



## Conflict Factsheet

### Conflict between Masalit and Reizegat Abbala in Sudan

Type of conflict  
Sub

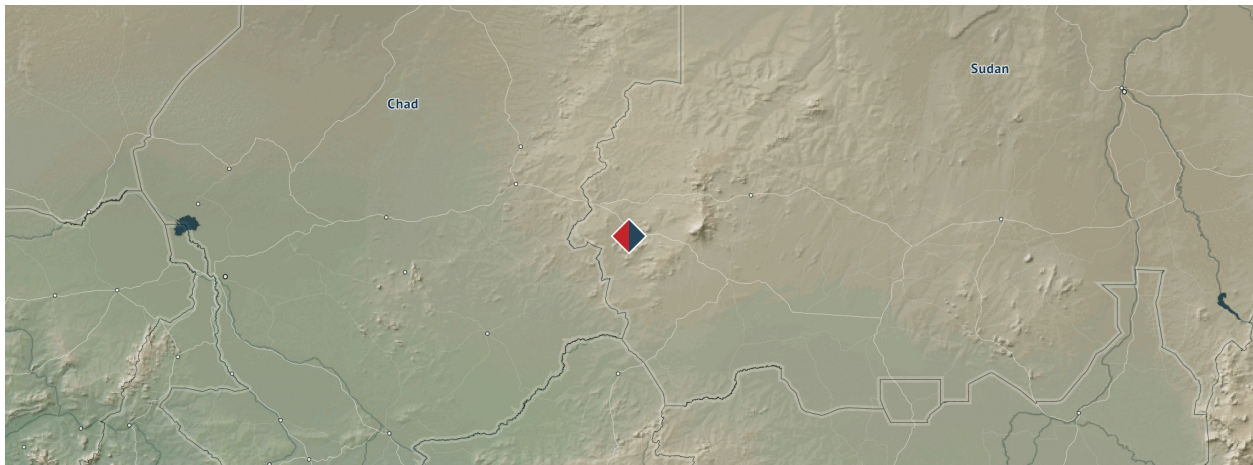
Intensity  
3

Conflict Locality  
Northern Africa

Time  
1944– 1999

Countries  
Sudan

Resources  
Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



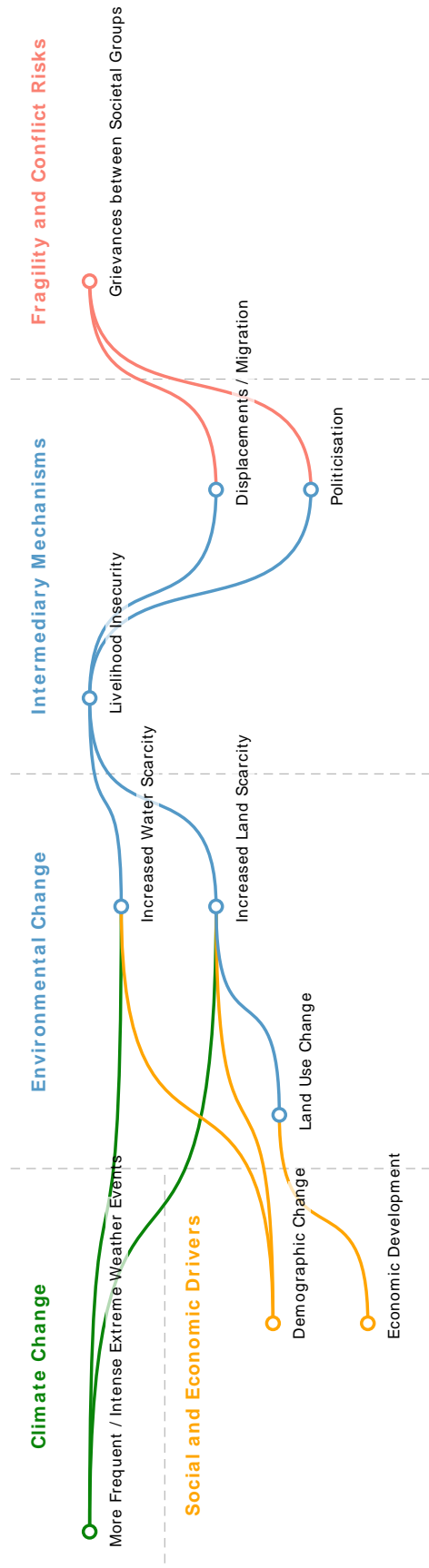
Local resource  
competition

### Conflict Summary

Violent clashes between the Masalit and Reizegat Abbala are one of many conflicts originating from diminishing land and water resources in the wake of spreading desertification, population growth and agricultural expansion in Darfur. In the present case, land conflicts were further exacerbated by biased government policies in favor of the “Arab” groups such as the Reizegat.



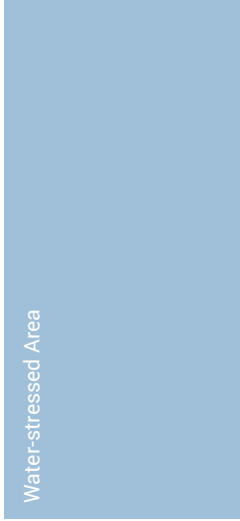
### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



Water-stressed Area



- Food Insecurity
- History of Conflict
- Insecure Land Tenure
- Low Level of Economic Development
- Political Marginalization
- Power Differential
- Weak Institutions



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## Conflict History

In 1998 and 1999, conflict over contested land between the African Masalit and the Arab Reizegat Abbala culminated and left more than 400 people dead. Resource competition between the two groups had characterized their relationship for decades. However, the clashes in the late 1990s were different from previous ones, as they included a high degree of violence, rape, killings, stripping of assets and systematic destruction of agricultural resources (UCDP, 2015).

