

Darfur: Identity, Gender and Water in the Conflict

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The armed conflict of Darfur in Sudan that was fuelled in 2003 has resulted in one of the most contemporary tragic humanitarian situations in the world. As a result of the dire attacks about 400000 people have lost their lives, more than 2.2 millions are living in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps while 250000 have fled the region to the neighboring disrupted country of Chad. Moreover about 4 million of the 6.5 million populations of the region are currently depending on humanitarian aid. In this paper it is our intention to give a reflection on the relationship of the scarcity of water to gender, ethnicity, religion and conflict. Emphasis will be laid upon IDPs and water and sanitation.

Location, area and states

Located in western Sudan, Darfur is the largest region in the country. It has borders with four neighboring countries: Chad, Central Africa Republic, Libya and Egypt. Its area occupies about 549000 square kilometer which is comparable to the total area of Borkinafaso, England and Tunisia (Table 1). Through the period 1650-1916 Darfur was an independent Sultanate and it had thus capitulated to the British Empire about two decades later than other regions of the country. Dar Masalit in the western part was annexed in 1922. Administratively the region is divided into three states, North, South and West Darfour (*Suleiman; 2000, De Wall; 200?*).

Table (1): States and areas

The state	Area	Equal/ similar to
North Darfour	260,000	Borkinafaso
South Darfour	139,000	England
West Darfour	150,000	Tunisia

Source: Suleiman; 2000

Ethnicity, religion and gender

DarFur means the land of Fur who was the last group to rule the region until the conquest of the British. However there are many other tribes that used to share life in the region through centuries. The term Darfur is thus only ethno-political since Fur tribe is small minority compared to the total number of population. The majority of the Arab Darfurians migrated to the region in the middle of the 18th century from the west of the African continent. They trace their roots to the Arab of Juheiyana in Arabia. Similar to many Nilo-Arabs they claim their genealogy to link to Prophet Mohammed. The Sultan of Fur has allowed the cattle herders to settle in the south and west-south of the region and even to own and establish their sub-administrative system. Camel herders were allowed to live in the north with Zaghawa. Besides the Arab, Darfur had also experienced migration of West African groups like Borgu, Bornu and Fulani (*De Wall, 200?*).

Although the region is divided to various tribal dars (lands), the region is known with intermarriage between the different groups. Moreover if a Zaghawan happens to go

settle in Fur area he/she will become a Fur or if a Furian move to the area of Arab Rezeigat he/she will become a Rezeigat (*Willemse, 2005*). In addition it is very difficult in many cases to draw sharp distinction between Arab and Non-Arab Darfurians even in the racist criteria of color and facial characteristic (*De Wall; 200?*).

Religion wise all Darfurians are Sunni Muslims. The majority of them are affiliates to the Tijaniya Sufi sect which is common to most people of the Sudanic region. In fact Tijanya scholars were the ones who introduced Islam to Darfur. The founder of the sect was the Moroccan scholar Sheikh Ahmed Eltijani. However Tijaniya has been modified by West Africans to fit into their cultural context.

Unlike the orthodoxy of Nile Valley Muslims in Tijaniya women can reach the high status of Sheikh or teacher. This is closely related to the relatively higher socio-economic status that women have had enjoyed in savanna societies. However the independence and social recognition of women began to diminish gradually with the exportation of the Nilo-orthodox Islam. The most striking physical manifestation of this is the spread of female genital mutilation that was widely practiced in the 1970's and 1980's in a time when the Nilo-elite began to abandon it. Yet in both sedentary and pastoral communities it is the woman who is responsible for cultivation (*Suleiman; 2000*). Moreover they are the head of households during significant part of the year when men have to travel with the cattle and camels in herding communities. 70-80-% agriculture products and 80-90% of animal products (animal hair, lather textile, fat clarification, Cheese) are made by women (*CGRT; 2004*).

