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People on the Move: Addressing Vulnerabilities of Nomadic Communities in Darfur

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Abstract

Until recently, the needs and concerns of the Arab nomadic communities in Darfur were not given sufficient attention by the international community, probably because of the tendency to equate them with the notorious “Arab militia” accused of committing crimes during the conflict in Darfur. This began to change after several Arab nomad leaders complained to the United Nations and relief groups about their exclusion from humanitarian and development programmes and projects implemented in the region. The article explores the conditions and vulnerabilities of nomadic communities in Darfur and highlights some of the subsequent successful initiatives undertaken by the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) to address the concerns of the nomadic community members.

Keywords

pastoralists, nomads, UNAMID, Darfur, Sudan, intercommunal conflict, needs, concerns and vulnerabilities

1. Introduction

Competition over natural resources, particularly land, has become an issue of concern and cause of conflict among the pastoral and farming populations of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, with Sudan

being no exception. The notion of **pastoralism** encompasses a variety of movements ranging from pure “nomadism” which is characterized by year-around camel breeding and long-distance migration, to seasonal movements over shorter distances in combination with some form of agricultural activities.

In Sudan, pastoralists still constitute more than 20 percent of the population. Historically, there has long been tension along pastoral corridors over land and grazing rights between nomads and farmers and in recent years, some parts of the country have suffered from both severe droughts and dwindling resources. Disputes can then quickly arise between farmers and pastoralists as a result of migrating camel and livestock herders in search of water and pasture for their animals during the dry season, sometimes leading to the grazing on farmers’ lands and use of their water points. Disputes over lost crops, land, and access to water and pastoralists’ routes can regularly lead to widespread seasonal tensions between pastoralists and farmers as well as between traditional farmers and owners of large-scale mechanized farms.

Although the meaning of the term varies from country to country, **nomads** are generally understood to be members of a community who move from one place to another, rather than settling permanently in one location. Usually nomads do not rely on agriculture, with some exceptions. In Sudan, all nomads depend on domesticated animals of various species. Some nomads engage in small-scale agriculture at fixed points or along their migration routes. However, their main income is derived from their animals. Among some tribes, some nomadic groups have a permanent dwelling, for temporary and occasional use.

Semi-nomads raise herds and have one or more permanent dwellings and often engage in small-scale agriculture. They usually migrate for short distances, twice annually, between one or more herding grounds, and maintain a permanent dwelling in a village in order to secure water for their animals.

Transhumance is considered to be a more stabilized form of semi-nomadism, often with two fixed dwellings at different altitudes.

Due to changes in climate and other physical elements, **migration cycles** change over time. New cycles, adjusting to surrounding situations, evolve gradually with droughts, and in response, both nomads and semi-nomads tend to resort to added crop cultivation in order to secure the necessary household grain requirements (El Sammani & Salih, 2016).

2. Background

Darfur region is made up by five states of North, South, Central, West and East Darfur, and covers 1/5 of Sudan. It stretches from the Sahara in the north to the equatorial forest in the south.

“One of the key components of rural livelihoods in Darfur is Livestock. The livestock is made of sheep, goat, camels, and cattle and is traded between various groups like pastoralists and farmers. On top of using the livestock to make a living, people also use it as a source of export to various places: sheep, goat, camels and cattle to the Middle East, through Port Sudan and Suakin; camels to Libya, and to Egypt; cattle to Chad and the Central African Republic; and flying chilled meat to Khartoum, to Middle

East, and occasionally to Nyala in South Darfur” (Senturk, 2015).

Darfur estimated population of 7.1 million people is made up of 80 different tribes. This population is sometimes simply categorized into two main groups: Arab origin tribes and African origin tribes. Although there are no reliable statistics on the number of Arabs and non-Arabs, “still, it is estimated that about half of Darfur’s residents are Arab nomads who crisscross the region following the faint-green sprays of seasonal grasses that appear like miracles in the sometimes rolling, sometimes rocky desert” (McCrummen, 2007). However, the two groups are mixed in the urban areas in Darfur which include the majority of Darfur population, so the only distinction could be for the Arab nomads and the farmers who are African origin tribes living in the rural areas.

