

Land Use and Tenure: A Key to Sustainable Peace in Darfur
Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, UK, 7-10 September 2004

This three-day meeting, organised by Concordis International, brought together 15 Sudanese, predominantly from Darfur, as well as a number of international scholars. The participants came from diverse backgrounds and represented a comprehensive range of key Sudanese constituencies. Over the course of the three days, eight presentations were given by Sudanese participants and international experts on land use and tenure in the Darfur region of Sudan. The presentations were followed by group discussion that was vigorous, frank and informed in each area.

Participants highlighted that traditionally land in Darfur is considered a secure resource in which the culture of each tribe is deeply rooted. However, with changes being enacted in constitutional land rights (The Land Registration Order of 1970) and environmental degradation leading to increased competition for resources, land use and tenure has become a central aspect of the conflict. They noted that recently, discussion has emerged concerning the freedom of movement and settlement on the basis of citizenship, which has in turn led to a conflict between tribal heritage and modernity. They stressed, however, that problems in Darfur are not caused by ethnic conflict, but by marginalisation.

Participants agreed that change needed to occur on a number of fronts, from the Government of Sudan (GoS) enacting a clear and effective water policy, to a radical reform of customary land rights. Participants were generally positive about the traditional forms of land tenure and felt that the traditional forms of land tenure need to be respected by the GoS. They agreed that the GoS should also respect and utilise the native administrative systems and that there needs to be a transition to democracy, i.e. a multiparty system to compete along tribal lines. The lack of a development plan for Darfur was also noted as a serious problem.

Participants believed that pressure on the ecosystem can be reduced in many ways: from improved seed technology to the implementation of natural forest protection systems and agreed that these needed to be pursued if Darfur is to develop. They also discussed the issue of compensation for those in Darfur who have experienced loss of livelihood and highlighted that while these people have a right to be compensated, the difficulty will be identifying those who are eligible for compensation.

The participants agreed that land reform itself cannot create peace and that resettlement can only take place as part of a post conflict scenario. Therefore they felt the priority must be to establish peace. The native administration cannot be restored without a ceasefire and a disarmament of the militias. After the fighting has stopped then the changes that need to be made can be made. They agreed that the native administration cannot be restored as it was and while abolishing the traditional leaders is not the answer either, simply re-instating them will not work.

Overall, the participants agreed that the issue of land use and tenure was central to the conflict in Darfur and so in need of solution, but land reform itself cannot create peace. Land reform issues must be dealt with, but in a post-conflict scenario.

