Conflict Factsheet

Civil War in Darfur, Sudan

Type of conflict	Intensity
Main	4

Conflict Locality	Time
Northern Africa	2003 −ongoing

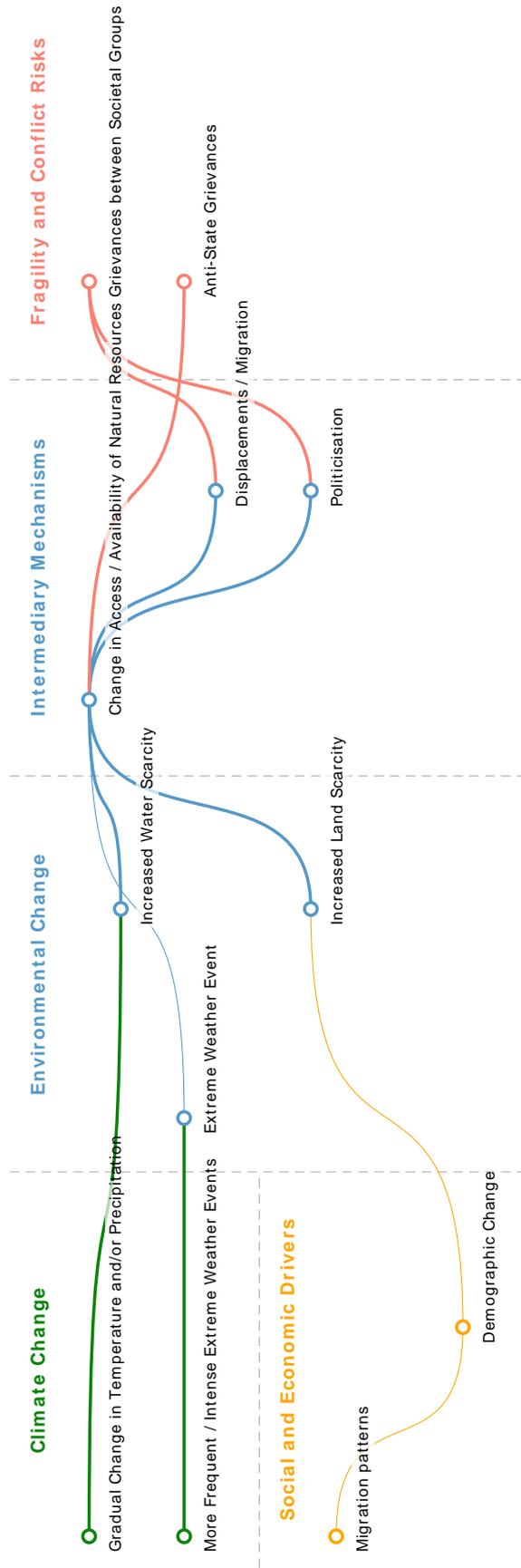| Countries	Resources
Sudan	Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water
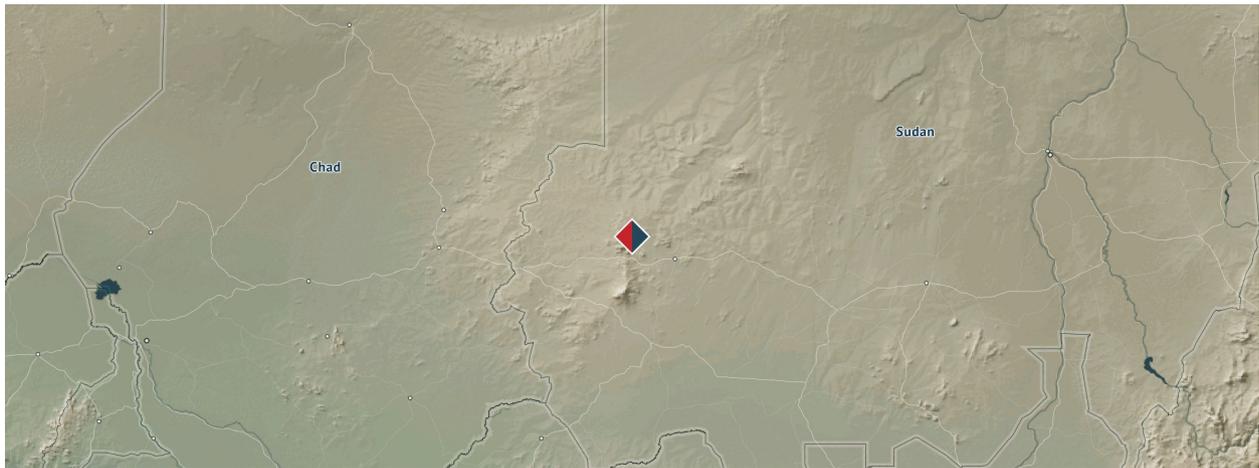
Local resource
competition

