

## **Challenges of the Federal System to Pastoral Development: The Case of Darfur Region**

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In 1976 an ILO report characterizes Darfur economy as being a traditional agricultural sector, with traditional rainfed agriculture and livestock raising as the principal modes of living. Then the 1993 population census affirms that 83% of the regional population lived in the rural areas, with 17% of them taking pastoral nomadism as a mode of livelihood. The bulk of the rural population, however, remains to be settled farmers. Conflicts between the two groups (herders and farmers) appear inevitable, as both of them compete over the natural dwindling resources. Pastoral nomads do not only clash with settled farmers, but also among themselves. The issue at stake in all cases is depleting natural resources. It is evidently clear that even without episodic factors that caused deterioration of the natural resources, the increasing number of human and animal populations tends to increasingly overwhelm land carrying capacity.

The conflictual situation has been further aggravated by episodic factors. Since the early 1970s the northern parts of the region have been seriously hit by the African Salehlian belt drought, making its arid land even much more incapable of sustaining herding or cultivation. It forced the Zaghawa sedentary population to move in large numbers southwardly into the homelands (dars) of other identity groups, instigating violent conflicts between them and many “dar” owners to the South.

The Salelian drought also affected the migration patterns of the Arab camel nomads, who occupy the same semi-desert area. They have changed their seasonal migration patterns so that they now tend to move to the south earlier and stay longer, making it unlikely for farmers to

cultivate their lands and harvest their crops, without being trespassed by animals. Like the Zaghawa migrants, the camel herders also got involved into violent conflicts with most of identity groups to the south. Some tribal identities (e.g. the Bani Halba and the Habbania) prevented camel nomads from passing into their dars. Both Bani Halba and Habbania are Arabs as the camel nomads are, disproving the rather simplistic view that conflicts in the region are based on ethnicity. Tribalism and ethnicity divided comes into play as a result of conflict and not as a cause of it. Conflicts remain to be caused by competition over natural resources in the first place. They then acquire ethnic or tribal dimensions for mobilization purposes. Eventually tribalism and ethnicity can become the causes of war.

Among other episodic factors that complicated the conflict-ridden situation are the following: a) the Chadian civil war, b) the proliferation of small arms and c) the disbanding of Native Administration. The Chadian civil war affected the region in two ways. First, large numbers of war-affected Chadians crossed the border into the region. This was made possible by the open frontier between Darfur and neighbouring Chad and by blood ties between several identity groups in the region and in its neighboring Chad. This explains how the 1993 population census estimated the population annual growth in the region to be as high as 4.15, next only to Khartoum. , Takara (1999) counted 27 distinct identity groups to have crossed the border and settled in “dar Masalit”, most of whom were pastoral nomads. The possibility can not be ruled out that the (1996-99) Masalit-Arab conflicts are closely related to this Chadian influx.

Secondly, the Chadian civil war is also responsible for the proliferation of small arms. There are two sources of Chadian arms coming to the region: 1) retreating Chadian war factions, coming to the

region with their arms, which they offered for sale at affordable prices; 2) the region being the route for arm smuggling between Libya and Chad must have received its share of the smuggled arms.

The environmental degradation, the increase of human and animal populations and the proliferation of firearms also coincided with the decision by the central government to disband native administration in 1970. Native administrators had been responsible for maintaining law and order, both within and between identity groups. Now that the system had been dissolved, tribesmen took the law in their own hands and tended to resolve their disputes by resorting to armed violence rather than to peaceful dialogue.

Not only the camel nomads who threaten peace in the region. The cattle nomads, occupying the Baggara belt to the south, are also pastoral nomads, although increasingly they are becoming transhumants. The seasonal movements of the cattle nomads bring them into conflicts with their southern neighbours of Bahr el-Ghazal region and with settled farmers to the north.

Over the course of time the occurrence of conflict has become more frequent and more devastating. It is not the intention of this focused paper to elaborate on or suggest how to reconcile the needs of the herders and those of the farmers in the region. One practical measure, however, seems to be a practical central policy of nomads settlement. It goes beyond the scope of the paper to discuss it.