Table 1. Rural Areas of Darfur

State	Nomads	Percentage	from	total	Total Population
		population			
North Darfur	195,000	15%			1,306,406
South and East Darfur	909,000	22%			4,093,594
West and Central Darfur	240,000	14%			1,700,000
Total	1,344,000	19%			7,100,000

Arabs in the rural areas of Darfur follow a nomadic life moving with their animal in eleven traditional animal routes that extend from the northern borders of North Darfur up to 60 km inside the Republic of South Sudan. Still they have permanent villages along the transhumance animal routes called Damras in North Darfur, Farigs in South and East Darfur, and Dankoojs in West and Central Darfur. It is worth noting that not all the nomadic population move with animals as some family members remain in the villages (Damras, Farigs & Dankujs).

Table 2. State

State	Cows	Sheep	Camels	Total
North Darfur	5,000	20,000	40,000	65,000
South and East Darfur	30,000,000	10,000,000	5,000	40,005,000
West and Central Darfur	20,000	10,000	40,000	70,000
Total	30,025,000	10,030,000	85,000	40,140,000

Not much different from others, nomads were also victimized by Darfur conflict as some were killed, some were displaced and moved to towns or joined some nomads in other safer settlements while a lot of them lost properties.

More than 200 years ago, the Fur Sultan Husein divided the lands between some Darfur tribes for

administrative and governance purposes. Some Arab tribes in North, South, East, Central and West Darfur have lands called “hakoor” in North Darfur and “dar” in the rest of the states. Traditionally that assignment of lands is taken as a way of organizing the movement of people rather than closed borders. Therefore, social groups did usually find no problem in living and utilizing lands according to certain traditional norms prevailing in Darfur.

The intercommunal conflicts which took place from time to time between Arabs and Africans have always been seen as conflicts between farmers and pastoralists competing over natural resources rather than based on ethnic or political grounds.

The nomads in Darfur are fairly estimated at 1,344,000 people, i.e., some 20 percent of the total population. They live at the borders of Darfur enclosing it in a form of a belt, thus the term “Arabic belt of Darfur”. In each of the five states they are concentrated into certain areas. Areas of concentration for nomads in North Darfur are Kutum, Kabkabiya, El Kuma, Mellit and El Sereif. Major settlement areas for nomads in South and East Darfur are El Daein, Buram, Ed Al Fursan, Rihaidalbirdi, Tulus and Tumbusko. They have their settlements around those areas at the valleys of Widiarhaid, Wadi Ibra, Wadi Kaya, Wadi Gulgul and Kundi. In West and Central Darfur, the nomads are concentrated around Zalingei, Garsila, Mukjar and Wadi Salih.

The livelihood activities for nomads have always been animal breeding. However, before the conflict in Darfur which started in 2003, they used to export camels from North and West Darfur to Egypt and Libya as well as import goods from there. Therefore, the commerce across borders represented a second source of income for their community. Currently, the nomads do not have cross-border commercial activities any longer and their movement along the animal routes were restricted by the ongoing conflict. As a consequence, their means of livelihood deteriorated considerably.

There are three administrative organs for nomads which are Alwaha locality in North Darfur, the Commission for Nomads in South Darfur, and the Commission for Nomads in West Darfur. The nomads are also represented by the Nomads Network in North Darfur and the Peace and Social Coexistence Forum in South Darfur as the two strong civil society organizations.

The nomadic women were also victimized by the armed conflict in Darfur as there are about 1,000 widows who lost their husbands in the war, especially in North Darfur, and some of them currently live in the towns as IDPs. The illiteracy rate among the nomadic women is very high (about 90 percent). There are no midwives in their rural settlements and there are not enough health services. This is in addition to the general problem of water shortage in most of the rural areas where they live.

There is lack of water in most nomadic settlements in the five states, especially during the summer. Nomads move with their animals not only for pasture but mainly for drinking water. For North Darfur, there are six animal routes north of El Fasher, north of Mellit and north of Kutum (ranging between 150 and 200 km in length). It is estimated that 30 wells (“donkis”) are needed for those routes, and if water is provided there, the nomads in North Darfur would have no need to move towards south during the summer. This would also put an end to the conflicts between pastoralists and farmers in North Darfur.

In the nomadic settlements, especially in North, West and Central Darfur, there is very little veterinary services available and the loss of animals as a result of various diseases amounts to at least 10 percent. Currently, the animal routes are closed in the northern area of North Darfur because of the armed conflict. This deprived nomads of enjoying the rich pastures in the northern parts of North Darfur, which results in low animal productivity.