Conflict Summary

The war in Darfur, Sudan is frequently cited as a classic example of a 'climate conflict'. Climate variability in the Sahel, which culminated with devastating droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, has arguably played an important role in pitting different groups against one another and against the Government of Sudan. However, the impact of climatic changes in Darfur cannot fully be understood without acknowledging the fundamental imbalances in Sudan's political economy, the profoundly destabilizing effect of Arab-African racial tensions and the erosion of customary land management institutions.

A project by

supported by

adelphi

Federal Foreign Office

Conceptual Model

Climate Change

Environmental Change

Intermediary Mechanisms

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Grievances between Societal Groups

Anti-State Grievances

Grievances

Displacements / Migration

Politicisation

Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources

Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation

Increased Water Scarcity

Increased Land Scarcity

Extreme Weather Event

More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

Social and Economic Drivers

Demographic Change

Migration patterns

Group Focused Enmity
History of Conflict
Political Marginalization
Proliferation of Weapons
Unresponsive Government
Weak Institutions

Context Factors

Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

ECC Factbook

Page 3 of 8

A project by

supported by

adelphi

Federal Foreign Office

Conflict History

The war in Darfur, Sudan (2003-present) has received considerable media attention as a primary example of mass violence in conjunction with adverse climate change (Ban Ki Moon, 2007). It can roughly be broken down into three conflict dimensions: the first opposing the Government of Sudan to various rebel groups fighting for the regional autonomy of Darfur, the second opposing different local groups, which compete over land use and are often divided along an Arab-African and/or farmer-herder dichotomy and the third defined by factional disputes within the rebel groups (see Communal conflicts in Darfur). Fighting between these groups and the government as well as mass violence against the civilian population has led to several hundred thousand direct and indirect fatalities and more than 2.5 million displaced people (UCDP, 2014; Auswärtiges Amt, 2012). Two multilateral military interventions have been conducted in Darfur without succeeding in ending the violence. The humanitarian situation on the ground remains difficult.

A climate culprit in Darfur?

Originally, the war in Darfur evolved out of rebel groups' struggle against the economic and political marginalization of Darfur by the central government in Khartoum. Yet, it became rapidly intermingled with local conflicts over resources, whose origins can partly be traced back to the Sahelian droughts of the 1970s and 1980s. Whether these droughts were caused by anthropogenic climate change or instead resulted from natural climate variability is still a matter of scientific debate (see for instance Niang, Ruppel, Abdabro et al., 2014). Claims about a direct link should therefore be considered with caution, even if they come from very respectable sources such as the current Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon (2007). Yet irrespective of this scientific debate about climate change versus climate variability, the Darfur case is illustrative of how conflicts may develop when societies are unable to adapt to the consequences of climatic changes with peaceful means. And these lessons matter because there is strong evidence and scientific agreement that climate change will generally bring about intensifying and more frequent droughts, despite the uncertainty about the causes of any single event such as the 1980s drought in the Sahel.

Drought, migration and resource competition

Prior to 2003, Darfur had already witnessed several armed clashes between different local groups, most often divided along an Arab-African and/or farmer-herder dichotomy and mostly revolving around issues of competing land use. These conflicts were driven to an important part by deteriorating environmental conditions in the Sahel and the need for northern pastoralists to relocate further south, into areas mainly inhabited by settled farmer communities (De Waal, 2007a). Rainfall in Darfur had constantly been declining in the 1960s, 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, culminating with the drought and famine of 1984/85. Nomadic pastoralists living in the northern part of the region were hit particularly hard, whereas populations in the southern part of Darfur were somewhat less severely affected. During the 1980s and the 1990s, a high number of northern pastoralists thus relocated further south, into areas mainly inhabited by settled farmer communities (De Juan, 2015). At that time, the southern part of Darfur was already experiencing mounting pressures on local resources, due to natural population growth and an influx of

ECC Factbook

Page 4 of 8

A project by

supported by

adelphi

Federal Foreign Office

migrants from neighboring Chad. In combination with increased migration from northern Darfur and the gradual abandonment of traditional fallow systems, these factors led to a vicious cycle of overexploited soils, deforestation and further depleted resources (De Waal, 2007a; Leroy, 2009).

