Research Paper – Case Study

“Reducing pastoralism-related violence in the Sudano-Sahel”

Hanna Qadir
Advanced Conflict Resolution
Columbia University
Executive Summary

On August 31, 2020, a historic Sudanese Peace Agreement was signed in South Sudan between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) (which includes the five main Sudanese rebel groups and the Sudan Liberation Army - SLA). The agreement aims to “achieve stability and peace in Sudan after decades of multiple civil conflicts, which have killed more than 300 thousand people and displaced more than two and a half million according to estimates” (France 24, 2020). This agreement includes eight protocols, two of which will remain the core area of analysis for this report:

- Development of the nomadic and herders sector.
- Land redistribution, including solving the hawakeer problem, which is a name given to land that falls within the control of tribes or property that call for it. (BBC, 2020)

Although originating from humble beginnings as local-level disputes over land and resources, pastoralism-related violence in the Sudano-Sahel has become increasingly intertwined with some of the most pressing security threats facing the world today (Velturo, 2020). This apparent competition for scarce resources between farmers (mostly non-Arab) and pastoralists (mostly Arab) is a complex area and the focus of this report is to describe the issue in more detail, provide context and background, analyze the various actors involved, and propose potential intervention options to facilitate the work of decision-makers.

It is crucial to address the underlying relationships between the conflicting groups through fair agricultural uses of land, in order to prevent this situation from worsening. There remain concerns that the conflict will persist unless land use and development of agriculture is addressed from the local perspective to enable co-existence of the traditional farmers and herders. This situation becomes even more relevant with the ending of the largest ever humanitarian relief effort, the African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) a joint United
Nations and African Union peacekeeping mission, in Darfur that ended its mandate after 13 years. This report examines the ongoing role of the pastoralist groups in Darfur, their engagement in conflict and peace and new opportunities for change and peace building.

**Introduction**

The conflict in Darfur can be described in terms of classic competition for scarce resources, as manifested through the needs of the farmers and the pastoralists. Growing competition over land, resources, and power has triggered retaliatory cycles of violence spiraling out of control. In some cases pastoralism-related violence has sparked atrocities and mass violence against civilians and is also contributing to growing insurgent and extremist threats in parts of the region posing significant risks to regional stability and international peace and security (Vellturo, 2020). The conflict sits at the intersection of the development-security-environmental nexus, overlapping with a complex set of economic, social, political, and ecological factors. Investigations on the causes of the conflict in Darfur have been dominated by theoretical models, and in a study, Sudanese Scholar-Practitioner Osman (2012) noted:

“**A prominent paradigm is the herder-versus-farmer model, which tends to describe these conflicts as farmer–herder conflicts or tribal conflicts over a diminishing natural resource base. Such description implies that these conflicts are inherent in the coexistence of farmers and herders and of the different tribes in Darfur. Moreover, it implies that the conflicts could be resolved through the traditional mechanism of tribal reconciliation conferences, but the traditional dispute resolution mechanisms seem to have broken down in the face of agricultural change.”** (Osman, 2012)

The focus of this report is to understand this conflict against the backdrop of an agricultural system, and the implications of this system on violence and social tensions in Darfur
over the past three decades. While the atrocities in Darfur have resulted in between 1.6 and 2.0 million of the non-Arab population fleeing their homes and their farms, and ending up either in camps in Sudan as internally displaced persons (IDP’s) or in refugee camps in Chad (approximately 300,000) (UK Home Office, 2018), much analysis and commentary has “neglected the dynamic of agricultural change in Darfur and its dimension in the areas violence, with little acknowledgement of the agricultural changes and related changes to the land-rights and land-use system” (Osman, et al., 2013).

