamic trajectory was developed to include:

- Dispute phase, (opposing claims expressed through existing institutional processes);
- Crisis phase, (opposition use existing institutional processes, but their substitution with violence is openly threatened or expected);
- Limited violence phase, (legitimacy of institutional processes in question, and systematic and regular use of force is considered justified);
- Massive violence phase, (regular, systematic, and unrestrained use of force; institutional processes for peaceful settlement are disabled or avoided);
- Abatement phase, (actions leading to temporary suspension of opposition, use of violence, and expectations), and
- Settlement phase (resolution of opposing claims and establishment or reestablishment of mutually recognized institutional processes).[24]

Causes of Conflict

There are several causes of conflict. Conflict may occur when:

- A party is required to engage in an activity that is incongruent with his or her needs or interests.
- A party holds behavioral preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with another person's implementation of his or her preferences.
- A party wants some mutually desirable resource that is in short supply, such that the wants of all parties involved may not be satisfied fully.
- A party possesses attitudes, values, skills, and goals that are salient in directing his or her behavior but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills, and goals held by the other(s).
- Two parties have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their joint actions.
- Two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities.[25]

Five basic issues over which conflict could arise are, control over resources, values, preferences and nuisances, beliefs, or the nature of the relationship.[26] The normal situations that warrants conflicts are ideology, dynastic legitimacy, territory, language, ethnicity, religion, self-determination, dominance, equality, resources, markets, and, revenge.[27] It is observed that the most prominent factors that cause interstate conflicts in Nigeria are ethnic territory and resource control. There exists the scramble and struggle for access to and control over vital resources as oil, water, productive land etc. Four important conditions influence the likelihood that resources lead to conflict and they are (1) the degree of scarcity; (2) the extent to which the supply is shared by two or more group/states; (3) the relative power of those groups; and (4) the ease of access to alternative sources. These with their associated environmental degradation and absence of Corporate Social Responsibility are key issues in resource conflicts.[28] The causes of conflict in Africa are varied and they include, ethnicity, governance, and most importantly the multi-ethnic composition of the African continent. [29]

Looking at ethnicity as the cause of conflict and violence, it is discovered that ethnic conflict is psychological, especially the fear and insecurity of ethnic groups during transition. It has been opined that extremists build upon these fears to separate or make people to separate into two groups with completely opposite opinions. Again, memories of past unpleasant experiences increase these fears and anxieties. These interactions lead to an ugly and unpleasant suspicion and distrust necessitating tribal clashes. In Africa where poverty and deprivation are prevalent, as a result of distributive injustice; ethnicity has maintained a vital tool for mobilization and survival.[30]

Darfur Tribes

It is estimated that there exists about 80 tribes that occupies the Darfur region of Sothern Sudan, about 27 of the tribes are classified as Arabs, and the rest non-Arabs. The Arab tribes are: Djawama, Beni Halba, Habbaniya, Ziyaddiya, Fulbe, Ja'aliyin, Misseriya, Beni Helba, Meidob Habania, Khawabeer, Ateefat, Humur, Beni Hussein, Khuzam, Ta'aisha, Beni Jarrar, Batahin, Mahameed, Ma'aliyah, Rizeyyat etc.

The non-Arab tribes are: the Barno, Kuraan, Fur, Jebel, Zaghawa, Bideyat, Tama, Masalit, Mima, Berti, Bargo, Kanein, Birgid, Tunjur, Berti, Dajo, Erenga, Kanein, Mararit, Sambat, Hadahid, Fellata, Gimir and others. Darfur major tribes are the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa.[31]

Northern Darfur is predominantly occupied by nomadic (Arab) tribes and the western and southern regions of Darfu rare predominantly occupied by sedentary group (Non-Arab), mainly composed of peasant farmers. These communities were identified as cattle keepers, Baqqara, versus those who never kept cattle, non-Baqqara. Cattle ownership was a symbol of economic status, and one could move from being a Baqqara to a non-Baqqara, and vice versa, depending on the cattle one had. [32]

Economic Competition and the Darfur Conflict

While the conflict in Darfur is most frequently described as one between distinct "Arab" and "non-Arab" (or "African") tribes, the more accurate distinction between population groups in Darfur is not ethnic, but economic. The dry northern part of Darfur, inhabited mostly by tribes claiming "Arab" descent, developed an economy based on nomadic cattle/camel rearing. The fertile arable south, where the majority of the people claim "non-Arab" (i.e., "African") descent, developed a subsistence farming economy. A long period of intermarriage and slave trading have made it difficult to distinguish the physical ethnic characteristics, but for the most part this economic division has remained.[33]

