



## Livelihoods, Power, and Choice: The Vulnerability of the Northern Rizaygat of Darfur, Sudan

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**The Feinstein International Center** develops and promotes operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives and livelihoods of people living in crisis-affected and -marginalized communities. The Center works globally in partnership with national and international organizations to bring about institutional changes that enhance effective policy reform and promote best practice.

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Livelihoods in Darfur are intimately linked to the conflict, none more so than the livelihoods of the Northern Rizaygat, the camel-herding nomads. Their notoriety as part of the Janjaweed militia and the government's counterinsurgency has completely obscured from view their pastoralist identity linked to their distinctive nomadic culture of camel-herding (*aballa*). Their traditional livestock migration routes extended from the semi-arid rainy season pastures (the Jizzu) of North Darfur, to the far south bordering Southern Sudan and Central African Republic. They are not the only *aballa* group in the Darfur region – others include the Zaghawa, Zayadia and Meidob. But they are the only *aballa* group that do not have their own tribal homeland or *dar*.

Local actors in Darfur recognized that pastoralists were relatively excluded from various forms of international action on Darfur—humanitarian programming, international peace processes, and international advocacy campaigns. This prompted the first field-based study since the conflict started that specifically focuses on pastoralists, and the Northern Rizaygat in particular. Apart from the politicized image of the Northern Rizaygat as Janjaweed, other reasons for their exclusion are that they are physically hard to

reach and much less visible, as they live in scattered rural communities in areas that are inaccessible to the international community, and they have been alienated by the pariah status attached to them. They are also widely perceived by the international community as less vulnerable than other groups (despite the dearth of humanitarian assessments and lack of evidence).

The study uses a livelihoods lens to illustrate the processes that shaped the vulnerability of the Northern Rizaygat, and brought them to the point where they were willing to actively support the counterinsurgency against the Darfuri rebels, and subsequently how conflict related processes have shaped and exacerbate their particular vulnerability. The wider purpose of this research is to promote understanding and raise awareness in Sudan and abroad of the livelihood challenges facing specific pastoralist groups in Darfur, and to promote their inclusion as stakeholders in relevant national and international processes to meet humanitarian need and promote peace and recovery. The appalling violence and associated human rights abuses that have been recorded in Darfur are not the subject of this research. We are not seeking to condone or excuse the violence. Our aim is to address the gap in understanding about the livelihoods of these groups and their particular vulnerability, and, in so doing, to challenge the oversimplified representation of this group as marauding militia.

Darfuri nomads have much in common with pastoralists in other conflict-affected areas of Africa and elsewhere, who face equivalent challenges as a result of their marginalization. Therefore, lessons learned from this very specific case of Darfur have broader implications, not only for prospects of peace and recovery in Darfur, but also for policies around pastoralism, land tenure security, climate adaptation, natural resource management, and humanitarian intervention.

### **From Marginalization to Mal-adaptation**

The research shows that marginalization and livelihood 'mal-adaptations' lie at the heart of the Darfur crisis. Historical policy and institutional processes have contributed to unequal power relations and resource distribution, to the disadvantage of the Northern Rizaygat. The impoverishment and marginalization of pastoralist groups, within the broader context of the marginalization of Darfur, is an outcome of combined socioeconomic, political, and ecological processes of which the relationship between the government and the nomads is an overriding factor contributing to their exclusion from power and resource distribution. For example, longstanding and inequitable systems of land tenure and natural resource management became entrenched by successive governments and created a hierarchy of rights to natural resources, which were to the disadvantage of the Northern Rizaygat. This has exacerbated tensions between pastoralist groups and settled farming groups, and between pastoralists and regional and national authorities. In terms of human development, before the conflict fewer than 10% of pastoralist children attended primary school, while access to health services was similarly poor. Local leaders attributed their lack of political representation and presence in local government structures to their relatively poorer access to education and limited

land rights as compared with sedentary groups (which is why some are now pushing their people to settle in order to access schools and other services).

These tensions built up over a long time and pushed the nomads into alliances and violence that started to take shape at the end of the eighties, and was eventually manifested in their decision in early 2003 to join the government's counterinsurgency. The research argues that it was the particular vulnerability of the Northern Rizaygat's livelihoods that drove them to actively join the government's counterinsurgency strategy in 2004, thus catapulting them, in post-9/11 discourse, into the role of 'evil' Janjaweed.

From 2003 onwards, the livelihoods of the Northern Rizaygat were directly affected as a result of their active recruitment by the government, their exclusion by the rebels, and the significant impact of conflict and insecurity on their livelihoods. As a result of violent attacks, livestock raiding, blocked migration routes, kidnappings, and killings, many were forced to move to safer areas, and many became displaced—a reality not generally acknowledged or reported.

### **Pastoralism Under Threat**

The livelihoods of the Northern Rizaygat are going through rapid transition, which has been accompanied by sweeping changes in pastoralist lifestyles. The severe constriction of their pastoralist domain, accompanied by the blocking of livestock migration and trade routes by insecurity, has badly affected their traditional livelihoods. Their seasonal migratory movements are restricted to safe zones, which denies them access to their favored pastures, particularly in the north. The control of this northern area of Darfur by the Zaghawa—a semi-nomadic, non-Arab people living in Darfur and Chad—has also blocked livestock trade with Libya and Egypt, an important source of livelihood for many people. Most of this trade is now dominated by the Zaghawa. This restricted access has also negatively affected labor migration to Libya—another traditional livelihood strategy for the Northern Rizaygat.