Weakened institutions and 'divide and rule' politics

This adverse development was accompanied by the progressive weakening of customary land management institutions. The Hakura system, traditionally responsible for allocating land and coping with drought, came under stress, both by the reduced availability of land, and by efforts of the central government in Khartoum to nationalize unregistered land in Darfur. The following nationalization process created opportunities for northern pastoralists to circumvent customary law and extend their claims on the land of southern farmers, encouraging farmer-herder violence (Unruh & Abdul-Jalil, 2012).
The situation was such that an increasing number of Darfurians grew discontent with the central government in Khartoum, which did little to avert famine and quell disputes between migrants and residents. To the contrary, its ham-fisted counter-insurgency tactics often revolved around what Sudan expert Alex de Waal (2007b:1039) has described as 'Khartoum's penchant for addressing local conflicts by distributing arms to one side to suppress the other'.

'Arab' - 'African' divide

Matters were further compounded by a racist discourse affirming the superiority of 'Arab' groups over 'African' groups, which was both encouraged by elites in Khartoum, and a pan-arabic nationalism propagated by Libya's Muammar al-Qaddhafi. Grievances over structural inequalities between Darfur and the central regions of Sudan had collectively been shared by different Darfurian groups and are a major reason for the formation of the 'Sudan Liberation Movement/Army' (SLM/A) and 'Justice and Equality Movement' (JEM) and their struggle for regional autonomy. Increasing ethnic polarization created however new divisions within Darfur, which could be exploited by the government in order to weaken the Darfurian rebels (see Conflict between Masalit and Reizegat Abbala). This explains the dual nature of the war in Darfur, as both a war about autonomy and an inter-ethnic conflict.

Resolution Efforts

Since 2003 the Government of Sudan has engaged in several rounds of talks with the Darfurian rebels. Mediated by Chad, Qatar, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) these talks have, however, not succeeded in putting an end to the violence. Lacking commitment on both sides to respect ceasefires and agreements, but also factional disputes within the rebel movements are seriously undermining the peace process. The 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was not signed by all rebel groups and the 2011 Doha Peace Agreement with the JEM has barely had any effect on the situation on the ground. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for the Sudanese president Omar al Bashir, his minister of defense and various rebel leaders, which has further complicated the diplomatic relationships with the Sudanese government (UCDP, 2014).

Peacekeeping operations

ECC Factbook

Page 5 of 8

A project by

supported by

adelphi

Federal Foreign Office

Two multilateral military interventions have been conducted in Darfur: The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) from 2004 to 2008 and the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) - a hybrid UN-AU intervention - since 2008. But reluctance of the Sudanese government to accommodate UN-troops on its soil as well as reservations of western countries to provide the mission with necessary military equipment have hampered the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations in Darfur (Brosché, 2008).

Humanitarian action

The humanitarian operation in Darfur is one of the largest in the world. It has drastically reduced the rate of acute malnutrition as well as crude mortality rates. But widespread insecurity in Darfur as well as bureaucratic obstacles and the harassment of aid organizations by government officials make the work of NGOs difficult. Following the issue of an international arrest warrant against president Bashir in 2009, the government of Sudan banned several international NGOs such as Oxfam, Care and Médecins Sans Frontičres and withdrew the authorization of several Sudanese NGOs (Auswärtiges Amt, 2012).

Regional instability

The security situation in Darfur is further compounded by different regional factors. The Libyan crisis of 2011 has facilitated the flow of weapons to Darfur and the implication of Darfurian rebels in the civil war in neighboring South Sudan since 2013 puts additional strains on the conflict resolution process. Yet, the level of violence in Darfur has decreased compared to the years 2003 to 2005 (UCDP, 2014; Auswärtiges Amt, 2012).