This report will research and analyze publicly available data, taking a coordinated and interdisciplinary strategic approach, to understanding the threats posed by pastoral communities. In identifying interventions, one of the key aspects to resolving the conflict will be to ensure that the local perspective is considered, especially in understanding land ownership and use. Paffenholz (2018), a believer in the role and function of civil society in peace building states:

“Social capital between groups is invariably degraded or destroyed during war between those groups…Therefore it is crucial to build ‘bridging ties’ across adversarial groups as well as ‘bonding ties’ within specific groups to create intergroup social cohesion and help these groups learn to live together in peaceful coexistence.” (Paffenholz, 2014)

**Issue Statement and Objectives**

The conflict in Darfur is a product of complex and interlocked factors operating at different levels – local, national and regional, with many analysts oversimplifying the conflict in Darfur as one between ethnic groups: Arabs against non-Arabs (Takana, et al., 2012). The Sudan government’s use of pastoralist groups (predominantly Arab) as intermediaries in its counter-insurgency however has made ethnicity appear as a prominent factor in Darfur conflict, particularly among scholars writings and media coverage. Pastoralists suffered and continue to
suffer from the prolongation of the conflict in Darfur, with the conflict negatively impacting “the daily life of pastoralists, limiting the distance of their movements and destroying the symbolic relationship they used to have with settled neighbours” (Takana, et al., 2012). Any framework introduced needs to recognize actors on both sides of the conflict; engage appropriately to rebuild relationships and resilience, allowing those farmers displaced to return to their homes and ensure sustainable peace.

“We don’t have a specific development strategy for pastoralists in our five year strategic plan” - Secretary General of the Sudan strategic planning council (Khartoum, July 2011)

The statement above is very telling and prompts the issue statement for this report: to review the engagement of pastoralists in conflict and peace processes and the role of emerging new opportunities for peace building associated with pastoralists and farmers in Darfur.

Acting as a peacekeeping consultant and conflict resolution practitioner for an international peace NGO, the focus will be on exploring the Darfur conflict in relation to land ownership and development of agricultural relations in the region. The objective of this study is therefore to identify conflict resolution approaches and interventions to resolve the conflict between farmers and pastoralists in Darfur with a focus on balancing the needs of each. Historically, such conflicts were generally settled through local mechanisms for conflict mediation and reconciliation such as involving chiefs and elders with “local leadership and traditional practices retaining an important role in managing conflicts between communities and at times exert authority to force reconciliation” (Mohamed & Balghis, 2005). However, over time their effectiveness has varied in part due to politicization by external influences. Further goals of the report will be to understand the ongoing role of locals at a grassroots level in establishing peace settlements the Darfur region.
Context, Background and Analysis

The 2003 Sudan conflict started when the SLM and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel groups began fighting the government of Sudan; accused of oppressing Darfur’s non-Arab population. The government’s disproportionate response created chaos and genocide and instigated a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Darfur’s non-Arabs, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians. In 2009 Sudan’s President, Omar al-Bashir, became the first sitting head of a state to be indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, with the Sudanese government announcing on 11 February 2020 that it had agreed to hand over al-Bashir to the ICC for trial (Magdy, 2020). This aroused hopes for peace in Darfur, but violence has since surged amid fresh accusations against Sudan’s security forces.

History of Darfur Pastoralist Groups

For many centuries, farmers and herders coexisted in Darfur, sharing resources and changing uses of land as their needs required. However, since early times pastoralist groups in Sudan, generally speaking, were either poorly represented or not represented at all in policy-making institutions and federal bodies. A Pastoralists Union established during the May military regime (1969-1985) proved ineffective in serving the interests and representing the pastoral groups in Sudan. The historically weak representation of pastoralists demands led many groups “to see themselves as a marginalized group even within the rural communities” (Ahmed, 1976).

Following Sudan’s independence from Britain in 1956 power was left in the hands of a minority group of Arab northern elites in the north. After years of civil strife between the north and south, South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan in 2011. However conflict in the Darfur region persisted and factors such as: changing political and demographic changes and an untimely drought in the 1980s, led to famine and the dismantling of traditional sharing of
resources between the farmers and pastoralists. The indigenous peoples of Darfur and the Arabs have always had relatively distinct identities and generally got along well until resources became scarce and *ethnicity* and *race* became a factor in the conflict. Farmers were driven from their land with attempts made to divide them up, leading to a rebellion by two local groups in 2003 - the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the SLA, accusing the government of oppressing non-Arabs in favor of Arabs. A war began with attacks on towns, government facilities and civilians in Darfur, with the conflict resulting in deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Sudan (and neighbouring Chad). A growing humanitarian crisis ensued, with activities of the nomadic Arab tribesmen (known as the *Janjaweed*) coming into focus - with many claiming sponsorship by the Sudanese government.