The increasing trend towards sedentarization of nomads has been accompanied by some expanding into maladaptive livelihood strategies, meaning short-term, quick-return strategies that depend on the captive IDP market, distorted conflict-related economy, conflict, and violence. Rapid militarization, and the use of intimidation and violence as a means of controlling or restricting access to natural resources (e.g. forestry resources, access to cultivable land) are examples of livelihood maladaptations that undermine the livelihoods of others. Firewood, especially in West Darfur, provides a significant source of income for the increasingly sedentarized pastoralists. The increasingly urbanized IDPs are constrained by insecurity from themselves continuing to gather natural resources such as firewood and animal fodder. These strategies are unsustainable in the longer term, because they are not based on legal rights and entitlements and therefore have no security or future. More seriously, other evidence suggests that these strategies at times depend on intimidation, violence, and coercion of other groups, thus inflicting serious harm and loss of livelihoods

on others. These strategies are not the result of sedentarization per se, but are linked directly with the conflict and its causes. The conflict is further exacerbated and perpetuated by these extralegal, and sometimes criminal, acts linked to livelihoods.

While their ‘maladaptive’ livelihood strategies may have broadened their livelihood options, and strengthened certain livelihood capitals, other critical livelihood capitals—particularly, social, human, and political capital—have been seriously diminished. The displacement of many rural farmers to towns and camps has given pastoralists the upper hand in these rural areas, but, at the same time, has removed a critical part of the social and economic fabric of their society. The absence of rural farming communities has destroyed local markets, which nomads depend on to buy essential goods and sell their own produce. The loss of social, human, and political capital has further skewed their asset portfolio below the existing, very low levels at the start of the war. This reflects their continuing and deepening marginalization since 2003, and the vulnerability caused by militarization, constriction of the pastoralist domain, dependence on a war economy, and control of resources through violence.

Nomadic camel-based pastoralism is seriously under threat as a livelihood system as a result of insecurity limiting migration, biased or unfavorable policies, pressures to settle, and the economic incentives of maladaptive strategies. The traditional goals of seeking status and power through camels and camel herding are being replaced with more modern goals of seeking power associated with militarization and education.

### **Ongoing Processes of Erosion, Exclusion, and Misrepresentation**

The livelihood maladaptations over the past five years are influenced by the rapid acceleration in processes of sedentarization; militarization of youth; social polarization; loss of local and transnational markets; failing governance and leadership; and international processes of exclusion and misrepresentation. It is this combination of power-seeking, livelihood choices, and ongoing processes that continue to shape and characterize the particular vulnerability of the Northern Rizaygat.

In conclusion, a long-term perspective is needed in order to understand current livelihoods, and how access to resources and power generate local tensions and conflict. We should not be distracted by spurious notions of ethnicity, disparaging attitudes towards nomads, and demonization of the Northern Rizaygat for becoming embroiled in a conflict not of their making.

Humanitarian actors are urged to take account of the particular vulnerability of pastoral groups, and to recognise that their needs are qualitatively different from those of IDPs. Exclusion, neglect, and marginalization are the unfortunate legacies of colonial and post-colonial policies, which the international community, including humanitarian actors, must not continue to legitimize and reinforce.

Local peace initiatives are happening in Darfur and need to happen of their own accord and to be fostered. They will have limited impact unless supported by wider systems of good governance. Strengthening governance at every level will help to promote and improve dialogue and consultation between citizens, civil society, and government, and enhance participation in policy formulation and implementation. Good governance and respect for the rule of law is a prerequisite for lasting peace and for reversing long-term processes of political marginalization, economic impoverishment, and social exclusion. Thus, many of the specific recommendations in this report directly concern governance and government capacities at all levels.

Finally, international peace processes must be more attentive to nomads. This requires getting to the heart of and really understanding local tensions and conflicts, and links with national and international level processes. This task is not just about looking back at events of the past five years of conflict in Darfur. It must primarily focus on tackling deep-rooted processes of marginalization and unrepresentative governance systems at all levels.

### **Recommendations for policies, programming and advocacy**

The research outlines eight broad areas of recommendations intended to promote:

- A participatory policy review of pastoralism in order to encourage policy coherence between ministries concerned with pastoral issues.
- Space for local and national civil society to develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy on camel pastoralism and the economic importance of the *abbala* to the national economy.
- Localization of the peace process and stronger linkages from local- to higher-level peace initiatives.
- Linkages between pastoralist livelihoods and development: education, health, and women’s development are priorities.
- Improved accountability, transparency, and responsiveness through building the capacity of key governance institutions as the Sudanese government’s Pastoral Commission and Women’s Commission.
- A new generation of leadership through civil society development and by enabling youth to engage with government authorities and the military.
- Reversal of processes of militarization linked to livelihoods.
- Promoting best practice, joint research, and collaborative learning which includes building the capacities of local universities and integrating issues of pastoralism, livelihoods, and conflict in their curricula. 📖