There are currently not enough schools for nomadic children in Darfur, especially girls. The types of schools suitable for nomadic boys and nomadic girls are the boarding schools to accommodate children from the dispersed villages.

Similarly, the serious shortage of equipped health facilities in nomadic areas represents one of the major challenges, especially for the vulnerable representatives of nomadic communities.

Specific challenges that the nomadic women are facing in Darfur include the lack of health and reproductive health services, and lack of midwives, resulting into the high abortion and mortality rates among pregnant women and newly born babies. They also suffer from the lack of girls' schools and high rate of illiteracy. There are about 1,000 widows among the nomadic community in North Darfur.

For any interventions targeting the nomadic women, the appropriate channels are the Nomads Network and the Women Development Network in North Darfur as well as the Forum for Peace and Social Coexistence in the rest of the states.

3. Method

The United Nations—African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) was established on 31 July 2007 with the adoption of Security Council resolution 1769 (UNSC 2007). The Mission has the protection of civilians as its core mandate, and is also tasked with contributing to security for humanitarian assistance, monitoring and verifying implementation of agreements, assisting an inclusive political process, contributing to the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, and monitoring and reporting on the situation along the borders with Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR).

In addition, based on the dire humanitarian situation in Darfur, the Mission has been also implementing quick impact projects (QIPs) (UN DPKO and DFS 2012) and community-based labor-intensive projects (CLIPs) in the areas of water and sanitation, education, health, rule of law, and livelihoods. More than 500 QIPs and over 80 CLIPs projects have been implemented by UNAMID since its deployment to Darfur. A number of these projects have addressed the needs and vulnerabilities of nomadic communities in Darfur on the basis of the identified needs and in partnership with the local and international stakeholders.

Many of the nomadic groups in Darfur maintain that they have been unfairly targeted and denied support by the international community. They complain that the nomad populations have suffered from lack of access to humanitarian assistance and to services provided by the international community due to what they perceive an unjustified bias against them. "The nomads, who aid workers say are in their thousands, have largely been unnoticed by the international community, and Darfur's other residents

often equate them with the notorious “Janjaweed”—the government allied militia who have been accused of terrorizing the region's non-Arab tribes” (IRIN, 2005). There has only been very limited engagement with the nomadic groups in the international involvement in Darfur in recent years. As a significant party in Darfur, discussions on humanitarian concerns need to engage also with this group. Since 2010, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) has been working with nomad groups in Darfur to help address concerns that they are being excluded from current humanitarian and development efforts in the region. These efforts have been strongly supported by both UNAMID and the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA) who see the inclusion of the nomadic communities as a key element to achieving sustainable peace in Darfur.

To promote a dialogue, the HD Centre organized a series of confidence building workshops for nomadic communities in North, South and West Darfur with participation of UNAMID and the UN agencies, funds and programmes. During the workshops, the nomadic community leaders had an opportunity to raise their concerns and explain the humanitarian challenges and gaps they have been facing, especially in remote areas since the eruption of the conflict in Darfur in 2003 (UNAMID, 2012). Nomadic women leaders highlighted the challenges they are facing in their communities and presented some fundamental proposals that they would like to be funded. They emphasized the need for development projects in the education, health care, vocational training and mostly raising general awareness about the lives of Darfur's nomads, who they say may number one million people (Radio Dabanga, 2011).

The workshops aimed to bring together the nomads and aid agencies working in Darfur and gave the nomad representatives an opportunity to open, inter alia, a new page in the cooperation between them and humanitarian organizations, as well as with UNAMID. During the workshop, UNAMID also presented an overview of its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and explained the process required to receive funding. In this context, the Mission urged the nomad representatives to prioritize their needs and submit proposals for priority needs for UNAMID's review.

The workshops resulted in almost immediate funding of eight quick impact projects by UNAMID for nomadic communities upon receiving of their project proposals. Four of these projects in South and East Darfur included a capacity-building programme to train members of the Nomadic Forum for Peace and Social Coexistence to increase their administrative management and proposal writing skills. Another project raised the awareness on conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence among farmers and pastoralists. A third helped the Forum establish an administrative office. And a fourth raised awareness among nomadic women of the issues of early marriage and circumcision, as well as on developing income generating activities.