Darfur region's economy is largely agrarian. Before the economic scarcity and the Darfur crisis, there was in operation in Darfur three major agricultural systems, namely, sedentary rain-fed agriculture, sedentary irrigated agriculture and nomadic pastoralism.[34] The ecological balance which once existed between sedentary agriculture and nomadic pastoralism suffered as repeated periods of drought led to desertification and environmental degradation. Patterns of rainfall in Southern Sudan changed, which declined rainfall intensity and rainfall duration.[35] Consistent periods of drought and environmental degradation have become major

challenges especially in the western region of Darfur. Mid-1980s, marked the period drought started in Sudan. Devastating impact of drought and famine reared its ugly head from 1984/85. Sudan has subsequently suffered from drought in 1989, 1990, 1997 and 2000. Crop failures and loss of livestock and pastureland are as a result of consecutive periods of drought in Sudan.[36]

Desertification and the southward encroachment of the desert, pose a dangerous challenge to the existing farming and nomadic communities. Reoccurring drought and desertification were attributed by environmentalists and the humanitarian community as the main factors that caused conflict in Darfur. The phenomenon of cyclical drought has affected the entire Sahe; one in every five years is dry, resulting in the collapse of farming activities necessitating migration of people and, thus, increasing the probability of clashes over resources that were scarce. [37]

Drought, famine and the spread of the deserts caused increased competition for land, as early as the 1980's, severely upsetting the structure of Darfuri society. Farmers had claimed every available bit of land to farm or forage for food, closing off traditional routes used by the herders. The herders, desperate to feed and water their animals in a dwindling landscape, tried to force the southern routes open, attacking farmers who attempted to block their paths. Traditionally, conflicts were settled with little or no violence by respected local councils. These were abolished by the Bashir regime after it came to power in a coup in 1989, leaving no mechanisms for resolving disputes peacefully. Spurred by this increasing conflict over scarce resources and wedge politics played by the central government in Northern Sudan, nomadic and farming tribes began to polarize along ethnic lines. To Darfuris facing starvation, the dichotomous ideology of African versus Arab began to have explanatory power. Amongst some sedentary "Africans", the ideas that uncaring "Arabs" in Khartoum had let the famine happen and then Darfuri "Arabs" armed by their Libyan allies had attacked "African" farmers began to gain credence. Similarly, semi-nomadic Darfuri "Arabs" began to seriously consider that "Africans" had vindictively tried to punish them for the famine by trying to keep them from pastureland.[38] For a number of years Darfur was the scene of sporadic clashes between "African" farming communities such as the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa, on the one hand, and "Arab" nomadic groups on the other. These clashes lead to many deaths and to the destruction and looting of homes. The government blamed competition over scarce resources for the clashes, and in fact, did nothing to try to resolve the problems in Darfur.

Sudan got their independence from Britain in 1956, and became involved in two civil wars for most of the remainder of the 20th century. The war was rooted in northern economic, political, and social domination of largely non-Muslim, non-Arab southern Sudanese. Struggle for scarce resources played a vital role. As nomads began to compete for grazing land, traditional reconciliation measures were no longer able to settle disputes, causing the region to become increasingly militarized. The complexities of desertification, famines, and the civil war raging between North and South Sudan contributed to a rise in regional tensions during the 1980s. In the same vein, as oil was discovered in Western Sudan, the Sudanese government and international contributors became more interested in Darfur.[39]

Historically, the nomadic tribes, like the Rizeigat, resided in the drier northern reaches of Darfur and traveled with their animals south into the more temperate southern farmlands during the dry season. They would then migrate back north with the onset on the rains; but with water holes and seasonal rivers vanishing, the nomads gradually ventured farther south searching for fertile land to pasture.[40] Before the droughts in the 1980s, the nomadic and farming tribes relied on one another, and their families intermarried, but eventually conditions deteriorated.[41] Many of the nomads settled into a semi-pastoral existence, establishing permanent villages amid the farming communities, the Fur, Masalit and Tunjur.[42] During periods of drought, the dramatic decrease in rainfall enabled Darfur's farming community to produce local crops, resulting in a substantial decrease in the food supply.[43] The nomadic populations also suffered because their livestock died from the lack of available water. Evidently, the southern regions of Darfur were overpopulated and the available natural resources stretched. With increasing competition over the diminishing pool of natural resources- water, grassland, arable soil- conflicts increased.

There was no system to stem the trend of the increasing disputes over water and land, the tribes resumed the defense of their own areas and unleashed reprisal attacks on their enemies.[44] Clashes escalated throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The Sudanese government failed to bring the clashes under control as a result of their involvement in preventing the growing separatist's movement in Darfur.