![Pastoralists in North Darfur](Source: UNEP, 2016)

*Fig 1. Pastoralists in North Darfur (Source: UNEP, 2016)*

**Actor Analysis – Local Actors**

In further analyzing the context of this conflict there is a need for a brief actor analysis. Fig 2. highlights an Actor-Network Map - a tool to focus on the relationships between actors and
processes connected in a network. The map clearly identifies the non-Arab or “African” farmer actors from the Arab Pastoralist actors. The non-Arab Darfuris are a large, diverse group composed of many tribes, some of whom, such as the Gimir and Fallata, have previously allied themselves with the government and others such as the Zagawa, Fur and Massaleit became part of the Darfuri rebel groups.

![Actor-Network Map – Darfur](source: Created by Author)

The actor-network map does not highlight every diverse tribal actor in relation to the conflict (Darfur is home to some 80 plus tribes and ethnic groups), instead choosing to focus on those specific actors appropriate to the context of the report. Each actor is a knot in a network of relations with other actors and relationship dynamics are labeled through arrows (as per the
legend). Three key actor clusters are highlighted – Clusters 1 and 2 are the non-Arab Darfuri subsistence farmers and traditional cultivators and Cluster 3 highlights the Arab Darfuri pastoralists. While each cluster operates as a separate network, collectively they may also be seen to play a role in representing either side to the conflict (rebel groups or the Sudanese military / government). Geographies also play a part in historic origins of the main sub-groups, focusing on four main regions: South Darfur, North Darfur, West Darfur and Jebel Merra (mountainous peaks) further influencing ethnic groupings. The UNAMID is also highlighted as a separate international actor in the actor-network map, which will be analyzed next.

International Actor and Mediator - UNAMID and UNITAMS

The UNAMID originally set up to bring stability to the war-town Darfur region of Sudan was initiated on July 31, 2007. However, thirteen years later on 31 December 2020 there was a UNAMID withdrawal suggesting its mandate was complete. Although many Darfuri residents claimed UNAMID did not effectively protect them, there were still fears over its withdrawal leaving many vulnerable groups to stage protests against the UN decision to end the UNAMID mandate. Many of the protestors were mostly displaced women and children, wanting the peacekeepers to stay, with many believing the “UNAMID exit will create a security vacuum in a region with several active militia groups” (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Such polarization led to the set-up of a new special political mission, the UN Integrated Transitional Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), continuing to support the transition in Sudan. There is hope UNITAMS will take lessons learnt from UNAMID and “overcome the challenges of deeply entrenched bureaucratic cultures to deliver on ambitious mandates through a ‘whole-of-system’ approach” (Forti, 2021). This would allow the reorientation of humanitarian aid toward peace building and development and for increased cooperation among the various actors in order
to navigate the volatile geopolitical environment. As an international NGO, it is the intention that any peace building work undertaken will also align with the general mandate of UNITAMS.

**Group Identity Politics and Ethnic Division Analysis**

It is important to note that the “ethnic groups within Sudan are numerous; and individual group identities have multiple aspects…considerable sections of the population of northern Sudan – in Darfur and elsewhere, while practicing Islam and speaking one of the Sudanese dialects of Arabic as a lingua franca, retain their own languages. They remain culturally distinct from Arab communities living alongside or among them. These differences may be underlined locally…by different modes of livelihood – most Arab groups in Darfur, for example, are primarily nomadic pastoralists; while many of the non-Arab groups are sedentary farmers” (Ryle, 2011). It should also be noted that skin colour (though not a matter of indifference to Sudanese) does not map onto ethnic divisions once again highlighting the complexities of ethnicity and identity in Sudanese society. There is an *ethnic hierarchy* in Sudanese society, which is far from binary Arab/non-Arab and best described as a “sliding scales between two poles” (Ryle, 2011). One pole is represented by the powerful families and clans who have monopolized much of political power in Sudan for centuries (seen as a sort of *ideal Arabs*) and the opposite pole to this ideal is constituted by members of social groups categorized as *African* and don't identity themselves as Arab. Diversity and identity therefore remains an important component of Sudan’s population and also political, economic and cultural structures. These remain important points when analyzing this conflict further.

**Theoretical Lenses to Aid Analysis - Coleman, (2003) and Lederach’s Pyramid Model (1997)**

*Intractable conflicts* emerge from a history of domination and perceived injustice.