Environment and water resources

The climate of Darfur varies between arid in the far north to semi-arid in the south. It is characterized by high degrees of temperatures and rates of evaporation (4-12mm). Rainfall is regular and seasonal in only few months but highly variable from year to year and rather localized in the three states of the region (*UNEP; 2007, Tearfund; 2007*). This has significant implications on vegetation and explains the dominance of nomadic style of livelihood in arid areas of north Darfur. Besides the regular drop in rainfall the increase in population density is the main factor in the remarkable land degradation and deforestation of the region vis-à-vis the population of Darfur has increased from one million in 1920 to 6.5 millions before the beginning of the current conflict (*Tearfund; 2007*).

Darfur is devoid of rivers and the only available watercourses are the wadis (ephemeral watercourses that flow for short time during the rainy season). Ground water is therefore the most important source of drinking water. Groundwater potential is affected by both the intensity of rainfall and aquifer type. The 10-year moving average rainfall has decreased by about 100mm between 1946 and 2005 (Annex II). There are four basic types of aquifers in the region (Table 2). Sandstone aquifers combine high levels of storage with high borehole yields. However they require typically deeper boreholes. The wadi sand (alluvial) aquifers vary in saturated depth between the dry and wet season. Where the wadis are large and the sand is sufficiently deep they provide important storage of water. Volcanic rocks constitute reasonable aquifers and are found in areas of high rainfall in Jebal Marra Mountain. Basement Complex aquifers have typically low borehole yields as well as low storage capacity. Consequently people living in areas of these aquifers have the highest vulnerability to ground water depletion (*Terafund; 2007*).

Table (2): Characteristics of aquifers in Darfur

Aquifer type	Sandstone/ sedimentary	Volcanic rocks	Wadi Sands	Basement Complex
Groundwater potential	Moderate-High	Moderate	Moderate-High	Low
Typical borehole yield (L/min)	1-10	0.5-5	1-20	0.1-1
Typical depth to water (m)	30-110	Very variable	2-10	15-55
Typical depth of borehole (m)	200-350	?50	5-40	30-50
Relative Aquifer storage capacity	Very High	Moderate	Moderate-High	Very low
Relative vulnerability to depletion	Very low	High	Low-Moderate	High

Source: Tearfund; 2007

Water resources and conflicts

The conflict is the result of interaction of several factors. However competition on resources has been regularly a cross-cutting issue (*Suleiman; 2000, UNEP; 2007*). The majority of Darfurians relies upon subsistence economy and is either camel herders, cultivators or cattle herders (Table 3). These three activities that have been dictated by environmental factors depend on the availability of water. There was a long history of conflicts that were settled by tribal mechanisms. Sometimes they happened to occur only among Arab-Darfurians, in others only among Non-Arab-Darfurians while they happened in sometimes to be between Arab and Non-Arab without evoking emotions of the current ethnic polarization. Most these conflict were sparked by movements of herders for water and vegetation into territories of other groups.

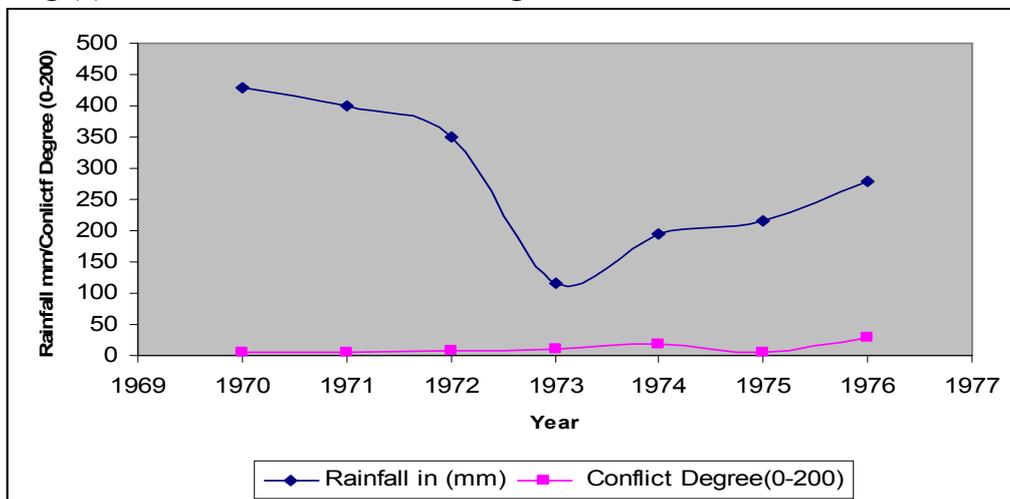
Table (3): Darfurians activities, water, ethnicity and interaction