### Resource scarcity, migration and conflict

Spreading desertification and severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s have forced pastoralist groups from northern Darfur, such as the Reizegat Abbala, to relocate further south. This has led to tensions over crop damages and access to water, as well as violent competition over land with southern farming communities such as the Masalit (de Waal, 2007; Unruh & Abdul-Jalil, 2012; see also [Droughts, migration and communal conflicts in Darfur](#)). However, the scope and gravity of this conflict cannot be fully understood without acknowledging major institutional and political failures by the government of Sudan.

### Institutional vacuum and competing land claims

The abolition of the Native Administration System by the government of Sudan in 1971 had crippled much of the functionality of the customary institutions that could have provided the basis for flexible resource sharing agreements between northern pastoralists and southern farmers. A situation further aggravated by the lack of providing adequate substitutes in statutory law. The resulting institutional vacuum could be exploited by northern groups such as the Reizegat Abbala to claim land customarily assigned to the Masalit, creating major tensions between these communities (see [Unruh & Abdul-Jalil, 2012](#)).

### Ethnic polarisation and the role of the government of Sudan

Furthermore, the regional government supported land claims of northern communities with “Arab” identity at the expense of southern communities with “African” identity. In 1995 the State of West Darfur divided the land of the Masalit (“Dar Masalit”) among Masalit and northern pastoralists such as the Reizegat Abbala, encouraging the latter to start evicting Masalit from newly acquired territories and prompting the formation of Masalit self-defense militias ([Bradbury et al., 2006](#)).

Finally, the government of Sudan started arming and supporting northern pastoralist as part of a counter-insurgency strategy in Darfur. This strategy aimed at the exploitation of Arab-African animosities in order to weaken “African” communities such as the Masalit, which were suspected to support emerging rebel movements in Darfur and southern Sudan ([Bradbury et al., 2006](#); [Takana, 2008](#); [Brosché, 2012](#); see also [Civil war in Darfur](#)). Taken together, these factors contributed to the violent escalation of land conflicts between Masalit and Reizegat Abbala in the late 1990. A heavy handed response by government forces in 1999 could briefly stop the violence. Yet, severe political discriminations experienced during the 1990s incited many Masalit to join other non-Arab groups in opposing the government in an open revolt in 2003.



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## Resolution Efforts

At the beginning of January in 1999, security forces were able to briefly bring the fighting under control, before it escalated again at the end of the month.

### Government sponsored reconciliation

In mid-February, the Khartoum government sent the minister of Federal Relations, Ahmed Ibrahim al-Tahir, and Lieutenant-General Mohamed Ahmed al-Dabi, to the region to mediate and resolve the conflict. In early June, a government-hosted reconciliation meeting led to an accord between Masalit and Reizegat Abbala, ending the fighting and stipulating yearly meetings to organize the contentious issue of access to water and grazing resources (UCDP, 2015). The government also established special courts to punish those accused of instigating the violence in Dar Masalit. Fourteen were sentenced to death. However, some government sponsored reconciliation conferences would also become the scene of confrontations between Masalit and Arab groups, with the former bearing the brunt of the violence (Bradbury et al., 2006).

### Persisting grievances and inter-group animosities

Despite the accord of 1999, thousands of Masalit refugees refused to return to their homes due to still present violence and fears of a renewed escalation of the conflict. Even though immediate fighting between Masalit and Reizegat Abbala could briefly be stopped in 1999, the conflict between the Masalit and Reizegat Abbala was one of the major factors leading up to the Masalit eventually joining forces with other non-Arab groups, such as the Fur and Zaghawa, in opposing the government in open revolt in 2003 (UCDP, 2015; see also [Civil war in Darfur](#)).



### Intensities & Influences



#### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



#### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Regional



Mass displacement

Less than 100.000 and less than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



### Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

There was no reduction in violence.

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Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

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Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

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Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

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Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.

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Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

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## Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

### Treaty/agreement

A reconciliation meeting between the Masalit and the Reizegat Abbala was hosted by the government leading to an accord to end the fighting and stipulating yearly meetings to discuss the issues of access to water and grazing resources.

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## Resources and Materials

### Conflict References

[Civil War in Darfur, Sudan](#)

[Droughts, Migration and Communal Conflicts in Darfur](#)

### References with URL

[Uppsala Conflict Data Program \(Date of retrieval: 2015/05/18\) UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia: www.ucdp.uu.se/database, Uppsala University](#)

[Takana, Y. \(2008\). The Politics of Local Boundaries and Conflict in Sudan, The South Darfur Case.](#)

[Bradbury, M., Ryle, J., Medley, M. & Sansculotte-Greenidge, K. \(2006\). Local Peace Processes in Sudan, A Baseline Study. Rift Valley Institute](#)

[Brosché, J. \(2012\). Conflicts over the Commons - Communal Conflicts in Darfur and Eastern Sudan. Bloomington: University of Indiana](#)

[de Waal, A. \(2007\). Is Climate Change the Culprit for Darfur?](#)

[Unruh, J. & Abdul-Jalil, M. A. \(2012\). Land rights in Darfur: Institutional flexibility, policy and adaptation to environmental change.](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/masalit-reizegat-abbala-sudan-darfur>