Intractable conflicts regularly occur in situations in which there exists a severe imbalance
of power between the parties, and the more powerful party exploits, controls, or abuses the less powerful” (Coleman, 2000).

Sudan holds a long history of domination and perceived injustices, with a series of war crimes perpetrated against humanity. Such crimes demonstrated a typical exploitation of the intergroup distinctions - using the Arab based tribes against the non-Arab villagers. “Often the power holders in such a setting will use the existence of salient intergroup distinctions (such as ethnicity or class) as a means of maintaining or strengthening their power base” (Staub, 2001).

Lederach’s (1997) beliefs on contemporary armed conflicts (primarily internal conflicts occurring between different identity groups within a state) may also be used to further interpret this conflict. Arguing that contemporary conflicts tend to arise within poor, developing nations, create deeply divided societies and are fueled more by psychological or cultural factors than by substantive issues, Lederach advocates understanding the social-psychological perceptions, emotions, and subjective experiences associated with such conflicts. Applying Lederach’s peace building pyramid (1997), depicting the three levels of a complex system (Fig. 3) offers a model for further analysis, particularly useful when proposing interventions. While Darfur conflict resolution methods to date may have placed more emphasis on the top-level leadership (that is the military and political leaders that have high visibility) the leaders lower down (L2 and L3) also have key roles to play. At the grassroots (L3) level, this may be the local pastoral and substantive farmer leaders but also leaders of indigenous communities and refugee camp leaders (where many displaced farmers are now located). The L2 middle-range leadership, such as ethnic or religious leaders, NGO humanitarian leaders etc are also important to recognize (since they have ties at the top as well as connections with the bottom level leaders). Lederach argues: “working with the top-level leadership, the focus is generally on high-level negotiations, working
on cease fires and ultimate peace agreements but very often this does not work with the intractable conflicts” (Lederach, 1997). Leaders at the lower levels (L3) may be better placed to deal with the day-to-day manifestations of the conflict and understand psychological and cultural components, often leading to more creative conflict resolution solutions. Referred to as “insider partials, describing those insiders involved in the conflict but still able to work across the conflict lines to try to bring opposing people together” (Lederach, 1997).

Fig 3. Three Levels of the Peacebuilding Pyramid (Source: Lederach, 1997)

Addressing the issues of individual land control (and the policy challenges presented) will require a need to harness local potential to achieve sustainable reconciliation and rebuild relationships across the different land production systems and the groups involved in them (Osman, 2012). The intervention options proposed will aim to appropriately address Level 3: Grassroots Leadership, and the ongoing role of locals in peace building and resilience activities.

Potential Intervention Options
Understanding human needs as well as the social identity of actors (in terms of status, recognition and relatedness) is critical to an enduring solution to address the conflict in Darfur. “Farming and pastoralist systems are often associated with particular ethnic (tribal) groups, with the term ‘nomad’ in the Darfur context linked with both a cultural identity and the practice of camel and cattle pastoralism” (Young, 2019). The interventions proposed will therefore focus on the role of the various “local” tribal groups in an attempt to interpret relationships, social identities and resolve their rights to the land. Three interventions are outlined below: each focusing on collaborative conflict resolution methods at a grassroots level.

1. **Exploring the relationship between the traditional farmer and pastoralist through Dialogue and Deliberation methods:** Lederach (1997) states: “engagement of the conflicting groups suggests an encounter, not only of people but also of different and highly interdependent streams of activity. Reconciliation must find ways to address the past without being locked into a vicious cycle of mutual exclusiveness.” Dialogue and Deliberation sessions offer a means “to build and strengthen relationships, bridge gaps, resolve conflicts, generate innovative solutions to problems as well as inspire collaborative action” (Holman, 2007). This approach may allow both farmers and pastoralists the opportunity (and space) to express their emotions and memories of the injustices experienced, while also giving local people a strengthened voice in governance and decision-making.

2. **Human Relations Exploration through Facilitated Problem-Solving Workshops:** Coleman uses the heuristic of paradigmatic framing to describe five conflict paradigms and associated approaches to working with protracted, intractable conflicts. The Human Relations paradigm focuses on the *social psychological* aspects of
conflict: “which stresses the vital role human social interactions play in triggering, perpetuating, and resolving conflict” (Coleman, 2004). Through “understanding interdependence and inducing cooperation,” (Deutsch, 1973), the main objective of this intervention will be to focus on problem-solving through facilitated dialogue with the locals through a series of workshops. Proposed workshop topics could be: (a) to explore the conflict and identify common goals and concerns (relating to use and sharing of land and resources), (b) to help the disputants become aware that mutual cooperation can improve their situation (exploring Darfur’s extreme environmental conditions which can impact the parties differently), and (c) to encourage development of the relevant structures to address the ongoing use of land and safe return of IDP’s and refugees.

