

SUDAN: CLIMATE CHANGE ONLY ONE CAUSE AMONG MANY FOR DARFUR CONFLICT

Integrated Regional Information Networks

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The following is a report from the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), which is part of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The report assesses the validity of attributing the Darfur conflict to global climate change.

Climate change may be one of the causes of the Darfur crisis, but to consider it the single root cause would obscure other important factors and could hamper the search for solutions, climate and conflict analysts say.

A number of commentators, journalists and analysts have recently focused on competition for natural resources, increasingly scarce due to global warming, as the trigger of the conflict in western Sudan.

"It [global warming] has become such a trendy issue that everything is being packaged as climate change," said Sorcha O'Callaghan, a researcher at the UK-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

"Competition for resources has definitely been one of the main issues in the conflict, but undue emphasis on it, at the expense of other causes, is an attempt to simplify the crisis. The complexity of the different factors driving Darfur's conflict need to be borne in mind in efforts towards its resolution and, therefore, over-simplification should be avoided", she added.

() In an opinion piece for The Washington Post earlier this month, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote, "Amid the diverse social and political causes, the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change."

() Understanding all the causes of the Darfur crisis may need a more nuanced approach. Julie Flint, who with Alex de Waal, wrote the book *Darfur: The Short History of a Long War*, told IRIN, "There is some truth in this [the link between conflict and the demand for natural resources]. The great drought and famine of 1984-85 led to localised conflicts that generally pitted pastoralists against farmers in a struggle for diminishing resources, culminating in the Fur-Arab war of 1987-89."

But attempts to paint the Darfur conflict as simply resource-based "whitewashes the Sudan government", claimed Flint. The "full-fledged tragedy" starting in 2003, was caused by the government's response to the rebellion, "for which two people have already been indicted for war crimes by the ICC [International Criminal Court] - not by resource conflict."

The ODI's O'Callaghan listed a range of causes for the conflict, none of which a sole or primary cause: "Historical grievances, local perceptions of race, demands for a fair sharing of power between different groups, the inequitable distribution of economic resources and benefits, disputes over access to and control over increasingly scarce natural resources (land, livestock

and water), the proliferation of arms and the militarisation of young people, the absence of a democratic process and other governance issues ... Local issues have been politicised and militarised, and drawn into the wider political dynamics of Sudan," she commented.

Geoffrey Dabelko, director of the Environmental Change and Security Programme at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, noted that "competition between pastoralists and agriculturalists is key to so many conflicts in East Africa, including the crisis in Darfur. Violence between tribes and ethnic groups are the most visible dividing lines, but the stories of these conflicts cannot be told without including underlying environmental and demographic stresses."

()Dabelko, of the Woodrow Wilson Center, commented: "The challenge is to avoid over-simplistic or deterministic formulations that equate climate change inexorably with genocide or terrorism, as some less careful commentators have done."()

Full text is available at:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72985>