activity	Location in the region	Environment	Ethnicity	Interaction
Camels herder	North	Completely dessert	Mixture	Frequently conflict
Cultivation	center	Rich rain ,water, soil hills	African	Corresponding, stability
Cows herder	south	Forests with low rain	Arabian	Frequently conflict

Source: Suleiman; 2000

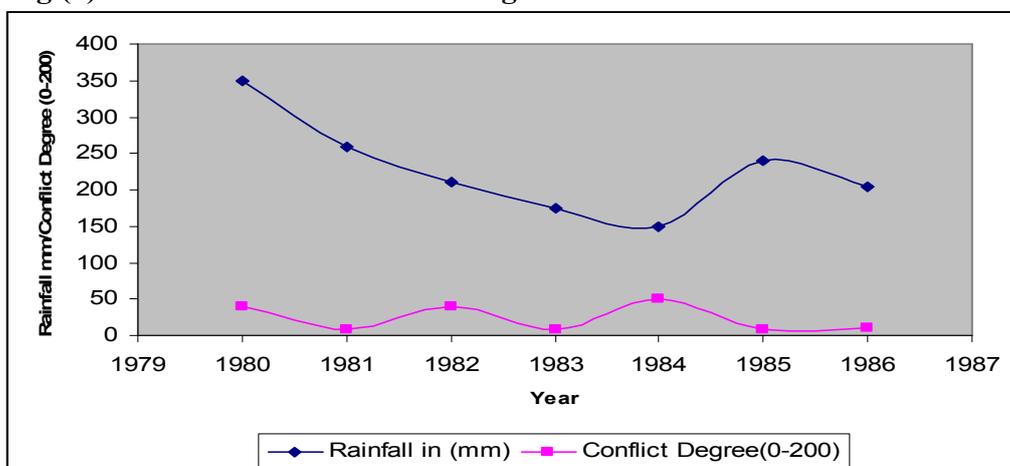
The bloodiest conflicts in the 20th century occurred during or short time after draught periods. The region had witnessed three famous draught periods; 1957-1960, 1972-1974 and 1982-1984 (*Suleiman; 2000*). Figures (1) and (2) show the reciprocal relation between the intensity of rainfall and degree of bloodiest conflicts in 1970-1976 and 1980-1987. The conflict of 1957 which was about grazing and water rights in North- Darfur involved Kababish (Arab), Medoup (Non-Arab) and Zyadiya (Arab). The conflict of 1975 in South Darfur involved Rezeigat (Arab), Baggara (Arab) and Dinka (Non-Arab). The first conflict of 1976 over grazing and water rights was between three Arab Darfurian groups; Beni Helba, Zyadiya and Mahriya. The other was also over grazing and water rights and the engaged parties were Northern Rezeigat (Arab) and Dago (Non-Arab). Three of five bloodiest conflicts in the period of the third draught were among Arab tribes. On the other hand four of six conflicts over grazing and water rights were between Non-Arab groups with the Zaghawa as the common part. For more details an overview of the conflict causes and involved parties during the period 1932-2000 is given in Annex I.