3. Use of Fishers Comprehensive Framework (1994) to “unearth and express ontological human needs as a means of analyzing deep-rooted conflicts” (Coleman, 2003): Fishers Framework will enable the skills of disputants to be developed fostering an ability to work together to constructively resolve their conflict. Coleman believes intractable conflicts are caused by the denial of fundamental human needs including security, recognition, distributive justice, and control. Methods typically employed to address conflict, such as negotiation, and mediation are thought to contribute to these problems by dealing primarily with surface interests (who owns and gets to use the land) and lack the means for a deeper analysis of the underlying needs (Fisher, 1997). Fishers (1994) Comprehensive Framework (for addressing protracted intergroup conflict) follows three phases: conflict analysis, conflict confrontation, and conflict resolution. The collective goal will be to train participants on the types of conflicts,
escalations and dynamics, working towards utilizing a cooperative frame to bring parties together for shared exploration of resolutions such as: how to use the land (especially during periods of drought) and how to share resources to their mutual benefit.

**Recommendations**

It is the recommendation of this international peace NGO that the process for reestablishing relationships between the farmers and the pastoralists and fostering reconciliation is undertaken as a priority. “First and foremost is the perhaps self-evident (but often-neglected) notion that relationship is the basis of both the conflict and its long-term solution” (Lederach, 1997). At the center of each intervention proposed is a need to understand the human relationship as a means of understanding the system. Outcomes at the end of the collaborative dialogue sessions and problem-solving workshops will be based on understanding interdependence between farmers and pastoralists (both in terms of the land use as well as psychologically). Each intervention may be considered on an exclusive basis or on the basis of a blended solution (covering a mix of each of the interventions proposed) and will be facilitated by trained representatives from the NGO. Outputs will be fully documented at the end of each session. The typical duration of follow-up ranges from 12-24 months (dependent on findings) but further analysis may be deemed necessary before confirming any timelines. There may also be a dependency on understanding any ongoing work with international peace builders (such as UNITAMS well as any government-mandated work (particularly in the remit of establishing land rights and making any necessary policy decisions).

Critical success factors to implementing any of the above proposals will cover: robust planning, adequate participant representation (covering all major perspectives / roles), co-
operation and open mindedness of all parties, and ensuring a safe environment is created for participants. This will allow renewed relationships to be developed and building of a common, connected future for Darfur farmers and pastoralists.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Research and the analysis contained in this report has shown that intractable conflicts are best resolved by restoring intergroup relations on social psychological levels and understanding stakeholder needs. The Executive Summary of this report clearly highlighted two protocols from the 2020 Sudanese Peace Agreement: development of the nomadic and herders sector and addressing the issues of land redistribution. Interventions have been proposed (aligned to these two protocols) to provide appropriate forums for reconciliation and to reestablish land use rights.

“Human relationship management is linked to better natural resources management and remains a top priority for peace” – Chambas, (Joint Chief Mediator for the AU and UN - 2013). Adopting interventions that provide local stakeholder groups an opportunity to address contentious issues (with a history of attracting only argument and negative debate) will pave the way to creating collective clarity to the long-standing conflict in Darfur between farmers and pastoralists.

To conclude it seems appropriate to revisit the issue statement of this report: to review the engagement of pastoralists in conflict and peace processes and the role of emerging new opportunities for peace building associated with pastoralists and farmers in Darfur. Inspiring people to take time to reflect and heal - through collective problem solving and building common ground, will ultimately build resilience and lead to effective and new grass roots peace building processes and opportunities. Civil societies contribution to peace building may also be dependent
on a set of context-specific factors such as “the level of violence, the role of the state, and the role of the media, as well as the behaviors of powerful regional actors” (Paffenholz, 2014).


[https://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Darfur-Pastoralist-Groups.pdf](https://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Darfur-Pastoralist-Groups.pdf)