Struggle over Scarce Resources by Different Tribes in Sudan Contributed to the Darfur Conflict

The Darfur conflict is usually described as racially motivated, pitting mounted Arabs against black rebels and civilians. But the fault lines have their origins in another distinction, between settled farmers and nomadic herders fighting over failing lands. Until the rains began to fail, the nomadic herdsmen lived amicably together with the settled farmers. The nomads were passers-through, grazing their camels on the rocky hillsides that separated the fertile plots. The farmers would share their wells, and the herders would feed their stock on

the leavings from the harvest. But during the drought, the farmers began protect all their land so that passing herdsmen would not trespass. A few tribes drifted elsewhere or took up farming, but the Arab herders stuck to their fraying livelihoods—nomadic herding was central to their cultural identity. (The distinction between “Arab” and “African” in Darfur is defined more by lifestyle than any physical difference: Arabs are generally herders, Africans typically farmers. The two groups are not racially distinct).[45]

Thus, disputes over scarce water and grazing land between black African farmers and Arab pastoralist communities caused the war in Darfur. Lack of access to water is one of the major causes of the conflict in Darfur. People in developed countries when they want water, they turn on the tap. The people in Darfur, when they want water, they have to walk far distances in search of water. A UN video shows women and children walking long distances through the dry desert in search of water in Darfur. When they eventually find the water, they have to stay in a very long line to fill their cans with water. They embark on this process repeatedly. According to the United Nations, one person uses nearly 400 liters of water per day, in the world's wealthiest countries. In Darfur, 400 liters of water are shared by 20 people.[46]

While referring to Mohamed Yonis, Deputy Joint Special Representative of the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur it was stated that:

Water is one of the main root causes of this conflict, there is a need to address this issue and we do believe that water will serve as an instrument for peace...Water we believe is life and we believe it could contribute to the initiatives that the UN is making in terms of trying to reach peace with the people of Darfur.[47]

Affirming the above, the deadly conflict in Darfur has deep roots in a vast, arid and long-neglected region in Sudan's west, where battles over water and grazing rights stretched back generations. The demographic shift that plays out across Africa's north helps feed the conflict. Darfur is on the leading edge of the continental demographic divide, where sub-Saharan black Africa melds with Arabic-speaking populations. And in this Muslim-on-Muslim battle in Darfur, it is the civilians who suffer.[48]

The hostilities erupted in early 2003, when two rebel groups - The Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) - attacked government targets, claiming that the predominantly African region was being neglected by the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum. The rebel movements from different ideological backgrounds cooperated in their fight against the government.[49]

Tension between the region's African farmers and Arab pastoralists has existed for decades. Wangari Maathai, described the roots of the conflict thus:

To outsiders, the conflict is seen as tribal warfare. At its roots, though, it is a struggle over controlling an environment that can no longer support all the people who must live on it.[50]

A sense of inequity was exacerbated by years of official Sudanese government support for groups in the region who identified themselves as Arab. An administrative reorganization in 1994 divided the vast territory into three regions and put Arabs in positions of power. The black African tribes - the Fur, Zagawa and Masalit - found themselves increasingly marginalized. People in Darfur refer to themselves as "black," and many Darfuris say that the dispute with the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum is ethnically based. Droughts and diminishing resources ignited regular communal hostilities, which came to a head with the rebel assaults in 2003.

The government responded with a scorched-earth campaign against the rebels and the tribes they came from. The Sudanese government used aerial bombardments, while government-backed Janjaweed militia attacked civilians on the ground. Janjaweed come from Arabic-speaking pastoralist communities. They herd camels in northern Darfur and cattle in southern Darfur.[51]

The attacks razed villages, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands, mostly as a result of disease and starvation and millions of people were displaced, many of whom fled across the border to refugee camps in Chad. The Janjaweed have been accused of the systematic rape and ethnic cleansing of Darfur's black residents. Sudan's government denied it supported the militia.

II. Conclusion

This article was aimed at ascertaining the relationship between the struggle for scarce resources by the different tribes and conflict in Darfur region. Our findings, through the literature reviewed and the test of our hypothesis apparently signified that struggle over scarce resources by different tribes in Sudan contributed to the Darfur conflict.

The root causes of the conflict should be dealt with by way of promoting environmental rehabilitation and empowering the people to do things for themselves. Any solution to the Darfur conflict should be proceeded by reconciliation between different tribes in the region. Reconciliation should include compensation, the safe returns of villagers to their villages and the prosecution of perpetrators of atrocities and violence and peace panel should be established while member states of AU should show legal and financial commitments to its structures and activities, particularly the governance and military units.

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