In North Darfur, UNAMID funded two projects which aimed at facilitating the access of nomadic children to education and the establishment of nomadic women's cultural center. Similarly, in West and Central Darfur the implementation of two project proposals was approved for facilitating access to clean and safe water and for raising awareness of nomadic community members on peaceful

coexistence and peaceful conflict resolution as part of the peace education.

4. Result

One of the distinct projects implemented by UNAMID for nomadic communities was supporting the access for nomadic children in North Darfur with mobile classrooms. For generations, nomads and their livestock have been traveling through the hot dry lowlands of the Darfur region of Sudan. There are, however, very few schools that are adapted to this type of lifestyle and as a result, it can be difficult for these communities to support full access to education for their children in an environment that is conducive to their way of life. The humanitarian community and UNAMID have for some time pursued ways to address the specific needs of nomadic communities, including helping to improve the education standards and education environment for students of nomadic families. As part of its support to the nomad communities and more generally to recovery and development in Darfur, UNAMID has facilitated a QIPs project that addressed better access to education for children of nomad parents in North Darfur and made available twelve tents to be used as mobile classrooms for children of nomads in five localities in North Darfur.

The tents made available as part of this QIPs project were designed to accommodate up to 1,484 students from grades 1-4 as well as 14 teachers; with one teacher available to regularly travel together with the nomad community. The mobile tents were set up in El Waha, Serif, Saraf Omra, Kabkabiya and El Kuma localities where until recently, many children of nomad families have been studying under trees. These mobile tent classrooms represented a concrete means of enhancing the ability of nomad children in these five localities of North Darfur State to gain an education in a learning environment conducive to the specific cultural requirements of their nomadic way of life.

This QIPs project was executed through collaboration with the HD Centre and the Nomads Development Organizations Network of North Darfur. Established in 2011, the Nomads Networks is composed of various community-based organizations working in North Darfur, and is replicated across all five Darfur States. Their mandate is multi-dimensional, including peace building, mediation, access to education, health, clean water, women's empowerment, social awareness, as well as veterinary services for animals. As part of their support to nomadic communities, and in line with their mandated work on mediation, reconciliation and development more generally, the HD Centre has organized a series of confidence-building workshops for the Nomads Networks, one of which included a grant writing session on how to apply for UNAMID QIPs projects. This session ultimately led to the QIPs proposal for building of tailored school facilities that would better enable their children to attend schools.

5. Discussion

In speaking with UNAMID regarding the issue of the mobile tent classrooms and education for nomadic children more generally, the Peace Society for Nomad Development, one of the NGOs

belonging to the North Darfur Nomads Network, explained that children would be taught how to read and write and how to sum, but also would be taught how to live healthier lives, the dangers (and elimination) of female circumcision and early marriage. The school timetable would be drawn up in consultation with the nomad families, and the NGO was also looking to the future, and considering the possibility of developing boarding schools for students after grade 4.

The Peace Society for Nomadic Development stated that they are convinced of the value education, especially for women, and aim to advance the education of the next generation, with lessons in math, religion, and English. Ultimately, the mobile tent classroom project aimed at creating a suitable environment for education, improving the general status of the Nomad Community, and ensuring that the next generation is given full access to opportunities for growth and success for the future. Within the nomad community young girls are starting to become inspired to grow up to be teachers themselves, and parents are also supporting their children to pursue the teaching field and become teachers within the nomad community.

6. Conclusion

UNAMID, the broader humanitarian community and the Nomads Networks continue to seek ways to assist and support the specific needs of nomadic communities in Darfur. It is hoped that this initial mobile tents QIPs project can further encourage parents and students alike to ensure that young girls and boys are being sent to school, and remaining enrolled, to help ensure that all children fulfill their right to obtain a Basic School level education (UNAMID, 2012).

The overall impact of funding quick impact projects for nomadic communities in Darfur cannot be underestimated. In addition to meeting the priority needs of nomadic communities (including women and children), these projects facilitate confidence building among nomads and UNAMID (and the UN system in Darfur in general), help mitigate conflicts among the different pastoralist tribes and reduce resource-based conflicts among pastoralists and farmers promoting peaceful co-existence and recovery in Darfur.

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Notes

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