Resources and livelihoods

A solution to the crisis in Darfur needs to take into account the interaction between the environmental, humanitarian and political dimensions of the conflict. Violence in Darfur is compounding longstanding processes of environmental degradation, thus worsening environmental conflict drivers (Bromwich, 2008). The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) explicitly acknowledges the need to put an end to environmental degradation and mitigate local conflicts over water and pastures. The European Union and the United Nations Environmental Project are working on the development of major water catchment projects. The Darfur Land Commission (DLC) is currently documenting customary land use mechanisms in order to facilitate the co-integration of formal and customary land use institutions. And UNEP works with Tufts on enhancing pastoralist livelihoods in the eastern Sahel (Buchanan-Smith, Bromwich, and Nassef, 2013; Krätli, El Dirani, and Young, 2013). Generally, the Government of Sudan has been willing to embrace international initiatives in the domain of environmental protection. However, limited capacity and weak coordination mechanisms between the federal and regional level as well as with civil society actors have undermined implementation (Mohamed and Egemi, 2012).

Intensities & Influences

1 2 3 4

INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

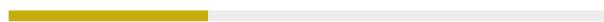Human Suffering

INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences

Societal Influences

Violent Conflict

Yes

Salience with nation

National

Mass displacement

More than 100.000 or more than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.

Cross Border Mass Displacement

Best estimate that more than 100.000 or more than 10% of country population are displaced across borders.

Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

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

Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.

Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

ECC Factbook

Page 7 of 8

A project by

supported by

adelphi

Federal Foreign Office

Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Peacekeeping
The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) have conducted peacekeeping interventions in Darfur.

1

Mediation & arbitration
The Government of Sudan has engaged in several rounds of talks, mediated by Chad, Qatar, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN), with the Darfurian rebels. However, these talks have not been successful in ending the violence.

1

Treaty/agreement
The 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement and the 2011 Doha Peace Agreement have been largely unsuccessful in putting an end to the violence due to lack of commitment.

1

Humanitarian & Development aid
Humanitarian operations in Darfur have reduced the rate of malnutrition as well as mortality rates. However, widespread insecurity and an uncooperative government have created great obstacles for the continuation of such operations.

2

Environmental restoration & protection
Various international initiatives concerning environmental protection are being conducted in Sudan.

1

Resources and Materials

Conflict References
Droughts, Migration and Communal Conflicts in Darfur
Conflict between Masalit and Reizegat Abbala in Sudan

References with URL
Auswärtiges Amt (2014). Der Darfur-Konflikt. Accessed September 12, 2014
Ban Ki Moon (2007, June 16). A climate culprit in Darfur. The Washington Post
Bromwich, B. (2008, July). Environmental degradation and conflict in Darfur: Implications for peace and recovery. Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, 39
Brosché, J. (2008). Darfur - Dimensions and dilemmas of a complex situation. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research

ECC Factbook

Page 8 of 8

A project by

supported by

adelphi

Federal Foreign Office

Buchanan-Smith, M., Bromwich, B., & Nassef, M. (2013). Governance for peace over natural resources: A review of transitions in environmental governance across Africa as a resource for peacebuilding and environmental management in Sudan. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme

De Juan, A. (2015). Long-term environmental change and geographical patterns of violence in Darfur, 2003−2005, Political Geography, 45, 22-33

De Waal, A. (Ed.). (2007a). War in Darfur - And the search for peace. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

De Waal, A. (2007b). Darfur and the failure of the responsibility to protect. International Affairs 83 (6), 1039-1054

Krätli, S., El Dirani, O.H., Young, H. (2013). Standing wealth: Pastoralist livestock production and local livelihoods in Sudan. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme

Leroy, Marcel, 2009. Environment and conflict in Africa − Reflections in Darfur. Addis Ababa: University for Peace

Mohamed, Y.A., & Egemi, O. (2012). Environmental governance in Sudan: An expert review. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme

Niang, I., Ruppel, O., Abdrabo, M., Essel, A., Lennard, C., Padgham, J., Urquhart, P. (2015). IPCC 5th Assessment Report - Africa

UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Retrieved Sep. 15, 2014 from UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia: Uppsala University

Unruh, J., Abdul-Jalil, A.A (2012). Land rights in Darfur: Institutional flexibility, policy and adaptation to environmental change. Natural Resources Forum, 36(4), 274-284

Further information

https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/civil-war-darfur-sudan