### **Decentralization and Retribalization**

The discussion of pastoral nomadism, traditional, shifting rainfed agriculture and their relation to intergroup conflicts, can not be complete without reference to the decentralization and retribalization policies that the Sudanese State has been adopting. We are safer to talk about "decentralization" in a broader sense rather than about "federalism" in its

rather restricted academic definition, to which Sudan experience might not be adequately described.

Until 1974 Darfur as an area had been one administrative unit, with its capital in El-Fasher. That central authority evidently was more capable of maintaining law and order, than the presently dispersed authority into three states. The Sudanese state's lately attempts, to create a so-called "mechanism for the prevalence of security and restoration of state authority" is testimony to the regional need for a centralised authority.

In any case, in 1974 the region was divided into two administrative units of northern Darfur and southern Darfur, called provinces. It was at this time that the people in southern Darfur began to give rise to ethnic consciousness. The province had been polarised into Arabs and (zurga) . the Zurga means literally the blacks, although most of the Arabs themselves are equally dark-skinned. The dichotomy was clearly based on self identification, with the Arabs starting the mobilization among those identify themselves as Arabs. The competition between the two groups continued to be peaceful and only heightened during election times. Then in 1980 the region was once again brought under a unified leadership via the Regional Government Act. It appeared as though a centralized authority was in the making. But the new system proved to be more dividing than uniting the regional population, as it created the post of the regional "governor", which according to the regional memory with governance, was a recreation of a regional "sultan". Three distinct ethnic groups have become particularly active aspirants of the post: the Arabs, the Zaghawa and the Fur. Ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization that have been started in southern Darfur have now been spread through out the region among tribal and/or ethnic elites. As ethnic consciousness and mobilization were carried down to the grassroots, the illiterate tribesmen added an ethnic dimension to their traditional

resource-based competition, and intergroup conflicts have since become widespread, more frequent and devastating.

Then in the mid-1990s the region was once again divided into three administrative units, called States. Ethnic mobilization to control states' government continued unabated. Ethnic violent conflicts have been averted, or postponed, however, by the central government appointing the governors and their cabinets, rather than leaving it for the local electorates to do the job.

The policy of decentralization was not limited to the regional level. It has been carried down to the sub-regional and local levels. Numerous administrative units have been founded, designated as counties or provinces at the sub-regional level. Occupants still remain to be appointed by the central government, albeit the system is still called "federalism"! The so-called commissioners who occupied these offices are now to be renamed "Mutamads", with more powers to be conferred on them.

At the local level even more numerous localities have been founded within counties still under the rubric of "federalism"! These localities are now to be amalgamated under the recently adopted system, which makes them legislative councils at the sub-regional level, but still called localities.

This system of widespread decentralization is coupled clearly with a state policy of retribalization. Tribes are allowed (some people would say encouraged) to form their own tribal consultancy leaderships, formed by understandably pro-governmental elements. Tribes and ethnic groups are rewarded for being mobilized behind state declared policies by having members of their tribal elites appointed in leadership positions. So, ethnic or tribal consciousness at the grassroots level has become more felt, greatly threatening intergroup peaceful coexistence.

Retribalizing administrative units at the sub-regional and local levels can greatly impair the proper functioning of these units. They fail to treat all identity groups on equal bases, when rendering services or controlling security hazards. The Rezaigat raiding of el-Tabbat village of the Maaliyya tribe, (May 2002), illustrates how such administrative units might be incapable of controlling violence. The Rezaigat militiamen defied all local authorities and carried out the raid against the Maaliyya. Daein commissioner at the time was member of the ruling family among the Rezaigat. On the other hand, the commissioner of Adila, the Maaliyya headquarters, was also a notable Maaliyya tribesman. It was inconceivable for either of them to be strictly neutral in such a circumstance and be able to apply the rule of law against his own identity group. So, parochialism and retribalization can be liabilities rather than assets, as far as intercommunal conflicts are concerned. In fact, the present day severe conflicts between farmers and herders around Jebel Marra massif could be attributed in good part to the policies of retribalization and decentralization.