Fig (1): Rainfall rate and conflict degree in 1970-1976



Adapted from Suleiman; 2000

Fig (2): Rainfall rate and conflict degree in 1980-1986



Adapted from Suleiman; 2000

Darfur has therefore long history of local conflicts over grazing and water rights particularly. Even in their bloodiest manifestations the dichotomy African/Arabs has never been used. They were assigned the names of the involved tribes and have been settled to greater extent by the tribal administration mechanisms. The current conflict started when groups of Sudan Liberation Army launched armed struggle against the government of Sudan demanding fair share in power and wealth for one of the least developed regions of the country. How was ethnicity politicized in the discourse and conflict is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless vast majority of affected people belong to Non-Arab Darfurian; mainly Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa. To this point we would like to add our voice to those who argue that the dichotomy African/Arabs is misleading in the debate over Darfur. Firstly both the Non-Arab and Arab militia combatants belong to the African continent in which Darfur is only small part. Most important is that the main and major Arab-Darfurians are not involved; namely Rezeigat, Habbaniya, Maaliya and most of the Taaisha (*De Wall; 200?*).

The impacts of the current conflict

In 2004 the war reached its maximum curve point. With the availability of high-tech arms and polarization Arab/African Darfur has experienced like never happened before horrible burning of villages, vast damage of crops and brutal looting of property. Worst than that numerous maniac incidents of raping women from all stages of generations have been reported (*AI; 2008, Darfur Australia Network; 2006, UNDP; 2006, WCRWC; 2005*). Most reports state that rape was closely related to the noble scarification of women while undertaking the unrewarded work of providing their households with water, wood or even when working in cultivation of fields in insecure zones. Because many women have experienced rape and killing of their relatives in front of their eyes some scholars are even challenging the concept of genocide by gendercide (*Willemse; 2005*).

As a consequence fleeing homes and villages was then the only left hope for survival. One of the most significant shifts in roles in IDPs camps is that households headed by women have increased by about 100% in one year. While rich people were and are in position to sustain life in urban centers within or outside the region or even to reach secure places as far as Europe, poor people and particularly women have had no other option than what the relief agencies are trying to achieve in the IDPs camps. One of the most significant shift of roles in IDPs camps is that households headed by women have increased by about 100% in one year as shown by Table (4) (*WFP et. al; 2006*).

Table (4): Percentage of households headed by women in two years of the conflict

Year	% among IDP households	%among resident households
2004	18	14
2005	34	30

Source: WFP et al.; 2006

In the early stages of the current conflict concerns on gender, water and sanitation in IDPs camps could be summarized in the followings:

- Poor personal hygiene practices and lack of safe drinking water and human disposal facilities in IDPs camps leave a large risk of spreading diseases especially among women and children under five.

- The high influx of IDPs that exceeded the capacity of the facilities.
- Women spend a lot of time amounting to 150-240 days from family time annually in provision of water.
- Hand pump site selection in camps was a role of men.
- Women have proved to show high skills in training on hand pumps operation and maintenance but still were not mainstreamed in managing such facilities.
- Lack of security.

Interventions of various NGO's have contributed positively to both encompassing the conflict as well as improving the conditions of water and sanitation in the IDPs camps. Most camps have been provided with adequate boreholes and one latrine per one or two houses instead of public latrines. However the following issues could be of concern from gender point of view:

- except few reports mainstreaming gender in management of water facilities is hardly to encounter in the agenda of the involved NGO's (*Inclusive Security: Women Waging Peace, 200?*). Most of gender oriented reports and literature on the conflict concentrates on issues of Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBS).
- The capacity of the hybrid forces of UN-AU is not yet on the level of the several risks. Despite the cease fire only one faction has concluded peace agreement with the government.
- Most IDPs camps are located in areas of Complex Basement aquifers. They are therefore vulnerable to groundwater depletion in any occasional dry season. In such cases miseries of women and poor men will be extremely exacerbated.

