

What has been happening to cause conflict in Darfur?

Sudan has suffered from civil war for years, with the most recent one starting in 2003. During this time, 250,000 have been killed and around 3 million have been made homeless, and this is only counting the civil war from 2003. Many homes were burnt down and entire villages destroyed. Many orphaned boys formed large walking groups and walked across the country to apparent safety in Ethiopia. Previously the environment was already under pressure:

- ➔ One year out of every five brings drought, crop failure and livestock loss to Sudan.
- ➔ The Sahel's ability to produce food has not kept pace with its growing population.

The environment has played a major role in creating conflict. In 2003, nomadic cattle herders and settled farmers began to fight over water supplies and land. Herders were deliberately prevented from reaching water sources by farmers, which led to overgrazing. Once the vegetation was gone, their cattle died. In revenge, some herders chased farmers from their villages, and cut down their crops and trees.

Millions fled their land and homes. They were housed in refugee camps, with help from the UN. But refugee camps create new environmental stress wherever they are located and cause desertification to spread. When people finally return home, further desertification is expected.

Overcultivation is a major human cause of desertification. This consists of over cropping land, exhausting the soil's fertility. Part of this has been due to small-scale subsistence farmers. As health improves, more children are surviving infancy, increasing the population. More crops are planted and aquifers are drained dry. Commercial farming makes the situation worse. European companies are using large areas of fragile land in Ghana to plant cash crops that are water hungry.

Overgrazing occurs when too many goats or cattle are grazed for too long on one site, as all the vegetation is eaten and may not be able to regrow. Nomadic groups used to wander freely, following rain when it fell. They would leave land before all the vegetation was gone. However due to new political boundaries, or because large companies have bought up the land rights, this cannot happen. Civil war and political instability also force herders to stay too long in places.

Soil erosion results from over cultivation and overgrazing. If vegetation has been eaten by cattle or killed by drought, the exposed topsoil becomes baked hard by sunlight. When it finally arrives, intense rain washes over the soil rather than soaking into the ground. As it flows, it carries the topsoil away. Once the soil has eroded, it becomes impossible for the vegetation to grow back.

It has meant people cannot live in the place they once called home. It is too dangerous due to the civil war, and wars over land have meant people don't have a reliable source of food and water.