Conclusions and recommendations

From the above discussion the followings could be concluded and recommended:

- The conflict of Darfur has affected about two third of the population in the region. More than two millions of these live in IDPs camps. The majority of them are poor men and women.
- Although the dichotomy African/Arab as used in the political rhetoric is misleading, most affected people belongs to Non-Arab Darfurians.
- In contrast to the already settled North-South civil war, all involved parties in Darfur are Muslims.
- Scarcity of water in the agro-pastoral context of Darfur has been a main factor in most conflicts of Darfur.
- The international interventions have improved the situation of water and sanitation in IDPs camps and women have shown high skills in operation and maintenance of hand pumps. However they are not yet mainstreamed in the management of the facilities. Attention should also be given to this important gender aspect.
- The majority of IDPs camps are located in areas of high potential for groundwater depletion. IDPs are therefore in vulnerable situation, particularly women.

Annex I: Local conflicts in Darfur from 1932 to 2000

No.	Tribal groups involved	Year	Main cause of conflict
1	Kababish, Kawahla, Berti and Medoub	1932	Grazing and water rights
2	Kababish, Medoub and Zyadiya	1957	Grazing and water rights
3	Rezeigat, Baggara and Maalia	1968	Local politics of administration
4	Rezeigat, Baggara and Dinka	1975	Grazing and water rights
5	Beni Helba, Zyadiya and Mahriya	1976	Grazing and water rights
6	Northern Rezeigat (Abbala) and Dago	1976	Grazing and water rights
7	N Rezeigat (Abbala) and Bargo	1978	Grazing and water rights
8	N Rezeigat and Gimir	1978	Grazing and water rights
9	N Rezeigat and Fur	1980	Grazing and water rights
10	N Rezeigat (Abbala) and Bargo	1980	Grazing and water rights
11	Taasha and Salamat	1980	Local politics of administration
12	Kababish, Berti and Ziyadiya	1981	Grazing and water rights
13	Rezeigat, Baggara and Dinka	1981	Grazing and water rights
14	N Rezeigat and Beni Helba	1982	Grazing and water rights
15	Kababish, Kawahla, Berti and Medoub	1982	Grazing and water rights
16	Rezeigat and Mysseriya	1983	Grazing and water rights
17	Kababish, Berti and Medoub	1984	Grazing and water rights
18	Rezeigat and Mysseriya	1984	Grazing and water rights
19	Gimir and Fallata (Fulani)	1987	Administrative boundaries
20	Kababish, Kawahla, Berti and Medoub	1987	Grazing and water rights
21	Fur and Bidayat	1989	Armed robberies
22	Arab and Fur	1989	Grazing, cross-boundary politics
23	Zaghawa and Gimir	1990	Administrative boundaries
24	Zaghawa and Gimir	1990	Administrative boundaries
25	Taasha and Gimir	1990	Land
26	Bargo and Rezeigat	1990	Grazing and water rights
27	Zaghawa and Maalia	1991	Land
28	Zaghawa and Marareit	1991	Grazing and water rights
29	Zaghawa and Beni Hussein	1991	Grazing and water rights
30	Zaghawa, Mima and Birgid	1991	Grazing and water rights
31	Zaghawa and Birgid	1991	Grazing and water rights
32	Zaghawa and Birgid	1991	Grazing and water rights
33	Fur and Turgum	1991	Land
34	Zaghawa and Arab	1994	Grazing and water rights
35	Zaghawa Sudan and Zaghawa Chad	1994	Power and politics
36	Masalit and Arab	1996	Grazing, administration
37	Zaghawa and Rezeigat	1997	Local politics
38	Kababish Arabs and Midoub	1997	Grazing and water rights
39	Masalit and Arab	1996	Grazing, administration
40	Zaghawa and Gimir	1999	Grazing, administration
41	Fur and Arab	2000	Grazing, politics, armed robberies

Source: UNEP, 2007.

Annex II: The rainfall in Darfur in 1946-2005

Rain gauge location	Average annual rainfall (mm) 1946 - 1975	Average annual rainfall (mm) 1976 - 2005	Reduction (-)	Percentage
El Fasher, Northern Darfur	272.36	178.90	- 93.46	- 34 %
Nyala, Southern Darfur	448.71	376.50	- 72.21	- 16 %
El Geneina, Western Darfur	564.20	427.70	- 136.50	- 24 %

Source: UNEP, 2007.

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